

JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY OF IDEAS



2025

Volume 14 Issue 28
Item 2

– Section 1: Articles –

Ontology of Bonds

Sympathy, Desire and Matter in Giordano Bruno

by
Alberto Fabris



JJHI 2025

Volume 14 Issue 28

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Ontology of Bonds

Sympathy, Desire and Matter in Giordano Bruno

Alberto Fabris *

This essay examines Bruno's radical reconceptualisation of sympathy as the generative principle of being. While many Renaissance thinkers conceived of sympathy as the index of a transcendent order or as a derivative structure grounded in participation and analogy, Bruno transforms it into an immanent force of matter itself. In his philosophy, sympathy is the performative act of binding—through which entities are constituted, transformed, and undone. Through a close reading of the De magia and the De vinculis in genere, the study elaborates a full ontology of the bond, showing how desire and matter converge within an infinite and living universe, where being emerges as relation-in-act. The Brunian bond is reciprocal, contingent, and temporally constructed: it does not preserve order but produces it as a provisional configuration, always exposed to vicissitude. Bruno's operative ontology culminates in a theory of binding that operates across the natural, psychic, and political registers, positing sympathy not as the conservation of a cosmic form, but as the force through which reality ceaselessly reinvents itself.

1. Introduction — Beyond the Cosmological Framework: Towards an Immanent Ontology of Relation

Within Renaissance thought, sympathy occupies a peculiar place. At once a cosmological notion, an ontological principle, and an operative device, it stands at the intersection of the principal tensions of natural philosophy, magic, and occult theology.

* Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia (alberto.fabris@unive.it). This research was conducted within the framework of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) project GlobalIngoli (Grant Agreement No. 101212381), funded by the European Union.

In the philosophical culture of the 15th and early-16th centuries—from Ficino to Pico, from Agrippa to Paracelsus—sympathy was understood as an intimate correspondence among things: the reflection of an analogical fabric that joined microcosm and macrocosm through the law of universal participation.¹ The world appeared as a living organism, ordered and harmonious, in which each entity, though singular, referred back to a structure of hidden yet constitutive bonds. Despite its various articulations, this conception rested on an ontology of order: a hierarchical vision of being,² where every relation mirrored a transcendent foundation. In its Hermetic–Neoplatonic form, sympathy was mediated through a stratified system of correspondences, that linked levels of reality through participation in immutable principles. Natural magic did not create new bonds but reactivated those already inscribed in the fabric of the world. The *magus* was not a demiurge but an interpreter and actualiser³ of a cosmic grammar whose efficacy depended entirely on fidelity to a pre-given order.

Against this backdrop, Giordano Bruno enacts a radical torsion. While retaining the vocabulary and structural elements of the tradition, he frees sympathy from its static, ordering function, reconfiguring it as the immanent dynamism of matter—an inner force through which entities generate and transform themselves in the very act of binding.

Bruno does not reiterate the analogy as an expression of transcendence; he inverts it into a theory of the bond as a productive force. Every tie becomes an *event* of the real, not the reflection of a predetermined harmony. Sympathy no longer registers given correspondences: it names the active principle by which reality is ceaselessly woven and transformed. No longer derivative of a higher order, it is the inner movement through which things attract and repel, bind and generate one another—according to the logic of an infinite, operative matter.

¹ Sophia Howlett, *Marsilio Ficino and His World* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 71, 83–88; Giulio Busi and Raphael Ebgı, eds., *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: mito, magia, qabbalah* (Einaudi, 2014), 150–51, 158, 329, 338; Christopher Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels: Cornelius Agrippa’s Occult Philosophy* (Brill, 2003), 3–11, 23, 50, 81; Charles Webster, *Paracelsus: Medicine, Magic and Mission at the End of Time* (Yale University Press, 2008), see chap. 5 “Matter and magic”.

² Howlett, *Marsilio Ficino and His World*, 83–88 (*anima mundi* as a principle of cohesion); Michele Schiavone, *Problemi filosofici in Marsilio Ficino* (Marzorati, 1957), chap. I.

³ Howlett, *Marsilio Ficino and His World*, 151–153 (“The magus”); Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels*, 66–67, 70–73.

In this perspective, sympathy designates the bond as an originary and generative act: an immanent tension that not only connects but transforms the very terms it relates. This reconceptualisation is inseparable from the metaphysical horizon that sustains it: an infinite, living universe populated by infinite worlds,¹ where every form is an act of matter and every relation arises from immanent interactions—without recourse to transcendent mediation.

This shift entails a radical transformation of the very concept of being. In Bruno, being does not precede the bond (*vinculum*); it is the bond—relation-in-act, the incessant production of ties. No self-sufficient substance remains, only provisional centres where forces condense as momentary effects of continuous interaction. Sympathy thus becomes the constitutive principle of reality: the expression of matter's infinite potency as it articulates itself into contingent, ever-revisable forms. A bond is real only in its efficacy; reality exists only insofar as it is bound.

Bruno's philosophy thus offers one of the most radical articulations of relational ontology at the threshold of modernity. It resists linear genealogies and asserts itself as an autonomous theoretical project, capable of overturning the entire edifice of a metaphysics of separation. This essay explores Bruno's concept of sympathy within that horizon, reinterpreting it as an operative principle and a generative force. Through a close reading of the *De magia* and the *De vinculis in genere*, I reconstruct the internal logic of this conceptual torsion, showing how it implies an immanent theory of forces and a reality conceived as a shifting network of active bonds—irreducible to given structures, and generated through a play of intensities and attractions.

What Bruno offers is not a revision but a radical displacement of the Renaissance concept of sympathy. No longer a mirror of cosmic order, sympathy becomes the act through which matter expresses its power to connect, transform, and regenerate. Each bond is a site of emergence: not the confirmation of a design, but the invention of a relation. In this perspective, there is no being outside the movement of binding and unbinding—no substance, no permanence, only configurations sustained by tension and exposed to change. Brunian sympathy does not guarantee coherence; it opens the real to its own excess.

¹ Fabio Raimondi, *Il sigillo della vicissitudine* (Unipress, 1999), 1-27, 71-113.



2. The Renaissance Paradigm of Sympathy: Order, Analogy, Hierarchy

In Renaissance philosophy and magic, sympathy functions as a structural principle: not a mere connection among things, but the ontological device through which coherence, intelligibility, and stability are imposed upon the multiplicity of existence. It operates as the medium through which heterogeneous levels of reality—natural and intelligible, visible and invisible, microcosmic and macrocosmic—are articulated into a systemic totality.

The essential feature of this paradigm lies in the fact that relation never arises from within things themselves, but it is guaranteed by a transcendent instance that precedes and sustains every possible linkage. Sympathy does not emerge as an effect of interaction, but as the expression of a metaphysical architecture that distributes efficacy according to a preestablished design. The order it reflects is not generated but presupposed: the bond derives its legitimacy from its conformity to a higher model.

This logic is stabilised through the triadic schema of participation, analogy, and hierarchy, which ensures the communication between separate orders while safeguarding their vertical articulation. Within such a framework, the magus does not establish relations: he recognises and activates the latent correspondences already inscribed in being. Relation is never a site of ontological production; it functions as a vehicle of resonance within a closed system of similitudes.

The aim of this article is to reconstruct the inner logic of this configuration: to show how, despite internal variations, the sympathetic paradigm remains governed by a metaphysics of order, in which relation is not a constitutive act but the secondary reflection of a transcendent principle. From Ficino to Agrippa, and even in Paracelsus—who reanimates matter without abandoning its theological ground—sympathy retains this function: it does not found reality, but maintains its equilibrium; it does not create novelty, but redistributes the already-possible.

To delineate the structure of this paradigm is to render visible the limit it imposes on the very idea of relation. What it excludes is the possibility of conceiving the bond as an act of genesis—capable not of echoing being, but of bringing it into existence. It is against this limit, and by displacing its terms from within, that Giordano Bruno elaborates his theory of the bond: a transition from sympathy as testimony of being to sympathy as its originary force.

2.1. Marsilio Ficino — Anima mundi, Eros and the Grammar of Harmony

In the thought of Marsilio Ficino, sympathy is not a secondary motif nor a conventional feature of Hermetic magic, but a central concept through which the order of the cosmos is made intelligible. Far from denoting a mere affinity among entities, it expresses the inner logic of a universe conceived as a living organism—graded in degrees of perfection and hierarchically arranged according to proximity to the One.¹ Within this vision, each being occupies a determinate place on the scale of being, and that position determines its nature, function, and efficacy. Sympathy renders this configuration perceptible: it acts as a hidden but operative bond, joining by the law of *similitudo* and disclosing, on the phenomenal plane, the invisible unity of the whole.

This network of correspondences does not arise from within matter, nor from any autonomous relational dynamic. Rather, it reflects a transcendent order inscribed into the very fabric of being by the divine principle. The world, for Ficino, is structured according to an analogical logic: each part refers back to the whole, and each level of being communicates with the others through a chain of mediations. As he writes in his *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, the innate desire to propagate one's own perfection unfolds the latent fecundity of each being, drawing forth life and connection across all things. Yet this generative motion does not originate from matter itself, but reflects the order impressed by a single divine artificer, whose Love operates as the perpetual knot and sustaining bond of the world. The cosmos thus forms a unified machine, whose parts are harmonized through an analogical structure rooted in transcendent design.

¹ Howlett, *Marsilio Ficino and His World*, 69-101.

(...) desiderium hoc perfectionis propriae propagandae cunctis ingenitum, latentem et implicitam cuiusque fecunditatem explicat; dum semina in germen pullulare compellit, et vires cuiusque eius educit sinu fetusque concipit, et quasi clavibus quibusdam conceptus aperiendo producit in lucem; quamobrem omnes mundi partes, quia unius artificis opera sunt, eiusdem machinae membra inter se in essendo et vivendo similia, mutua quadam caritate sibi invicem vinciuntur, ut merito dici possit amor nodus perpetuus, et copula mundi, partiumque eius immobile sustentaculum, ac firmum totius machinae fundamentum.¹

At the heart of this vision lies the *anima mundi*, the mediating principle between the intelligible and the sensible realms, which ensures the cohesion of the world and enables communication among its parts.² Drawing on Plato's *Timaeus* and the Plotinian tradition, Ficino describes the world-soul as a single, living substance that animates and governs the universe, just as the human soul animates the body. It instills into each being a vital spark, a principle of movement and participation, allowing each to respond to the others as part of an animated totality. In this context, sympathy is the sensible manifestation of the soul's activity: the echo of spirit within the world, making relation possible beyond physical contact or mechanical causality.

Yet Ficino's most profound articulation of sympathy emerges in the interplay between *anima mundi* and *amor*. Love, in his metaphysics, is not a subjective feeling but a universal force that draws all things toward their origin. It is desire for beauty—understood as the visible trace of divine proportion—that directs each being toward its fulfilment, generating bonds according to analogy and consonance. In the *De amore*, where Plato's *Symposium* is reinterpreted through a Neoplatonic lens, *eros* appears as the very force that animates the

¹ Marsilio Ficino, *Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, ed. and trans. Sears Reynolds Jayne (University of Missouri, 1944) 55-6. Translation: "As we have shown, this desire for the spread of its own perfection which is innate in everything, explains the innate and latent fecundity of everything. This desire compels seeds to sprout out into shoots; it draws out from the heart of each thing the powers of that thing, and conceives offspring; and opening the thing as though with a kind of key, it leads the offspring forth into the light. Wherefore, all the parts of the world, because they are the works of one artist, the parts of one creation, like each other in life and essence, are bound to each other by a certain mutual affection so that it may justly be said that love is a perpetual knot and binder of the world, the immovable support of its parts and the firm foundation of the whole creation", 152.

² Howlett, *Marsilio Ficino and His World*, 83-88.

cosmos: everything that exists seeks what resembles it, and in this movement the sympathetic structure of the world is established. Beauty renders the divine form perceptible; love binds each thing to its source. Sympathy is thus the affective medium of the cosmos: the invisible yet effective resonance of soul and desire across all levels of reality.¹

This conception deepens in the *Theologia Platonica*, where Ficino elaborates a metaphysics of participation.² Being is distributed in degrees along a hierarchical scale, in which every level derives from the one above as its image and reflection. Sympathy does not intervene as a force of production, but as the principle that guarantees ontological continuity—sustaining the bond between that which participates and that in which it participates. The world appears as a manifold mirror, refracting the divine ideas: each image, however attenuated, maintains an internal link to the archetype that grounds it. Sympathy, here, is not a power in itself, but the expressive rhythm of a reflective structure: it ensures the transmission of being without disrupting its order.

Within this framework, natural magic is not invention but interpretation. The *magus* is the one who understands the language of the cosmos, who reads in nature the traces of a divine script and activates its correspondences in fidelity to an established harmony. He does not forge new ties, but awakens those already inscribed within the order of things. As in Ficino's analogy with the farmer, his task is not to transform the substance of the world, but to cultivate its latent connections. Every bond he mobilises derives its efficacy from its rootedness in a higher principle, and the success of his operation depends on this fidelity.³

In this perspective, sympathy cannot be conceived as a principle of genesis or transformation. It is not the creative gesture that brings beings into relation, but the grammar that regulates their articulation; not the force that generates order, but the code that manifests it. As Schiavone observes, reality has value only insofar as it is part of an ordered totality, in which love binds the whole in a perfect metaphysical necessity.⁴ Every movement is, ultimately, a return; every difference, a variation; every change, a modulation within a form that precedes it.

¹ Howlett, *Marsilio Ficino and His World*, 71.

² Howlett, *Marsilio Ficino and His World*, 83–88.

³ Howlett, *Marsilio Ficino and His World*, 71.

⁴ Schiavone, *Problemi filosofici in Marsilio Ficino*, 37–53.

2.2. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola — Freedom, Sacred Semiotics and Participation

In the brief yet dazzling trajectory of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the notion of sympathy is embedded within a conceptual edifice where Platonic, Aristotelian, Hermetic, and Cabbalistic strands intersect toward a vision of cosmic order grounded in resemblance. Yet unlike Ficino, Pico situates the human being at the heart of the cosmos not only as a participant, but also as an interpreter and transformative agent—able to traverse and reconfigure the hierarchy of being through freedom and knowledge. Sympathy, here, retains its anchorage in structural analogy among the levels of being, but increasingly assumes the function of a hermeneutic device—one that enables the deciphering of the unity underlying the diversity of traditions and languages: philosophy, theology, magic, and the cabbala.

For Pico, the world is an ordered articulation of multiplicity refracted from a single transcendent source. In the *De ente et uno*, being is nothing other than unity: no real distinction separates being from the One except at the level of names.¹ All that exists does so by participation in unity; and in this light, sympathy is not a force but an effect—a perceptible correspondence among things, grounded in their shared originary foundation. It is the expression, not of material interaction, but of metaphysical proximity: a semiotics of participation that reflects the simplicity of the One in the complexity of the many.

Within this framework, the human being—the apex of creation and the microcosmic mirror of the universe—assumes a distinctive epistemological role. Endowed with the capacity to ascend the hierarchy of being, the human soul is able to gather within itself the scattered forms of knowledge and existence. Sympathy thus becomes the very condition of analogical thought: the principle that renders possible the transposition of meaning across planes of reality. The *Conclusiones* do not explicitly formulate a theory of sympathy, yet they presuppose its logic when affirming, e.g., that “Eadem est scientia de Deo, homine, et materia prima, et qui de uno scientiam habuerit, habebit de reliquis, seruata pro-

¹ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, “*De ente et uno*”, chap. 3, in *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno, e scritti vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Vallecchi, 1942); Steven A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)* (ACMRS Press, 1998), 25-30.

portione extremi ad extremum, medii ad extrema, et extremorum ad media”:¹ a single science binds together God, the human, and prime matter, insofar as proportion is maintained between extremes and their mediating term.

This logic is elevated into a metaphysical anthropology in the *Oratio de hominis dignitate*, where Pico grounds the dignity of the human in its indeterminacy,² the capacity to assume any ontological form. But this freedom is not arbitrary plasticity; it is the power to participate at every level of reality, by virtue of a soul sympathetically attuned to the cosmos. The desire for knowledge is itself a sympathetic tension: a movement toward what resembles and completes us, through which the world becomes intelligible as an ordered web of signs.

It is on this basis that Pico articulates his philosophy of magic. Far from being a creative act, magic is a disciplined operation—at once hermeneutic and technical—rooted in the recognition of structural correspondences. As in Ficino, natural magic is the science of hidden affinities, grounded in the metaphysical architecture of the real. Yet in Pico, this science is more explicitly linguistic: it depends on knowledge of the true names of things, as revealed in Hermetic and Cabbalistic traditions.³ Sympathy thus becomes the effect of a sacred semiotics: things are bound not only by nature, but also by their inscription within a symbolic order that the human intellect, within certain limits, is able to decode and activate.

Nonetheless, sympathy in Pico remains subordinate to a higher principle. It never constitutes an autonomous agency, but always reflects an ordered participation in a transcendent unity. Even when Pico affirms the fundamental bond between God, the human, and prime matter, that unity remains proportionally structured and hierarchically mediated.⁴ At its highest levels, magic too is subordinated to a negative theology: access to the divine is always oblique, and sympathetic power remains circumscribed by ontological constraints.

¹ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Conclusiones nongentae. Le novecento tesi dell'anno 1486* (Leo Olschki editore, 1995), *Conclusiones numero quingentae secundum opinionem propriam*, III, 52, p. 84; discussed in Busi and Ebgi, *Giovanni Pico*, Intro., XXVI.

² Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oratio de hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno, e scritti vari*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Vallecchi, 1942), §§ 1–2 (“Magnum, o Asclepi, miraculum est homo”). See Busi and Ebgi, *Giovanni Pico*, XXVII.

³ On Pico’s natural magic as a learned, analogical and philological art (with Cabbalah and Hermetica), see Busi and Ebgi, *Giovanni Pico*, XXV footnote 46, and the entry “Quabbalah”, 294–306.

⁴ See Mariateresa Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri, *Pico della Mirandola* (Laterza, 2011), 94–9.

It is here that the central tension of Pico's system emerges: on the one hand, a metaphysical structure of analogy that legitimates magical operations; on the other, an anthropological aspiration to freedom and metamorphosis that strains against every fixed determination. Yet this tension is not resolved through a subversion of order. Sympathy, for Pico, remains sign and medium—not source. It translates without generating; it connects without producing. It does not institute, but reflects.

In this respect, Pico stands as a pivotal yet internal figure within the ordering paradigm of Renaissance sympathy. His vision is integrative rather than transformative; his conception of the bond remains inscribed within a logic of reflection and mediation. Far from anticipating Bruno's radicalisation, Pico still moves within a symbolic economy in which sympathy operates not as a creative force, but as the interpretive trace of a divine order.

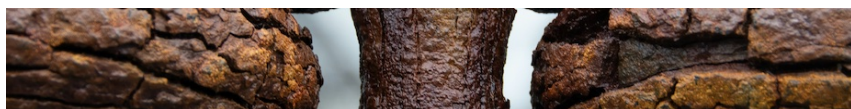
2.3. Cornelius Agrippa — Occult Philosophy Between Operativity and Disenchantment

The thought of Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim places the notion of sympathy at the unstable intersection of analogical ontology, magical practice, and a growing scepticism toward the traditional sciences. An ambiguous and deeply contradictory figure, Agrippa does not propose a unified doctrine of the bond. Rather, sympathy becomes the site of a fundamental tension—between the aspiration to a total science capable of reuniting the world in its originary unity, and the dawning awareness of the instability, opacity, and illusory nature of human knowledge. It is within this oscillation—between the *De occulta philosophia* and the *De vanitate scientiarum*—that the ambivalence of the sympathetic paradigm fully emerges: on one side, as an operative principle; on the other, as the symptom of a metaphysical desire vulnerable to idolatry.

In the *De occulta philosophia*, Agrippa constructs a vast system articulated across three ontological registers—physical, celestial, and divine.¹ This architecture is founded on the idea that the cosmos is woven from correspondences, signatures, and resonances that link things together by way of universal analogy.

¹ See Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, ed. Vittoria Perrone Compagni (Brill, 1992), 17, and Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels*, 43.

The *magus* is the one who knows this order and mobilises it through symbols, words, and ritual acts. As in Ficino and Pico, the world is a legible script, and to read it is to access its hidden connections. Yet for Agrippa, sympathy is not a passive reflection of nature but the very key to acting upon it: a principle that enables the will to operate through thought and language. Already here, however, a fault line becomes visible. Agrippa's occult philosophy does not merely describe the cosmic structure—it seeks to intervene within it. From its inception, it is exposed to the risk of *hybris*: the temptation to subject the invisible to human mastery.



This risk becomes explicit in the *De vanitate*, where Agrippa executes a radical gesture of disenchantment. There, all human sciences—including magic—are unmasked as contingent, fallible, and ultimately incapable of guaranteeing truth or salvation.¹ Wisdom resides not in the manipulation of bonds but in the reception of divine revelation. What in the *De occulta* had appeared as supreme gnosis is now recast as illusion: a vain attempt by the human being to transcend the bounds of finitude. And yet, as Lehrich has shown, this critique does not cancel out the *De occulta*, but reinscribes it within a theological framework.² What collapses is not the symbolic potency of the bond, but its claim to cognitive autonomy. Agrippa's philosophy thus assumes a bifrontal structure: the *De vanitate* performs a destructive gesture, relativising all knowledge; the *De occulta* undertakes a reconstructive one, proposing a philosophy of the sign that, while drawing on Neoplatonic analogy, gradually reorients magic toward a theology of the Word.³

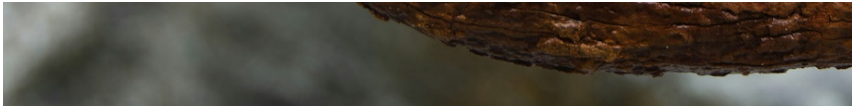
¹ On how *De vanitate* reframes rather than simply nullifies *De occulta*, see Lehrich, *The Language of Demons and Angels*, 39–42.

² Lehrich, *Language of Demons and Angels*, 32–6.

³ Lehrich, *Language of Demons and Angels*, 134–42 (on sign, language, revelation, and the semiotics recoding of occult 'bonds') and chap. 4 "The language of angels and demons", 147–212.

In this light, sympathy ceases to be an ontologically grounded force and becomes a figure of mediation: a symbolic image of the relation between creation and its source, between the human word and divine truth. Even within the operative logic of the *De occulta*, the bond no longer guarantees access to metaphysical reality, but points toward a higher order that exceeds the capacities of human reason. The binding power of magic does not disappear but is displaced: it enters an economy of revelation, where efficacy depends not on knowledge alone but on fidelity to a divine structure that eludes full comprehension.

For this reason, Agrippa marks a threshold in the history of Renaissance thought. Sympathy is no longer simply a cosmic grammar to be deciphered, as in Ficino, nor yet the latent *dynamis* of matter, as it will become in Bruno. It is a fractured symbol, caught between residual operativity and emerging disenchantment; it promises knowledge, yet reveals its own limits. Within occult philosophy, the bond becomes the place of a structural ambiguity: at once a mode of access to hidden forces and a mirror of the theological desire that haunts all epistemology.



This ambiguity surfaces in the very architecture of the *De occulta philosophia*, whose third book—dedicated to ceremonial magic and the cabbala—pushes magical speculation to the brink of orthodoxy.¹ Agrippa is fully aware of this tension: in the *De vanitate*, he explicitly condemns those who, claiming powers nature cannot provide, fall into imposture and self-deception. And yet this critique does not efface the symbolic force of the bond. Sympathy endures as the trace of a desire for mediation between the human and the divine—a desire that neither reason can fulfil nor theology entirely suppress. Magical knowledge, though stripped of gnostic ambition, remains the language of a world seeking relation beyond the reach of certainty.

¹ Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, lib. III (Cabala and ceremonial magic). For contextualisation and limits, see Lehrich, *Language of Demons and Angels*, 36-9.

In this sense, Agrippa represents a limit case of the sympathetic paradigm. He pushes the logic of the bond to its extreme—where operativity collapses into rhetoric, and the power to bind reveals itself as interpretive performance. It is from this ambivalence, from this lucid awareness of the bond’s epistemic instability, that Bruno will begin his reconfiguration: to think sympathy no longer as a sign of the divine, but as the immanent force of matter itself. Yet for this gesture to occur, the theological horizon that still frames Agrippa’s system must be decisively abandoned.

2.4. Paracelsus — Vitalism of Matter and the dynamics of *Signatura Rerum*

With Paracelsus, the notion of sympathy begins to detach itself from the Neoplatonic framework of cosmic harmony, acquiring a markedly dynamic and operative character. It becomes inseparable from a conception of matter as living, internally differentiated, and self-organising.¹ No longer the reflection of a transcendent order, sympathy is embedded in a vitalist cosmology where nature is animated by latent forces, instincts, and desires capable of producing real transformations.² Unlike Ficino’s hierarchical scale or Pico’s symbolic mediations, Paracelsus imagines a cosmos not of reflection but of impulse—an energetic organism traversed by tensions, flows, and active powers.

At the core of this vision lies the doctrine of *virtutes*: intrinsic capacities through which each entity affects and is affected.³ Sympathy thus arises not from analogical resemblance, but from the immanent interactions of operative forces. It is not a sign of order, but an act within a field of generative tendencies—effects of *natura naturans*, understood as a self-moving and plural principle. The sympathetic bond, in this light, is not a derivative expression of being but a constitutive relation: not a reflection, but an event.

¹ On Paracelsus’s move from Neoplatonic harmony to operative vitalism, see Walter Pagel, *Paracelsus: An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance* (Karger, 1982), 50-72.

² Georgiana D. Hedesan, “Paracelsian Medicine and the Theory of Generation in Exterior Homo”, *Medical History* 58, no. 3 (2014): 375-396.

³ Paracelsus, *Volumen Medicinae Paramirum*, trans. L. E. Leidecker (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1949), 26; Pagel, *Paracelsus*, 54.

Matter, accordingly, ceases to be a passive substrate and becomes the locus of intensity. It contains both signs and forces, and *magia naturalis* no longer consists in uncovering preexisting analogies, but in deciphering the *signatura rerum*: symbolic and causal traces inscribed in things, revealing their tendencies and affinities.¹ This semiotics displaces contemplative analogy with a practical hermeneutics, in which sympathy becomes a mode of engaged knowledge—an intervention into the structure of the real.

Magia naturalis is thus redefined as an experimental and technical art grounded in the resonance between human and cosmos. The magus is no longer a priest of celestial harmonies, but a physician and alchemist: one who acts upon the internal forces of matter to heal, modify, and disclose. For Paracelsus, the world is saturated with secrets accessible only through intuition and revelation, and magic is the highest form of knowledge insofar as it penetrates the inner logic of becoming.² Sympathy, in this context, is no longer a medium of correspondence but a vector of transformation: to act magically is to engage the generative potency of nature.³

Central to this vision is the concept of the *Archeus*—an inner principle that governs the vital processes of every being. Each entity possesses its own *Archeus*, a sort of natural intelligence through which its transformations and interactions unfold. Sympathetic bonds are activated not through external mediation but as direct expressions of this inner life.⁴ The bond thus ceases to be a passive effect of order and becomes a formative function: it generates being instead of presupposing it.

Even the polarity between sympathy and antipathy is no longer reducible to astral configurations: it reflects real tensions between forces that attract, repel, and recombine. Nature unfolds as a field of metamorphic interactions, and sympathy is but one modality of this incessant operativity.

Paracelsus thus opens a new conceptual space: the bond is no longer the image of participation in a stable order, but the articulation of tensions imma-

¹ Paracelsus, *De natura rerum* (Perna, 1573), lib. IX, “De signatura rerum naturalium”; Pagel, *Paracelsus*, 148; Paracelsus, *Essential readings*, selected and translated by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (Crucible, 1990), 129–30; 184–85.

² See Webster, *Paracelsus*.

³ Hedesan, “Paracelsian Medicine”, esp. on practice and intervention.

⁴ Pagel, *Paracelsus*, 106.

ment to matter. For Paracelsus knowledge is not speculation but praxis: a direct engagement with the forces that constitute the real. Magic no longer obeys a divine logic; it becomes the immanent act through which matter shapes itself.

In this sense, Paracelsus marks a turning point in the theory of sympathy. With him, the metaphysics of similitude gives way to a logic of the bond as energetic event: a force that not only connects, but alters; that not only reflects, but generates. Still transitional, yet already incisive, this shift prepares the ground for the Brunian inversion: the transformation of sympathy from the effect of order into the principle of its becoming.

2.5. Limits of the Sympathetic Paradigm: Relation as Dependence, Order against the Event

The analysis of Ficino, Pico, Agrippa, and Paracelsus reveals a conceptual structure at once powerful and intrinsically limited. Across these diverse elaborations, sympathy never functions as a generative principle, but only as a mode of manifestation: the sign of a hidden harmony that links multiplicity to unity, yet never the force that brings such linkage into being. It is not foundation but expression, not cause but index—a secondary articulation of a pre-given ontological configuration.

In all cases, this configuration is grounded in a hierarchical order. Whether articulated through Ficino's Neoplatonic scale, Pico's *prisca theologia*, Agrippa's occult signatures, or Paracelsus's vitalist energetics, sympathy is always inscribed within a logic of participation: a regime in which relation derives its legitimacy from something anterior. The bond is never autonomous; it presupposes a symbolic, metaphysical, or cosmic structure to which it must remain faithful. It is not an act that creates connection, but a *symptom* that reveals it.

This logic defines the threshold beyond which the classical paradigm cannot move. First, the primacy of analogy—as the general form of correspondence across levels of being—excludes the event. No true novelty is thinkable within this system, because every bond must be retrospectively aligned with a pre-established order. Transformation appears only as restitution or realignment, never as rupture. Sympathy does not enact being but reiterates it.

Second, the bond is never fully immanent. Even in Paracelsus—where matter possesses an internal dynamism—its efficacy remains dependent on a hermeneutics of signs: the recognition of *signatura*, the mirroring of macrocosm and microcosm, the deciphering of hidden resonances. The bond does not produce its own order but reflects a structure already inscribed. Its power is not to create but to confirm, to activate what is latent.

Third, and most decisively, the classical paradigm precludes any conception of the bond as a constitutive gesture: a relation that would not follow from being but bring it forth. Sympathy never names the act through which reality is constituted; it remains subordinated to a world already formed. However dynamic its effects, the bond is always posterior to the structure it expresses.

To recognise these constraints is to uncover a metaphysical decision underlying the Renaissance model: a conception of relation as derivative, of resemblance as the ground of connectivity, of unity as the condition for difference. What remains excluded is the possibility of thinking relation as origin—no longer as mediation but as genesis, not as the trace of being but as its very formation.

It is at this threshold that the need for a torsion becomes legible. To reconceive sympathy as a force that does not reflect order but constitutes it—as an immanent principle of binding and transformation—is to shift the axis of thought from analogy to production, from participation to emergence. Such a reconfiguration entails not merely a new theory of magic, but a new ontology. It is on this ground that Giordano Bruno's intervention will unfold.

3. Giordano Bruno and the Refoundation of Sympathy: The Bond as Act

In Giordano Bruno's philosophy, sympathy no longer designates the trace of a correspondence guaranteed by a transcendent order. It becomes, instead, the very name of a constitutive force: the immanent power by which matter—animated by desire—binds and unbinds itself, generating configurations of reality through the continuous articulation of its own potency.¹ The rupture does

¹ Giordano Bruno, *De la causa, principio et uno*, in *Giordano Bruno: Cause, Principle and Unity; and Essays on Magic*, ed. and trans. Richard J. Blackwell and Robert de Luca (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

not consist in a rejection of the Hermetic–Neoplatonic model from without, but in its radical transformation from within: while Bruno preserves its vocabulary and operative imagery, he overturns its metaphysical logic, giving rise to a relational ontology in which the bond no longer reflects being, but founds it.

Within this framework, the universe is no longer a finite, hierarchised totality but an infinite and self-organising multiplicity, in which matter is one, active, and autonomous. Every bond is a real event—not the echo of an archetype, but the effect of forces in mutual activation. Sympathy no longer operates through resemblance or participation, but through the contingent encounter of singular potencies. Its logic is not that of recognition, but of production.

Desire, which in the classical paradigm was oriented toward its model, becomes in Bruno the inner logic of relational becoming: not aspiration toward transcendence, but immanent drive—an affective and operative tension through which entities communicate, transform, and reconfigure one another. In a cosmos without centre or limit, the bond does not stabilise but disrupts; it opens the real to *vicissitudine*, to the constant transition from composition to dissolution, from relation to metamorphosis.

Bruno’s refoundation of sympathy is thus not a revision of magical doctrine, but a reconfiguration of ontology itself. In the *De magia* and the *De vinculis in genere*,¹ this transformation takes the form of a general theory of the bond—not as the recognition of preordained signs, but as the very act through which reality is constituted. To bind is to act within matter, to compose its forces into new relations. The magical operation is effective because it does not imitate a structure—it produces one. The bond is real insofar as it transforms: it affects both the one who binds and that which is bound, altering their positions in the very gesture that connects them.²

This section reconstructs the logic of this transformation, showing how Bruno reappropriates the motifs of the Hermetic–Neoplatonic tradition only to refunction them within an ontology of immanence and force. Beginning from the rupture with the classical paradigm, it will be argued that Bruno’s metaphysics of

¹ Bruno, *De magia* and *De vinculis in genere*, in *Giordano Bruno: Cause, Principle and Unity; and Essays on Magic* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. *On Magic*, 105–142 and *A General Account on Bonding*, 145–176. From now on, references to the *De magia* and the *De vinculis* will refer to this edition.

² Bruno, *De vinculis in genere*, art. 1–3 (on the formal/operative status of the bond), 145–6.

infinite worlds and living matter gives rise to a new science of bonds—where sympathy no longer mirrors a cosmic design, but emerges as a generative principle: at once ontological motor and technical instrument, indifferent energy and productive act.

3.1. From Reflection to Production: Beyond the Classical Paradigm

1. The vocabulary through which Bruno elaborates his theory of sympathy is drawn from the Hermetic-Neoplatonic tradition, but not as a passive inheritance. Terms such as *virtus*, *anima*, *correspondence*, and *bond*—central to Ficino, Pico, and Agrippa—are reappropriated as conceptual tools within a profound operation of theoretical displacement. Rather than confirming a paradigm of order, they are reworked to express a system in which the bond no longer reflects a transcendent structure, but emerges from the immanent productivity of infinite matter.¹

And this is universal matter, without which there is no form, in whose power, desire and disposition all forms are located, and which receives all forms in the development of its parts, even though it cannot receive two forms at the same time. Hence, matter is in a sense divine, just as a form, which is either a form of matter or nothing, is also in a sense divine. There is nothing outside of matter or without matter, otherwise the power to make and the power to be made would be one and the same thing, and would be grounded in one undivided principle, because the power to make anything and the power of anything to be made would be either present or absent together. There is only one potency taken absolutely and in itself (whatever it may be in particulars, in composites and when taken accidentally, a question which dominated the thinking and the minds of the Peripatetics and their monkish followers). I have said this in many places in my *De infinito et universo* and more precisely in my *De principio et uno*, where I conclude that it is not a foolish opinion which was defended by David of Dinant and by Avicbron in his *Fons vitae*, who cited the Arabs who also ventured to assert that God is matter.²

¹ Bruno, *De magia*, 111.

² Bruno, *De vinculis in genere*, 173.

Virtus, which in Ficino and Pico designated an operative potency derived from participation in a higher principle, is in Bruno severed from its hierarchical anchoring and reconceived as an intrinsic force: a generative expression of matter itself. The soul, no longer a mediating substance between ontological levels, becomes a function internal to bodies, a mode of self-organisation and relational composition. *Correspondence* ceases to signify a return to pre-established analogies and becomes the contingent effect of encounters between forces.¹ And the *bond*, far from marking a harmony to be deciphered, is redefined as a constitutive act: binding is no longer a sign of being—it is its very emergence.



This reconfiguration proceeds not by rejecting the traditional vocabulary, but by subverting it from within. In Bruno's magical and mnemonic writings, the terms and figures familiar to Renaissance natural philosophy are retained, but their metaphysical valence is reversed. In the *De magia*, for instance, *virtus occulta* no longer signals a hidden order to be mirrored, but a force that manifests in relational activation. And in the *De vinculis in genere*, the bond becomes an operative construct: not a datum to be recognised, but a device to be produced, manipulated, and transformed.

The decisive shift is from *sign* to *act*.² In the classical paradigm, the bond functioned as a semantic indicator: it attested to a structure external to itself, securing the intelligibility of the real through reference to an ontological ground. In Bruno, the bond institutes relation in the very moment it operates; it does not confirm an order but brings it into being. The traditional lexicon remains in place, but its internal grammar is rewritten in terms of immanence, agency, and production.

¹ Saverio Ansaldi, *Les liens de la métamorphose. Essais sur la Renaissance* (Kimé, 2017), chap. “Giordano Bruno: la fabrique du lien”.

² Thomas Berns, “Une philosophie du bondage? Politique du lien chez Giordano Bruno”, *K. Revue trans-européenne de philosophie et arts* 4, no. 1 (2020): 81-92.

This strategy is both conceptual and rhetorical. Conceptually, it allows Bruno to effect an ontological torsion from within the inherited framework: familiar terms are recharged to express a radically new metaphysics no longer subordinated to analogy or hierarchy. Rhetorically, it ensures continuity with the intellectual horizon of his interlocutors—steeped in the logic of resemblance—while subtly drawing them into a universe where forces bind directly, without recourse to mediation. This dimension is especially salient in the mnemonic treatises and in Bruno’s engagements across philosophical, medical, and magical contexts. The apparent fidelity to Hermetic-Neoplatonic language thus becomes the mask under which a subversive ontology is smuggled: a vision in which the bond no longer refers to order, but actively composes it.¹

2. One of the most decisive breaks Bruno enacts within the Hermetic-Neoplatonic framework—despite his continued use of its vocabulary—concerns the architecture of mediation that had traditionally organised the descent from transcendent unity to worldly multiplicity. In authors such as Ficino and Agrippa, communication among levels of being is structured by a hierarchy of intermediaries—angelic intellects, astral souls, archetypal forms—that regulate the flow of influences and preserve the integrity of the cosmic order.² Within such a schema, sympathy is never direct: every bond is filtered through layers of metaphysical mediation and serves as an index of participation in a superior principle.

Bruno dismantles this architecture by replacing mediation with immediacy. In the *De magia* and the *De vinculis in genere*, communication among entities no longer depends on ontological relay points. Bonds arise not from participation in a higher model, but from the direct encounter of virtues: intrinsic powers that do not refer beyond themselves. No angels, no archetypes, no celestial hierarchies are required to legitimise the efficacy of a relation. Even where Bruno echoes Ficino or Agrippa—sometimes closely enough to be accused of plagiarism³—the structural logic is already overturned. The chain is absorbed and neutralised: what remains is a continuous field of forces, in which each

¹ Ansaldi, *Les liens de la métamorphose*, chap. “Giordano Bruno: la fabrique du lien”.

² Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, ed. Raymond Marcel (J. Vrin, 1964), bk. III; Agrippa, *De occulta philosophia*, I, Prologue.

³ Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1964), chap. 12 and Raimondi, *La Repubblica dell’assoluta giustizia*, 93.

point may bind or be bound by virtue of its own operative potency. *Virtus* is no longer derivative but generative—an immanent principle of action internal to matter itself.

This shift has profound epistemological consequences. In the classical paradigm, knowledge meant interpretation: to read the world was to decipher a script already inscribed in the fabric of being. The *magus* was a hermeneut: he discovered relations, he did not create them. In Bruno, knowledge becomes a form of *technē*.¹ To know is to perform. Magic is no longer the science of correspondences, but the praxis of composition: the capacity to arrange, modulate, and transform. The world is no longer a text to be read but a medium to be reconfigured. The magus is not the guardian of hidden meanings but an agent within the same field he operates—an artisan of forces and an engineer of bonds.

From this perspective, the bond is no longer the echo of an archetype but the event of a contact. Its truth is not measured by resemblance, but by efficacy. A bond is real only insofar as it acts. When it ceases to operate, it dissolves. In this way, Bruno displaces the logic of reflection with that of performance: to bind is to bring into being, to activate a configuration that has no guarantee outside its own operation. Order, here, is not an ontological premise but a contingent effect—always provisional, always reversible, always exposed to reconfiguration. In a universe without centre, without mediation, and without model, sympathy is no longer the registration of harmony, but the force that generates it.

3. In Bruno, the bond does not follow being—it articulates it. It is not an instrument, but the threshold where existence emerges as relation. This claim, marking perhaps the most radical torsion of the Hermetic-Neoplatonic tradition, rests on the negation of any pre-relational substrate: there is no substance that precedes relation, no stable ground onto which connections are added. Being is nothing but the act of relation—binding as its constitutive movement.² As articulated in *De la causa, principio et uno*, this is not a reversal of priority between substance and relation, but their conceptual dissolution. Matter is infinite, animated from within by an active *virtus*, and the bond is its primordial expression.

¹ Berns, “Une philosophie du bondage?”

² Bruno, *De la causa, principio et uno*, Dialogues II–III.

In this framework, matter is not the passive recipient of form, but a self-organising principle, irreducibly productive and internally differentiated. Each entity is a contingent configuration—a knot within an infinite web with no centre or pre-established architecture. The permanence of being is not guaranteed by form but sustained by *vicissitudo*, the law of transformation that governs the infinite.¹ Order, here, is no longer a metaphysical given to be preserved, but the transient effect of the interplay among immanent forces—always open to reconfiguration.

Binding, then, is not the effect of structure but the manifestation of a constitutive tension: desire. Yet this desire must be clearly distinguished from the *appetitus* of scholastic metaphysics or from any model premised on lack.² Bruno's desire is not a movement toward plenitude but the expression of excess—an inexhaustible drive issuing from matter's own infinitude. It is the pulse through which matter opens itself to relation and transformation.

Desire thus names the immanent vector of matter's potency: the internal inclination that configures it toward the other and articulates it into singular forms. Each bond is the temporary crystallisation of this dynamic—an encounter where matter, simultaneously attracting and attracted, organises itself into a determinate yet always revisable expression. The bond is never final: it realises a tendency while reopening it, since desire, in Bruno, is not fulfilled in actualisation but reignited through it.

This ontological dynamic receives its clearest articulation in the magical treatises—above all in *De vinculis in genere*. There, the reality of the bond depends not only on material disposition (*materia apta ligari*), but also on the convergence of forces in time (*occasio*):³ without the opportune moment, the bond fails. Time is not an extrinsic condition but a structural dimension of relation: to bind is to seize a rhythm, to modulate intensities according to the temporal articulation of forces immanent to matter itself.

In this light, sympathy becomes the operational face of desire—not the name of a stable resemblance, but the process through which matter binds itself and is

¹ Bruno, *De l'infinito, universo e mondi*, Dialogue I.

² Ansaldo, *Les liens de la métamorphose*, chap. "Politique du désir et technologie du lien chez Bruno".

³ Bruno, *De vinculis in genere*, 50. "We experience various feelings at different times and on different occasions, and there is no one measure common to them all".

thereby transformed. *Vicissitudo* is no longer the mere alteration of forms, but the visible index of desire's persistence: the bond dissolves, not in failure, but as the precondition of new arrangements.

The efficacy of the bond is measured by its capacity to generate effects—not by conformity to archetypes, but by its operative power. As Bruno writes in *De magia*,

This is the most important and most fundamental of all the principles which provide an explanation of the marvels found in nature; namely, that because of the active principle and spirit or universal soul, nothing is so incomplete, defective or imperfect, or, according to common opinion, so completely insignificant that it could not become the source of great events.¹

Virtus, here, is not the expression of a transcendent order but a power internal to things, capable of activation and modulation in relation.

A decisive consequence of this ontology is the reciprocity of transformation. To bind is not to impose form upon inert matter, but to enter into a circuit of mutual alteration.

Bonds are so subtle, and that which is bound is so barely sensible in its depths, that it is possible to examine them only fleetingly and superficially. They change from moment to moment and are related to the bonding agent like Thetis fleeing from the embraces of Peleus. It is necessary to study the sequence of the changes and how the power of a subsequent form is influenced by its predecessor, for although matter is indeterminate in relation to innumerable forms, still its present form is not equally distant from all the others.²

There is no unilateral action, no sovereign subject untouched by its operations. The bond alters both terms of the relation and transforms them from within.

The result is a cosmos that is not merely infinite in extent or plurality of worlds, but in the very structure of its becoming: an infinitely desiring universe. In such a cosmos, the power to bind and the power to desire are two aspects of the same immanent act—the act by which matter, identical to itself in its infinity, continually renews itself in the multiplicity of its forms. Sympathy no

¹ Bruno, *De magia*, 111.

² Bruno, *De vinculis in genere*, 154.

longer marks a preordained order; it is the principle of its emergence, the generative device by which matter constitutes and reconstitutes the real. Being, in this horizon, is nothing but the process of binding—an immanent field of tensions, without ground beyond the efficacy of the relations it sustains. To bind is to compose the real, and philosophy becomes the science of its conditions of articulation, endurance, and metamorphosis.

3.2. Composing Relations in an Infinite World

In Bruno's system, the infinity of worlds and the unity of matter are not separate theses, but two expressions of a single ontological principle. The unity of matter implies its infinity:¹ were matter finite, its potency would remain inert, incapable of exhausting its generative capacity. Conversely, if matter is infinite, it must deploy itself in an unending multiplicity of forms. The transition from the finite, hierarchised cosmos of Aristotelian-Ptolemaic tradition to Bruno's boundless universe is not a mere dilation of space, but a transformation of the very architecture of reality.² With the disappearance of a fixed physical and metaphysical centre, the vertical structure collapses:³ no privileged point governs motion and influence, and every location becomes a potential site of action, relation, and transformation.

Within this horizon, connection no longer reflects a transcendent order, but emerges directly from the intrinsic *virtus* of matter—its immanent power of self-organisation and relation. *Virtus* is not an accidental property nor an imposed form, but the active capacity of matter in its tendency to bind and reconfigure itself. Every entity, by virtue of its material nature, is in principle connectable with any other—regardless of scale, distance, or form. Unity is no longer imposed from above, but grounded in the shared immanence of all things: not as a given harmony to be recognised, but as the ever-present possibility of generating new constellations.

¹ Giordano Bruno, *De l'infinito, universo e mondi*, Dialogues I–II; Hilary Gatti, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science* (Cornell University Press, 1999), chap. 5.

² Raimondi, *Il Sigillo della vicissitudine*, 105–7.

³ Raimondi, *Il Sigillo della vicissitudine*, 134–7.

Without a centre, the universe appears as a reticular field of forces—open, mutable, and without any extrinsic finality.¹ Each node is both a source and an effect of relations; no link refers back to a definitive origin or terminal point. The only persistence lies in the duration of the forces that sustain a given configuration. Order, here, is no longer the expression of a stable law, but the temporary equilibrium of converging potencies—always at risk, always reversible.

In this universe, vicissitude—the law of generation, corruption, and transformation—is not an accident but the very form of being’s unfolding.² Every bond contains the possibility of its own undoing, and it is precisely this dissolubility that ensures the openness of the whole. An immutable bond would paralyse the dynamism of matter; by contrast, its reversibility enables continuous metamorphosis. Sympathy is thus no longer the agent of preservation, but the principle of perpetual variation.

The consequence is decisive: the infinity of worlds is not merely spatial or numerical, but ontological. Each world, each form, is a contingent crystallisation of matter’s generative excess—destined to pass, mutate, or recombine under the pressure of the same forces that engendered it. The Brunian cosmos is infinite not because it lacks bounds, but because it ceaselessly actualises its own potential. Its unity is not that of a totality, but of a common material belonging: a desiring, self-organising ground from which new relations continually emerge.

In this framework, the bond is not a supervenient act upon a given reality, but the gesture through which reality is composed. It does not simply connect what already is: it brings entities into being through their situated inclusion in a shared field. The absence of centre and transcendence coincides with a radical immanence of relation: being is nothing other than the network of its bonds, and these, in their formation and dissolution, are the most direct expression of matter’s infinite potency.



¹ Bruno, *De la causa, principio et uno*, Dialogue II.

² Gatti, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science*, chap. 5.

3.3. De magia: Sympathy as an Operative Principle

1. *De magia* occupies a strategic position within Bruno's philosophical architecture, both chronologically and conceptually. Likely composed between 1588 and 1590—at the height of his speculative maturity—it belongs to the same theoretical constellation as *De vinculis in genere* and the mnemonic treatises of Wittenberg and Frankfurt. Together, these texts form a laboratory in which Bruno systematises and radicalises his reflection on natural magic in light of the metaphysics of infinite matter. Far from being a manual of correspondences or technical recipes—as many contemporary compilations were—*De magia* is a conceptual treatise: it interrogates the very conditions of magical operation, grounding them in ontological and anthropological structures. Magic is not a marginal or esoteric practice, but one of the primary expressions of being's self-articulation. Its originality lies precisely in this integration: it reinscribes magical art within the same ontological framework that underpins Bruno's entire philosophy.¹

From this perspective, natural magic is not an ancillary chapter of Renaissance Hermetism, but the operative continuation of the ontology outlined in *De la causa, principio et uno*. What that dialogue establishes on the speculative plane—the infinitude and internal dynamism of matter—*De magia* translates into a pragmatics of relation: cosmological principles become techniques of binding. Hence Bruno's explicit rejection of a model of magic conceived as the interpretation of fixed analogies between microcosm and macrocosm. In an infinite and decentred universe, the bond cannot be the mirrored effect of a pre-inscribed order. Bruno's reformulation is radical: sympathy no longer proceeds from a transcendent harmony, but emerges as the primary operation through which matter, animated by its own *virtus*, configures itself into effective relations. It is not the trace of a code, but the immanent activity of matter as it binds, transforms, and differentiates itself.

Philologically, the treatise presents itself as a dense and concise text, structured in short chapters that alternate definitions, distinctions, and operative principles. But this concision is not didactic reduction: Bruno constructs a genuine grammar of binding, applying to magical discourse the same formal rigour

¹ Gatti, *Giordano Bruno and Renaissance Science*, chap. 5; D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* (Penn State Press, 2000 [1958]), chap. on Bruno's natural magic.

that governs his cosmological expositions. The parallel between philosophy and magic is programmatic: both aim at rendering nature intelligible through conceptual formalisation, both constitute techniques for intervening in the real. Magic, in this light, is not the hermeneutics of a hidden script, but the strategic modulation of forces. The magus is not a reader of signs, but an artisan of relation—immersed in the field he transforms.

Read alongside *De vinculis*, *De magia* offers not a repertoire of applications but a general theory of operation within infinite nature. Bruno constructs a phenomenology of efficacy: a physics of binding in which matter and psyche converge. *Materia apta*, opportune conjunctions, imaginative mediation, mnemonic architecture—these are not ancillary elements, but structural components of the magical dispositif. The act of binding is never the mechanical repetition of a rule, but the situated composition of forces: a singular, immanent, and transformative event.

2. At the heart of the *De magia* lies the concept of *virtus*—a term inherited from the vocabulary of natural magic, yet radically rearticulated in Bruno's thought. In the great Renaissance systems—from Ficino to Agrippa—*virtus* designated a property conferred by an entity's position within the chain of being and its participation in a higher archetype, whether celestial, angelic, or intellectual. Force was not autonomous: it functioned as a sign of an external model, and the task of the magus was to recognise and reproduce this metaphysical architecture in the lower world. *Virtus* thus operated within a regime of analogy, subordinated to a vertical order of reflection and participation.

Bruno retains the term but subverts its logic. *Virtus* no longer indexes a transcendent principle, but names the operative potency immanent to matter itself: a force that grounds no correspondence beyond its own efficacy. Every body harbours an intrinsic power, revealed in the bonds it is capable of generating. The value of those bonds is not determined by resemblance to a higher form, but by their concrete capacity to affect and transform a given constellation. Bruno's *virtus* is not representative but performative: it does not mirror an order—it composes one.

This inversion has far-reaching consequences for the conception of sympathy. In an infinite and decentred universe, sympathy cannot consist in the recognition of stable analogies. It becomes the dynamic through which *virtutes* enter into resonance, conflict, or conjunction—producing bonds, repulsions, or

thresholds of intensity according to configurations that are always contingent, and always in flux. There is no preestablished table of correspondences, only a mobile field of interactions in which bonds emerge, mutate, and dissolve with the shifting play of forces. Sympathy thus ceases to be a code to interpret, and becomes a process to enact: a practice of relation that has no law but its own emergence.

From this standpoint, magic is no longer the hermeneutics of hidden signs, but the strategic modulation of energy. The *magus* is the one who discerns the potential of a configuration (*occasio*) and intervenes to activate, intensify, or dismantle its relations. *Virtus* is never a dormant capacity: a force is real only insofar as it binds, and the work of magic consists in drawing this power to its highest point of articulation. The magical act is not a mechanical application of rules, but a praxis of transformation: a singular operation that composes a field of tensions into effective form.

With this, the *De magia* signals the silent dismantling of the analogical paradigm that structured Renaissance Hermetism. In its place, Bruno articulates an energetic ontology: not the reflection of a preordained order, but the production of relations within a distributed, centreless cosmos. Sympathy, within this horizon, is not a symbol of similitude, but a real effect of interaction; not the echo of a hidden harmony, but the active pulse of matter binding itself into form.

3. A further decisive innovation of the *De magia*—which sets it apart from other treatises of natural magic—is the central role it assigns to imagination and memory: not auxiliary faculties, but fully operative powers integrated into the process of binding. Building on insights developed in his mnemonic writings, Bruno shows that the mind is not a passive mirror of nature, but an active crucible in which *virtutes* are condensed, modulated, and reoriented. Once *virtus* has been redefined as an immanent potency, it becomes clear that this potency can be seized, transformed, and redeployed by the psychic faculties themselves, which thus emerge as internal dispositifs of magical action.

Imagination, in this framework, is not the faculty of mental representation, but the dynamic site in which *virtutes*—perceived, selected, and internalised—are reorganised and projected outward in operative form.¹ Symbols and figures

¹ Nicoletta Tirinnanzi, *Umbra naturae: l'immaginazione da Ficino a Bruno* (Edizioni di storia e let-

are not images of things, but affective matrices: configurations capable of intensifying emotional and cognitive states in the subject and in others. Binding, therefore, is not simply aided by imagination—it is structured through it. Imagination furnishes the symbolic architecture within which bonds acquire their force.¹

Memory, in turn, is not a static archive, but a dynamic system of inscription and activation. In Bruno's mnemonic works, the *ars memoriae* becomes a topography of force—a constructed framework for storing, amplifying, and reactivating *virtutes*. Mnemonic images serve not to preserve information, but to excite dispositions, to relaunch affective intensities, to predispose the subject toward action. Memory is thus reconceived as a technical reservoir: a latent substrate of transformation.

The nexus between matter, imagination, and memory is crucial to understanding sympathy in its operative dimension. Matter provides the reservoir of *virtutes*; imagination configures them into symbolic forms; memory ensures their persistence and reactivation over time. Binding, in this light, is not the result of purely material manipulation, nor of abstract mental projection—it emerges from the conjunction of psychic and material forces. The mind, far from standing apart from nature, is one of its expressive articulations: a locus where the productive tension of matter takes on symbolic consistency and operative direction.

This integration constitutes one of the most radical contributions of the *De magia*: it dissolves the inherited separation between the mental and physical registers of magical efficacy. Images become agents; memory, a field of potential activation; imagination, a tool of transformation. Sympathy, from this perspective, is a continuous modulation of relations—an immanent process in which psychic and material energies are bound by a shared logic of effectuation. The result is a unified theory of action, in which mind and world are no longer distinct domains, but co-implicated expressions of the same ontological force.

4. In the *De magia*, *virtus* does not appear as an accessory attribute superimposed upon a neutral substrate, but as the very modality of being-in-act: the internal structuration through which entities emerge in reality. To speak of *vir-*

teratura, 2000).

¹ Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Routledge, 1966), chap. 12.

tus occulta is not to refer to esotericism, but to indicate a potency which, although not immediately manifest, precedes and grounds its own emergence. It remains 'hidden' not because it is inaccessible, but because it requires a form of knowledge capable of intervening in the conditions that render it effective.

Here, Bruno marks a decisive departure from the natural-magical tradition. In Ficino, Agrippa, and the Hermetic corpus, *virtus* is embedded in a cosmological order governed by preordained analogies, always referred back to a superior principle. The *magus* operates within this architecture, recognising and activating correspondences already inscribed in being. Bruno, by contrast, releases *virtus* from this vertical logic: it no longer expresses participation in a higher unity, but articulates the immanent tension of matter itself. Every entity becomes a singular node of emission and reception, traversed by force rather than subordinated to form. There is no exhaustive repertoire of properties, no closed table of relations—only an open and reversible field of interaction.

This shift—from analogy to dynamics—redefines the very meaning of sympathy. No longer a deciphering of hidden resemblances, it becomes the modulation of an energetic field, composed of encounters among autonomous potencies. *Virtus* is not a sign that points elsewhere, but an operative intensity that produces effects through resonance. To activate a *virtus occulta* is to configure a context—material, temporal, and psychic—within which the bond becomes possible. The *magus* does not unveil a pre-existing order, but composes an event: binding is not a recognition, but an invention. The *De magia* thus outlines a physics of invisible forces—a grammar of efficacy in which action takes precedence over interpretation.

A defining trait of this conception is reversibility. The same *virtus* may, under different conditions, generate attraction, repulsion, or remain inert. Potency is not a static essence, but a relational vector, subject to transformation. This logic is central to Bruno's principle of *vicissitudo*: every bond is a transitory configuration, a provisional knot of forces whose stability depends on the persistence of tension.¹

Far from being a defect, this reversibility becomes the motor of Bruno's *varietas infinita*: a universe in which the unity of matter does not entail fixity, but the capacity to articulate itself in ever-new forms. *Virtus* drives this meta-

¹ Bruno, *De vinculis in genere*, 153-4.

morphosis not by conforming to an external law, but by virtue of its intrinsic excess—its ontological surplus over every actualisation. The bond, in this horizon, is never a final structure, but a contingent ordering: a fleeting geometry of forces sustained only so long as their interaction remains alive.

5. Read in this light, the *De magia* appears as a theoretical–practical laboratory in which sympathy, *virtus*, imagination, and memory converge into a unified operative dispositif. Magic is no longer a collection of isolated procedures, but the strategic modulation of an immanent field of tensions—where bonds emerge, mutate, and dissolve through the autonomous potencies of matter, reconfigured by the mediating faculties of the mind.

This conception dissolves the inherited separation between the natural and the psychic planes. Matter becomes the site of active forces; imagination, the symbolic matrix through which they are composed and redirected; memory, the infrastructure that stabilises, reactivates, and amplifies their effects. Within this topology, sympathy ceases to be the analogical imprint of a cosmic design, and becomes the processual articulation of forces and representations into operative configurations—always situated, always subject to reconfiguration.

What distinguishes the treatise is precisely this transversal integration of cosmological, anthropological, and psychic dimensions. Bruno’s infinite universe is not a static architecture to be deciphered, but a field of immanent composition in which human action intervenes as a constitutive vector. The *magus* embodies this function: no longer the guardian of pre-existing analogies, but the artisan of contingent orders—the one who composes rhythms, calibrates intensities, and constructs bonds within the flux of becoming.

In this sense, the *De magia* prepares the theoretical ground for the *De vinculis in genere*. If the former offers a phenomenology of the conditions under which binding becomes possible—a physics of immanent efficacy—then the latter radicalises this horizon, abstracting the bond into a general category of action. What emerges is no longer a practice rooted in the recognition of hidden affinities, but a full-fledged theory of relation: an art of configuring and governing the dynamics of force within a decentred, unstable, and generative field of reality.



3.4. De vinculis: The Science of Bonds

1. The *De vinculis in genere*, composed during the final years of Bruno's life and transmitted only in manuscript form, constitutes the most concentrated and systematic elaboration of his theory of binding. Although situated within the magical corpus, the text resists reduction to a technical manual or applicative appendix. It presents itself instead as a theoretical experiment: a conceptual isolation of the bond from the diverse domains in which it operates, and its elevation to the status of a general category of action.¹

Its fragmentary yet tightly composed structure—lacking linear exposition or didactic scaffolding—mirrors the nature of its object. The bond cannot be subsumed under a fixed taxonomy, nor reduced to a stable set of procedures. It functions as a transversal operator, capable of traversing the natural, psychic, and social registers, adjusting its mode of efficacy to the shifting conditions of the field in which it intervenes.

This methodological gesture already signals a profound conceptual rupture. Where Renaissance magic had traditionally subordinated the bond to a closed cosmological hierarchy, Bruno enacts a radical abstraction: he extracts the bond from any anchorage in predetermined order and rethinks it as an autonomous principle of operativity. No longer a secondary consequence of symbolic correspondence, the bond becomes a formal dispositif—irreducible, generative, and structurally primary.

In this framework, the bond is not the mirror of a transcendent architecture but the expressive figure of immanent composition: the dynamic interface through which heterogeneous realities may be linked, altered, and recombined in accordance with the internal tensions of their own forces. What emerges

¹ Antonella Del Prete and Thomas Berns, eds., *Giordano Bruno, Une philosophie des liens et de la relation* (Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2016).

is not a theory of resemblance but a physics of relation: a model of action in which connection is not imposed from above, but arises from within the field it configures.

2. If the *De magia* had demonstrated how sympathy and *virtus* become embodied in operative configurations, the *De vinculis in genere* radicalises this intuition, elevating it into a genuine *scientia vincendi et ligandi*.¹ The focus is no longer on recognising the forces capable of attraction or transformation, but on interrogating their genesis, the modalities of their activation, the conditions of their efficacy, and the dynamics through which they persist or dissolve.

Binding is thus redefined as a formal act endowed with its own intrinsic logic—irreducible to the specific domains in which it manifests. Bruno does not seek to catalogue magical effects: his concern is with the *modus operandi* that underwrites the very possibility of efficacy². What constitutes the structure of operativity? What renders a bond active, stable, or subject to decay? These questions displace the empirical accumulation of techniques in favour of a conceptual analysis of force, form, and composition.

The originality of the *De vinculis* lies in this theoretical reversal. No longer a compendium of correspondences within a closed cosmology, it becomes a laboratory of strategic configurations in which nature, imagination, and relation converge into a single grammar. In this light, the treatise appears as a physics of force, an anthropology of affect, and a general theory of effectiveness. Its object is not what is bound, but what binds—not the result, but the operative principle that constitutes relation as such.

The shift from the *De magia* is decisive. There, Bruno still operated within a framework oriented toward identifying the virtues inscribed in matter and the faculties—imagination and memory—capable of directing them toward an effect. Binding appeared as the outcome of a compound process: a convergence of material disposition, psychic mediation, and favourable occasion. In the *De vinculis*, by contrast, the bond no longer functions as a derived application of natural magic—it becomes the elementary structure of all action. It traverses the full spectrum of experience: from the physical to the psychic, from the intersubjective to the political.

¹ Ansaldi, *Les liens de la métamorphose*, chap. “Giordano Bruno: la fabrique du lien”.

² Berns, “Une philosophie du bondage?”.

This conceptual torsion marks one of the most radical gestures of Bruno's thought. The bond is severed both from cosmological subordination—which would reduce it to the echo of a preordained order—and from the empiricism of magical technique—which would confine it to localised intervention. What emerges instead is a universal dispositif of connection and transformation: a formal force that does not derive its efficacy from what it unites, but affirms the power of binding as the very condition of reality's articulation.

3. The further step Bruno takes in the *De vinculis* is to abstract the bond from any ancillary role and elevate it to a formal matrix capable of structuring all interactions. Anything can be bound to anything else¹—not by virtue of a pre-established hierarchy, but through the convergence of forces rendered mutually accessible. The bond, thus conceived, is indifferent to content: its efficacy depends solely on the operative compatibility of the elements and the precision with which that compatibility is composed.

Bruno identifies certain structural operators that do not precede the bond as external conditions, but articulate its internal logic. They are not discrete inputs, but vectors of tension within the grammar of binding. The three fundamental terms—*materia*, *tempus*, *dispositio partium*—must be read not as empirical descriptors but as the dimensions in which relation configures itself.

Materia apta is not an inert substrate nor a passive receptacle, but the locus of desiring tension. Every body—human, animal, mineral—is already traversed by gradients of attraction and repulsion that predispose it to binding. 'Matter' here means matter already tending—already in motion toward encounter. The bond marks the emergence of this latent inclination into form.

Occasio,² the opportune moment, is not the accident of simultaneity, but the resonance between rhythms: the instant in which the pulsation of one *virtus* meets the frequency of another, generating an intensity sufficient to produce a tie. Time is not chronology but immanent rhythm—an interplay of delays and convergences without which no relation can take hold.

Dispositio partium refers not to spatial positioning but to a choreography of forces:³ who occupies the centre, what remains concealed, which intensities

¹ Bruno, "*De vinculis in genere*", in *Opere magiche*, ed. Michele Ciliberto (Adelphi, 2000), art. VI.

² Bruno, "*De vinculis in genere*", art. XXVI.

³ Bruno, "*De vinculis in genere*", art. VI.

are to be held in suspension, and which are to be discharged. The topology of binding is shaped by thresholds of visibility, degrees of proximity, vectors of latency and exposure. Binding is not simply a connection, but the modulation of access, orientation, and tension.

These three dimensions do not function sequentially, but in a continuous interplay. Matter without rhythm or composition remains inert; an *occasio* without tension is void; a disposition without temporal articulation is structurally mute. The bond arises not from addition but from convergence—unstable, situated, and always subject to renegotiation.

In this light, the binder is not a technician applying a pre-coded method, but a strategist of intensity: a composer of forces capable of maintaining the openness of relation without congealing it into fixity. The bond is not a form to be filled, but a rhythm to be sustained—a field of asymmetrical resonances whose efficacy lies in its capacity to endure tension without resolution.

4. What might initially appear in the *De vinculis* as a mere catalogue of operative modes—direct or mediated action, progressive sedimentation, dissolution of the bond—reveals itself, upon closer inspection, as the incomplete cartography of a multiplicity in motion.¹ Bruno does not provide a repertoire of techniques, but inscribes the act of binding within the very becoming of matter: a becoming that never follows a linear path, but unfolds through a mesh of intersecting, deviating, and reactivating trajectories.

The bond has no univocal direction: it is both centripetal and centrifugal, tending at once toward saturation and dispersion. Every effective tie inhabits this oscillation: if it closes upon itself, it dies; if it opens without measure, it dissipates. Its force lies in sustaining an unstable equilibrium—in the point of tension where attraction and divergence do not neutralise one another, but compose the field of relation.

Bruno intuits that the power of binding does not lie in possession, but in preserving the openness of the relation—in maintaining the very scene in which capture and escape remain co-possible. The bond does not conclude a process; it activates its continuous reconfiguration. Its logic is that of desire: not fulfilment, but renewal—an excess that does not stabilise, but multiplies the points of emergence.

¹ Berns, “Une philosophie du bondage?”.

The Brunian bond is thus not linear, but plural and polar. Its efficacy does not follow a single path, but branches into a constellation of access points: the immediate contact that saturates a latent inclination; the deferral that magnifies the charge of what remains suspended; the slow stratification of gestures into affective habitus; the calculated release that redistributes energy. These are not techniques imposed on matter, but modalities of its own differential logic: just as matter is infinite because it diversifies itself without limit, the bond is potent only insofar as it proliferates its own forms of metamorphosis.

Within this framework, the binder is not a sovereign manipulator, but a participant entangled in the very weave he composes. Every bond is reciprocal:¹ the matter that allows itself to be bound is also the matter that, in responding, alters the posture of the one who binds. Efficacy does not lie in control, but in the capacity to remain exposed to a field of forces that exceeds mastery—where each configuration is only a provisional knot in an open fabric of potential relations.

This, perhaps, is the most radical insight of the *De vinculis*: the bond is not the conclusion of an act, but the site of generative tension. Reciprocity is not a derivative effect, but the ontological condition of relation. To bind is to enter into the power that animates the other—to engage a zone where *mine* and *yours* no longer designate possessions, but inflexions within a shared material and desiring field. The bond, ultimately, is the act through which being abandons the logic of property and becomes relation.

5. If in the *De vinculis* the bond appears as a multiple articulation of trajectories, its most decisive structural trait lies in its performative reciprocity.² For Bruno, binding is never the transmission of force from a sovereign subject to a passive object, but a relational operation that transforms all the terms it engages. The act of binding alters not only the bound, but the binder himself: no pole remains intact after the encounter.

This reciprocity introduces a constitutive element of exposure. If to bind is to be transformed, then the agent of the bond can no longer claim immunity: every operative gesture entails vulnerability—a threshold where the other’s force penetrates and reconfigures one’s own economy of power. The bond is thus

¹ Bruno, *De vinculis in genere*, 147, 176.

² Ansaldo, *Les liens de la métamorphose*, chap. “Réciprocité et exposition du lieu”.

inherently risky: it may reverse direction, escape its origin, or generate effects that contradict its initial intent.

Such a conception destabilises the very logic of domination. Domination presupposes asymmetry: one exerts, the other submits. Binding, by contrast, unfolds as a bilateral dynamic—even when the relation seems unbalanced. Its efficacy does not lie in the perpetuation of control, but in the capacity to sustain the generative interplay it initiates. A bond that no longer transforms—nor transforms those it binds—atrophies. And with it vanishes the reality it had temporarily configured.

The bond also contains its own temporality. Its duration is not the inert persistence of a static form, but the active maintenance of a tension: it holds only insofar as it continues to act,¹ and acts only so long as its internal conditions remain alive or can be renewed. No bond is guaranteed in advance: there is no transcendent guarantee of continuity—only the labour of modulation, the recalibration of forces across time.

From this perspective, binding is not the imposition of fixity, but an art of orientation within an open field of unstable relations. The binder does not rule over a closed system, but navigates within a mobile topology of attractions and resistances—knowing that every configuration is provisional, every harbour temporary. Far from aiming at possession, the art of binding consists in sustaining metamorphosis: guiding the passage from one composition to another without letting any solidify into closure.

6. The *De vinculis* does not limit itself to the sphere of natural magic: the logic of binding it articulates is already inscribed within a political horizon. Every act of binding—however elementary—intervenes in a field of forces irreducible to the individual. When the matter of the bond becomes collective—when it engages the multitude—the stakes are not displaced, but amplified: the same performative structure that, on the ontological plane, constitutes beings as relations becomes the operative principle through which political bodies are assembled, composed, and undone.

This shift does not amount to a simplistic transposition from nature to society, but signals the recognition that the bond, when applied to the multitude, demands a distinct mode of modulation. The issue is no longer the stabilisation

¹ Bruno, *De vinculis in genere*, 166, 175.

of order, but the composition of mobility: the art of configuring without closure, of producing coherence without arresting difference. The multitude is not a substance to be unified, but a field of excesses—desires, affects, tensions—in which aggregation must remain reversible, provisional, and open to transformation.

In this light, the *De vinculis* outlines not a repertoire of coercive or persuasive techniques, but a genuine *grammar of relation*: a dynamic syntax through which matter, imagination, and affect are articulated into forms of the common. Efficacy, here, is neither the sign of legitimacy nor the guarantee of permanence, but the power to shape a field of forces—to modulate its intensities and orient its becoming toward configurations that are always contingent, always renegotiable.

Politics, in this framework, appears as the privileged theatre of binding: not the administration of what exists, but the invention of what may become. It is the art of making relation itself productive—of mobilising contingency, instability, and desire as the very resources through which new collective forms emerge. Bruno thus entrusts politics not with the task of preserving unity, but with the continual fabrication of the possible: a practice of metamorphosis in which the bond ceases to represent order and becomes its generative condition.

3.5. From Bond to Multitude: The Political Ontology of Desire

In Bruno's philosophy, no political order appears as a given structure or stable essence. Every collective configuration is a contingent crystallisation of a field of forces¹—a provisional coagulation of relations, affects, and tensions that traverse the multitude. There is no 'society' as a natural datum, no 'people' as a pre-political substance: what we call the political body is only the momentary form assumed by the interplay of seduction and repulsion, alliance and fear, that animates the social field.

In this light, the *De vinculis in genere* cannot be confined to the margins of Bruno's thought, nor reduced to an appendix on applied magic. It must be read as a subterranean political treatise: not because it offers a model of government,

¹ Berns, "Une philosophie du bondage?"

but because it exposes the invisible infrastructure upon which all forms of collective life depend.¹ While classical political theory sought foundations in law, contract, or institution, Bruno identifies the affective and imaginative economy that silently sustains them. No order endures unless it is able to bind desires, modulate passions, and produce orientations capable of organising coexistence from within.

The bond, in this sense, names the immanent core of sovereignty—not as command from above, but as the capacity to weave and sustain a web of relations in which heterogeneous elements remain connected without dissolving their singularity. Rather than instituting a centre, it composes a meshwork: a reticular logic of association² whose efficacy rests on the continuous renewal of the ties that prevent disaggregation. The order it produces is never a goal, but a by-product: the ephemeral effect of an unstable negotiation among forces, exposed at every moment to breakdown and recomposition.

At this level, Bruno's reflection converges—without simply overlapping—with Machiavelli's analysis in the *Prince* and the *Discourses*. Both understand that political action operates through the management of passions: fear, ambition, hope, and desire. Yet Bruno radicalises this insight: by stripping the bond of its juridico-theological framing, he rethinks it as a universal dispositif operative across all levels of reality—from physics to psychology to politics. To govern, in this framework, is not to impose order from above, but to intervene within the immanent play of forces: to compose relations, orient trajectories, bind without immobilising.

To think the bond politically is to invert the classical schema of sovereignty: it is not power that produces the bond, but the bond that actualises power. A sovereign without bonds is a void; a multitude without ties is a diffuse and inarticulate energy, according to a perspective that had already been sketched, in embryonic form, in Bruno's earliest surviving work, *The Candle Bearer*. The bond is the true substrate of the political: the plane where matter, imagination, and desire intersect to generate collective form. It is here that the possibility of political subjectivation is decided—not through representation, but through relation.

¹ Ioan P. Culianu, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (University of Chicago Press, 1987), 89–92.

² Ansaldo, *Les liens de la métamorphose*, chap. "Politique du lien".

This entails a fundamental reconception of political institutions. They are not instruments for imposing norms or preserving order, but machines for modulating passions—machines whose efficacy depends on their ability to transform, rather than suppress, the forces they mobilise. Unlike domination, which stabilises hierarchy through separation, the political bond acts through proximity and reciprocity. It is not imposed from without, but emerges from within the relation itself—altering both poles and generating a shared horizon of orientation and action.

Political power, from this perspective, is not a substance but an event. It does not reside in a fixed locus, but is coextensive with the success of the bond: it arises where ties are activated and sustained, and dissolves where they fray. Stability, accordingly, is not the absence of movement, but the capacity to persist through change: the resilience of a configuration that can absorb transformations without collapsing or congealing.

In this sense, the political bond is not only an instrument of organisation, but a vector of invention. It does not merely arrange what already exists, but enables the emergence of new forms of coexistence—forms that remain exposed to metamorphosis, and whose only consistency lies in the maintenance of their internal tensions. To bind is to articulate a collective trajectory; to govern is to modulate the flux of passions without attempting to arrest it.

It is on this terrain that the *De vinculis* intersects with Bruno's analysis of the multitude. The collective is never the sum of individuals, but the mesh of bonds that interlace them—bonds composed not of pure volition or reason, but of shared affects, images, and symbolic condensations. The political bond is the operative translation of common desire into form: a configuration at once stable and mobile, destined to mutate as the passions from which it emerges shift.

Bruno's decisive gesture lies in showing that the bond does not secure order by repressing desire, but by structuring it. A politics that neutralises desire renders itself fragile: it disconnects from the very force that sustains its coherence. Conversely, a political art capable of composing desire without exhausting it gives rise to forms endowed with intrinsic elasticity—capable of regenerating themselves through the transformation of the drives that animate them.

In this horizon, the multitude is not a problem to be solved or a unity to be imposed. It is the space of a potentiality: a field of divergent desires, partially entangled, continually renegotiated. The bond does not unify this multiplicity

by erasing its difference, but by composing it into relations that hold without closure, bind without enclosing, and orient without fixing. The political subject is not given, but constructed through the efficacy of these arrangements.

The *De vinculis* thus marks the threshold where Bruno's ontology of relation becomes explicitly political—not through application, but through internal development. The bond, as the minimal unit of composition, traverses all domains: nature and psyche, affect and language, matter and institution. To understand its logic is to grasp how collective configurations emerge, endure, and may be transformed without betraying the movement that constitutes them. It is to think of politics as the art of making the multitude resonate with itself—without imposing silence.

4. Conclusion

The trajectory from the *De magia* to the *De vinculis* does not mark a mere thematic development, but signals a mutation of the ontological regime within Bruno's thought. What begins as a mapping of operative forces and devices becomes, by the end, the elaboration of a true topology of relation—one in which the bond no longer expresses a pre-inscribed harmony, but emerges as the generative operator of being itself. In this framework, being is not that which precedes the act of connection, but that which emerges through it: existence is constituted in the moment when material and symbolic vectors condense into a configuration capable of sustaining its own efficacy in time.

'Sympathy', thus reconceived, ceases to designate the recognition of an antecedent order. It becomes, rather, the name of the gesture by which excessive, decentred matter organizes itself into transitory form. No longer the echo of cosmic consonance, it marks the irruption of a productive disequilibrium—a force that stabilizes only by passing through instability, and that configures only by remaining exposed to reconfiguration. The desire that animates this dynamic is not oriented toward restoration, but toward invention; not the melancholic return to unity, but the affirmation of a constitutive surplus that binds only in order to metamorphose.

Each bond is a local actualisation of this dynamic: a site where matter binds itself and, in doing so, invents a singular and provisional order. But that order

is always internally fragile, traversed by the very movement that generated it. The bond endures only as long as the desire that sustains it remains operative; once that tension shifts, deviates, or wanes, the structure dissolves, and the field of potentialities reopens. There are no pre-constituted substances entering into relation from the outside: binder and bound are retroactively constituted within the act itself—products of a shared transformation that alters both poles in the same motion.

The *De vinculis* thus lays bare the multipolar logic of binding: a dispositif composed of heterogeneous vectors—material, affective, symbolic, temporal—any one of which may catalyse the emergence of a relation. The bond is never univocal or unilateral: it is a differential machine in which every term is modified by contact, and in which efficacy is inseparable from this mutual transformation. To bind is not to transmit a force, but to generate a configuration in which force is always distributed, always negotiated, always reversible.

In this sense, efficacy is no longer the external confirmation of a model, but the very substance of reality. A bond is real only insofar as it produces effects; it is true only insofar as it acts. Bruno's ontology does not represent the world—it composes it. The bond is not the sign of an order, but the principle by which order is temporarily constituted; not the reflection of being, but its generative syntax.

It is here that sympathy reveals its most radical function: no longer a symbolic residue of metaphysical harmony, but the constructive force through which reality takes form. It does not secure the world against change, but exposes it to transformation. In binding, it does not consolidate, but opens—subjecting every form to the vicissitude that made it possible. Bruno's sympathy affirms transience not as loss, but as a condition: the rhythmic movement of a desire that binds only to unbind, composes only to reopen, and in so doing sustains an ontology without ground—an ontology whose only consistency is the perpetual generation of the possible.

What exists, ultimately, is nothing but this restless fabric of relations: bonds that persist only as long as the forces that compose them remain in tension, and that dissolve not as failures, but as the expression of an order that never ceases to begin.



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Shaojie, Heavily rusty chains (2019, <https://unsplash.com/photos/FI2oIPy78K4>)