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## “Coagulated Spirit”?

### Hemsterhuis on Matter as Organ and Signature

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#### ABSTRACT

Franz Baader, an enthusiastic reader of Hemsterhuis, attributed to the latter the claim that the body was coagulated spirit and the corporeal universe a coagulated God. Despite the attribution, an examination of Hemsterhuis' works soon proved that the claim in question was as such nowhere to be found in them. In light of this, most scholars have assumed that Baader simply mistook the source and credited Hemsterhuis with a view that he had actually taken from someone else. Against that reading, this article suggests that though Baader may have indeed gone too far by attributing to Hemsterhuis a turn of phrase which was not his, his reasons for doing so in fact closely followed Hemsterhuis' philosophical views. In that vein, it is further argued that understanding the views which motivated the misattribution can throw an otherwise missing light on Hemsterhuis' philosophical conception of the organ and its mediative role, as well as on the influence which that conception exercised on later thinkers.

*Keywords:* Hemsterhuis, Franz Baader, organ, matter, signature, mediation

#### RÉSUMÉ

Franz Baader, lecteur enthousiaste d'Hemsterhuis, attribue à ce dernier l'affirmation selon laquelle le corps est un esprit coagulé et l'univers corporel un Dieu coagulé. Malgré cette attribution, l'examen des œuvres d'Hemsterhuis a rapidement démontré que l'affirmation en question ne s'y trouvait pas. La plupart des chercheurs ont alors supposé que Baader s'était tout simplement trompé de source et avait attribué à Hemsterhuis un point de vue en réalité repris à quelqu'un d'autre. Contre cette lecture, on avance ici l'idée que, même si Baader est effectivement allé trop loin en attribuant à Hemsterhuis une tournure de phrase qui n'était pas la sienne, les raisons pour lesquelles il l'a fait suivent de près les vues philosophiques d'Hemsterhuis. On soutient également qu'une compréhension des raisons ayant motivé cette attribution erronée projette un éclairage qui fait sinon défaut sur la conception philosophique propre à Hemsterhuis de l'organe et de son rôle médiateur, ainsi que sur l'influence exercée par cette conception sur des penseurs ultérieurs.

*Mots clés :* Hemsterhuis, Franz Baader, organe, matière, signature, médiation

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Of the many signs of François Hemsterhuis’s profound influence on post-Leibnizian German philosophy—he was declared by A.W. Schlegel a “prophet of transcendental idealism,”<sup>1</sup> was translated and popularized by the likes of Herder and Jacobi, enthusiastically read by Lessing and Goethe, and, alongside Plato, considered a favorite source of insight by Novalis<sup>2</sup>—still perhaps none is more curious than the one which rears its head in Franz Baader’s nature-philosophy and then echoes in Schelling’s thought. This particular vein of influence, however, occurs under the guise of what has generally been understood to be an expression only mistakenly attributed to Hemsterhuis. Indeed, if a footnote in Baader’s 1798 “On the Pythagorean Square in Nature, or on the Four World-Regions” were to be believed, “Hemsterhuis makes use of the somewhat adventurous sounding and yet true expression of calling the body a coagulated spirit [*geronnener Geist*], and the corporeal universe a coagulated god [*geronnener Gott*].”<sup>3</sup> The alleged use of at least part of that adventurous expression was soon after lent credit by Schelling, whose 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* registers it in a slightly modified form, declaring namely that Hemsterhuis had called “matter” coagulated spirit.<sup>4</sup>

Only, as past and present readers of both these authors have been quick to point out, the expression ‘coagulated spirit’ is nowhere to be found in Hemsterhuis’s works. In 1852, Franz Hoffmann, student and friend of Baader, made this perfectly clear in his edition of his late teacher’s complete works. Around the same time, a then-much-older Schelling, tacitly confessing to have made his previous claim on nothing except the authority of Baader’s word, drew attention to the same textual absence in his *Presentation of Purely Rational Philosophy* (published posthumously in 1856). He there admits not to have “seen this dictum in any of [Hemsterhuis] writings,” nor to be able therefore to say “whether the coagulated spirit [*der geronnene Geist*] was expressed by *esprit caillé* or *esprit coagulé*,” whereupon, calling to his aid a source older than Hemsterhuis, he concludes the

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*, eds. E. Behler, F. Jolles, vol. 1 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989), 296.

<sup>2</sup> See Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. E. Behler *et al.*, vol. 23 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1959–), 40.

<sup>3</sup> See Franz Baader, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. F. Hoffmann, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Herrmann Bethmann Verlag, 1851–1860), 262. For an English translation of Baader’s “On the Pythagorean Square in Nature, or on the Four World-Regions”, see *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 3 (2021): 229–250.

<sup>4</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling, vol. 3 (Stuttgart & Augsburg: J. G. Cotta’scher Verlag, 1856–1861), 453.

expression rather refers to Leibniz’s dynamic account of corporeality.<sup>5</sup> In our own days, Michael Franz has in somewhat contradictory fashion judged that the expression *geronnener Geist* “evidently” constitutes a sort of usurped trophy with which Baader would have adorned himself, but by no means a real “Hemsterhuis citation.”<sup>6</sup> And even more recently, Alberto Bonchino has proposed that Baader did not take the expression from Hemsterhuis at all, but rather from the Danish diplomat Karl Heinrich von Gleichen, to whom Baader’s opusculum is dedicated, and to whose 1771 *Metaphysical Heresies* Baader explicitly makes reference elsewhere in his text, including in the footnote where the attribution in question takes place. As Bonchino highlights, von Gleichen had indeed stated that “matter is [...] nothing other than composite spirit [*zusammengesetzter Geist*],” and is this not enough to conclude, Bonchino submits, “that for Baader the most likely source of the syntagma attributed to Hemsterhuis is von Gleichen?”<sup>7</sup>

I think neither the importance of von Gleichen’s work as a source of insight for Baader can be dismissed, nor should one in any way deny the likelihood that his ‘*zusammengesetzter Geist*’ constitutes a factor of what may yet turn out to be Baader’s contraction—indeed coagulation—of several distinct sources which resulted in the ‘*geronnener Geist*’ philosopheme. Still, I believe no less that, despite the otherwise compelling case made, arguing for von Gleichen as Baader’s main source raises questions that are difficult to answer and ends up eclipsing a very real and very important connection

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<sup>5</sup> Schelling’s full remark is worth citing. He says that “Hemsterhuis [...] is supposed to have said: [that] matter is the coagulated spirit; I myself have admittedly not seen this dictum in any of his writings, and can therefore not say how it read in French: whether the coagulated spirit [*der geronnene Geist*] was expressed by *esprit caillé* or *esprit coagulé* or however else. I believe, however, that the expression belongs to a German, and is of older origin. I conclude this from a citation of a work which appeared for the first time in 1725, the *Dilucidations* of the famous Georg Bernhard Bilfinger, whom Friedrich the Great distinguishes as a philosopher in his treatise on German literature. It is there, namely, stated: “I knew a metaphysician whose witty saying was: a body is a compositely coagulated spiritual essence [*zusammengeronnenes geistiges Wesen*]”. The expression probably referred to Leibnizian doctrine...” (Schelling, *Werke*, 11.425) The cited passage appears in Georg Bernhard Bilfinger, *Dilucidationes philosophicae de Deo, anima humana, mundo, et generalibus rerum affectionibus*, (Tübingen, Johann Georg und Christian Gottfried Cotta, 1725), 103. Slightly different from Schelling’s, Bilfinger’s expression is ‘*zusammen geronnenes geistisches Wesen*’.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Franz. *Schellings Tübinger Platon-Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 81–82.

<sup>7</sup> Alberto Bonchino. *Materie als geronnener Geist. Studien von Franz von Baader in den philosophischen Konstellationen seiner Zeit*, (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014), 68 ff. Von Gleichen’s own equivalence statement reads: “I have always associated the idea of force with the word spirit, and finally found that matter consists of nothing but forces. Matter is for me nothing else than a composite spirit, and spirit, the all-being of matter”. Karl Friedrich Freiherr von Gleichen, *Metaphysische Ketzereien oder Versuche über die verborgensten Gegenstände der Weltweisheit und ihre Grundursachen* (1771), 95.

between this philosopheme and Hemsterhuis's thought. Most obvious among those lingering questions: If Baader had really taken the expression from von Gleichen, whom he clearly held in high esteem, why then the attribution to Hemsterhuis—an attribution which, it bears recalling, survived more than one revision (as “On the Pythagorean Square in Nature” was reedited over the years following its original publication)? What about the second part of the adventurous-sounding expression which Baader attributed to Hemsterhuis, namely: that the corporeal universe is a coagulated god, of which no trace whatsoever is to be found in von Gleichen's *Metaphysical Heresies*? And lastly, why would Baader have changed von Gleichen's already German expression ‘*zusammengesetztes Geist*’ into his own ‘*geronnener Geist*’? Does this discrepancy not rather suggest that the term was either taken from elsewhere, or in fact used in order to translate an expression from another language into German for the first time?

With regard to both these latter possibilities, the above-quoted passage from Schelling's last work offers valuable guidance. For one thing, beyond submitting the philosophically plausible hypothesis that the expression should ultimately be read as an encapsulation of Leibniz's dynamic doctrine of corporeality, Schelling also provides a citation which far precedes von Gleichen and which does in fact include the term ‘coagulated’—namely, Bilfinger's “a compositely coagulated spiritual essence.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Schelling also provides a crucial clue leading decisively beyond von Gleichen when he casually submits the French *esprit coagulé* as a possibility for how the expression may have—if at all—occurred in Hemsterhuis. Now, the term *esprit coagulé* cannot as such be found in Hemsterhuis's works any more than the alternative Schelling likewise considers, *esprit caillé*.<sup>9</sup> In this restricted sense, therefore, Michael Franz is indeed right when he declares that there is no way Baader's expression constitutes an actual citation from Hemsterhuis. It does not. And yet Schelling's conjectured translation nonetheless proves fruitful in two ways. Without meaning to, it first of all evokes an even older and deeper-running source than Leibniz whose influence and presence must

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<sup>8</sup> See footnote 5 above.

<sup>9</sup> Hemsterhuis rarely uses the term ‘spirit’ (*esprit*) in a sense other than the general one designating societal and cultural tendencies, as occurs when one speaks of the spirit of an era or the spirit of a people (cf. e.g., *EE* 1. 68 ff.; 1.114; 1.23). In order to refer to the immaterial component of the human being, excepting a couple of cases where the sense is rather that of individual élan or vital breath, Hemsterhuis by far privileges the notion of ‘soul’ (*l'âme*). His notion of soul is not that of a mere physiological principle, however, but covers both the physiological and what others would set apart therefrom as the properly spiritual. In this context, an important difference between the notion of soul and spirit as applied to the “coagulated god” part of the syntagma will be touched upon later. For citations to Hemsterhuis's work, see the explanation in the editor's introduction to this special issue.

nonetheless have hovered in front of Baader’s eyes at least as much as the former’s: the alchemical principle of *solve et coagula* and its application to the relation between body and spirit.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, Schelling’s conjecture proves felicitous because it turns out that, when dealing with matter, Hemsterhuis does indeed speak of certain *coagulations* and does indeed point to their crucial importance for a communication between matter and soul—about which more will be said below.

Accordingly, though the proliferation of possible sources for Baader’s expression may admittedly seem to do nothing if not lead us farther away from Hemsterhuis, once peace is made with the fact that ‘coagulated spirit’ may be neither more nor less than a contraction minted by Baader to capture the coming together of different strands of thought, the significance of his attribution of the expression—or *syntagma*, to use Bonchino’s all the more appropriate term—to Hemsterhuis actually grows rather than diminishes. Indeed, if much older sources had already linked body and spirit by way of the operations of coagulation and solution, if Leibniz had already suggested that the body was a lethargic manifestation of sorts of the same active power welling up in the soul, and if Bilfinger and von Gleichen (perhaps among others) had also provided textually closer precedents of the *syntagma* of coagulated spirit than Hemsterhuis ever did, then why did Baader explicitly and deliberately credit it to Hemsterhuis and not to all those seemingly likelier sources? What in Hemsterhuis’s philosophy other than the occurrence of the phrase itself may warrant the attribution?

In light of these questions, I would submit that at least as meaningful as the historiographical chase of a turn of phrase is a philosophical investigation as to whether that phrase’s core idea can indeed be corroborated in Hemsterhuis’s thought, and if so, to what extent and in exactly what way. This paper offers an attempt to do precisely that, though admittedly in incipient terms that cannot lay claim to being anything other than a first exploration of the paths thereby set down. The investigation meanwhile leads us not just to a consideration of Hemsterhuis’s views on the philosophical problem of matter, but thereby inevitably to the latter’s relation to mind and everything which can be said to be immaterial—both human and divine. This, in turn, calls forth another notion—arguably Hemsterhuis’s most meaningful contribution to ontology: the notion of the organ, i.e., of the

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<sup>10</sup> Baader’s fascination by and engagement with occultist, hermetic, and alchemical sources is well known. This is not the place to pursue this topic at any considerable length. Suffice to say, Baader’s familiarity with e.g. the 1550 *Rosarium philosophorum* (the second part to *De alchimia opuscula complura veterum philosophorum*, which appeared in print in 1550 in Frankfurt) is manifest in his writings (cf. e.g., *Werke*, 8.353; 2.473; 13.154).

medium or articulation through which the very encounter of the material and the immaterial, the external and the internal, can take place.

In talking about the allure Hemsterhuis's philosophy exercised on Baader and other Romantics, Gabriel Trop recently described Hemsterhuis as:

an agonistic and adventurous thinker, one who simultaneously differentiates and brings into a zone of indifferentiation operations associated with mind and body, [who] insists on a stark distinction between body and soul, [yet] explores conceptual operations—specifically those attributed to the figure of the organ—that integrate these two differentiated domains into an overarching functional framework and bring them into a zone of commensurability with one another.<sup>11</sup>

Trop's characterization could hardly be more felicitous. Though an inheritor of the stark dualism on the basis of which Modern philosophy had been set on its course by Descartes, Hemsterhuis is indeed a liminal thinker who signals and to an extent lives out the agony of that mode of thinking: a harbinger of the demise of a metaphysics predicated on the illusion of a clean cut distinction between ontological domains. It is as if in Hemsterhuis's thought Cartesian aporias revolving around the point of contact between heterogenous substances refuse to be rolled up into the pineal gland and, breaking out of their would-be containment, rather take center stage under a notion of organ that progressively becomes more and more complex, more and more encompassing, and more and more crucial to Hemsterhuis's entire philosophical project. And if one may finally judge Hemsterhuis's studies on organics not to have once and for all settled the question of the communication between body and soul—but then again, whose philosophy has?—it is nonetheless undeniable that his explorations would go on to pave the way for subsequent, perhaps more daring, advances. He opens up the path but holds back from it: from everything is coil-spring, to everything is seed; or better still: everything organ, through and through...

### 1. Matters of Attraction

Although by no means operatively absent, in a sense the problem of matter only gradually comes to the forefront of Hemsterhuis's explicit philosophical

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<sup>11</sup> Gabriel Trop, "Hemsterhuis as Provocation: The German Reception of his Early Writings," in François Hemsterhuis, *Early Writings, 1762–1773*, eds. J. van Sluis and D. Whistler (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 37.

attention. The early 1769 *Letter on Sculpture* refers directly to matter only in the sense of the given raw material, or the manipulable working-stuff of different art forms, e.g., the more or less malleable materials used in painting or in the different kinds of sculpture: *en ronde bosse* and *bas-relief* (see *EE* 1.72 ff). Beyond this commonplace usage of the term, at first no specific attention seems to be given to the questions of what matter’s nature may be and how it may relate to soul. But here, as elsewhere, initial appearances may be deceptive. The very notion of manipulability, or of matter’s amenability to serving the purpose of expressing an idea, will prove to have placed matter in a theoretical constellation whose operations and tensions will eventually lead to the very heart of the issue thanks to the introduction and critical exploration of a key third term: the figure of media or of organs. If one is looking for disclosure on whether an expression linking body and spirit by way of coagulation is plausibly traced back to Hemsterhuis, it is thus to the organ that one must turn. For it is indeed the figure of the organ that dominates Hemsterhuis’s philosophical output from beginning to end, giving it the gravitational center around which Hemsterhuis’s thought revolves as he gradually begins to uncover the subtleties of the communication between substances of a heterogeneous nature, from the inexorability of temporalization, to the irreducibility of the topological distinction between an interior and an exterior side of being, the functional relation between unity and plurality at the heart of informative experience, and to the dynamic of assimilation as a pondered expression of universal unification.

The first element that must be given attention is accordingly that of temporalization, or of the inescapability of time in our experience of the world. The *Letter on Sculpture* is most famous for Hemsterhuis’s introduction of his definition of beauty as an optimizing function: to wit, that “the beautiful in all arts must give us the greatest possible number of ideas in the smallest possible space of time” (*EE* 1.65). In arriving at this definition, Hemsterhuis explicitly focused on the effect or impression made by the experienced object on the subject experiencing it and “decomposed this action into intensity and duration” (*EE* 1.63). The procedure—unquestionably of Newtonian inspiration—thus makes beauty a function of two inversely-related variable parameters: intensity, to be thought as the quantity of the content transmitted to the soul in the experience of the object in question; and duration, or the time it takes for that transmission of content to take place. The prescription that the former be maximal whereas the latter be minimal—or what may reasonably be called the principle of ideational optimization—is introduced on the back of the realization that, while “there is something in our soul that loathes all relation to what we call succession or

duration,” (*EE* 1.67) our soul cannot ever enjoy an instantaneous contemplation of the object of aesthetic appreciation. For Hemsterhuis, this impossibility is as much due to the fact that our experience of the object is inescapably mediated, as well as that the medium through which it can be given, which he calls an organ, is of a limited nature, capable only of a dilated or successive transmission of content.<sup>12</sup> The organ’s imperfect mediation in giving the soul its ideas inevitably checks the soul’s inherent proclivity for atemporality—a notion of Platonic filiation—and makes a would-be instantaneous apprehension of an object’s total intensity into a *desideratum* only asymptotically pursued. The gatekeeper’s toll may be variable; but it is unavoidable. Beautiful is simply that object whose composition agrees with the organ’s own construction in such a way that the limitation can be circumvented as much as it possibly can be, by allowing for intensity to be maximal, while keeping deferment to a minimum. The metaphysical lesson of the beautiful, if we can put it this way, is the inexorability of temporalization: no interiorization of that which is outside the soul can ever occur if not at the price of entangling the soul in the passage of time.

Guided as he is by questions concerning art, however, in which considerations of production are as crucial as those of perception, Hemsterhuis recognizes that the inescapable temporalization and loss of intensity separating the soul from the object cuts two ways. With the declaration that “the first distinct and well-conceived idea by a man of genius, which is replete with the subject he wants to treat, is not only good, but already [stands] well above its expression,” (I, 64) Hemsterhuis extends the application of his principle of ideational optimization beyond cases of internalization to cases of externalization of content as well. Thus, not only does the decomposition of action into intensity and duration come into play whenever an object is taken in as the soul’s representational content; it likewise manifests whenever the soul objectifies a representation it may have by seeking to capture or fix the latter on a physical medium. The artistic execution or realization of a beautiful idea—its materialization, one may well say—is such that it too must transit between domains and in order to do so must likewise pay a toll at the hands of a gatekeeper. In fact, it is precisely in pondering this price to be paid in every artistic execution or realization of an idea, that Hemsterhuis is led to that consideration of the varying tractability of the materials disposed of by different arts which was mentioned at the beginning of the present section. All in all, there is thus an awareness that,

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<sup>12</sup> Within the purview of the letter’s inquiry of the visible arts, that limitation is explained by applying the laws of optics to the constitution of our eye.



on the one hand, the plenum that is any existing thing is diminished in its perception or impression due to the mediation of organs, while on the other hand, it is diminished in its production or expression due to the incidence of matter, or the physical medium in and through which that idea acquires an objective subsistence so as to be enjoyed by anyone other than the artist. The *Letter on Sculpture* may not then proceed to an explicit thematization of the relation between matter, mediation, and organs; but it nonetheless will already have set down a clear path in that direction, which later works will more carefully explore.

In summing up that early work, the subsequent 1770 *Letter on Desires* makes no secret of the negative or limiting aspect of mediation and the figure of the organ:

I have proven to you in my preceding [letter] that the soul always seeks the greatest possible number of ideas in the smallest possible space of time, and that what prevents it from being satisfied in this respect lies in the necessity by which it is compelled to use organs and media [...] If the soul could be affected by an object without the means of organs, the time it would take for it to form the idea would be reduced to precisely nothing (*EE* 1.79).

This limiting character of the organ notwithstanding, there is a corresponding positive or enabling aspect which—in opening up his otherwise mainly aesthetic considerations to the broader context of more overtly metaphysical ones—the *Letter on Desires* allows to emerge from the background. In this work, the definition of beauty as the soul’s optimal enjoyment of a maximum possible of ideas of an external object in a minimum possible time, is now reinterpreted as the more or less accomplished attainment of the soul’s desire, which Hemsterhuis understands as the soul’s inherent tendency to seek a “perfect and intimate union with all that is outside of it” (*EE* 1.81). It is in the context of this thematic enlargement, and particularly thanks to matter’s first tentative appearance as itself an object of perception, that the organ’s enabling role will be highlighted. Although professing “perfect ignorance of what matter is”, and cautioning against too readily accepting physics’ pretension to deliver ultimate knowledge in this regard, Hemsterhuis nonetheless concedes that there are certain attributes of matter with which we can familiarize ourselves thanks to the “relation which exists between some effects and our organs” (*EE* 1.79). The intimation is thus that, even if matter is more than we can possibly know, and we would do well not to forget this by reductively rigidifying our conception of it, our organs do allow a certain alethic encounter with it, or a partial yet truthful disclosure of its

being. Hemsterhuis thereby makes clear that, though they may ultimately keep the contact of the soul's essence with that of its desired object from either being instantaneous or ever possibly reaching a complete union, organs are in any case the only means through which an otherwise impossible encounter with alterity can happen at all—at least, and this is yet another Platonic assertion, “in the current state in which the soul is found” (*EE* 1.80). As such, the figure of the organ discharges the role of ontological articulation between the soul and everything that is outside and other to it: not limited to, but importantly including matter. Or to put it differently, the soul's membership to a community of existence from which it would otherwise be cut off is ensured by the communication the organs facilitate for it, imperfect and dilated as that communication may be.

The recognition of the organ's constitutive ambivalence as limiting and enabling in turn opens up theoretical paths which previously had remained unexplored, and which will bring matter's relation to soul into sharper philosophical focus. It is, indeed, on the authority of the evidence given by those few material attributes which are known to our organs that Hemsterhuis ventures the claim that there is a strong analogy between the soul's inherent tendency towards perfect essential union with its external objects of desire and the force of attraction universally displayed by each and every instance of matter (see *EE* 1.79).<sup>13</sup> In addition, the analogous character of matter and soul receives further support by considering that, just as in matter there is nonetheless an inherent resistance to an otherwise immediate and total surrender to attraction, viz. matter's inertia, so too the soul can exercise a moral directive power over its desires, keeping itself from simply being enslaved by them. By thus subsuming certain properties of matter and soul as the terms of an analogy, Hemsterhuis accordingly pushes beyond the commonplace acknowledgment that material conditions are at the root of affections in our soul, as well as, contrarily, that we are capable of translating psychological states into material consequences. He rather gestures at an underlying operational commonality of these two domains of existence according to which matter and soul would not simply coexist and impinge on one another, but they would each operate in ways which attest to a certain essential kinship of being—minimal as it may be—rather than to a merely accidental coincidence at a given locale. This minimal kinship is admittedly

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<sup>13</sup> See *EE* 1.79. Hemsterhuis's metric for the degree of attainment of union as a function of variables of time and intensity suffices to see how the asserted analogy carries over to Newtonian mechanics, according to which the rate of change (increase or decrease in time) in momentum (or intensity) is equal to the net force—in this case of attraction—operating over a given material existent.

not explored in more detail at this stage, but—as will be seen in due time—it already sets the foundation on the basis of which the rapprochement between the soul and the body will be pursued, from mere analogy to organic signature...

Lest the above kinship be exaggerated, however, it is worth emphasizing that the use of analogy as a conjoining operator points as clearly to a proximity between the *relata* being compared as to an irreducible distance holding them apart. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the declaration of the analogy between material attraction and psychological proclivity for union goes hand in hand with the introduction of a notional pair that will prove of great importance to Hemsterhuis’s account, even while it destabilizes its otherwise neatly drawn schematic: the categories of homogeneity and heterogeneity between substances. Still in the *Letter on Desires*, Hemsterhuis says: “In regard to the objects that the soul may desire, they are either homogeneous or heterogeneous to its essence; and the vivacity of desires, or rather the degree of the attractive force, will be consistently measured by the degree of homogeneity of the thing desired” (*EE* 1.80). Needless to say, the characterization of two substances as either homogenous or heterogeneous is a qualitative one, and Hemsterhuis’s submission that the extent to which the desire for union between substances can take place depends on their degree of homogeneity, amounts to a recognition that, while universal, the unifying desire coursing through mindful existence is not therefore invariable throughout.<sup>14</sup> With words reminiscent of the Platonic erotic ascent of souls of the *Symposium*, Hemsterhuis thus submits that:

One will love a beautiful statue less than one’s friend, one’s friend less than one’s mistress, and one’s mistress less than the Supreme Being. It is because of this that religion makes greater enthusiasts than love, love more than friendship, and friendship more than desire for purely material things. (*EE* 1.80)

Thought from the subjective standpoint of one’s soul qua source of desire, there is accordingly an implied arrangement of substances within the community of existence along a spectrum of variable degrees of

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<sup>14</sup> This is not unlike how, according to Newtonian mechanics, all matter exercises a universal force of attraction on all other matter, but the magnitude of this force changes under different circumstances. The key difference, of course, is that the criterion determining the variable degree of intensity is purely quantitative in the latter case—the amount of mass of the bodies in play and the distance separating them—while qualitative in the former—the homogeneity or heterogeneity of desiring and desired substance.

homogeneity / heterogeneity.<sup>15</sup> It is less important at this point to determine how that spectrum is thought—whether as a continuum exhausting all intermediate values, or as a series with discrete points kept apart by regular or irregular intervals—and more important to insist on the crucial fact that Hemsterhuis nonetheless includes matter within the purview of existents subject to desire. Purely material things—as he explicitly calls them—may well stand at the very end of the spectrum, opposite the soul, but they are not therefore untouched by the soul’s universal tendency to union, and so not themselves beyond exercising their attractive power on the soul, if admittedly less based on a criterion of quantity and more on a subjective criterion of amenability to the soul. This twofold fact—that we desire material things in addition to immaterial ones, and that material things may attract immaterial ones as well as material ones—is only apparently trivial. Thought through the lens of the ontological picture of universal unification which Hemsterhuis is beginning to sketch, it suggests that the heterogeneity of soul and matter may be maximal—in the precise sense that nothing other than matter could possibly be ascertained as being still less homologous to soul than matter—but it still cannot be total, in the sense that they would be incapable of a certain overlap or communicative fusion over and beyond their mere impact and impulsion of one another.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, much in line with the assertion of an analogy of properties between matter and soul, the qualitative spectrum of homogeneity / heterogeneity which Hemsterhuis deploys on the basis of that analogy likewise points to the all-important fact that Hemsterhuis’s metaphysical picture is not as stark a dualism as one may otherwise believe it to be. Matter and soul stand directly opposed to one another, but they crucially do so on opposite ends of a spectrum held together by a common tendency to unity. Or to put it into alternative terms: matter and soul are indeed polar opposites within the field of existence. But this entire field, with its polar opposites included, hovers between the only hypothetically reachable extremes of absolute opposites, whereas the opposites which appear within the thema-

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<sup>15</sup> An important thing to recognize at this point is that *all* relations which the soul may entertain are mediated, and not simply those between the soul and its most heterogenous objects of desire. This is evident, for example, from the consideration of our relations to other human beings and the impossibility of a perfect union (see *EE* I.80). In what follows, however, we will focus on the role of the organ qua mediating—i.e. joining and separating—element between the material and the immaterial.

<sup>16</sup> The recognition that there is a difference between maximal and total heterogeneity is what leads Hemsterhuis, some years later, to claim that: “two things cannot have relationships with each other without having some homogeneous or homologous aspect in common” (*EE* 2.96).

tizable reach of the field itself stand already at a remove from those hypothetic extremes, and hence, on at least that count, closer to one another. While the conviction of “the heterogeneity of the soul and the body” (*EE* 1.97) will lose none of its validity in the years to come,<sup>17</sup> the awareness that ontological opposition within the field of thematizable existence cannot be conceived as absolute does nothing if not grow in Hemsterhuis’s middle works, i.e., in the much more ambitious *Letter on Man and his Relations*, from 1772, with its subsequently appended “Clarifications,” as well as in the dialogue *Sophylus, or on Philosophy*, which appeared in 1778.

## 2. Socratic Consolations

“All that is passive, is: I sense, thus I am passive; therefore I am” (*EE* 2.48; my translation).<sup>18</sup> With this playful variation on the Cartesian dictum, proffered by Euthyphro at the beginning of the *Sophylus*, Hemsterhuis proposes that we begin philosophy anew—not, as he says, in the sense of jettisoning all previous lessons and discovered truths, but rather in the sense of finding the angular stone from which those truths which make up the true system can quickly be recovered from one’s own common sense and laid out in their correct relations to one another. This proposed point of departure aligns itself with his conviction that, though eternal and active of its own, the soul’s realization of its own existence—if not its existence itself—is consequent on the reaction it feels by means of things outside itself (see *EE* 1.96). The conviction is as important because it does away with a sort of purist or overly rationalistic doctrine of the soul, rather circumscribing all possible thematization of the self to the area of its encounter with alterity, as it is because it precisely thereby evokes that with which alone the soul can become self-aware, thus recasting passivity as a reliable indication that there are, besides one’s own soul, other things with which existence is shared, and which stand as the actual causes of ideas in us. Staying all the same true to

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<sup>17</sup> In fact, Hemsterhuis not only stands firm by his conviction regarding this heterogeneity, but devises ingenious proofs for it, to the point that he claims to have “demonstrated that the nature of the velleity is directly contrary and repugnant to what we know of the essential qualities of matter” (*EE* 1.94 ff; *EE* 2.55). Whatever theoretical *rapprochement* between matter and the immaterial may be operated by Hemsterhuis is therefore one which clearly does not efface the radical difference keeping them apart, but which nonetheless manages to make their communication plausible.

<sup>18</sup> The otherwise very accurate English translation of the Edinburgh edition shows a slight yet important alteration of Hemsterhuis’s words, which I prefer to avoid here. In the original we find: “*Tout ce qui est passif, est: je sens; ainsi je suis passif: par conséquent je suis.*” See *Œuvres philosophiques de F. Hemsterhuis*, ed. Jansen, 2 vols. (Paris: L. Haussmann Imprimeur-Libraire, 1809), 1.293.

both the *Letter on Sculpture* and the *Letter on Desires*, Hemsterhuis once again underscores that the ideas which the soul may form of things outside are not, and can never be, those things themselves. For the experience of those things, on which our acquisition of the idea depends, is always a mediated one, occurring by way of organs. Whatever access or cognitive possession of the essence in question we may have thus occurs in such a way that time and composition must intervene: i.e., in a manner such that the total intensity of the thing's action upon the soul is broken apart and dosed along a given duration, whereby something of its vivacity is inevitably muted—quite literally: lost in translation.

As if this were not sufficiently unsettling in epistemological terms, beginning with the *Letter on Man and his Relations*, Hemsterhuis furthermore submits the thesis that our five senses are like a drop in the ocean of an “infinite progression of organs which would make known an infinite progression of faces of the universe” (*EE* 1.103). Already at a mediated remove from the things through which we come to encounter both the world and ourselves, we thus now learn that there are “faces of the universe that are not turned towards our organs,” (*EE* 1.89) and so that it is true of each essence we encounter that it can have “a thousand ways of being that are unknown to me” (*EE* 2.49). The properties we assign to an essence—for example to matter—do not constitute an exhaustive list of determinations which would finally pinpoint its uniquely possible way of being, but rather a reflection of the specific organs through which that essence and we ourselves can in fact come to an informative encounter: can overlap ontologically as well as epistemologically. One may rightly trace a Spinozist vein in this intimation that human beings are only privy to a subset of the attributes or faces of the universe, while the greater bulk of the latter remains turned away from them: in no sense less real, yet constitutively beyond their possibility of access and encounter. Or perhaps, recalling Schlegel's touting of Hemsterhuis as a forerunner of transcendental idealism, one may counter that the latter's philosophy already leaves all *sub specie aeternitatis* philosophizing behind in favor of a proto-Copernican turn of sorts, since for him matter is not simply understood as an attribute in itself but rather as the result of the encounter of our own finite being with another finite essence with which we share existence.<sup>19</sup> Hemsterhuis himself, meanwhile, would surely

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<sup>19</sup> This accompanies a subtle, yet significant, change in Hemsterhuis's understanding of matter, and of its standing *vis-à-vis* the totality of possible being. Whereas in previous works Hemsterhuis had considered matter virtually synonymous to the essence which is partially known, in the middle works matter rather becomes that part of essence which is known. In other words, rather than affirming that the human being knows only some attributes of

downplay any affiliation other than to his patron, Socrates, and, by turning to our own human depths, at once humbly call for an acknowledgment of our limits, while confidently demanding that those limits be transposed in the direction of new, if now self-aware, knowledge: an ignorance thus genuinely rendered *docta* (see *EE* 2.47 ff, 2.57). We must not, after all, renounce our “right, so to speak, to aspire to knowledge of the truth” (*EE* 1.90); nor should we come to doubt that “something we watch, we hear, we touch, is, among other things, really what it appears to us to be” (*EE* 2.49). The question, of course, is how such confidence in the disclosure of our senses can be maintained in the midst of so encircling a darkness; and quite particularly, what refinement or enlargements the notion of the mediating organ must undergo such that it can support the transposition in question.

There are three main pillars which support Hemsterhuis’s Socratic epistemic optimism. First, preempting any skeptical undermining of knowledge on account of the possible distortion imported by way of the mediation which is inevitably involved in the formation of ideas, Hemsterhuis offers the consideration that, even if our experience cannot pierce through its conditions of mediation and disclose essences themselves such as they are, the constancy of this incapacity in fact guarantees a fidelity in our ideal representation, “at least in relation to the order of things” (*EE* 2.48). Indeed, as long as whatever loss, interference, or sensual noise there may be in the mediation is kept constant as the soul considers different objects, then, regardless of how inaccessible those things qua essences may be, “exactly the same” (*EE* 2.49) set of relations must hold between the ideas the soul gets of them as it holds between the things themselves. This guarantees that, provided of course they are properly drawn, the inferences I extract from reasoning on the order of ideas carry over truthfully to the order of things.<sup>20</sup> The second pillar of Hemsterhuis’s epistemological confidence, a bit more inconspicuous than the others, consists in the ontological application of the principle of non-contradiction to the classic categorial pair of a substance and

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matter but not its essence, Hemsterhuis begins to say that matter is essence to the extent that it is sensibly amenable to being known by the human being. And whereas before matter basically made up the entirety of the universe, albeit with the exclusion of souls, it later begins to be presented as likely only a minimal portion of all possible being. This difference is advanced tentatively at first, drawing attention to it precisely by correcting himself several times in quick succession: “matter, or rather essence” (*EE* 2.52). He will nonetheless finally state: “All that we call matter is just an infinitely small part of all that is essence” (*EE* 2.53).<sup>20</sup> Hemsterhuis submits a pragmatic consideration as proof of this: were truths not extrapolatable from the order of ideas to that of things, no technological design aimed at the manipulation of nature would ever be possible, since the *idea* of what effects would follow from a given envisioned state of affairs would never actually be corresponded by the real production of those effects by way of the physical production of the design. See *EE* 2.49.

its attributes. In both the *Letter on Man* as well as in *Sophylus*, Hemsterhuis makes clear that even if one cannot know all the attributes or properties of a given essence, departing from the basis of the few ones which are known, one can likewise be sure that the essence in question cannot have attributes which would be incompatible with them.<sup>21</sup> Here too, therefore, by pondering that which we cannot possibly know, our knowledge of what we can know is greatly increased and buttressed. And thirdly—and in fact most importantly, since the previous two depend on it—Hemsterhuis’s defense in the face of would-be skeptics involves an enlargement of the conception of the organ such that it comes to encompass all the intervening factors between the knowing soul and the known object; or more specifically, such that it encompasses not just the subjective receptor of a given action but also the objective vehicle of that action: “not only the eye that sees, but also the light reflected from the object; not only the ear that hears, but also the air set in oscillation by the movements of the object” (*EE* 1.89). This notion of the organ as both subjective and objective may have arguably dawned in previous works, but it is thematized for the first time in the *Letter on Man*. And given that it is mainly on the basis of its corollaries that Baader’s attribution of the syntagma of coagulated spirit rests, it is worth exploring it in more detail below.

### 3. The Nerve of the Question

By making the objective vehicle as well as the subjective receptor count as organ—the light as much as the eye; the oscillating air as much as the ear—Hemsterhuis purports to secure a fusing of the subjective and objective horizons which would ensure that the interaction of two separate, yet mediated substances can be informative and truth-preserving, even if partial

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, the above conclusion—that what we sense must be, among other things, such as we sense it—is immediately preceded by this application of the principle of non-contradiction: “if we pay attention to the fact that a thing, which is such as it is, cannot have another way of being that would result in it not being what it is, we clearly see that something we watch, we hear, we touch, is, among other things, really what it appears to us to be” (*EE* 2.49). In the *Letter on Man*, the declaration is even more explicit: “it is perfectly impossible for anything to have two contradictory essential properties, that is to say, that matter be both capable of figure and not capable of figure, extended as well as non-extended, etc., at the same time” (*EE* 1.97). The argument follows the structure of the classic *modus ponendo tollens*: the affirmation of one of the terms of an exclusive disjunction of itself implies the negation of the other term of the disjunction. A given essence can be either extended or non-extended. If my eyes show me that it is extended, then I can safely conclude that it is not also non-extended. And even while acknowledging that other organs may reveal other as yet unknown attributes of the same essence, I can be sure that none of those attributes would imply the essence’s non-extension.



and perspectival with regard to the objects of cognitive intention. If the entire interfacial field of contact between one substance and another falls under the figure of the organ, then the separation or intervening expanse between them is in principle saturated by the medium of their communication, thereby precluding any real risk of dis-communication.<sup>22</sup> While it would thus remain true that an essence has innumerable ways of being which must remain unknown to me, provided no distortion by means of faulty inferences were imported, the thing could not possibly keep itself from truthfully disclosing to me those manners of being through which it and I are in fact connected; it could not possibly cause in me “another idea than that which I have of it” (*EE* 2.49). This is, therefore, what secures the “analogy between things and ideas,” (*EE* 2.49) on the basis of which, then, in collaboration with the two previously mentioned pillars, the sameness of relations between our representation of the world and world itself can be staked, and our practical navigation of the latter ensured. It is likewise this subjective-objective enlargement of the organ which explains Hemsterhuis’s total trust in isolated truths and his characterization of error not so much as arising from misperception, as rather from the careless “arrangement, [...] the composition of truths” (*EE* 2.47). To what extent Hemsterhuis in fact purports to secure a continuous medium of communication through his idiosyncratic understanding of the organ as both subjective and objective is clear in his submission that in considering a relation between essences—in the *Sophylus*: an observer and a cube (see *EE* 2.49)—one can consider the terms of the relation as either: on one end, the observing soul alongside the eye and the light and, on the other end, the observed cube; or else, on one end, the observing soul, and, on the other side, the cube alongside the light and the eye through which that light reaches the soul. It is indeed as if Hemsterhuis wanted to conjure away the problematic gap between the knower and known object by leaving it as little space as possible to span, and then by shifting it back and forth between the minimal crevices where it could still take refuge.

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<sup>22</sup> Admittedly, Hemsterhuis vacillates in this respect, at times clearly suggesting the organ is inclusive of the objective vehicle of the action (cf. *EE* 1.89, 1.93), at times nonetheless drawing a distinction between them, though without ceasing to emphasize the need for their analogy (cf. *EE* 2.58). I take this vacillation to be indicative of the unresolved tensions in Hemsterhuis’s organics stemming from the fact that he still tries to draw a clear cut distinction between matter and the immaterial, as though these two were types of existences which could occur in their purity—the one merely reactive though incapable of intrinsic activity, the other the only source of activity—rather than, as will later be the case in the philosophies of Baader and Schelling, as factors of existence which both pervade the entirety of the field of existence, if in varying relative preponderance in the different existents which make up that field.

Closer inspection, however, reveals the problem of the transition between the objective and the subjective to have been merely blurred out of focus through such maneuvers, but not yet resolved. For the problem is not really that of bridging what materially belongs to the subject and what materially belongs to the object, but precisely that of bridging that which in the subject is material with what however is immaterial—namely: the body and the soul. Structurally reminiscent of the ever-recurring philosophical conundrum of the third man, the introduction of an intermediary between substances previously declared maximally heterogeneous—whatever the intermediary’s nature may be—begs the question of how a third element could at once offer the minimal commonality with both the substances it is to connect, without itself suffering the same break which it is supposed to remedy in its midst. Barring the introduction of some as-yet-unexplained procedure or new operation of conjunction, the introduction of this intermediary would either simply duplicate the disjointedness on either end, or else it would turn out only to have displaced it to that side of the opposition with which it itself has no homogeneity.

Hemsterhuis is too lucid a thinker not to see this. He knows that on the side of the physical medium in which the object finds itself, the communication with the object may well be explained by recourse to pure mechanism—or, if this notion is too restrictive, then to a concatenation linking causes and effects in a field wherein no break in homogeneity comes into play. The immersed globe he considers as an example in the *Sophylus*, for instance, creates waves in the fluids of its immersion by means of motion, and these waves are then gradually transmitted, *pars ad partem*, throughout each entire fluid, whereupon they ostensibly meet and affect the respective sense organ or receptor of a knower likewise immersed in that same fluid. That this transmitted effect can thus cover the expanse and reach the material or bodily component of the knower’s organ is not at all surprising. The real question is obviously how it makes the transition from the still material receptor—the eye, skin, ear, etc.—to the eminently immaterial soul. This is the crux; this is the still unbridged abyss which no shifting or maneuvering can conjure away. One can indeed admit Hemsterhuis’s distinction between “essences which can manifest their relations to us by means of our [sensory] organs; and [...] others which cannot so manifest” (*EE* 2.53). But unless one were ready to renounce our own constitution as beings of a centaur nature, both with a material body and an immaterial soul, the pretense that interactions falling under the first case would be any less problematic would turn out to be highly naïve the moment it were extended to cover not only relations between physical objects themselves but also their intake and

subsequent representational ideation by the soul. And though the dialogue is a bit ambiguous on this particular, in fact the final question keeping Sophylus and Euthyphro apart towards the end of the inquiry, to wit: whether “it is possible for an essence, by a quality that cannot be made manifest to us by our organs, to be able to act on essences that can be made manifest to us by our organs, such that this [second type of] essence manifests [the first type] to us by means of our organs” (*EE* 2.59)—this is a question which covers as much a would-be exteriorizing action of the soul on the body as well as a would-be interiorizing action of body on soul.<sup>23</sup>

With his more comprehensive—subjective *and* objective—conception of the organ, Hemsterhuis has therefore imported the question of how analogy may provide an actual communication between its antipodes into the very core of our experience in and of the world. This question—how action can take place between the heterogenous substances of body and soul, regardless of what the direction of the action may be—is indeed the question on which everything stands or falls. For unless it can be explained how the immaterial soul can impress and receive action on and from the material universe, one can never definitively refute the reductive physicalist hypothesis that everything may finally consist of “subtle active matter” (*EE* 2.53)—too subtle to be detected *yet matter still*—and so that our very awareness of ourselves and our inner life as beings endowed with soul may ultimately be nothing more than an epiphenomenal occurrence. Yet if the body, being material, is indeed as heterogenous to the soul as Hemsterhuis had declared it to be, then what exactly could ever make it—or at least the parts of the body which take the form of organs or constitute factors of the organ<sup>24</sup>—capable of functioning as a vehicle for the translation of action between the otherwise maximally heterogenous matter and soul? How can the organ ensure that by making good on their analogous dimension, heterogeneous essences may be at least minimally *assimilated* into one another, “propagat[ing] their reciprocal actions,” (*EE* 2.57) and thereby becoming equally capable of marveling at the sculpture’s beauty, of transforming the idea of a pocket watch into a

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<sup>23</sup> The accusation Schelling would levy in the Introduction to his 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* would otherwise prove incisive: “You may insert as many intermediate links as you like between the affection of your nerves, your brain, etc., and the representation of an external thing; but you only deceive yourselves. For the transition from the body to the soul cannot be continuous according to your own conceptions, but only through a leap, which you nevertheless pretend to want to avoid” (*Werke*, 2.26).

<sup>24</sup> The body is said to be only known by the soul “through the external action of the body upon its own organs” (*EE* I.81)—an important reminder that organs cannot simply be taken as synonymous with the body, which here appears not so much as the means of experience but rather as the object thereof, and so necessarily to be distinguished from the organs, at least on some irreducible level.

ticking reality, of articulating the humble disclosures of five senses into a precise geometry of the heavens, and of moving entire armies on the face of the earth with the invisible power of a word?<sup>25</sup> In the *Letter on Man*, Hemsterhuis's had remarked that: "there is perhaps but one organization, among the faces of the universe which we know, to which [the soul] can attach itself to such an extent that it can act on this organization; but once attached to its organs, everything which is homogenous to these organs becomes organ for it."<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, therefore, everything rests on the possibility of embodiment, radically understood, i.e., on giving an account of how a putatively eternal soul can attach itself (*s'attacher*) to the few changing faces of the universe which are indeed analogously turned towards it.

Hemsterhuis's response to this crucial question lays the basis on which credibility for Baader's attribution of the '*geronnener Geist*' syntagma can be staked. But let us proceed step by step. On the one hand, Hemsterhuis admits that there is no ultimate answer to the question of how matter could act on soul or vice versa. He states that there are causes in nature whose analogy with their effects cannot but remain completely veiled in our current situation and even mocks the overly pretentious philosopher that "seeks blindly and occupies himself eagerly in ultimately useless investigations." (*EE* 2.60) At the same time, however, he shows his staple Socratic perseverance, seeking "so far as it is permitted to man," (*EE* 2.60) to conceive how this communication may possibly take place. Returning to previous inklings in the direction of the impossibility that their heterogeneity amount to an absolute disparity of being, he reasons that if the soul and the body act on each other reciprocally, then it can only be because they "must also have in common one or more qualities, modifications, or manners of being that we do not know of" (*EE* 2.60). Ultimately, therefore, he stakes the possibility of communication between body and soul on the commonality that subsists despite their maximal heterogeneity. Of this commonality, two things of particular importance can be remarked. First, its *specificity* and *locality*. In Hemsterhuis's view, it is not all matter that supports awareness and ideation on the basis of the intake of data, but only certain parts of material existents, and only of material existents of a certain kind.<sup>27</sup> The second proviso is that,

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<sup>25</sup> Euthyphro's consideration against a reductive physicalism—a purely mass-based materialism—is as simple as it is powerful: "To move thirty cannons, it still takes a real force of fifty thousand pounds at least. [...] The prince doesn't transmit this force from Europe to Asia, I think. [...] He sends one ounce of paper, and the artillery moves..." (*EE* 2.55).

<sup>26</sup> My translation; see Jansen's edition of the *Œuvres philosophiques*, 1.163.

<sup>27</sup> Hemsterhuis does admit that animals have a soul, and even suggests that the overly stark distinctions we make between animal souls and our own may be due to our vanity and incapacity to adopt the animal's experiential standpoint. (*EE* 1.98) But he is far from

in order that it truly concern the one essence as much as the other rather than constitute a mere extension of only one side, then the common manner of being allowing for communication would manifest in each case under the overarching character of each of the respective antipodes it links: soul and body. What exactly this means in terms of Hemsterhuis’s studies on the organ can be read from the declaration with which he virtually concludes the *Sophylus*:

The relation that exists between a nerve or the brain and the soul derives—in accordance with this demonstration—from a quality, a modification, or a way of being that is common to the soul and to the nerve or the brain. The nerve or the brain, as nerve or brain, is a composite essence. The qualities which it may have in common with the soul exist in it as a composite, since otherwise the soul could itself act on all matter that was neither nerve nor brain; and this is not the case. (*EE* 2.60)

It is worth unpacking what exactly is being proposed here. Hemsterhuis puts forth that the commonality between body and soul which allows for their interaction is such that whereas its occurrence in the soul is unitary, the body presents the same property but only in virtue of the specific manner in which it is composed, i.e., in which its multiple parts are arranged. He thereby ventures an answer to the question of how the soul could be attached to a given side of the corporeal or material universe by suggesting that the indivisible soul attaches itself to those precise points of the material universe in which it happens that a certain specific composition of parts mirrors one of the properties the soul possesses. On the side of the soul, that property subsists in a unitary, undivided, manner; whereas on the side of the discrete body in which the attachment takes place the subsistence of the property is only possibly showcased if the multiple parts of matter which make up the

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suggesting that an ensoulment—even if minimal—is common to any and all instances of matter. In this respect, he stands decisively on the side of Newton and later Kant, and opposite the likes of Leibniz, Herder, Baader, and Schelling. His very declaration that “everything is coil-spring” (*EE* 1.100) attests to his view of matter as that of an ultimately inert essence—one admittedly tensile and reactive, but precisely therefore still ultimately passive, and without an intrinsic source of activity. On this particular, cf. the contrast drawn between the coil-spring and the will. (*EE* 1.98) Attempts to vivify Hemsterhuis’s conception of matter could be made on the basis of his seeming attribution of seminal quality to it (see *EE* 1.101). But that attribution does not apply in an intrinsic or constitutive level to all matter. And, more importantly, the crux of the issue is that Hemsterhuis makes force into something which inheres on matter rather than constitutes matter; and so if one takes a closer look at his account of the first seeds that would allow for material formation (see *EE* 1.100 ff.) one can very well see that form always comes as a result of purely inert bits of matter being set in motion extrinsically rather than intrinsically.

corporeal existent are disposed in relation to one another in such a way that they extensively instantiate that which in the soul is cyphered in purely intensive terms. In contrast to the extensively disposed material composite, pure intensity represents a well of essence which does not entail juxtaposition, and hence speaks of an interior dimension of being, an ontological reserve beyond the externality of space. And so the organ, as that which links domains of existence and thereby articulates the subsistence of the universe as both physical and intellectual, would accordingly constitute the functional articulating point of a specific manner of being as occurring on the one hand unitarily in an inner spiritual region, and on the other as extended and divided into parts in the external material region. In a closely related context, Leif Weatherby puts it thus: “the organ is the integral and simultaneous differential of the opposed tendencies of the inner and the outer. It homogenizes and separates, isolates and causes interaction.”<sup>28</sup> Neither pure body nor pure soul, hovering as the attractive midpoint between extremes, the organ would thus enable essence to complicate itself—quite literally—into an interplay between a real and an ideal, a physical and a spiritual, manifestation of its power to be. And here Hemsterhuis’s oldest insight would come back once again, as it would be the operations of translation between these two domains which would constitute the passage of time: a *translation* which, as it will turn out, is to be understood in more ways than one...

The simple yet powerful insight that Hemsterhuis lastingly associates to the philosophical notions of organ and organicity is thus that they consist in the functional correspondence between interior unity and exterior multiplicity such that a channel between these two domains is secured, and the possibility for informative action between them can be upheld. Of course, the notion that the soul’s attachment to the corporeal universe happens by means of the specific disposition of parts of material existents inevitably opens up the question: how are specific material configurations achieved such that souls may attach to them? How can matter form itself into certain configurations whose specific composition (i.e., whose specific disposition of parts) mirrors and gives expression to an informatively complex and yet mereologically simple property of the unitary and indivisible soul? It is thus no coincidence that it is in the *Letter on Man*, just as he was also beginning to ponder how the soul could attach itself to the universe, that Hemsterhuis had first begun to explore the key question concerning matter’s capacity for

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<sup>28</sup> Leif Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ. German Romanticism Between Leibniz and Marx* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 224.

formation.<sup>29</sup> Regrettably, a more detailed exploration of Hemsterhuis’s attempts to account for material formation—to which belong his at times equivocal and changing elucidation of the dynamics of attraction, inertia, and centrifugal force—lies among the many forking paths which the larger avenue of this investigation must for now leave unexplored. Even so, however, certain passing remarks cannot be avoided.

Relying once again on the categories of homogeneity and heterogeneity, though this time applied to matter itself, Hemsterhuis submits that the “first seeds of all physical individuals” lie in a principle of regularity which comes to be when the homogenous parts of matter, by means of the unifying force of attraction / inertia, coalesce to form a lasting gravitational center. In Hemsterhuis’s own words, material individuals thus arise through “the first coagulation [*première coagulation*] of a certain number of homogeneous and uniform parts” (*EE* 1.101). There must however be something to keep this coagulating power of the homogenous from simply reducing the entire universe to a single mass, and so, against the attractive force which pulls matter together to a common center, Hemsterhuis postulates that heterogeneous parts of matter have been impressed<sup>30</sup> with a “centrifugal force” which, when pondered with the centripetal pull of attraction, leads to the arrangement of each material individual, and ultimately of the entire material universe, into formations not unlike those of “a planet which orbits its sun” (*EE* 1.101). Thus, by way of the dynamic arrangement of its homogenous and heterogeneous parts and forces, matter would be able to “produce [...] every transition we remark in the modifications of the individuals [the universe] contains” (*EE* 1. 101), quite literally organizing itself, i.e., locally

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<sup>29</sup> That question is skirted in the *Sophylus*, but returns all the more forcefully in the dialogue *Aristaeus, or on the Divinity*, where it is in fact for the first time thematized explicitly under the notion of ‘the general tendency towards organization’, understood both as the constitution of organs, but also more broadly in terms of generation, i.e., as the “firm and steady march of the parts of the universe to attain the formation of a substance” (*EE* 2.74). See *EE* 2.80, where Hemsterhuis speaks of an “organic principle” and an “organic march” of the universe.

<sup>30</sup> Needless to say, this impression of motion is of divine origin, and here Hemsterhuis’s theory of material formation comes together with his view that the universe is in a “forced state” of multiplicity (see *EE* 1.85) the direct cause of which is God. This (in this sense) seamless transition between God and creature is what enables Hemsterhuis to conclude from the “prodigiously transcendent and profound” geometry of the eye (see *EE* 1.103) to God qua intelligent author of the universe. Thus, Hemsterhuis’s philosophy is susceptible to the same critique which can also be levelled, *mutatis mutandis*, against Leibniz’s: that the way in which it sets God and the universe in relation to one another impinges on the possibility of nature’s autonomy and matter’s intrinsic formative capacity. It would be Herder—and after him Baader and Schelling, among others—who, seeking to explain formation from the dynamic of natural principles alone would first articulate an account of organicity as arising in a thoroughly natural manner: neither randomly, nor as an imposition of either transcendental or transcendent source.

configurating itself to form those specific corporeal dispositions which, by exhibiting a certain commonality with soul, would allow the latter to attach itself to the objective universe to such an extent as to practically navigate it. Put together with Hemsterhuis's aforementioned views on embodiment, this means that the material and the spiritual sides of the universe are connected to each other only by means of the orbital revolutions its parts carry out. And if, on top of this, it is true that "in any composition which has a certain end for its goal, the ideal must necessarily precede reality," (*EE* 2.49)<sup>31</sup> then matter's relation to that other domain of being begins indeed to suggest itself as that of a spatially extended and composite expression to the unity which underwrites and dictates its composition from within, as though this unity were the central idea which sets the pace of the *motio translationis* of the orbiting externality. Were we further to pair the fact that the mark of inertia is to keep every revolution from being instantaneous<sup>32</sup> with the previously staked insight that the conversions between central intensity and peripheral extensity begins with a material coagulation and entail the emergence of time, then the coming together of all theoretical strands would near its end. Not only would Plato have approvingly smiled at this confirmation that time indeed is the "moving image of eternity" (*Timaeus* 37d); but Baader, in any case, would not have failed to take notice.

#### 4. The Coagulation of Spirit

Let us now return to the point from which we set off: Baader's attribution of the syntagma of '*coagulated spirit*' to Hemsterhuis. Having laid the basis for a better-informed assessment of the plausibility of that attribution, it is now worth citing Baader at length and considering, even if cursorily, the context in which his attribution comes. Students of Baader may recall the fact that, following on the advances of his 1797 "Contributions to Elementary-Physiology," Baader's "On the Pythagorean Square in Nature" works to mark the difference between the efficient, motive forces of repulsion and attraction and the substantial ground force of gravity. In contrast to the other

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<sup>31</sup> See the following remark, from *Aristaeus*: "I will make two further remarks: first, where an organisation occurs, there appears a goal and consequently a determinate limit; secondly, where a goal appears, some ideal seems to have to precede the real" (*EE* 2.74).

<sup>32</sup> I refer here to Kepler, forerunner of all modern variations of ontological dynamics, who submitted that if there were no *vis inertiae* to be overcome by the *vis motrix* which brings about the movement of celestial bodies, their revolutions would happen instantaneously. The *vis inertiae*, however, came to those bodies by reason of their very matter (*ratione suae materiae*). See Johannes Kepler, *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. Max Caspar and Walter von Dyck, vol. 7 (München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1938–2017), 296.



two efficient forces, Baader claims gravity subsists at an internal remove from the spatial externality of material existence and constitutes the unifying medium and “common ground of their definite and persistent presence.”<sup>33</sup> To that extent, he submits it plays the role of an “interiority analogous to that of the stuff of our inner sense in every corporeal configuration.”<sup>34</sup> It is in referring to the motive forces of repulsion and attraction, specifically in contrast to the ground force of gravity and the fourth, actualizing, principle, that Baader approvingly refers to von Gleichen’s designation of these forces as “half-forces [*Halb-Kräfte*]”—since, after all, they make evident nature’s polarity, i.e., its *dichotomy* or division in two. Immediately thereafter, no longer drawing from von Gleichen but explicitly as a supplement to what the latter has to say concerning the question of spirit, Baader adds:

The concept of a spirit in contrast to the body (as only its negative) is that of the undivided, unpartitioned, i.e., unextended unity, in contrast to the divided, separated, extended one. — In this sense, Hemsterhuis makes use of the somewhat adventurous sounding and yet true expression of calling the body a coagulated spirit, and the corporeal universe a coagulated god. Since every action is immediately preceded by a synthesis of the elements or forces, the essence that is extended within itself necessarily experiences a suspension, and it must first overcome the resistance that opposes the totality or congruence of all its individual forces. This *solutio continui* must therefore be accompanied by pain, and is actually for us the suffering of time.<sup>35</sup>

In light of the considerations which have preceded, it does not seem to me unjustified to conclude that while the application of the infamous *geronnener Geist* syntagma to Hemsterhuis represents a textual license on Baader’s part—a contraction of insights at times dispersed and at times only incipiently presented—it is a license which is nonetheless taken entirely on the occasion of Hemsterhuis’s thought. What Baader had in mind with the attribution of this syntagma of coagulated spirit to Hemsterhuis is precisely the latter’s insight that an organ can only operate the communicative conjunction of the material and the immaterial if, for a given property of essence, it encompasses both the unextended unitary manifestation of its spiritual occurrence, as well as its corresponding exposition in the multiplicity of material parts, dynamically kept together as orbiting an attractive center. The coagulation at issue in the syntagma seems indeed to refer to the aforementioned “first

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<sup>33</sup> Baader, *Werke*, 3.258.

<sup>34</sup> Baader, *Werke*, 3.216.

<sup>35</sup> Baader, *Werke*, 3.262.

coagulations” which form the seeds or the principle of regularity around which the temporalized revolutions of the material center themselves. And what doubt, finally, could remain in this respect when one considers the closing part of Baader’s passage cited above: namely, that the process of *(dis)solution* which, as the negative of this coagulation, is the route the soul must take in translating its velleity or conatus into a physical action, amounts to breaking the resistance of all individual forces and constitutes for the otherwise eternal soul the suffering of time?

At issue for Hemsterhuis with a “coagulation of spirit” would thus never have been a total effacement of the difference between body and spirit or even of a transformation as such of the one into the other. At stake would much rather have been the attempt at recasting these otherwise absolutely disparate substances in such a way that their common boundary could plausibly sustain rule-bound and truth-preserving interaction. Propulsion by impact is a purely material phenomenon; it gets lost the instant one would purport to appeal to it in order to explain the interaction between matter and what is no longer matter... Acceleration by will is a purely spiritual event; it remains impotent the instant one would purport to appeal to it in order to explain the interaction between the soul and that through which it is located in a milieu of openness to alterity. And the universe itself would fall out of joint if these two could not both be kept in the closest proximity to one another precisely by that which sets them apart, in some way allowing for the point of contact to become porous as it makes them ever so minimally similar to one another. This is exactly what, in the terms of his own philosophy, Baader would eventually refer to as the law of assimilation (*Assimilationsgesetz*)—and would do so in direct connection to Hemsterhuis’s consideration of the relation of our own intellectual self to external material things no less.<sup>36</sup> Of course, by the time this assimilation resurfaces in Baader’s philosophy, Hemsterhuis’s own insights will have been filtered through and enriched by Herder’s own force-based meditations on organicity,<sup>37</sup> and so the organ will

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<sup>36</sup> See Baader, *Werke*, 3.209; 11.175; 11.293.

<sup>37</sup> Over and above the piece “On Love and Egoism,” with which he countered what he saw as an overly enthusiastic surrender to the unification of essences, Herder played a crucial role in dictating the terms in which Hemsterhuis’s organics would influence later German philosophy. Much closer to Leibniz’s *vis viva* metaphysics, Herder was for one thing opposed to any conception of materiality as a merely passive existent devoid of all activity other than one extrinsically transmitted, insisting that matter is not just the foil and refractory surface of force, but is itself force through and through. Nonetheless cognizant of the need to oppose both the theological dependency of Leibnizianism, as well as the overly subjectivistic tendencies of its transcendental reformulation by Kant, Herder underscored that the medium of connection of forces in their rule-bound integration to form material existents must itself be a force in nature rather than either a divinely guaranteed preestablished

not so much be that third element which brings matter and soul into a region of commonality, but organicity will much rather have become—*pace* Kant—into the inherently complex manner of being of all possible instances of existence. Among the many consequences which will follow from this, the fact can be highlighted that the universe will thereby have been decisively delivered from the puerile atomistic sketch of an aggregate of inert chunks of matter interacting by mere mechanical impulsion in a container of invariable space and invariable time, and set instead on its path towards an account according to which it is the energetic commerce of essence as it transits between the complex topography of being which leads to an accommodation of finite existence in emerging parameters of exhaustion through distension and deferment. Dynamic orbits instead of axiomatic bits, *all the way to the ground...* In turn, ontological mediation will have gone from the conviction of a merely extrinsic analogy between the antipodal domains of spirit and matter, to the much more daring view that existence consists in nothing other than the signature of the spiritual unto the material. In the aforementioned “Contributions to Elementary-Physiology,” Baader indeed says:

Every moving thing is to that extent inside and above the moved thing, as the soul (the animating) is inside and above its organ; the former (e.g. gravity) carries, the latter is carried.—But as everywhere, so too here spontaneity and receptivity are not separable; and the spirit, the active one, is here without its body as good a phantasmagoria, and the mere body (matter as pure passivity or inertia) is as good a metaphysical corpse, as is everywhere else the case. *Inasmuch, by the way, as moving is acting, and resting is a being moved and being acted upon, and [inasmuch as] the acting, the inspiring, strives for nothing in the acting but to make that in and by which it acts like itself, to mirror itself in it, to sign itself with it, so it can also only rest by and through the fact that it moves [it]*—Movement of the

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harmony or the mind of the cognitive subject. This mediating and connecting force—he submitted in *God: Some Dialogues* (see Herder, *Werke* 15.456; 15.548)—occupies a different hierarchical level to the one of the forces which it connects. In fact—Herder submits, no doubt deeply profiting from Hemsterhuis’s insights—this one ruling force disposes of the multiple ruled forces in order to express itself over time in a milieu beyond its self-containment. In other words, it uses those forces as its instrument or *organon*, thereby also organizing them to form an ordered spatio-temporalized disclosure of its essence. This conviction—grossly misunderstood by Kant but rehabilitated by later thinkers—is what is at the heart of Herder’s intimation, in works such as the *Ideas towards a Philosophy of the History of Human Kind*, that all existence is organic: i.e. inherently constituted as the dynamical expression of a unitary essence unto the common medium in which alone it comes together with others as properly existing.

periphery is one with rest of the center, inhibition of movement in the periphery is one with restlessness of the center.<sup>38</sup>

But what about the coagulated god? The reasons why Baader would have proceeded to the second part of his attribution—claiming that for Hemsterhuis the corporeal universe is a coagulated god—are admittedly harder to unearth; yet in light of the proposed solution to the first part of the conundrum, let themselves be cleared up. As a first step toward that end, it is important not to lose sight that, over and beyond the fact that the relation at stake in coagulation is *not* one of straightforward identity (but rather of asymmetrical assimilation), Baader additionally never claims Hemsterhuis to have made the divinity itself—God writ large—into the universe as such. What he rather submitted was the somewhat more digestible claim that Hemsterhuis took the corporeal universe to be a coagulated god. It is undeniable that for Baader this would have first and foremost referred to Hemsterhuis’s characterization of God as the ultimate unity which relates to the universe as a whole qua multiple and extended, in fact being the very cause of its “forced” multiplicity and of all the arrangements and motions through which that multiplicity acquires the particular configurations that it does (see *EE* 1.85).<sup>39</sup> In this respect, both the *Letter on Desires* and the *Letter on Man* offer important instruction. Beyond that, further valuable clues are, unsurprisingly, found in the dialogue *Aristaeus, or on Divinity*.<sup>40</sup> For one thing, this dialogue supports previous characterizations of God as the source of “primitive action” (*EE* 2.83) overcoming the inherent inertia of an otherwise static and sterile material universe in the direction of its “forced state” of mereological dynamic complexity. For another thing, the *Aristaeus* also explicitly thematizes the issue of the precise medium of relation which would connect God to the material universe, and so importantly draws the notion of coagulation closer to divinity, albeit at the price of a reduction of scope.

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<sup>38</sup> Baader, *Werke*, 3.251; my emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> Hemsterhuis’s rejection of the conception of divinity as a world-soul may appear to speak against Baader’s parallel between coagulated spirit and a coagulated god. It nonetheless seems to me that the arguments against such a parallel dissipate as soon as one considers that Hemsterhuis’s rejection of the world-soul conception obeys his view that God is not to be reduced to a mere aggregation or regulative principle of all the motions of the material universe, and that this view is presented precisely on the basis of the argument that the immaterial part of the human being likewise is not simply a mere sum of physiological or involuntary motions of the body, but something which transcends that level and relates to it freely by means of a will. See footnote 9 above.

<sup>40</sup> Evidence of the importance of this work for Baader’s philosophical development, particularly in what concerns God’s relation to the universe and the role the former plays as the cause of the universe’s “forced state” as composite and resisting ultimate unification, is provided by his diary. See Baader, *Werke*, 11.171–173; 11.327.

Indeed, Hemsterhuis makes clear that, in the eyes of divinity, the composition of the universe is not simply to be thought as the mere material sum-total of atoms—somewhat like a “block of marble”—but much rather as composed by parts “in terms of their entire essences,” (*EE* 2. 70) i.e., considering also the myriad relations of its constituent essences beyond their analogy to sense organs only. That does not mean to say, however, that the material universe would not itself already bear a relation to God in terms of its composition. Only this relation would not so much pertain to God as such, but rather only to one of its infinite attributes—and indeed to “the only attribute by which we know of this great Being by means of our [sensible] organs” (*EE* 2.93), namely: space. In this sense, Hemsterhuis makes clear that, as only one attribute, space stands an infinity of attributes away from exhausting the plenitude and power of God. But he does say of it that—like God—it is infinite, one, and that it has no parts and is absolute in nature, “encompass[ing] within itself everything” (*EE* 2.93). And moreover, taking up the same line of argument as he had in the *Sophylus* with regard to the nerve—and undoubtedly drawing inspiration once again from Newton<sup>41</sup>—he submits that all of what is material or corporeal has relation to God through space “in proportion to the richness of their composition and of their homogeneity with him” (*EE* 2.95). Although space is not an organ, it is nonetheless very plausible that, in Baader’s creative appropriation of Hemsterhuis’s speculations, its role in relating divinity to nature and giving rise to “eternal duration” would have found expression in the view that, just as matter is coagulated spirit to the extent that it arranges itself in a given composition corresponding to a given property of the soul, so too the corporeal universe would be a coagulated god to the extent that it is arranged in a given composition corresponding to an attribute of God.

I leave to the reader the task of deciding whether God is capable of the imperfect look through which alone the universe could appear as beautiful.

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<sup>41</sup> I am thinking of course of Newton’s (in)famous thesis—found in Query 31 to the *Opticks*—that space constitutes a *sensorium Dei*, or the medium (distinguished explicitly from organ) through which God would perceive and act on bodies. See Isaac Newton, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Andrew Janiak, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 138.

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