

 **CHIASMA**  
A Site For Thought

#3

ENDS OF PHILOSOPHY

Chiasma: A Site For Thought Vol. 3, Issue 3: Ends of Philosophy

ISBN: 978-0-7714-3122-7 (Print)

ISBN: 978-0-7714-3123-4 (Online)

ISSN: 2292-6887 (Print)

ISSN: 2292-6925 (Online)

Copyright 2016. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, of photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

Layout and cover design by M. Curtis Allen.

# CHIASMA



## CHIEF EDITOR

Jeremy Colangelo

## DEPUTY CHIEF EDITOR

Eric J. Guzzi

## REVIEW EDITOR

Tomas Boudreau

## INTERVIEW EDITOR

Kate Lawless

## TRANSLATION EDITOR

Domenic Hutchins

## GRAPHIC DESIGN

M. Curtis Allen

## DEPUTY EDITORS

Alan Del Pino

Ido Govrin

David Miller

John Nyman

Evan Pebesma

Taylor Randall

James Steinhoff

Nathan Tebokkel

Ben Woodard

## ADVISORY BOARD

Garnet Kindervater

University of Minnesota

Julia Obert

University of Wyoming

Allan Pero

Western University

Anthony Paul Smith

La Salle University

Joseph Winters

Duke University



*Chiasma: A Site For Thought* is housed in Western  
University's Centre for the Study of Theory and  
Criticism

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor's Introduction <i>Jeremy Colangelo</i>	6
--	---

## ESSAYS

Time Without Temporalization: Futurity in François Laruelle's Non-Philosophy <i>Thomas Sutherland</i>	11
Eschatology and Infinite Non-linear Time on the Field of Absolute Emptiness <i>Rossa Ó Muireartaigh</i>	32
Futurity, an Eschatological Methodology <i>Itzhak Benyamini</i>	43
Anticipatory Grief and Perceptions of the Future <i>Rachel Bath</i>	65
The Future of Continental Realism: Heidegger's Fourfold <i>Graham Harman</i>	81
The Future of Plasticity <i>Catherine Malabou interviewed by Kate Lawless</i>	99
A False Explanation of My Stories <i>Felisberto Hernández (translated by Jaime R. Brenes Reyes)</i>	109

## REVIEWS

Dylan Trigg, *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror* 112  
*Mike Thorn*

John B. Cobb Jr., Richard Falk, Katherine Keller (editors);  
*Reason and Re-enchantment: the Philosophical, Religious and*  
*Political Thought of David Ray Griffin* 117  
*Randy Schroeder*

## ‡ EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

While it may be that an end can justify its means, in philosophy we are more often found with means in search of ends. Ends, of course, in two senses: of the (utopian?) terminus of the philosophical endeavour, and of that endeavour's goals. As this issue of *Chiasma* attests, the two senses of ending have more in common than their name, for often it is through an awareness that a mode of thought *can* end that we find the means to bring that end about. And, it is in believing that there is no end to come that we lose sight of our aims.

The initial call for this issue included a passage from Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* intended to lend our contributors so many Nietzschean arrows. Philosophy, says Nietzsche, is always "acting counter to our time, and thereby acting on our time, and, let us hope, to the benefit of a time to come."<sup>1</sup> For the essays in this issue – each of them responding to a call to think about the future and/of philosophy – this untimeliness often manifests as a question as to what "the future" is, or should be, and how we might relate to it. It is no coincidence then that two of the contributions deal directly with eschatology, and that two others discuss trauma and grief. Likewise, several texts discuss the future of philosophy both as a practice and a field of academic study, joining the analysis of the future as such with an attentive eye to the continued existence of its thought. Today the thought of the future is increasingly indistinct from the future of thought.

Nowhere in this issue does attention to the philosophy of the future better join that of the future of philosophy than in Thomas Sutherland's essay "Time-Without-Temporalization: Futurity in François Laruelle's Non-

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 60.

Philosophy,” in examining the relationship between Laruelle’s concept of “futurity” and his larger philosophical project. There Sutherland proposes, with Laruelle, that previous attempts to describe and understand the structure of time within a philosophical system have fallen prey to the assumption that “philosophy [is] capable of describing the essence of time (even if this manifests in a deconstructed form), and as such, maintains a philocentrism that implicitly views all possible temporalities as cognizable within the temporal horizon of philosophy itself.” The result amounting to a sequence of philosophically-imagined futures either “shackled to the past” which preceded them or “locked into a cycle of permanent revolution.” Laruelle’s non-philosophy emerges to sidestep this philosophical diode in favour of an essentially content-less future that escapes standard philosophical (temporal) registration.

Rossa Ó Muireartaigh’s essay, “Eschatology and Infinite Non-Linear Time on the Field of Absolute Emptiness,” likewise responds to an attempted evacuation of the future’s potential. Drawing from the work of the Japanese existentialist Keiji Nishitani, and framing her argument as a response to Francis Fukuyama’s “End of History” thesis, Ó Muireartaigh argues that the type of linear, finite models of historical progression that make theses like Fukuyama’s possible ultimately engineer their own negation. For Nishitani, on the other hand, the limitlessness of time necessarily obscures both the beginning and the end of any history. For Nishitani, writes Ó Muireartaigh, “to see oneself as moving along a line of time between past and future is to get raveled in finite linear optical illusions. When time is infinite there can only ever be now, never lines of time.” This infinite time can, Ó Muireartaigh argues, serve as an antidote to the grand historical narratives so often spun in defence of whatever ideological structure happens to be dominant at the time. A narrative, after all, requires a beginning and an end, and history has neither.

“Futurity, an Eschatological Methodology,” by Itzhak Benyamini, likewise focuses on the role of the future as a repository of potential. But for Benyamini, this potential is constraining. “Though,” he writes, “the Western subject’s core is eschatologically-progressive, always moving towards a future, it now seems that this futurity no longer permits any *being* in the subject beyond a structural servility to the future.” This type of looking-forward exerts a conservative force on thought and action, wherein the dread of an apocalyptic future leads to the dredging up of the past – the complete repurposing

of the old as a shield to guard against the new. Solving our anxiety over the future therefore requires inventing a past from which we might look upon it. As Benyamini writes, “thus we recreate our future, or the movement towards it itself, and maybe thus also the relation between our real present and our real future as well as this movement towards an imminent merger between the present and future.”

Our fourth essay, Rachael Bath’s “Anticipatory Grief and Perceptions of the Future,” brings the issue full-circle – from Laruelle’s empty future in non-philosophy to a future that is terrifyingly full. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty’s work on temporality, Bath examines how anticipatory grief – that is, grief experienced in anticipation of a loss that has not yet occurred – conditions one’s mode of perception. Anticipatory grief often leads to a breaking off from the person or thing being grieved, so that (in Bath’s example) someone awaiting the death of a loved one is driven by their love to emotionally disinvest from them prior to the actual moment of death. This *decathexis* evolves into a generalized closing off of possibility, and a withdrawal from the world and from experience. A subject in the throes of anticipatory grief thus becomes a subject in withdrawal, one driven by their attachment to the world, that which makes the world grievable, towards its abandonment. It is in this way that the grief’s anticipatory, future-oriented nature causes it to invade the present, forcing one to grieve for something one still possesses, and to regret a loss that has not occurred.

By contrast, we find a proponent of withdrawal (this time of the object instead of the subject) in Graham Harman – the founder of Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) – who has contributed “The Future of Continental Realism: Heidegger’s Fourfold.” The article begins by examining the recent interest in realism among several Continental philosophers, including himself and others affiliated with speculative realism, the Deleuzo-Guattarian realism of Manuel DeLanda, and the New Realism of Maurizio Ferraris and Markus Gabriel. Following a brief summary of his previous work on Heidegger’s tool-analysis, Harman then goes on to defend his own realist reading of Heidegger, in which tools do not simply exist purely in relation to Dasein (as in the conventional reading), rather their existence is independent of their use and apprehension. As Harman writes, “it is not only for us that the jug and wine withdraw from such explicit features, but *in their own right*. It is not the mere accident of my looking at the jug and wine that transforms them from



physical masses into strange, withdrawn residues.” Finally, Harman relates this object independence to Heidegger’s notion of the fourfold, which Harman schematizes as a pair of intersecting dualisms that together structure the relationships between real and intentional aspects of reality.

Following Harman’s realist reading on the fourfold comes another proposal for future directions of philosophy: an interview with Catherine Malabou on “The Future of Plasticity,” conducted by *Chiasma*’s interview editor Kate Lawless. The interview was conducted in early 2016 while Malabou delivered a keynote address of a conference dedicated to her philosophy held jointly by the Centre for Advanced Research in European Philosophy, and the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism at King’s University College, Western University. In the interview, Malabou discusses psychological trauma and its link to “the negative implications of plasticity,” the relationship between subjectivity and the environment, and the role of nationalism in movements for political autonomy.

Our third issue concludes with a new translation of Felisberto Hernández’s “A False Explanation of My Stories” by Jaime R. Brenes Reyes. Though Hernández – a Uruguayan writer whose work is still being translated into English – is little known in the English-speaking world, he has been quietly but widely influential for literature the world over, being read by such authors as Italo Calvino and Gabriel García Márquez. In this text, Hernández presents an allegorical description of his writing process, comparing the work to a delicate plant that, growing independently of its gardener, will die if tampered with.

Deep thanks are due to the Faculty of the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism for its dedicated support of *Chiasma*—in particular to Drs. Jan Plug and Allan Pero for their support of this year’s issue. Thanks are also due, of course, to the *Chiasma* advisory board, for their invaluable advice and continued vigilance. Likewise, we owe a debt of gratitude to our several anonymous peer reviewers, who found the time to help us sort through our large trove of submissions. Finally, I would like to thank this issue’s contributors and editorial team, without whom we would not have had an issue at all.

# ✚ ESSAYS

# ‡ TIME WITHOUT TEMPORALIZATION

*Futurity in François Laruelle's Non-Philosophy*

THOMAS SUTHERLAND

*It is better to walk straight into the wind of the future than to enter into the future backwards or to head straight back into the past.*

**François Laruelle – Philosophy and Non-Philosophy**

Although the problem of time has remained central to philosophical enquiry since at least Anaximander, it is only really in the work of Aristotle – or more specifically, in *Physics IV*, that most foundational of metaphysical texts – that it is really considered on its own terms, as time *qua* time. It is in this context of Aristotle's ontology of nature, remarks Martin Heidegger, that “the ordinary way of understanding time has received its first thematically detailed traditional interpretation.”<sup>1</sup> Yet even Aristotle's notoriously obscure examination of time pales in terms of import to that of Saint Augustine, whose comparatively lucid account would provide the basic template for Western metaphysics' conceptualization of temporality until the rise of phenomenology in the early twentieth century. Augustine concludes that in a strictly objective sense “neither the future nor the past exist,” and instead, we should speak of “three times, a present of past things, a present of present things, and a present of future things.”<sup>2</sup> When we speak of time in the conventional sense, he continues, we are speaking of phenomena that exist only in the mind: “the present of past things is the memory; the present of present things is direct percep-

---

1 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1962), 414.

2 Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 269.

tion; and the present of future things is expectation.”<sup>3</sup>

In proposing this, Augustine accounts for the future as a mere present-to-come, an assurance that as the present passes away, a new present will come to replace it. For François Laruelle (following a line of thought inaugurated by Heidegger), however, this understanding of the future, filled with positive content, reflects a philosophical inability to think outside of the present, and thus, to think the future in its own right, rather than as a mere reiteration of said presence. His project of non-philosophy strives to “make a tabula rasa of the future” – to embrace a *futurity* that is neither shackled to the past that precedes it, nor locked into a cycle of permanent revolution, but rather, is emptied of all content.<sup>4</sup> This is a future that is not already mixed or reversible with the past and the present, but is entirely and irreducibly futural in nature. In particular, Laruelle’s work provokes us to consider the fate of philosophy itself, and the extent to which this discipline is capable of contemplating a future that is not already colonized by its concepts and categories – not so much a future without philosophy (for philosophers themselves frequently pronounce the death of their field), but one that cannot be foreseen within the strictures of philosophical discursiveness.

Of course, Laruelle is not alone in this endeavor. Continental philosophy in the twentieth century has recurrently occupied itself with this desire to conceive of a future without content: Heidegger’s authentic temporality of anticipatory resoluteness, Derrida’s messianism-without-messiah, Deleuze’s eternal return, Badiou’s event, most recently Meillassoux’s hyper-chaos – all strive to uncover (or recover) a radical futurity unfettered by the seemingly endless repetitions of the past. Yet from the viewpoint of non-philosophy, all these approaches are limited by their inherently *philocentric* character, which is congenitally incapable of thinking the future *qua* future (i.e. one that would be truly *productive* or *inventive*) precisely because it cannot envision a future that would not be expressed in philosophical terms, under the aegis of philosophical reason and *logos*. What non-philosophy challenges, in other words, is the (usually unspoken) presupposition that philosophy as a modality of thought, regardless of its limitations or blindspots at any one moment, is constitutionally *sufficient* to speak to or survey all possible phenomena and forms of

---

3 Ibid.

4 François Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, trans. Drew S. Burk and Anthony Paul Smith (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2012), 9.

knowledge. The time of philosophy appears as the ultimate horizon for every possible thought. Non-philosophy, in contrast to this, offers “a theory and a pragmatics of philosophical time on the basis of the past as radical immanence (of) time to self,” a “heretical time or the heretical conception of time, without history or becoming,” that purports to have freed itself from such philocentric confines.<sup>5</sup>

It is this time-seen-in-One, and the notion of futurity that comes along with it, that will compose the main focus of this article. Exploring the Heideggerian distinction between the authentic and inauthentic temporalities of Dasein (which is explicitly mobilized in opposition to Aristotle’s conceptualization of time), and Jacques Derrida’s subsequent observation that Heidegger, for all his effort to subvert the metaphysical presentation of time, remains thoroughly within the Aristotelian framework that he derides, I will argue that both of these accounts still presume philosophy to be capable of describing the essence of time (even if this manifests in a deconstructed form), and as such, maintain a philocentrism that implicitly views all possible temporalities as cognizable within the temporal horizon of philosophy itself. With this in mind, I will go on to discuss Laruelle’s attempt to articulate a non-philosophical and inecstatic time, a time that is given without temporalization, one that conceives of a future no longer burdened by the illusions of philosophical sufficiency.

### “World-time” and “now-time”: from Aristotle to Heidegger

Any discussion of time within contemporary continental thought is indebted, for better or worse, to the work of Heidegger, who proffers perhaps the most significant reconceptualization of this concept since Augustine. Especially crucial here is the notion of *world-time*: “the time which makes itself public in the temporalizing of temporality.”<sup>6</sup> This is a time that belongs to the world – “world” understood here in the ontico-existential sense of “that ‘*wherein*’ a factual Dasein as such can be said to ‘live’” – and in accordance with which we encounter entities within such a world.<sup>7</sup> In the disclosure of this world, by which these entities become intelligible as such, world-time is the ordi-

---

5 François Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2012), 148.

6 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 414.

7 *Ibid.*, 65. All emphasis in quotes is original unless otherwise noted [Ed.].

nary, linear form of time through which Dasein understands such entities as encountered *in time*. The ecstatic-horizontal temporalization of world-time provides the time within which both the ready-to-hand and the present-at-hand are constituted.

World-time is effectively the interface between an authentic, primordial ecstatic unity of Dasein, and a crude, uniform *now-time*: from Aristotle through to Bergson, Heidegger observes, “all discussions of the concept of time have clung *in principle* to the Aristotelian definitions,” time being measured and understood in terms of the homogeneous medium of clock time, such that each moment of time is conceived of as merely one in an infinite series of presents.<sup>8</sup> The definition alluded to here is specifically Aristotle’s description of time as “number of motion in respect of ‘before’ and ‘after,’” which follows the common-sense understanding of time as that which is counted (and thus made present) as a pointer (be it the hand of a clock or the shadow of a sundial) passes over it, each moment forming an intemporal point-limit that demarcates the past and the future.<sup>9</sup> Whereas world-time is *datable*, its concepts of “now,” “then,” and “ago” being constituted in relation to the significance of a human event, now-time is abstract, standardized, and linear, divorcing time from the world that it temporalizes.

In order to escape this Aristotelian framework, Heidegger argues that time must be thought in terms of three ecstases – “Being-already-in...,” “Being-ahead-of-itself,” and “Being-alongside...” – which correspond in turn with Dasein’s structure of care, which “comprises in itself facticity (thrownness), existence (projection), and falling.”<sup>10</sup> Superficially, it would be easy to view these three structures as correlating fairly neatly with the classical categories of future, past, and present, respectively. Yet he is adamant that to do so would be to remain within the scope of the vulgar, inauthentic interpretation of time that he strives to denounce:

---

8 Ibid., 421. Heidegger’s preparedness here to lump Bergson together with the philosophers of Aristotelian clock-time is odd (given the consonances between their respective approaches to philosophy), and his justification – that Bergson merely reverses the Hegelian conflation of time with space – infamously cursory and obscure. On this topic, see Heath Massey, *The Origin of Time: Heidegger and Bergson* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015).

9 Aristotle, “Physics” *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 219b.

10 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 284, 327.

only in so far as Dasein *is* as an “I-am-as-having-been,” can Dasein come towards itself futurally in such a way that it comes *back*. As authentically futural, Dasein *is* authentically as “*having been*.” Anticipation of one’s uttermost and ownmost possibility is coming back understandingly to one’s ownmost “been”. Only so far as it is futural can Dasein *be* authentically as having been. The character of “having been” arises, in a certain way, from the future.<sup>11</sup>

Authentic time, according to this account, is inescapably unitary, for none of these structures may be extricated from the others without flattening their relations such that they return to the linear series of presents that characterizes inauthentic existence. Our understanding of time, therefore, and of Being more generally, must begin with the inherent futurity of Dasein as being, in that it is always anticipating, “always coming towards itself.”<sup>12</sup>

The future (that which is not-yet-now) does not arise from the present (the now); rather, through this ecstatic unity the present actually emerges from the future. “Dasein is Being-possible which has been delivered over to itself – *thrown possibility* through and through,” such that “Dasein is in every case what it can be, and in the way in which it is its possibility.”<sup>13</sup> This Being-possible means in effect that Dasein is always oriented, or projected, toward the future; its “potentiality-for-Being towards itself, for the sake of itself” always lies within the possibility of “what is *not yet* actual and what is *not at any time* necessary.”<sup>14</sup> To speak of Dasein as projecting itself is not to suggest that one plans out in advance one’s futurity, for “any Dasein has, as Dasein, already projected itself; and as long as it is, it is projecting,” and as long as it does this, it will always understand itself in terms of possibilities, albeit without ever actually being able to grasp thematically these possibilities into which it throws itself, given that the very nature of projection relies upon the fact that it, “in throwing, throws before itself the possibility as possibility, and lets it *be* as such.”<sup>15</sup> Being, therefore, is always already ahead of itself, coming into its own.

Importantly, though, Derrida challenges the notion that this ecstatic

---

11 Ibid., 326.

12 Ibid., 325.

13 Ibid., 143.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 145.

temporality of Dasein actually marks a discrete break from the Aristotelian approach, arguing that “every text of metaphysics carries within itself ... *both* the so-called ‘vulgar’ concept of time *and* the resources that will be borrowed from the system of metaphysics in order to criticize that concept.”<sup>16</sup> Aristotle does not simply reify the presence of the present as “now” (*vñ*); rather, he accounts for the now’s paradoxical nature as both being and non-being, presence and absence:

[o]ne part of it has been and is not, while the other is going to be and is not yet. Yet time – both infinite time and any time you like to take – is made up of these. One would naturally suppose that what is made up of things which do not exist could have no share in reality.<sup>17</sup>

The conundrum Aristotle identifies here is that if we consider time to be the coming-to-be and perishing of these nows, then they cannot *be*, for they are in a constant state of becoming. How can time have a share of reality when nothing of which it is composed is ever actually in a state of being?

Moreover, Aristotle notes, “if a divisible thing is to exist, it is necessary that, when it exists, all or some of its parts must exist,” and yet, when discussing time “some parts have been, while others have to be,” and thus it “is not held to be made up of ‘nows’.”<sup>18</sup> If time were represented as a divisible line, then it would not actually be temporal, because it would involve multiple concurrent nows lined up next to each other, and time cannot be composed of more than one now at any one moment, for the now is constitutive *of* this moment. Yet “we apprehend time only when we have marked motion, marking it by ‘before’ and ‘after’; and it is only when we have perceived ‘before’ and ‘after’ in motion that we say that time has elapsed,” and as such, in some sense we must think time in exactly such a fashion – with the now as the point-limit – for it is only via such a conception that time is actually thinkable as such.<sup>19</sup> The strange, dual nature of the now means that “every simultaneous time is self-identical; for the ‘now’ as a subject is an identity, but it accepts different attributes”: there is a certain shared identity to all nows, in the sense that they

---

16 Jacques Derrida, “Ousia and Gramme: Note On a Note from *Being and Time*” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 60.

17 Aristotle, “Physics,” *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, 217b-218a.

18 *Ibid.*, 218a.

19 *Ibid.*, 219a.



must come-to-be, constituting the persistence of time, and yet, each now must also be different.<sup>20</sup> The now is always the same (in its being-now) but always different (in its becoming).

In acknowledging this internal tension, contends Derrida, Aristotle establishes “both traditional metaphysical security, and, in its inaugural ambiguity, the critique of this security,” furnishing “the premises of a thought of time no longer dominated simply by the present.”<sup>21</sup> What is rejected as much in the Aristotelian and Bergsonian accounts of time as in the Heideggerian division of authentic and inauthentic time therefore is “not the *gramme* as such, but the *gramme* as a series of points, as a composition of parts each of which would be an arrested limit”: in both cases, it is acknowledged that to reduce time to a succession of point-limits (nows) is to describe something that is fundamentally atemporal, given that it implies the simultaneous presence of multiple nows.<sup>22</sup> This acknowledgement in itself, however, does not demonstrate that the thought of time wholly exceeds representation:

if one considers now that the point, as limit, does not exist *in act*, is not (present), exists only potentially and by accident, takes its existence only from line in act, then it is not impossible to preserve the analogy of the *gramme*: on the condition that one does not take it as a series of potential limits, but as a line in act, as a line thought on the basis of its extremities and not of its parts.<sup>23</sup>

To think time metaphysically, the point-limit cannot be conceived of as existing in action (i.e. in its presence) for this would arrest the flow of becoming by which the very notion of time is characterized. The point-limit, therefore, exists only in potential: the now is a non-being, in the sense that is always already past, even whilst it constitutes the very possibility (and impossibility) of being *qua* presence. This point in potentiality, however, is derived from the line in actuality, such that to think time in non-segmentary terms – instead of as a series of present nows – is to think it rather “on the basis of the *telos* of a *gramme* that is completed, in act, fully present, that keeps its *tracing* close to itself, that is, erases its tracing in a *circle*.”<sup>24</sup>

---

20 Ibid., 219b.

21 Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 49.

22 Ibid., 59.

23 Ibid., 59-60.

24 Ibid., 60.

### The impenetrable circularity of philosophical World-time

We can summarize Derrida’s argument as follows: the metaphysical presentation of time always already deconstructs itself – given that it is necessarily premised upon the enigmatic double-nature of the now as both being and non-being, act and potentiality – but it nonetheless remains under the authority of a broader metaphysics of presence insofar as it recuperates this division between the presence of a potential limit-point between a past and a future, and the presence of a complete time in act. As a consequence, the Heideggerian delimitation of a vulgar, ordinary time (comprising both world-time and now-time) from an authentic and primordial temporality of Dasein merely recapitulates in a more explicit manner the originary Aristotelian gesture, dividing the conception of time between the now as point-limit and the now as circle:

*Physics IV* doubtless confirms the Heideggerian de-limitation. Without a doubt, Aristotle thinks time on the basis of *ousia* as *parousia*, on the basis of the now, the point, etc. And yet an entire reading could be organized that would repeat in Aristotle’s text *both* this limitation *and* its opposite. And which made it appear that the de-limitation is still governed by the same concepts as the limitation.<sup>25</sup>

From the perspective of non-philosophy, however, the discovery of this deconstructive principle within the metaphysics of time may undercut the hierarchical primacy of the present *qua* presence, but it fails to illuminate a more general or universal occlusion – that of philosophical sufficiency. While Derrida is critical of any attempt to straightforwardly enquire into the essence of time, given that this question ends up covertly pre-determining the essence *of* essence in terms of presence (thus inscribing this question *within* the semantic horizon of the time that it seeks to interrogate), his conclusion that the concept of time inevitably “names the domination of presence” nonetheless makes recourse to a certain invocation of essence, tying the concept of time to an elided absence (the trace) by which its coherence is ensured.<sup>26</sup> Derrida therefore still subscribes to the “more-than-representative, more-than-

---

25 Ibid., 61

26 Ibid., 63.

logocentric sufficiency, assurance, and security that *philosophical decision even as illusion is necessary or belongs to the real.*"<sup>27</sup>

All of these philosophers mentioned – Aristotle, Bergson, Heidegger, Derrida – are fundamentally searching for the essence of time, to delimit the boundaries of time as a concept, and they presume philosophical discourse to be sufficient for this task. Even Derrida, deeply committed to destabilizing the sureties of metaphysical truth-claims, implicitly conceives of philosophy as the ultimate horizon within which all such enquiries can and must occur. For Laruelle, this is indicative of the unitary nature of philosophy as a modality of thought, internalizing within itself its own critique: whilst deconstructionists are more than happy to breach or dissolve the stable character of philosophical reason (in some cases proclaiming the destruction of metaphysics or even the outright death of philosophy), they do so whilst maintaining its overall validity, remaining content to “observe or aggravate the ruinous character of the edifice without daring to really put it at the base in order to construct other things elsewhere.”<sup>28</sup> For philosophy to think its other as its condition, as that which limits or restrains it, it must not only already take for granted its own sufficiency to think this alterity, but also project upon the latter a teleological function such that its existence is taken to be meaningful by virtue of its proximate connection to philosophy.

In short, Derrida elucidates the finitude of the philosophical concept in relation to its own other, but does so without ever leaving the borders of philosophical discourse proper, incorporating even *différance* within its transcendental and metaphysical unity. Philosophy, according to the non-philosophical project, is characterized by an operation of mixing or blending, a unity-of-contraries that finds its first overt articulation in the Heraclitean *logos*. Thus, when philosophers strive to uncover the true essence of time, they end up finding it in a mixed or blended form, one which transcends an empirical time-of-the-world in order to locate its transcendental origin or condition. Once again, we witness this unification of contraries even in Derrida, who maintains a causal and productive relationship between the metaphysical construal of time *qua* presence, and the ceaseless scission of *différance* – “a difference still more unthought than the difference between Being and beings” –

---

27 François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2012), 184.

28 François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 201.

as its condition of simultaneous possibility and impossibility.<sup>29</sup>

The problem here is that whilst, as Laruelle observes, post-Hegelian continental philosophy has strenuously attempted to “make of time (of history or even of becoming) the essence of the real, to desubstantialize the latter by the former, to align being with time or time-being with duration,” it effectuates this desubstantialization without ever abandoning the decisional structure whereby the real is bisected into time and its temporalizing conditions, so that these opposed terms may in turn be united through a movement of transcendence that passes from one to the other in a wholly reversible manner (since an *a priori* condition can only be meaningful as such in relation to a conditioned given, and vice-versa).<sup>30</sup> Philosophers thus continually try to grasp at the essence of time (and, within the post-Hegelian milieu, that of the real also), and in their failure to do so, fall back into a unitary dissimulation of time that merely reiterates the aforementioned Heraclitean postulate, the One-of-the-dyad.

It is this congenital inability of philosophy to think outside its own self-sustaining aesthetic and logic—given in the sensible data and concepts through which such data are to be comprehended in a single motion, such that the concepts would seem to not only provide the conditions for the existence of sensibilia, but also the means by which it is legislated and judged—with which non-philosophy takes particular umbrage: philosophy is able to make reference to the real (and more specifically, to tout its ability to identify the truth or essence of such) because the image of the world given to us by philosophers is one in which philosophy is deemed co-extensive or even synonymous with reality. By presenting the real in this unitary (hallucinatory) form, the philosopher sustains the illusion that there is nothing outside of philosophy – that philosophy is spontaneously given and uniquely sufficient to speak to and for this world, with all other practices and modalities of thought remaining in a state of pre-philosophical naïvety.

The “anguish and precariousness of philosophy” – its simultaneous fascination and revulsion regarding these regional knowledges – is a result of its internally contradictory outlook in relation to them: on the one hand, philosophy “manifests a *claim* to domination, legislation, grounding, critique,” demarcating a horizon that either always-already includes such proximate

---

29 Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 67.

30 Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 146.

knowledges within itself, or heralds the desire to colonize them; on the other hand, it must also “recognize the weakness of this claim which is always in the process of realization,” for the mere acknowledgement of such knowledges is predicated upon a certain finitude.<sup>31</sup> Key to the blinkered viewpoint of philosophy is this delimitation of a horizon that is at once finite and infinite, setting immanent limits to its own capacities (in relation to regional knowledges), only to then overcome these barriers through its transcendental claim to a co-determination of the real:

[t]he superior or dominant place is in effect always occupied by philosophy: within the unification or intersection of two regions, it is still philosophy as over-dominant, if we can put it this way, that triumphs, the satisfaction of the need to philosophize; the synthesis is made to the benefit of philosophy.<sup>32</sup>

Philosophy posits itself as its own destiny, inscribed within a teleology that postulates and expects its inherent sufficiency for classifying and analyzing all extra-philosophical phenomena.

This self-inscribed teleology, contends Laruelle, means that philosophers feel they have no need to ever genuinely confront “the narcissism and the historicizing and textual auto-reference within which unitary thought seems to want to consume itself until the end of time.”<sup>33</sup> Non-philosophy is founded upon the (highly instigative and controvertible) premise that the philosopher is the heir to a heritage that she or he merely invests in and perpetuates, rather than ever truly creating anew. Even the success of Plato, for all of his apparent formal and conceptual innovation, is viewed by Laruelle as a consequence of his possessing “the art of ordering and hierarchizing the riches of the past,” driven by the impulse to “save, conserve, or raise up the past.”<sup>34</sup> Although philosophers have put forward innumerable variegated conceptions of the future of the world, far less consideration has been put into the question of the future of philosophy itself, and as a result, the passage from philosopher to philosopher, and from concept to concept, tends to be un-critically presented as following “a linear development of thought, a

---

31 Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 44.

32 Ibid., 43.

33 Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 19.

34 François Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou*, trans. Robin Mackay (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 25-26.

definitive solving of problems or an obsolescence of philosophy” – a feature less obvious in continental (as opposed to analytic) philosophy, but one that still tends to determine the former’s image of thought, inasmuch as it revolves around the seemingly-miraculous arrival of the datable philosophical work.<sup>35</sup>

Even the Deleuzian metaphilosophy – which attempts to avoid any such linear progression, proposing that whilst the life of philosophers “conforms to the ordinary laws of succession,” their conceptual personae “coexist and shine either as luminous points that take us through the components of a concept once more or as the cardinal points of a stratum or layer that continually come back to us” – still subscribes to a model of endless becoming-philosophy.<sup>36</sup> The future of philosophy, from the Deleuzian perspective, is the eternal return of the creative event, carrying on the philosophical legacy by “continually changing concepts without ever changing operations.”<sup>37</sup> In short, then, the future of philosophy is comprehended by philosophy in unmistakably philosophical terms, in accordance with the usual, metaphysical presentation of time. Philosophy is treated as an object of the world, even as it retains its supposed co-extensiveness with said world.

### The three clones of time

Given that non-philosophy is always in some way parasitic, always based on “a transformation of that self-referential usage of philosophical language which regulates the statements of philosophy, into a new usage,” it would not seem too aberrant to describe philosophy as existing in a state of *fallenness*, in the specifically Heideggerian sense of the word.<sup>38</sup> Fallenness (or ensnarement) is of course the ontologico-existential state of inauthenticity for Dasein, the moment at which “Dasein is inclined to fall back upon its world (the world in which it is) and to interpret itself in terms of that world by its reflected light” and simultaneously fall prey “to the tradition of which it has more or less explicitly taken hold.”<sup>39</sup> Dasein loses sight of the truth of Being, instead

35 Ibid., 20.

36 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 59.

37 François Laruelle, “What Can Non-Philosophy Do?,” *The Non-Philosophy Project*, edited by Gabriel Alkon and Boris Gunjevic (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2012), 46.

38 François Laruelle, “A Summary of Non-Philosophy,” *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, edited by Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2012), 289.

39 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 21.

focusing its attention upon those ontic entities that populate the world. World-time concomitantly represents the fallen, inauthentic character of ordinary temporal reckoning, its datable, spanned, and public nature demonstrative of this concern with and absorption in Being-with-one-another.

Insofar as their boundaries remain entirely co-extensive, non-philosophy refuses to treat philosophy as an existent object within a world that precedes it; conversely, it regards the World as a unitary mixture of philosophy and world that is given through philosophical structuration. The World is the primary object of philosophical reflection, the given exteriority from which philosophy takes its departure, the mixture-form of an ontical experience of being grounded in the temporality of world-time and an ecstático-horizantal transcendence, departing from these ontic beings toward the ground of their Being, recognizing the ontological difference that distinguishes these two terms. Put another way, *the World is the philosophical hallucination of the One*: fundamental ontological Being is posited as that which holds primacy and authority over not only all existent beings, but also over the unitary identity of the World, which philosophy effectuates through its traversal of this ontological difference.

If the World is given through philosophy and is, in effect, synonymous with philosophy (marking the precise boundaries of the latter's noetic possibility), then it follows that philosophical thought remains entangled within and operates according to a World-time of its own creation. This is a form of temporality that "elevates time to the World's form under philosophy's authority," marking a specifically philosophical experience of time, "the ensemble of decisions-of-time already carried out or still to come in accordance with the World" – that is, it is within this World-time that the effectivity of the philosophical decision (which in each instance determines the particular terms to be mixed) is temporalized, such that it is made manifest within a datable and linear history of thought.<sup>40</sup> The philosophical field (what Deleuze refers to as the "plane of immanence") upon which these decisions are effectuated remains in a state of constant re-organization and re-distribution as new concepts are created and old ones revitalized, but this perpetual movement always remains bounded by the horizon of philosophical sufficiency and the undecidable mélange of immanence and transcendence that characterizes the decisional structure of which all philosophers and philosophical concepts

---

40 Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 147.

partake.

The World-time of philosophy is inhibited by its failure to conceive of the future (of philosophy, and thus, accordingly, of the World also) as anything other than a perpetuation of its invariant structure, for the assurance of a constant re-configuration of its terms within the framework of decision (a guarantee underwritten by the inability of philosophy to speak of the One as anything other than unitary – and thus divided – in essence) means that the future of philosophy is always already filled with content. Philosophy may experiment with this decisional structure, but it never abandons it, and as a result, it can never truly reinvent itself. It can only enact becomings within the confines of its own unitary circularity. It is for exactly this reason that we might describe philosophy as fallen or ensnared in the Heideggerian sense: it is caught within a perennial presence, comprehending the past as an accumulation of prior decisions to be recalled and re-worked in the furtherance of the overall surety of philosophy as a project and a discipline, and likewise the future as a never-ending succession of decisions to come. Philosophical World-time is inherently historical in character, and as such, cannot think outside of the boundaries of the specular philosophical circle. The only end that the philosopher can truly countenance is that of a complete closure, “winding around itself, gathering itself and withdrawing from thought.”<sup>41</sup>

As noted in the introduction, part of Laruelle’s goal in proposing a non-philosophical approach to studying philosophy (and hence one that is not necessarily in thrall to historicizing preconceptions) is to “open up the dimension of a radical future” for philosophy, the goal here being not to reject philosophical praxis (in spite of the unnecessarily derisive or even actively hostile tone that his writing often exhibits), but to bring forth “*a radically experimental practice of philosophy that is foreign to its circle or its philocentrism.*”<sup>42</sup> In order to do this, he articulates a *time-according-to-the-One*, which suspends the sufficiency of philosophical World-time such that it can “only be a material or occasion for naming, indicating and effectuating the vision-in-One (of) time.”<sup>43</sup> No longer is World-time treated, as it is in its philosophical usage, as the temporalizing horizon of all thought; instead, non-philosophy clones it as an inert material instance: a perpetual, static present stripped of all pretensions to cogniz-

---

41 François Laruelle, “What Can Non-Philosophy Do?,” *The Non-Philosophy Project* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2012), 197.

42 Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 123.

43 Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 146.



ing either the past or the future. World-time is henceforth regarded not as a temporalizing time in its own right, but as a single everlasting moment – a world-Present – within a broader division of time thought according to the radical, finite immanence of the One, making usage (as material) of the three classical, ordinary (Aristotelian) states of time (past, present, and future). This immanence refers not to the Being or essence of which philosophy attempts to speak, but rather the necessary but insufficient condition of thought; the enigmatic, ineffable, and idempotent identity-in-the-last-instance of philosophy and all of its supposed exteriorities.

This time is a time-seen-in-One, a purely transcendental and subjective temporality that is cloned from (but is not synonymous with) the present of World-time, and is determined-in-the-last-instance by the One. Most crucially, it can

only be from its position the radical past of pure immanence and of identity, a past which has not only never been present but also will never be present in the future (and for the future) as trace, but which will remain immanent past even in the future that it clones from world-time’s present.<sup>44</sup>

The One is not temporal in any philosophical sense of the word, for it cannot ever be reduced to ontological qualities, but through this process of cloning a certain expression of time is given. This is a time that is given-without-giveness, a time-without-temporalization, grounded in “a time of the past which simultaneously possesses a primacy over both synchrony and diachrony and determines these transcendent dimensions themselves, at least insofar as they form the object of philosophical interpretations.”<sup>45</sup> It is a radical past, an immanent time “of which one could say that it is-without-existing or even that it is a non-temporal time.”<sup>46</sup> It is not the past of philosophical World-time, which always remains a present even when it has passed into the past, nor is it an absolute past forgotten thanks to *hypomnēsis* but recoverable through *anámnesis* (which would simply reproduce the classical metaphysical distinction between presence and absence, considering philosophy sufficient to both forget and retrieve its truths) – it is a past that always is and always will be in the past (one might say that it is a past-without-passage, inasmuch as its condi-

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 147.

46 Ibid.

tion as past is in no way determined by a present that precedes it, and from which it passed from existence into non-existence), such that “even effectuated as future, remains in its necessary sterility and in no way participates in the world-present such as non-philosophy conceives it.”<sup>47</sup>

Such a past would seem immediately reminiscent of the “inefficacious, impassive, and sterile splendor” of the Deleuzian sense-event, which spreads out toward both the past and the future whilst eluding the present, and perhaps also of the motionless Bergsonian memory, irreducible to the present and yet constantly feeding into it.<sup>48</sup> There are, however, two crucial differences that separate these models of time from the inecstatic clones proposed by Laruelle. Firstly, as Katerina Kolozova writes, both Bergson and Deleuze understand time in terms of a “future always already collapsing into the returning past”: although both philosophers reject the straightforward succession of now-time and clock-time, they do so in favour of an indivisible continuity between past and present, ensuring these two terms’ perpetual convertibility.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, both of these concepts operate “as functions of a worldly time,” immanent to the field of consciousness (albeit an ontological rather than psychological consciousness), and thus inherently philosophizable.<sup>50</sup> What Laruelle attempts to describe instead is a past that determines “the present as material for the future,” but does so in an entirely unilateral manner – the past in this account does not commingle with the present (such that it would find itself reversible with World-time, and hence philosophizable); rather, it is a radical past, “*found and experienced only in-past* in its own immanence,” determining the present only *in-the-last-instance* (that is, it constitutes a necessary but insufficient condition for the World-time of the present, such that it will always remain foreclosed and indifferent to the temporal horizon of the World).<sup>51</sup>

We therefore have two clones or instances of a theoretical time that eludes philosophical temporalization and the presuppositions of sufficiency that come along with it: the first is the past as given, an immanent One-time that does not and cannot participate in the present, whilst the second

---

47 Ibid.

48 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London and New York: Continuum, 1990), 23.

49 Katerina Kolozova, *Cut of the Real: Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 61.

50 Laruelle, *Future Christ*, 75.

51 Ibid., 75-76.

is the present of philosophical World-time, which forecloses all thought of this One-time of the past by seeking out the supposed essence of time in the decisional mixture-form of time and World, and from which non-philosophy borrows the metaphysical syntax and idiom (albeit disarming it of its pretensions in the process) by which its theory of time is articulated. The ultimate aim of non-philosophy, however, is only truly articulated in relation to the third clone, “the instance of the transcendental future or of temporalizing force” which is “deployed from the past-in-One to the world-Present.”<sup>52</sup>

This cloned future, like that of the past, is not merely a present-to-come nor even a thrown projection (both of which would encase it within the divided unity of philosophical time), but the future as “identity cloned or produced on the basis of world-time as One.”<sup>53</sup> Such futurity is obtained not by mixing the immobile finitude of the past and the mobile time of the present, for this would simply recapitulate the reversible and undecidable relationship between time and World furnished by philosophy; instead, the future is the transcendental identity of the past unilaterally oriented toward the present-World. This future is what Laruelle often refers to as the force-(of)-thought, a transcendental organon that transforms the philosophical World-time into an inert *a priori* material. It is in and through this future – a future that will never come-to-be, which will always remain as such, ensconced in its futural identity – that the radical past is effectuated under the contingent conditions of World-time (although the unilateral directionality of this determination-in-the-last-instance means that the past is not actually affected by this effectuation), and this World-time is in turn rendered as a material capable of transformation through non-philosophical means. The future, put straightforwardly, signifies the non-philosophical transformation of philosophical material, facilitated by the suspension of the latter’s sufficiency (and with this, its seemingly inescapable circularity).

### **Futurity and the democracy of thought**

Robin Mackay expresses a common frustration amongst those who study Laruelle when he remarks that “it is difficult to avoid the impression of a continual anticipation of the moment when non-philosophy will begin to function” – whilst Laruelle has built up a formidable corpus of work over the past

---

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

four decades, one can quite justifiably find tiresome his tendency to reiterate, with seemingly minor variation, the same arguments over and over again without ever giving a strong or clear articulation of what a non-philosophical comprehension of philosophy (vision-in-One) actually comprises.<sup>54</sup> Laruelle seems to continually describe the method of non-philosophy without ever actually putting it into action.

This, however, is not so much a failing of the non-philosophical project as an indication of its attempt to subvert the philosophical (Worldly) structuration of time: the transformation of philosophical materials, the effectuation of the One-time of the past via the inert data of the world-Present, is cloned as a future, but this is not a future-to-come (which would imply its ontological reversibility with the present, such that what is now futural will at some point become present); rather, it is a future that “is foreclosed to past and present History, just as it is foreclosed to the place of places, the World,” hence lacking all positive content (and with it, all possibility of speculation and prediction), remaining entirely “unimaginable and unintelligible.”<sup>55</sup> Time-seen-in-One is not an object to be thought (as with the metaphysical presentation of time), but a thought in its own right, a thought already given in-the-last-instance. Non-philosophy “makes a clean cut at once with the contents of the past and of the present as well as with their sufficiency, in the name of a radical past and that which does not pass in being-in-the-Past,” and it does so in the name of a Stranger-subject who is synonymous with the ordinary essence of the human individual.<sup>56</sup>

The non-philosophical clone of the future is produced in the form of this Stranger – “the experience of a time of exteriority or stranger time” – who is not thrown into World-time, but instead is directed toward it, indicating those usages of its material that do not make recourse to philosophical presumptions of sufficiency.<sup>57</sup> The Stranger does not substantiate the future,

---

54 Robin Mackay, “Introduction: Laruelle Undivided,” *From Decision to Heresy: Experiments in Non-Standard Thought*, edited by Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2012), 28.

55 Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, 18.

56 François Laruelle, *Future Christ*, trans. Anthony Paul Smith (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 18. On Laruelle’s frequent identification of the Stranger-subject with the so-called “ordinary man,” see Thomas Sutherland and Elliot Patsoura, “Human-in-the-Last-Instance: The Concept of ‘Man’ Between Foucault and Laruelle,” *Parrhesia* 24 (2015): 285-311.

57 Laruelle, *Dictionary of Non-Philosophy*, 148.

for the latter is already given through the One, but it recovers through the transformation of these philosophical materials a futurity “that forces us to invent the present as transformation of the past.”<sup>58</sup> The Stranger inserts the future into World-time, and thus into history also, but it does so from a position of irreducible exteriority, manifesting a time that cannot be placed within the reversible mixture of philosophical decision. This unilateralized subject, as a force-(of)-thought, transforms philosophy into an occasional cause without itself being transformed *by* philosophy: it does not view the One as an object or Being to be thought, but as that which is foreclosed and indifferent to all thought, but determines it in-the-last-instance.

This movement of transformation is central to non-philosophy, which aims to change the way that we view philosophy, without negating its importance or utility. It involves, as John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith astutely describe, “a revision of philosophy somewhat like a figure-ground shift in perception,” bringing to the fore those elements of thought that philosophy masks in its endless quest for the essence of Being (and its temporalization).<sup>59</sup> Non-philosophy has no interest in the present, the established, and the pre-fabricated except to the extent that they might be transformed by the futural in order to bring to the fore that which has been excluded or subordinated by the authoritarian impulses of philosophical reason:

[t]his does not concern reshuffling what already exists or what has already *taken place*, of ‘making something new out of the old’, but of discovering the new itself, the statements and forms of thought that are not already given other than through their data but which we ignore because we have not realized them or manifested them and which thus, in a sense, have not yet taken place in thought itself.<sup>60</sup>

The ultimate aim of such a transformation, and of this futurity in general, is “a *new democratic order of thought*” diametrically opposed to the arrogance and specularity of philosophical sufficiency, attempting to avoid “conflictuality between philosophies and between philosophy and regional knowledges.”<sup>61</sup> This noetic democracy has nothing to do with making any

58 Laruelle, *Struggle and Utopia at the End Times of Philosophy*, 76.

59 John Mullarkey and Anthony Paul Smith, “Introduction: The Non-Philosophical Inversion: Laruelle’s Knowledge Without Domination,” *Laruelle and Non-Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 5.

60 Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 163.

61 *Ibid.*, 13.

claim about things in themselves, as if other disciplines (science, art, etc.) are just as or more capable of speaking to a stable external reality, for this would simply project a philosophical inference upon these extra-philosophical knowledges and practices. Instead, it is fundamentally about the co-existence and equality of all such disciplines and objects (materials), all recognized as incomplete and insufficient, and all determined-in-the-last-instance by the One. Through this non-decisional democracy, a new space of thought is claimed to be created, one outside of philosophical sufficiency, even if philosophical concepts and ideas are incorporated within it. If the World-time of philosophy is characterized by an inexhaustible demand for finality, its operations teleologically oriented toward the preservation of its structure and consequent specular circularity (such that the specific contents of any one decision are of little interest to it), the futurity of non-philosophy, as seen-in-One, is decidedly opposed to all such finality, concerned with “only the usage of means in view of the invention of existence.”<sup>62</sup> In the last instance, all knowledges, philosophical or otherwise, are “transformed into mere means,” deprived of any presupposed sufficiency such that they may be the catalysts for new, inventive modes of thought outside philosophical parameters.<sup>63</sup>

It was Heidegger, Laruelle argues, “who unleashed the absurd delirium of ‘total questioning’” – the former, of course, seeking to reconfigure philosophy, directing it away from its concern with ontic beings, and back toward a more fundamental (but largely forgotten) enquiry into the nature of Being itself.<sup>64</sup> This incessant questioning is, from the non-philosophical perspective, symptomatic of the circularity of the philosophical *logos*, always searching for certitude but never actually reaching it. Philosophy constantly enquires into the essence of being, the nature of the real, but this act of interrogation is precisely the problem: the real is already there, already given to us – as soon as we enquire into its being, however, we are immediately led away from this fundamental truth, finding ourselves ensnared instead within the transcendence of the *logos*. Laruelle instead declares the need to “affirm the primacy of the answer over questions,”<sup>65</sup> bringing into focus that which is “already *given* even outside every operation of givenness, ontological or scien-

---

62 Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou*, 24.

63 Ibid.

64 Laruelle, “What Can Non-Philosophy Do?,” *The Non-Philosophy Project*, 207.

65 Ibid., 207-208.

tific, which would precisely possibilize it,”<sup>66</sup> and as a result cannot be fitted to an ecstatic unity of time, let alone the successive “nows” of ordinary temporal reckoning. The futurity of non-philosophy, by means of which it attempts to instantiate a time of invention opposed to the temporalization of World-time, is founded upon “an intra-temporal order that supposes the arrow of worldly time oriented from the future toward the past across the present.”<sup>67</sup>

‡ ‡ ‡

Where philosophy can only think the future of thought in the terms of its own structural and syntactical recapitulation, non-philosophy by contrast attempts to foreground another future, one that is foreclosed to the effectivity of the present (philosophical World-time), and yet makes usage of this present as an inert and contingent material *a priori*, a radical (and thus finite) immanence expunged of all pretense to sufficiency and teleological auto-legitimacy. This is not an abstract utopia still-to-come, nor a perpetually deferred messianism, but a celebration of a time of thought, a time of the Stranger-subject, which does not aim at teleological ends, but strives instead to emphasize a lived experience incapable of being reduced to such external determinants. The goal of non-philosophy, in this context, is not to diminish or dismiss the ceaseless circuit of World-time, but to remind us that another perspective on time is possible – a time-seen-in-One, that makes no claim to determining the real, and yet is identical with it in the last instance. The future, when thought according to the One, is a transformation of philosophical materials (the inert *a priori*) beyond the horizon of philosophical possibility.

---

66 Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, 92.

67 Laruelle, *Anti-Badiou*, 23.

# ‡ ESCATOLOGY AND INFINITE NON-LINEAR TIME

*On the Field of Absolute Emptiness*

ROSSA Ó MUIREARTAIGH

## 1 – Following the ends of history

Alexandre Kojève in a footnote to his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* describes, most likely in jest, Japan as a society at the end of history. On this account, Japan has managed to perfect a way of life that involves immersion in form without content, a heightened snobbery where actions are done purely for their own sake and not for the sake of any natural survival or political or social motives. Japan has become a land defined by the ethic of the Edo samurai, a social class that did not fight, or work, but still followed intensely the ways of select refined arts (such as Noh Theater, the tea ceremony, and flower arranging). Japan's version of the End of History is posed as a contrast to an alternative End of History which would involve a move in the opposite direction, a return to animality, a version Kojève saw most exemplified in the USA.<sup>1</sup>

Kojève did actually visit Japan, but his observations seem quaint and clueless. The idea that “all Japanese without exception are currently in a position to live according to totally *formalized* values – that is, values completely empty of all ‘human’ content in the ‘historical’ sense”<sup>2</sup> – comes nowhere close to describing the struggles of the average Japanese family in contemporary capitalist society. Furthermore, it is puzzling that Kojève sees *Noh Theater*,

1 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. James H. Nichols (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1969), 161-162. For a summary of Kojève's views on this issue see also Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

2 Kojève, *Hegel*, 162.



*Chanoyu* tea ceremony, and *Ikebana* flower arranging as such radically distinct human activities. Surely every society has its ritualized performances and stylized decorative arts. Perhaps, Kojève was focusing on the fact that the art-forms of Noh and tea-ceremony, are, at least in the official descriptions of them, formalized to the extent of seeming historically frozen. In Noh and, maybe the tea-ceremony, artists struggle to repeat the old rather than to express something new. I am here imagining that when Kojève saw these art-forms he saw in them a mode of human action where everything moves with deliberate slowness and precision so as to ensure that surprise, contingency, newness, dissatisfaction, and all the other ingredients of dialectic history are erased. This is just my speculation, yet whatever may have been going on inside Kojève's mind as he sat through Noh-theater, tea ceremonies and all the other tourist delights during his trips to Japan, his inability to see Japan as just another country illustrates two particular problems that will haunt any philosophy that espouses the concept of an "End of History." These are, first of all, the problem of where to draw the line of history so that it will have a coherent beginning, middle, and end. And secondly, the problem of imagining how humans could "do" an end of history.

Fitting Japan and East Asia into a linear account of history has always been a challenge for historians of a dialectical persuasion (materialist or otherwise), since the isolation of this region from European conquest for large swathes of time has meant that it stands outside the causal chain that is seen to have shaped the rest of the World. Karl Marx, for instance, saw history to be composed of a series of modes of production. One of these modes was the Asiatic Mode of Production. This, of course, raised the problem of whether this mode of production is inside or outside the progression of history. As Raymond Aron describes it "the Asiatic mode of production does not seem to constitute a stage in Western History. Hence Marx's interpreters have endlessly debated the unity or non-unity of the historical process."<sup>3</sup> A line, in history or anything else, implies a unity, a continuity between each part of the line leading in a particular direction. To include the Asiatic mode of production would mean drawing another line through history. However, in drawing more than one line we are unwittingly demonstrating the contingency and exclusionism that is implied in any linear narrative. This becomes a problem

---

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought 1* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 124.

for the End of History because it means that the End of History at the terminal point of one line could be, theoretically, intersected by a line coming from another history. For there to be a coherent End of History there needs to be one line through history. However, as the difficulty in including the Asiatic Mode of Production demonstrates, such a line through history must either be all-inclusive to the point of being warped and beyond narrative cohesion, or all-exclusive, in which case it becomes an impoverished and embellished account.

The other problem that Kojève's quirky observations of Japan raise is the difficulty in both imagining and recognizing what the End of History would be like. History makes sense to us when we read it as a line of causes producing effects. We can see how events lead to other events, forging out a linear narrative. But what happens when the process of history stops, when there are no dialectical tensions or contradictions, and events no longer necessitate social transformation? Will human life become one of constant repetition of harmonious and happy activities? It is always hard, of course, to imagine the future after the End of History since the End of History will come after transformations that will have produced new structures and conditions that we cannot imagine and hence speculate about. However, in one famous passage in *The German Ideology*, Marx does have a go at imagining a post-end-of-history scenario, that is, a society without divisions and potential conflict. Marx wrote:

For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a herdsman, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic. This fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now.<sup>4</sup>

---

4 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C.J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1981), 53-54.

In reading Marx's description, one cannot but be struck by how fragile a utopia it is, and how easy it would be for everything to go wrong and history (the natural state of conflict) to crank into gear once more. What happens if nobody wants to do a bit of hunting in the morning? Do we starve or do we coerce each other into heading out for some fresh venison? To be sure, modern technology with hunting and fishing robots could help with things but then what about other non-manual activities, such as becoming an after-dinner critic? Will a society of critics deem some people to be greater poets than others? Will this create new *amor en soi* become *amor propre*-style Rousseauian tensions? What if we absolve the great poets from hunting and fishing robot maintenance duties? Does this create a new division of labor and hence kick-start history into action again? What about anti-hunting, anti-speciesists, for whom history will not have ended? In the end, what exactly does this phrase that Marx uses, "society regulates the general production," really mean? How does this work without coercions and tensions, and the potential for structured division?

It seems fair to say that the utopia being described at the end of history is only sustainable if humans themselves undergo a radical transformation. As Kojève has argued, one way is for humans to become animals again, as Kojève believed America had become. Animals never create new social structures to facilitate new means of production. Humans could become like this, residing in a world where people engage in activities (such as hunting, fishing, poetry appreciation) without ever feeling the need to change society since society nourishes and fulfills all biologically (as distinct from socially) derived impulses and desires. We would be completely content and calm with our changeless comforts like cows munching grass in pastures of plenty.

On the other hand, humans could become, as Kojève believed he saw in Japan, highly formalized entities that stand aloof from the allure of biological instinct. In a word, humans will be like Bodhisattvas, those beings that can resist the temptations of the sensuous, and see with complete clarity the falsity of social status and competition. Only a society of Bodhisattvas or of beasts can sustain the harmony and stasis implied in the End of History. However, the problem in essence is that humans at the End of History, whether by becoming animals or purely formalized beings, will have lost their ability to see the unfolding of history and to read the line of time, with its chain of conflicts and progressions. This is because humans at the End of History must effec-

tively lose their ability to reflect and evaluate, to compare actions and events, since such comparisons risk once more generating *dukkha* and dissatisfaction, and once more setting in spin the *samsara* of the master-slave dialectic.<sup>5</sup>

We humans trudging through the dark tunnel of history can see clearly the promised light ahead at the end. Anticipated utopias, with their end to present drudgery, will obviously be better than what we have now. But we know this because we can compare. When one is in dark, the value of light is obvious. But when we reach the end of the tunnel, and emerge into the light, the light will become invisible to us. It will need to flicker again for us to see it and appreciate it once more.

## 2 – Flickers at the end of history

The problem the End of History and utopian liberation poses the human, that creature which uniquely reads and responds to modal change in its world, was actually well summarized by the magician David Copperfield during the few minutes in 1983 when he made the Statue of Liberty disappear. Copperfield not only made the Statue of Liberty vanish but also managed to summarize most eloquently, in a direct to camera speech, the challenges of the semiotico-epistemological caesura generated by eschatological finitude. This is what Copperfield had to say:

I want to tell you why I did this [make the Statue of Liberty disappear for a few minutes.] My mother was the first one to tell me about the Statue of Liberty. She saw it first from the deck of the ship that brought her to America: she was an immigrant. She impressed upon me how precious our liberty is and how easily it can be lost. And then one day it occurred to me that I could show with magic how we take our freedom for granted. Sometimes we don't realize how important something is until it's gone. So I asked our government for permission to let me make the Statue of Liberty disappear... just for a few minutes. I thought that if we faced emptiness where, for as long as we can remember, that great lady has lifted up her lamp, why then...we might

---

5 The terms *dukkha* and *samsara* are part of the technical vocabulary of the basic doctrines of Buddhism: *dukkha* is generally rendered in English “suffering”, but covers a broad spectrum of possible meanings, some more general and others more precise than “suffering” normally connotes; it is also the first of “The Four Noble Truths” of Buddhism. *Samsara* – literally “wandering” or “world” – refers both to the doctrine of the karmic cycle of re-incarnation in Buddhism and Hinduism as well as to the quality of unending, circuitous change of the mundane world [Ed.].

imagine what the world would be like without liberty and we realize how precious our freedom really is. And then I will make the Statue of Liberty reappear, by remembering the word that made it appear in the first place. The word is freedom. Freedom is the true magic. It's beyond the power of any magician. But wherever one human being guarantees another the same rights he or she enjoys, we find freedom. [The curtain between the live audience and the Statue of Liberty used to hide the secret of its disappearance is raised.] How long can we stay free? About just as long as we keep thinking, and speaking, and acting as free human beings. Our ancestors just couldn't. We can. And I will show you the way. Now! [The curtain is lowered and the Statue of Liberty reappears.]<sup>6</sup>

What Copperfield is pointing out is that to appreciate liberty we have to experience what non-liberty is. We must go through a process of negation (non-liberty becoming something that it is not) in order to attain liberty. On the one hand, this is straight-forward semiology. We understand what "A" is by comparison and reference to all that is not A (the "non-A"). The Statue of Liberty is an object for us because it stands in contrast to all that is not the Statue of Liberty. However, there is more than semiology at stake here since what is being articulated in Copperfield's analysis is also a view of time that sees any moment of time as dependent on past moments for its intelligibility and articulation. The Statue of Liberty, in itself, has no significance for us unless we can place it within its history, its emergence from a prior "emptiness" (Copperfield's term). Time moves in a line and any point on that line takes its meaning from the prior contrasting point.

However, what happens when we have reached the end of the line and found ourselves at the End of History where the master-slave dialectic has been negated and liberty is ours? As Copperfield surmises, when "one human being guarantees another the same rights he or she enjoys, we find freedom." However, as Copperfield asks "How long can we stay free?" The answer, Copperfield reminds us, is "...just as long as we keep thinking, and speaking, and acting as free human beings." And therein lies the problem: thinking, speaking, and acting human beings, unlike animals and Bodhisattvas, can only know they are free from the notion of unfreedom. Copperfield's

---

6 *The Magic of David Copperfield V: The Statue of Liberty Disappears*, directed by David Copperfield, aired April 8, 1983, on CBS, accessed January 8, 2016, [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/David\\_Copperfield\\_%28illusionist%29](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/David_Copperfield_%28illusionist%29). My italics.

remedy to this is, in fact, a common strategy in any post-revolutionary utopian society. It is to use performances to re-enact the becoming of freedom, the moment of liberation, the magical gestures and utterances that ushered in something new. This attempt to freeze the moment when history ended and liberty appeared so as to constantly reenact it explains much of the obsessive pageantry and outdated paranoia that seems to be an endemic feature of a self-declared “End of History” society such as North Korea. The mass choreographed celebrations in Pyongyang and the constant belligerent proclamations to keep wars that are decades over still hot in the memory are all about keeping the magical appearance of revolutionary liberation alive. Indeed, North Korea is in many ways just performing a more extreme version of what any modern nation-state in the formation of its own identity seeks to do, namely, put an end to history through the conjuring of an eternally returning narrative of the nation’s emergence as the final legitimate (i.e. sole and legal) solution to our historical struggles. However, magicians repeating their tricks always risk undoing the illusion. Whereas an animal, a being existing in a world where there are never new forms, only new content may be tricked eternally, or a Boddhisattva existing in a world where there is never new content, only shifting forms, may remain eternally nonchalant, for those creatures that “keep thinking, and speaking, and acting as free human beings” the magic is bound to wear off.

And here lies the problem. The end of history is a concept that relies on a vision of history as a line where every now is part of a chain that is moving forward due to contradictions that must work themselves out, with the result that every now is being shaped by its prior moment and, in turn, is shaping its next moment. The result is that history will go on forever or history will stop. If history goes on forever, every society will have difficulty in claiming its historical legitimacy and right to declare a final peace since there will be always be a better society on the horizon due to the innate contradictions in the society we have now. Why be loyal to a society that denies you the liberty that inevitably awaits? The other possible result is that the series of contradictions in societal development will resolve themselves, history will stop, and we will reach a stage where prior moments have no bearing on future moments since nothing needs to be worked out or resolved. We can just chew the cud in our new unchanging Eden. The former result is a society of constant dissatisfaction. The latter is a society of eternal vacuity. Neither view of the future seems appealing. But perhaps the problem is not history but our

view of it, a view that is linear and hence limited.

### 3 – Getting back now here

One philosopher who has tried to go beyond a linear view of history is Keiji Nishitani.<sup>7</sup> First of all, Nishitani emphasizes the infinite nature of time and how this infinity undermines the signification processes that a linear concept of time generates. When time is infinite, the ultimate beginning and end of events remain obscure to those events. The beginning and end of an event is not the prior moment before the event or next moment after the event since these moments themselves do not have a discernable prior or next moment. The chain of moments has emerged infinitely, or rather has never emerged, was always there, so no moment can be seen as primordial or originary or ultimately defining of other moments. For instance, Nishitani comments:

While the beginning and the end of time in itself without beginning or end can be sought within this actual presence, that presence itself implies something that remains out of reach, no matter how far back or how forward we go. It involves something of another dimension, as different as a solid body is from a flat plane, something like a true infinity that can never be attained no matter how much something finite is enlarged. Seen from this perspective, it stands to reason that the beginning and end of time and being are not to be found within time. In the same way that a three-dimensional solid can never be reduced to a two-dimensional plane (for example, the angle of vision at which a mountain top is viewed by someone standing on the plain below never reaches zero, no matter how far one distances oneself from the mountain), we never encounter the beginning or the end of time, no matter how deeply we step back into the past or how far ahead we reach into the future. For this, at bottom, is the essence of time.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Nishitani would assert that all moments of time are of equal value. We do not live in the shadow of greater moments and events in history. Our time now is just as significant and creative as when the Big Bang or Genesis happened and it is just as significant and consequential as any *eschaton* our future world may bring. Furthermore, on this infinite plane of time there is no other ground to observe time or to be in time than now. To see oneself as

7 Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

8 *Ibid.*, 224.



moving along a line of time between past and future is to get raveled in finite linear optical illusions. When time is infinite there can only ever be now, never lines of time. As Nishitani writes: “Even so, the unshakable fact remains: I am actually existing here and now. Let time be without beginning or end; this being that is present is actually present.”<sup>9</sup>

This infinite concept of time undermines the stand-alone identity of objects in our world. In line with this, the idea that, for instance, the Statue of Liberty is a sign or symbol of an eternal truth because it emerges from an emptiness, whilst true on a surface level, is also, according to Nishitani’s infinite schema, based on a viewpoint that places the true meaning and value of things in our world on the wrong level. It gives ultimate value to that which is contingent and ignores the value of that which is eternal, the pure thusness of the statue itself as it stands. The emptiness before the Statue of Liberty appears and the appearance of the Statue of Liberty are of equal value. The value created by the contrast is a value generated by an attachment to a process that is essentially detached from the fuller truth of the thusness of the universe. We break down time into parts, reading causes and effects, ignoring that this is a pragmatically motivated line we have drawn. For any object in our world gets its true meaning not from its contrast with the earlier moments of history when it was not there but from its contrast with itself as emergent from the ground of absolute emptiness (Sunyata). This perhaps can be expressed by the idea of, what is called in Japanese, *sokuhi* logic, a logical format first proposed by D.T. Suzuki, who derived it from the formulaic statements in the Diamond Sutra. *Sokuhi* is the idea that: A is A, therefore it is not A. Alternatively, A is not A therefore it is A.<sup>10</sup> The Statue of Liberty is the Statue of Liberty therefore it is not the Statue of Liberty.

How does this paradoxical *sokuhi* logic work? One temptation is to read it as an idealist statement, the belief that since I see the world through the filter of my consciousness anything I see must be logically different to what it really is. However, this is not the fullest expression we can wrench from this formula. Instead, perhaps, a better take on it would be to see it as

---

9 Ibid., 223. Non-linear infinite time should also not be reduced to a block of time in the sense of J. M. E. McTaggart’s B-series since McTaggart’s two series work on a 2-D schema whereas Nishitani’s temporal metaphors are distinctly 3-D. See J. M. E. McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time,” *The Philosophy of Time*, edit. Robin Le Poidevin and Murray MacBeath (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 23-34.

10 Nishitani 118.



the consequence of a non-linear view of time. In such a view, there is only (a/the) Now “existing” but this Now is only an infinitesimal pinpoint on the infinite plane (of emptiness) from which time arises. As an infinitesimal point it does grant lingering but zero-time moments for which objects can have ontological “content.” An object is there and not there. It is itself, in itself, but it is not different from the totality of all that it is not from which it has emerged and which it remains a part of. At the moment Copperfield made the Statue disappear, it was already gone. At the moment he made it reappear, it was already there. As Nishitani writes: “In short, it is only on a field where the being of all things is a being at one with emptiness that it is possible for all things to gather into one, even while each retains its reality as an absolutely unique being.”<sup>11</sup>

One important point to add is that we must reject the idea of eternity. Now as being a frozen moment, the view that there is nothing but the Now, so nothing is moving. This is not what Nishitani asserts. Time does move and this does have clear implications for us. There are connections between the moments of now, which pile up consequences of the past for us, which push us on. Nishitani writes:

Two points have been emphasized in connection with the time without beginning or end implied in the expression ‘from time past without beginning.’ First, time without beginning and end bestows on existence at one and the same time the character of a burden or debt, and the character of a creativity or freedom, while in the background a kind of infinite drive is seen to be at work. Secondly, time without beginning or end can come about only if it contains at its ground the presence of an infinite openness.<sup>12</sup>

There is nothing but now, but now does nothing but change. This is not a description of a finite line (something which requires an initial Now) but of time on the plane of infinity that is emptiness (Sunnyata) where there was never anything but nows. The consequence of this vision is that existence in the now means newness and creation at every moment. But it also means that time has never, and will never, stop. According to Nishitani:

To repeat, only as something in infinite openness without beginning or end

---

11 Ibid., 148.

12 Ibid., 237.

does time become something perpetually new at each now. But this newness has a double meaning. The constant origination of new things, on the one hand, has the positive significance of genesis or creation...On the other hand, this same constant origination is not something we could put a stop to even if we wanted to. It gives us no rest, but pushes us ever forward.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

Going back to Kojève's views on those three traditional arts in Japan (tea ceremony, Noh, and flower arranging) and his belief that they were indicative of snobism – all form and no content – perhaps what he was failing to see was that these arts are, I would argue, in their slowness (or sparsity, in the case of flower arranging) manipulations of time which, when properly done, serve to demystify the delusional notions we garner from daily distractions as to how time passes. Such manipulations work best when played within assumptions and appreciations of the infinite and non-linear nature of time. When time is infinite, fast and slow, long and short passages of time are utterly relative. The seemingly eternal, glorious past of a civilization is merely the blink of a celestial eye. The promised paradise of an enduring future utopia will last no more than the nonchalant yawn of cosmic being. When time stretches forever into the past or future, only Now can be of eternal value. And that Now is the one we are physically experiencing. Even when unaware, we are still here utterly in its emptiness. What Kojève saw as vacuity and superficiality in those Japanese arts were, in fact, purposeful and intense explorations of this emptiness and the eternal value it gives to those who have the endurance to look.

However, awareness of infinite time is more than a coping mechanism for individuals feeling the hopelessness and despair of time's unrelenting and merciless march, it is also a powerful anecdote to ideologies that obsess with historical narratives, that bully individuals into sacrificing all for a duty to a national or tribal history that is a mere moment in an infinite cosmos, or that harass the masses into enslaving themselves for future utopian visions that will be mere seconds in the eternal scale of time. Freedom and salvation are only meaningful Now or not at all.

---

13 Ibid., 220.

# ‡ FUTURALITY, AN ESCHATOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

ITZHAK BENYAMINI

## 1 – The Subject of Futurity

In my project I set out to articulate a theoretical position regarding contemporary visuality. With this end in mind, my work attempts to formulate a befitting methodology, a methodology attributing and discerning the significance of *temporality* to visuality. To understand imagery and visuality in general, namely as located between the screen and subject, in the contemporary *present*, a methodology emerged with two opposing techniques stemming from the very same logic: One is a genealogy which turns to the “past” as a term and essence, and the other an eschatological turning to the ‘future’ in much the same way—both for the purpose of making sense of an incoherent, or underdetermined, ‘present’.

From the onset of reading into the writing of the present text, we are immediately overwhelmed by a flow, almost alien to us, of questionnaire-consciousness, asking: what is the best route for examining the status of the viewed image today? It is an examination that should be undertaken from a certain *perspective*, of the investigation of the this same ‘perspective’, or point of view *in* the image. In other words, an examination of contemporary *subjectivity*—a subjectivity entirely involved in, evolved from, and enthralled with *image viewing*; a subjectivity whose future (or destiny) controls and designs its present. All the more, the present and future are bound together owing *to the knot of their Past*—what present subjectivity’s religious, constituting past had *spiritually* promised it: a specific scopic telos.

*A preliminary note.* The religious theme is here owed to a metaphysical

axiom that holds us to it concerning the construction of the image as such: the sphere of imagery as a human one in ancient times and nations was, and is, constituted principally by and through religious practices, in spite of all monotheistic despites. Moreover, this holds for the dream format *as the originary fountain of human imagery*. In ancient times the dream picture was understood as a supernatural or spectral dimension. Is it here that we have the seeds for the present and future of the image—along with its eschatological projections—to move beyond itself, as something despite itself?

Should we articulate our investigation as critical and rational, in the trivial sense that the investigative subject actively explores the passive object-image? Are psychoanalytic and philosophical discourses enough for the purpose of exploring the image and its beyond? Should our inquiries terminate in theology, in exploring the subject of visuality and its orientation in human spatiality? Are these common discourses, those which have permeated and sustained our deepest thoughts until now, limited in their ability to comprehend the image as it will be viewed in the future (or might we say, un-viewed in the future)?

Not without embarrassment, do we nonetheless need to evoke an *eschatological methodology*, one that gives us tools to contend with our present realm of visuality by means of its *distant future*? As half-mentioned above, it seems that the logic ruling the encounter of the image is tied to its past, as an ancient, basic factor of our cultural lives. Nevertheless, this same imagery is in a state of a forward motion, as the image is propelled both by and towards a technological futurity. Moreover, it is the imminent promise of our own epoch that delivers us the idea that *viewing* as such will no longer be comprehensible under current (dominant) critical discourses (and by the same token, neither will the concept of the viewing subject). Will this future even permit visibility—seeing and being-seen? Can the critical, academic discourse with all its anal-compulsive tendencies fulfill the necessary methodological demands? Or can we, without fear or trembling, offer a quite different paradigm: a paradigm that opens the blocked gate to the dimension of *a persecutory futurity of the present subject*, from a position of determination and trepidation as well as suspicious apprehension? This methodological paradigm will propose a suspicious analogy regarding the transformations of the screen and image, as correlative to those transformations in the alterity of monotheistic divinity.

‡ ‡ ‡

This current proposal for understanding the contemporary image assumes that, nowadays, a radical change is taking place in the existential mode-of-operation of the image. This is discernible on two levels—one *paranoiac* and one *eschatological*:

1. First, in the relationship between the subject (of the viewing eye) and the other (as the eye of the image) in which the relations between self and other are constantly *reversing*, with the viewing subject at one moment viewing the *other* and at another the *other* viewing the subject. This formulation stems from a psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious dynamics at play between these two figures: in Freudo-Lacanian discourse, *consciousness* is aware only of its viewing of the image and the viewed-other, while the inverted relation takes place at the *unconscious* level. But it is not a neutral other that gazes back but, rather, viewed-otherness itself.<sup>1</sup>

We denote the subject as S and the Other (*Autre* in French) as A. The direction in consciousness is:  $A < S$ ; and in the unconscious is:  $S < A$ . This is not confined, however, to the clinical or psychological scene alone. Indeed, human life is increasingly located in the field of the external gaze, more and more it finds itself within the complex structures of social panopticism. We can acknowledge the fact that the internal/psychological relation is nothing but an allegory for the political relations found between the different eyes populating and constituting our sphere of images.

2. In the second level, the *futurity* of the domain of image is moving towards a post-human/matricial world, a unification of subject and other, without separation:  $S = A$ , or being totally included:  $A(S)$ . The rapport of the subject and its other as (big) Other is discussed (as is well known) in psychoanalysis, a discourse grounded in Jewish and Christian theologies and their particular formulations of the relation between the *human* subject and the *radical* subject, Other: God. Indeed, in my larger project called *iChrist* (to be published soon) I have delved into the writings of Saint Paul, who wandered the ex-

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire - X: L'angoisse* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

tremely (infinitesimally) short highway leading from Second Temple Judaism to the establishment of autonomous Christianity; in which God is turned human and then splits again, a movement which radically changed the logic of the other and the logic of its gaze upon the subject. When, if ever, did this paradigm shift take place or, rather, have they always coexisted?

‡ ‡ ‡

In light of the chaos and abundance which swallows us in this age of high technology, hurling us towards an unknown future—unknown except in some current, deeply “metaphysical,” sci-fi films which seem to watch us more than we watch them—we narrow our question to the immediacy of everyday reality: what is the essence of the ‘subject’<sup>2</sup> characterizing our age? Stated differently, what kind of subject is uncovered at the root of our *presentness* who moves towards the future, that is to say, whose entire essence is movement towards the future?

Though the Western subject’s core is eschatologically-progressive, always moving towards a future, it now seems that this futurity no longer permits any *being* in the subject beyond a structural servility to the future. We will attempt to address this new form of subjectivity while taking into account the very being of every subject as hence conceptualized (that is, one whose very existence, without exception, is already scripted in a spiritual notebook which precedes us and determines our modality by a given concept as part of a philosophical, religious, or other cultural construct).

This conceptualization describes the subject and its being, but also constitutes it within the confines of the description, and what is this description and being if not essentially, existentially in movement, from the present to the future? This is a movement in which the past is erased, not even dialectically, for the pastness itself of the subject is erased, as the past *per se*.

Although the monotheistic subject (in its Jewish metamorphoses, as *en route* to Christianity and Islam) is commanded to remember and honor the traditions of its fathers, its past remains that of serving the present and future, and the past as such is not preserved, except as a past which is processed and

---

2 The ‘subject’ here conceived on the one hand as a concept and on the other an existence consequent of yet exceeding its concept.

repressed dialectically through the resistance which the subject makes to it. This future is a kind of erasure (or foreclosure) of the repression or of forgetting of the past where its measure of violence towards it remains; a kind of play of tradition that is pseudo-faithful to that past while looking to its own future.

No hint of its character as pseudo-faith will remain in the future; where the past presently is: a total apathy towards the past—no negation or denial, no repression of the past. The past is simply not or even *not* (going so far as to deny the dimension of negation), since even the present is *no longer*; and hence the future will disappear from within this future futurity. Then, only the screen event, the instantaneous drug-like pleasure of the screen, will exist, without the need for temporal differentiation. The terms ‘uni-time’ or ‘uni-space’, in the sense of one-dimensionality, seem applicable. And what about the situation in which even entertainment cinema, from pornography to the most highbrow art films, encompassing 3D cinema and computer gaming moves to the actualization that the spectator experiences the virtual world in three dimensions through the use of virtual reality? It seems that in these cases the elimination of spatio-temporal dimensions grows more extreme in scope, approaching the temporal phenomena called “momentarity” (to the extent that time and space are reduced to the infinitesimal?).<sup>3</sup> This is already happening within the *screen-subject*, which is propelled into this dimensionless realm. Moreover, this motion, from the present toward the future, contains a conservative echo and protects the past, a dialectical echo of the foundations of the past. This is all a dialectical negation that seems to preserve the past, but actually leads towards its complete negation whereby the very erasure of the past is itself forgotten.

‡ ‡ ‡

We should now consider a text belonging to our past, a past increasingly shrinking as a cultural reference point, consciousness of its formative importance ever-fading. Nonetheless, the psycho-theological essence found in the depths of its pastness continues to resonate, at least until that time when its essence overtakes its cultural significance and it thus completely negates itself,

---

3 For more on the various changes the concepts of time and space are undergoing, see: Paul Virilio, *La Crise des dimensions: La Représentation de l'espace et la notion de dimension* (Paris: ESA, 1983).

like a snake swallowing its tail and, eventually, entirely, itself: the moment of the final negation in which nothing will remain: a continuous on-going negation of the surplus-negations (which still exist for brief moments). (And is this not the final goal of the matrix machine envisioned in Ray Kurzweil's future?).

The verse: "A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (*NRSV*: Isaiah 40:3), is later displaced from Isaiah by John the Baptist to the beginning of Matthew (3:3). The content of this verse (Jewish messianic sanctity), like its Christian displacement (a movement which necessarily translates it towards an eschatological resolution) mirrors the road of subjectivity, the way or movement of the subject, as well as the fact that the subject is being guided as such. This subject, in its entirety, is designed for ends (until we will be able to say that the entire highway is itself a subject incidentally infused with some object). This object, which imagines itself to itself as a subject, reaches its end and eventually dies along this route.<sup>4</sup>

The meaning of this current highway of subjectivity is its being-toward-a-future, terminating in the eschatological movement towards the negation of the subject. In the content of the verse we find the God-apparatus routing this process and its end point, a mechanism found at the basis of the Hebrew subject's existence (and by implication of the Abrahamic subject in general), leading this subject towards the paved road of the future (within the barren desert of the present), to a future redemption *a la* negation: an end reminiscent of a subject *en procès*.<sup>5</sup>

We should mention here in passing, something which is not marginal to our discussion: in the cited verse, as it rolled down to the mouth of John the Baptist, YHVH is presented as *kurios*, master, lord, in an attempt to express an affinity to YHVH as the *adonay* (literally: my lord) of the Hebrews, while in the New Testament it is not only an attempt to invoke the biblical God YHVH but the future Christ, while *dialectically erasing* YHVH. YHVH is the subject of the movement, He is that movement, He is the future subject in displacement, He: the "new" negation of the old by the new, until the final moment of appearance of the Subject-YHVH *of-the-road* at the eschatological dead-end.

4 Compare Lacan's interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter": Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on the 'Purloined Letter'" in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W.W. Norton &, 2006), 6-46.

5 In the sense used by Julia Kristeva, "Le Sujet En Procès," in *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 55-106.



What are the conditions of possibility for this type of dynamic subjectivity in Western culture, beyond those directly responsible for producing the contemporary scientific-technological condition; in other words, which foundations point us to monotheistic eschatology, and especially the Christian component of this axis? Along the scientific axis it seems that the contemporary subject is increasingly contrived under the biological-neurological order of cognitive research, understood through the paradigm of computing. Reflexively, such a paradigm symbolically represents the man-made creation of man himself. This is manifest in a reality where the subject internalizes more and more robotic actions, in its self-characterization.<sup>6</sup>

The metaphysical dimension of modern science in this sense no longer just describes the subject of science, but also elaborates an existence or a present for that subject. And in the actual world, the subject does not directly come about but rather only does so through and towards a futurity (with its subjectivity being the actual movement towards the future). In that futurity in which the subject is moving (though this is not necessarily *his own* future, but the movement is his and towards *that* future), coming about in the merger of the subject with the image: with the screen. Here, almost accidentally, the second axis is revealed, the theological-religious axis, and with it the specifically apocalyptic dimension it contains for the subject. The subject (in itself a natural desert) and the subject's path (the highway) come together, the subject merges with the *movement* of the apparatus—that which directs its constitution and end (the Other, God)—and moves towards the *simultaneous* disappearance of the subject altogether).

‡ ‡ ‡

Alas, in his essay on apparatus, Agamben notes that the most prominent apparatus in man's history on Earth is nothing but his own language.<sup>7</sup> It is an offhand comment by one who, criticized for being an apocalyptic-messianic thinker, made the assertion at the conclusion of a theo-political discussion concerning the Christian foundations of the apparatus (posed under the terms of *oekonomia* and *disposition*, originally connected to divine-ecclesiastical interven-

---

6 As suggested by Vilém Flusser in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion books, 1983), esp. chapter 8: "The Photographic Universe".

7 Giorgio Agamben, "What is an Apparatus?," in *What Is an Apparatus?: And Other Essays* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

tion). Moreover, we can indeed treat language as an apparatus or mechanism, as a *techne* engineering the mind, internalized and integrated with the same Self that conditions Mind<sup>8</sup> during its own life. While the older apparatuses operated by a double action of *horizontally* producing selves and *vertically* producing the distinction between self and self (regardless of the way in which a horizontalization of this distinction may be carried out in a deconstruction or postmodern critique). The futuristic apparatus, on the other hand, emerged as an external tool, which will overtake these coordinates of the individual self and render impossible any distinction between a self and its neighbor-self towards an *ocean of subjectivity* (in which the Internet, or something like it, will contain all of us embedded within it. This can already be spotted; each of our subjectivities is embedded until such a time when all subjectivity will henceforth dwell therein, and the respective borders of our different subjectivities will blend and disappear within this ocean).

A viewing of the 2008 film *Wall-E* reveals the radical infantilization of the screen-subject in the form of a future destiny of humans living in a paralyzing utopia on a distant spaceship run by a mothering apparatus in the form of a supercomputer with protruding eyes, blocking any possibility of growth or of returning to Earth. Indeed, through a reversal of the psychoanalytic formula, we discover regression, or perhaps an ontological-parody of it: from the submission of the subject-spectator to its absolute Other of the cinema show, through the narcissistic reflections passing between the user and the smartphone, till the forthcoming situation of the autoerotic screen-subject in a merger in which there is no longer a distinction between subject, screen and apparatus. An apocalyptic regression, or one aimed towards an apocalyptic experience, in which the subject undergoes a process of *reversal* of the Freudian *construction* of the subject out of auto-eroticism (the love devoid of any connection to the dimension of otherness), through narcissism (the love of the image as identical to the self, being the one image that is the only other possible) and finally towards the subject, to the attraction of the otherly-thing (the love of the object as an other).<sup>9</sup>

8 In Hebrew, as in the German “*Geist*,” the terms for the English “mind” and “spirit” can be given by a single word, in this case: “*ruach*.” Benyamini has likely capitalized it here to emphasize the use of this conjunction of terms in Hegel’s philosophical system. The Hebrew “*ruach*,” like the Greek “*pneuma*,” can also mean “wind” and “breath,” which adds to both the exegetical and eschatological heritage of the term [Ed.].

9 See: Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” in *Standard Edition*, vol. 7 (S.l.: Hogarth Press).

To what extent is this process influenced by the fact that these screens developed within the Christo-Western world and its emergent techno-subjectivity? And how much of it can be extrapolated to a universal subject through cultural colonialism? For a substantial portion of that subjectivity was formulated on the road in which the Pauline epistles made their way towards their everlasting audience. We take this into account in positing Christianity, like every systematized religion, as much more than a spiritual framework, but a wider cultural one.

‡ ‡ ‡

The discussion presented here regarding the relation between the viewer-subject and the screen, a discussion which has clear eschatological characteristics, is aimed at the trivial in its everydayness, but also at that which has surprisingly apocalyptic aspects, and ultimately at the superficiality of this coincidence which weds the contemporary with finitude itself. It seems that what is being outlined here is none other than a cultural paradox. To better perform this structural paradox, we stress the fact that today's intellectuals, no less than lay people, reject any argument claiming that our time is close to an apocalyptic futurity; they reject the absurd aspect of that claim, namely the contradictory relation between two radically different states, a relation that entails a peculiar proximity. Before the meaning of this paradox is clarified, its structure will be presented by an examination of this rejection, which expresses the structure of its futurity in a paradigmatic way.

The defensive response itself, which defends against this paradoxical situation, while expressing a sneering rejection of its actual presence or existence—especially in the extreme apocalyptic situation in which we find ourselves—serves as an example of the problematic nature of our contemporary logic insofar as it highlights how we face a problem that can be taken as *either* radical or trivial. But the choice of either pole misses the *larger* point regarding its parallax coordinates: concurrently democratically liberating and oppressively totalitarian. This is not an issue of different perspectives, but of a phenomenon that is the synchronization of both aspects into an inseparable mesh! The anti-dialectical rejection leaves us with only the trivial, hence arousing in us a suspicion concerning the apocalyptic way in which the apparatus consumes us.

In the hope that a conceptual clarification can elucidate the difficulties in which we find ourselves, we shall clarify that when we use the term “apocalypse,” we take into account the tension between its original-literal meaning and the more common-historical meaning as understood today, and through Christian history; *literal* in the sense of an illusionary spectacle which reveals a sub-reality of the present or and super-reality of the future, like that found in the title of the final part of the New Testament, “John’s vision”, Αποκάλυψη του Ιωάννη; and *historical* in the most common and well-used sense, in which the word is imbued with meaning following the *content* of that very text detailing an eschatological catastrophe at the end of days. De facto, in a broad cultural context, the meaning is perceived as mostly negative, especially to contemporary secular sensitivities, and is no longer a bearable mix of negative reckoning with positive redemption. The influence of Hollywood reinforces this trend with the paranoia that it instills in us, its viewers. Hence the cinematic renditions of Philip K. Dick’s paranoid plots, geared towards a dystopian pleasure which catches the viewer, completely embedding him in the monadic space created for him and him alone as he ironically identifies with the hero of the *Truman Show*.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the terrifying aspect of that imagery is connected to the manner in which Hollywood production understands, while pleasuring us in the most Catholic-bloody way, the imaginary depth of our relation to a future apocalypse.

Besides those noted above, who reject the apocalyptic claim, there are those who accept the ongoing change but experience it indifferently if not enthusiastically, who can claim that, as part of our attempt to conceptualize our condition, it is preferable to use the term ‘evolutionary’ and not ‘apocalyptic-catastrophic’, and who are astonished at the stubborn paranoia such as that expressed here which, to the sensibility of these greeters of the new, overly stresses the apocalyptic at the forfeiture of the liberating.

As a response to the claims described above, we wish to emphasize that from the perspective of the current moment that approaches the future, such as that described by Ray Kurzweil concerning the so-called *point of singularity*, this future is indeed a threat.<sup>11</sup> It is a future that seems to entail a threat that the contemporary subject senses from afar as its own negation,

---

<sup>10</sup> Although thematically similar, *The Truman Show* is not based of work by Phillip K. Dick [Ed.].

<sup>11</sup> Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005).

dissolution into the field of computerized cognitive automation and robotics. Indeed, there is not even a possibility of discourse from the yet unknown perspective of future man, for whom this situation will likely be trivial. So we go far back in time to our past to make a statement about the future, the future whose seed was planted in our present, or so it seems. The very same past of our inquiry is also closely associated with the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition of the Second Temple's destruction. This past thus ties together destruction and anxious anticipation of the future, an *imagined* anticipation from the *present* point of view, that is nevertheless also already rooted in the future—a view towards what is insinuated from the present to the future. This is how Paul perceived messianic time. In this regard, Paul imbues the subject with an apocalyptic core through *visual identification* with the image of the crucified, an identification whose final degradation will lead to a mystical merging with Christ until the two—subject and sublimely suffering God—are indistinguishable.

And thus we can ask if we are experiencing the soft and pleasurable attack of an apocalypse rolling down to us, in and towards us, in which our subjectivity becomes habituated, to a slippery slope which ends in annihilation through a merger with the Object-Screen? And this stands in contradiction to the earlier subjective prophecies, in which the subject contends with a horrible reality, unique and sudden, in a situation so dire that the subject has no choice but to be immediately accustomed to the catastrophe, to the sudden change.

Which situation is worse: the slow process of growing accustomed to growing accustomed, or the very traumatic not growing accustomed to growing accustomed? And are we today dealing with the formation of a revolution, a formative revolution? Will we still be able to define revolution? This is a revolution whose primary evil is that it contains the process of growing accustomed to it—becoming habituated to it—which dissolves the very objective “fact” of its historical existence, its very existence as “past”. This habituation is part of an existence that slowly but surely can no longer distinguish between epochs and will not recognize its existence within a revolutionary situation. This is an existence, finally, apathetic towards time. An irony of sorts—this will be the end of the subject of *futurity*.

## 2 – Eschatological Methodology

Let us delve into what we have called *eschatological methodology*. If you as readers raise the screen from above the current investigation, it shall grow clear to you that the current way of *imagining* our plot of a hypothetical and fundamental debate regarding the *contemporary movement towards futurity* is an imagined plot that has already come down in favor of one of this debate's two sides. This is so since this *way of imagining* is corrupted and bribed by virtue of its *placement* inside the field of this debate that, necessarily, begets certain questions.

This *way of imagining* (as will be described in the following paragraphs), which some will slam as highly hyperbolic for the sake of inspiring anger, will call the debate in favor of one side in response to a question regarding the very *relevance* of *that* argument to our contemporary period: One, who is apocalyptic in his mind, says “relevant,” the second, more a-apocalyptic and more normative in mind, declares “not so!”

This *imagined formation* of the debate presupposes a problem of temporality which appears from the onset, in accordance with the *written text's* own fears as he carries on its back the current author's own *futurative* anxieties, since sadly he sucks up and internalizes the dread of his surroundings. The acknowledgment of this *futural* anxiety is well-timed with the acknowledgment of the fact that every Hollywood spectator, indeed, each and every one of us is swept away towards the contemporary apocalyptic-catastrophic position of *persecution*. This position maintains, almost unwilling and unwittingly, an assumption about the looming actualization of the psychical or mental demise of humanity: film scripts entail technologically advanced extraterrestrials taking over the Earth; the subjection of humanity to a matricial/wombly supercomputer; humanity dissolving absolutely into cyborg beings (when at last the machine merges with the human body and soul); and, exponential scenarios emerge in which anxiety is produced from the threat of a post-modern, post-human, or even post-extinction future. More than anything else, this position reveals a futural anxiety, one that is present for every human, even those in the most remote rainforest in the Amazon, who are relentlessly being devoured by the front of industrial technology or etched into the face of the globe by Google's satellite(s)—satellites which strives to suture the world under their unifying gaze. How much of this script is grounded in the Real, and how much stems only from embedded anxiety?

We find this dilemma, before its resolution, and while it carries this future resolution on its back (regarding the question of whether there is value in our presentation which reveals a certain anxious subjectivity and whether we are indeed faced with an imminent threatening future). the dilemma is itself the basis of the *eschatological methodology* as much as the very subject of its inquiry. Methodologically, we will not identify, let alone fully endorse, this paranoiac position regarding the future (or in other words, framing the future as the *Other* which haunts the subject and heralds its demise or subjection), *even though we accept the fact that this position is an integral part of the internal construct of contemporary being*. Moreover, we will closely follow, almost leech onto that very position, draw as close as possible to its disposition, and elaborate it as from inside.

Following such a radical position so closely could chart a path of investigation into our presumed contemporary modality whilst itself serving as the subject of research, the object of investigation; the radicalness of the assumption regarding the future, the radicalness of that anxiety, and the radicalness of any anxiety (which is always an anxiety of an object, and it is always physically or temporally removed from us and thus always of-the-future, geared towards an encounter with the subject). Hence even if the assumption is found to be completely false, we will perhaps *only* stand to gain—*with a strong stress on the adverb*—by assuming, in any case, and as has been stated, that it is not completely false, because we are not dealing with an external-objective truth but with the ominous presence of a mental aspect in the life of contemporary man.

The *way of imagining* the debate, the curtly qualified subject of the previous pages' discussion, has undoubtedly begun to exhaust our reader. It presupposes a dialogue in which the apocalyptic hold that our contemporary period holds nothing for us except its own presence, and not even in its independent dimensions or their relations to us, and without the existence of a metaphysical dimension indicating the forthcoming. On the other hand, those opposing the apocalyptic hypothesis will respond that these times *do*, in fact, entail a presence-toward-the-future; a presence with a special status, that of the existence of an independent metaphysical dimension (which falls from the sky at us and for us) shelling upon us while containing and concealing this very latent futurity.

*Presence* only contains a futuristic dimension, a dimension that is pre-



cisely responsible for our *Presence*. For the optimists, this future is not just a shift in timeframe but, moreover, opens onto the possibility of a significant “leap” (in the sense in which Ray Kurzweil and co. speak of the singularity) toward a different futural dimension, one which finally contains *futurism-as-a-constant-state-in-the-Present* = a larger acceleration, uncontrollable and possibly insufferable (like that which Virilio spoke of); an acceleration that commences *now!* The current Present is aimed toward a futural existence in which the present will, in its entirety, be as *Being-in-future* (a strange ring to this phrase, indeed).

‡       ‡       ‡

For the *Dasein* formed by the Heideggerian hammer, existence in the present is tightly connected to its *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*) towards the future and a future death. This is a future that impedes our strides in the present, reversing, as it were, life in the current presence. Moreover, the future is not so distant, it is not that which-has-not-yet-existed, but rather it belongs to movement in the present, and even more relevant than the mere-present, although *only the present does exist* (while being designed by its future). Compare to that notion the optimists we have presented, who treat the futuristic-future as one that erases the present, not only coloring it: the future entirely engulfs the present and no longer promises a retroactive movement from the future to the past and present, and dissipates the equiprimordial dimensions of the temporality of the Heideggerian *Dasein*.

In other words, in accordance with the outlook of this disposition, whether or not their feelings are justified, *soon* the contemporary man will no longer be understood as being-there as a *Dasein*—there is no “being” there in the everydayness of the presence toward *the future*, but rather only a *being-towards, being-tomorrow*, whose being is not entailed in the present, but is *already-situated* in a futurity. For them, the contemporary historical moment of technological development is a critical moment in which immanent temporality sends humanity, for the first time, to *the-there*, to that-beyond (and not towards a general future or towards a future which retroactively reads the present in the Heideggerian sense, but rather to the *present-in-the-future*). In other words, it seems that the singularity of the contemporary subject lies not in its being-there as anticipating the future, but rather in being as *being-in-the-present* = the genesis of the *being-futuristic*.



And if we find ourselves at odds with the breadth of this futural obsession, which the previous passages sought to stress, we are constrained to seek our future-selves in those scholars and others who experience alternate modalities of temporality, if only by way of the fortune of history; times of a *future-towards-futural-apocalypticism*. In certain moments, in those end-times that proceed-the-Tomorrow, it is as though the present becomes equivalent with the future or time the latent futurity of the present in the most radical sense, and this might just mark the biggest horror: the present is no longer the present and the future is no longer the future; no longer respectively confined, they no longer preserve their own space, and due to mechanisms of high acceleration the momentary is entirely erased as a distant past. What a dreadful anxiety... and then future time is *also* negated in the futuristic because the ‘distant,’ of the distant future no longer exists; it is entirely *here* and its accelerated logic becomes indistinguishable from the instantaneous present. An instantaneousness which is wholly determined by its existence at the conceptual level but not at the ontological level. This momentarity is a destination which is always available due to the simple fact that there is no moment, the moment is crushed and erased under the future immediately: thrown to the waste of the past. For those futurists, both the threat and rejoicing of the current present are owing to the current present’s slippage towards such a futuristic-present.

‡ ‡ ‡

Moving forward, this essay attempts to differentiate between the modes of catastrophic presences, attempting to discern the different means by which these modalities manifest in human life: on the one hand, there is the symbolic-spiritual order, while the existential-material order comprises a second mode. This conceptual taxonomy should account for the reflexive confluence of such modalities in human life. Accepting these premises, such different genres of presence are split between the *speaking of the atrocity* and the *life of the atrocity*.

The atrocity is problematic only from certain subjective perspectives, not all of them. Take, for instance, the perfect and sublime ending to certain utopias; on the other hand for certain subjects, always split, this culmination is unbearable in its hideous heights of horror. Precisely what is this horrible

“atrocious?” Are we enclosed into a vertiginously tautological and exhausting experience of definition? What is so atrocious, so horrible, in the atrocity? There is atrocity, but there is horror that is not atrocious. There is no catastrophe more catastrophic than the horrible. And this ‘fact’ is more horrible than the just-atrocity. It cannot escape its own definition. And this is maybe what characterizes the catastrophic and the atrocious: although they seem respectively not to be so, they are very much so. Is this the Derridian supplement, but of *futurity*?

So, the *talk of atrocity* can be further categorized: between *speaking about the horror* and the *horrible speaking* (*de facto* both are recorded and lived in the depths of the apocalyptic written universe); and the *life of the atrocity* can be subdivided into *life within the horror* and the *horrible life*. In this sense it would be self-enclosed: lest the constant atrocity that man is within a circle in which all points aim in a single direction pointed at themselves, consuming itself in its circuit, without any point of beginning or end and every point moves along the circuit merging with the others. This recalls the logic of the Mobius strip (of which the most radical psychoanalyst, in his later years, would run along its edges to exemplify the co-determined rapport of the *RSI*) extends to all points of the circle. Since there is a logic which declares that the one walking on one side is bound to find himself on the other, and then by the same logic of the two-reversing-sides the circle materialize in its true form so that every point on the circle is always equal in value to the other points on the circle on all sides, as if the circle is a line with infinitely equal sides.

This model is presented to distinguish the concept of apocalyptic time from that of quotidian time (of the “common sense,” whether this is the one supported by science or not, and regardless of whether it maintains that the time is connected to events like those in the biblical ethic or whether time is an independently ontological essence which is unconcerned with the human clock). Quotidian time makes no real distinction between the past, present, and future, while the apocalyptic strives for a mystic consolidation of these temporal-units through a mutual influence between distinct units of time.

Our time itself, and not just its conceptualization, is guided in accordance with the ancient myths of faith recorded in monotheistic religion laid out by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as their sectarian derivatives and antecedents, as in Persian-Zoroastrian and Hellenistic-Roman traditions. This is a point that Mircea Eliade noted by indicating the shift from the cir-

cular natural time of primitive religions to the Western concept of *chronological* temporality. The apocalyptic notion of time in the West is grounded in the biblical premise of a linear temporal-exhaustion, of its history from the genesis of Genesis to its end, the *eschaton*. But such coordinates actually undermine the very premise, or point of origin, as it cuts away from this linear axis towards an *imminent, or contemporary, end* that will reorganize and create the world anew.

Let us further develop this dialectic with words of the greatest scholar of religion from the 20th century, the Romanian fascist Eliade: “When the Messiah comes, the world will be saved once and for all and history will cease to exist.” And for Eliade, “In this sense we are justified in speaking not only of an eschatological granting of value to the future, to ‘that day’, but also of the ‘salvation’ of historical becoming.”<sup>12</sup> These claims highlight a certain aspect for our understanding of time, which is tied to futurist position in the imagined debate raised concerning the openness of the present towards a new temporal concept in which presentness is swallowed up by the futuristic. This aspect is expressed in the relation connecting the apocalypse to the distant future which condenses it from being *just-distant*, and which, in a way, threatens the present: the elimination of the future retroactively destroys the present.

‡ ‡ ‡

Let us learn from the Minor Prophets of the Tanakh. A prophet dated to roughly the Second Temple, adds a pitiful ‘alas’ when heralding the day of God: “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes” (Joel: 1:15), using a play on words (preserved only in Hebrew) between a specific name of god (*Shaday*) and the arrival of a thief, a burglar (*Shoded*), an image that injected itself also into Saint Paul’s letter. The day’s arrival is imminent but also surprising—surprising and not surprising; Joel continues:

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick dark-

---

12 Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Trans. Willard R. Trask, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 107. My emphasis.

ness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come. (Joel: 2:1-2)

A horrible day like it has never been and will never happen anytime. But moreover, the existence of the *presentness* in the *present* will no longer be the same again since *that day*. And for Amos—who lived during the time First Temple Period in the kingdom of Israel—we are dealing with a highly atrocious event which will also be horribly noisy:

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord: In all the squares there shall be wailing; and in all the streets they shall say, “Alas! alas!” They shall call the farmers to mourning, and those skilled in lamentation, to wailing; in all the vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through the midst of you, says the Lord. The Day of the Lord a Dark Day; alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? (Amos 5: 16-20)

This is an unbearable day for the subject, in which its being is crushed, attacked by the future which overtakes it, a thief stealing being, its everyday. On the other hand, in Micah can some comfort in the day of God in which redemption does not entail horrendous destruction. Moreover, we are now talking about the “end of days.” A time in which no “day” will no longer exist:

In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth

of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. (Micah 4:1-5)

Encountering these ancient notions, we shall ask about the right understanding of the current apocalyptic perception of time, as it is represented and manifest in cultural or cinematic imagery, while echoing between ourselves? The question regarding our current conception and not just the historical one so that it retroactively reads in reverse our history in an endless and insufferable circle in which the “historical” explains the present, despite the fact that history is pierced specifically in light of the present, while the present is not eschatological towards an evil empire like the United States or Babylon or Rome but rather regarding the apparatus-like world in contemporary technological entirety. Alas! The day of the apparatus!

‡ ‡ ‡

As stated, if we return to our initial distinction between the life and speaking of atrocity, then it becomes clear in wake of the shortening of the distant-future that in the apocalyptic perception of time the following movement takes place: for example, speaking about the future atrocity > the atrocity in the speech > living inside the atrocity > the life of atrocity. Nevertheless they are all equal although they move each other, in other words they are identical in their interaction with the horrible future but not in the *manner of the movement* towards that future. They differ in their modalities.

The threatening future can merge with the present and with speaking about the atrocious life, but there is also a futurity that has not yet come and which tickles the present and is only so-called talk. And not simply talk—the words create a world, a parallel universe in which other lives are represented. This full circle serves as a possible example of the essence of death, as a mix of life and words regarding atrocities—and all this in wake of the being of the Western *Geist* in which talk about death on the Cross created a new type of death, death and crucifixion, a catastrophe of an existence confined not only to the historical moment of Pontius Pilate, but to every moment. (There are those who suggest: go and listen to the opening movements of Bach’s St. John Passion, circular movements which penetrate the listener’s present with

pending futural doom).

The aforementioned distinctions will permit an understanding of the futurists' ideas concerning the future lurking about the futuristic-present's door, whilst simultaneously challenging their claims. They occasion the possibility of differentiating between the presence of the *experience of the present inside a future apocalypse* (the future is already here in such a horrible way that it erases the existence of tomorrow) and the *perception of the future which turns us towards an apocalyptic situation* (the future in the future). And indeed, by turning to earlier times, the Biblical author's positions regarding the future begin to demystify:

1. The author who penned the second part of the book of Daniel. Chapters 1-6 describe the history of Daniel in the Babylonian kingdom, and it is safe to assume that it was indeed drafted by Daniel himself. It seems, however, that chapters 7-12 seek to describe Daniel's prognostic visions regarding forthcoming happenings in Babylon and the later Hellenist period. The assumption here being a different author wrote this 'prophecy' through a procedure known as *vaticinium ex eventu*, prophecy from (after) the event, describes prophecy as that of Daniel, who lived in the time of the first temple, towards the end of days, taking place of the author of chapters 6-12, the **second** Daniel, so to speak. This second Daniel experienced historicity as present in days of the Hellenistic kingdom, but the *pseudo-epigraphia* written in the name of Daniel about the future's unfolding, is not the future or the past of the same author. Moreover, the-belonging-to-the-future begins to show signs of hope for the future, which begins to consolidate in the present of the real author and the vision of the imagined author, Daniel.

$$Past_1 > Present_1 \text{ (formulated as an imagined } Present_2 \text{ which is } Past_1 + \text{ apocalyptic } Future_2 = Present_1) > Future_1$$

2. And if we are speaking about "second," then we must remember that better known second, that is, the second book of Isaiah, whose words, to no fault of his own, were grafted from chapter 40, while his words are about his present and his being. And so for this paradigm as well John of the Apocalypse who lived in a present of depression

and frustration, with futural anticipation for the erasure of the great kingdoms. The future is perceived as distant but the author is calling for its nearness.

*Past<sub>1</sub> > Present<sub>1</sub> > Future<sub>1</sub>*

**3.** For Paul the future was always the continuous future in the present, so that his present is no longer a present but always a *towards-a-future*. Nevertheless, all of this is happening without technological acceleration, only a mystical one, one that heralds the unification between the present-future and final-future (in which man will unite with the Godly Other and the present will merge with the future, towards the end of history).

*Past<sub>1</sub> > Present<sub>1</sub> (a formulation of Future<sub>1</sub> which Present<sub>1</sub> merges into) > Future<sub>1</sub>*

For all intents and purposes, each of these three subjects lived in a certain way under a present towards-futurity, which is their own present. What is unique to the contemporary subject is that he is in a situation towards futurity, towards an apocalyptic situation, which is hiding until it can reveal itself (but there are those who would say that every subject is *exceptional* in regards to subjectivity as such). In the first case noted here, the future-writing dwells entirely in an imagined past gazing at the future. In the second, the future is distant and unique, and in the third, the future is already here and overtaking the present, from outside. Is this like a time in which the past, present and future are erased, in the apocalypse that was Auschwitz?

Maybe, as Agamben hints, in that state of emergency the apocalypse is the norm, because the present once laundered the future and the entire past, and turned its subjects into *Muselmänner*.<sup>13</sup> This is the moment of annihilation toward which the apocalyptic thought heralds and fears, no longer bogged down with questions of occupation and oppression of minorities, we can avail ourselves to questions regarding the occupation of the present by the future until a state in which the present will conquer the future. That which is described as future is none other than the present or the futuristic within the present.

---

13 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive (Homo Sacer III)* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

And why bother with such a methodological preface regarding the futuristic? The goal is simply to gain insight into the future implicated in the present, one that does not yet exist as independent from the present, a not-yet pure future. This move is possibly justified from the direction of our encounter with the future while examining our relation with the ancients from the future of their past, when for some apocalypticians the future *was a gaze at the present future from an imagined past*.

And from this we can learn about our relations with futurity and, perhaps, reformulate it. Thus we recreate our future, or the movement towards itself, and maybe thus also the relation between our real present and our real future as well as this movement towards an imminent merger between the present and future. He who can help us here is Paul, who was responsible for formulating the internal figure of the (contemporary) Western subject, and thus also its unique anxiety and dreadful anticipation of the future merger.

*\* Translated by Omer Benjakob and edited by Ilya Merlin*



# # ANTICIPATORY GRIEF AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE FUTURE

RACHEL BATH

How might a person undergoing anticipatory grief perceive and take up their future? In order to respond to this question, I will first address literature on grief in order to contextualize my discussion of anticipatory grief and to show how a philosophical analysis of the anticipatory structure of this form of grieving addresses a gap in the literature. I will then provide a personal description of my lived experience of anticipatory grief. Following this, I will explicate Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological theories of temporality and subjectivity, as well as his concepts of trauma and intentional arc, so that I can apply these theories to my descriptive example in order to reveal how the anticipatory structure of anticipatory grief can inform a subject's personal perception of their future. Ultimately I will argue that anticipatory grief is an experience that has the capacity to traumatize one's structure of personal time. Whether or not this occurs will depend upon how one accomplishes their existence in the taking up of a situation in the present moment. My interpretation of the experience of anticipatory grief reveals how one's embodied perception of the future emerges through their response to their present situation and it is directly interrelated to their bodily openness toward the world and the movement of time.

Grief is a response to loss that can manifest in complicated ways. It is conceptually distinguished from bereavement and mourning, where bereavement is the state of having lost something or someone, and mourning is the outward expression of grief.<sup>1</sup> Grief can present in a variety of unexpected ways, including expressions of anger or detachment. Additionally it cannot

---

1 "Grief, mourning, and bereavement," *American Cancer Society*, date accessed March 11, 2015, [http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/emotional\\_sideeffects/griefandloss/coping-with-the-loss-of-a-loved-one-intro-to-grief-mourning-bereavement](http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/emotional_sideeffects/griefandloss/coping-with-the-loss-of-a-loved-one-intro-to-grief-mourning-bereavement).

be constrained by social norms that might prescribe what an “appropriate” response to loss is. It has emotive, relational, physiological, and psychological components. While five common stages of the grief experience have been outlined by Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, including denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance,<sup>2</sup> other scholars, including Camille B. Wortman and Roxane Cohen Silver have argued that the assumption that the coping process unfolds in a particular way negatively informs how reactions to loss are evaluated.<sup>3</sup> In short, grief is a deeply idiosyncratic experience and one that cannot be predicated or controlled.

Nonetheless, most of the time when one grieves, they grieve for something or someone that has been lost. In this sense, one grieves for an absent present. One grieves in the now or in the future for a person from the past, a person whose absence haunts the present and will surely be felt in the future. For some people, grief is not experienced directly after the loss, but takes months or even years to manifest. For others, it consumes their lives. Despite common assumptions to the contrary, it fails to wrap up neatly with a clearly demarcated “end.” Generally then, we consider grief to be an experience that follows a death or loss. This assumption was reflected in the secondary literature on the topic of grief up until 1944, when the concept of anticipatory grief was introduced by Erich Lindemann.<sup>4</sup> Lindemann argued that anticipatory grief is a form of grieving that unfolds in advance of loss. This concept has remained somewhat controversial in grief literature: whether or not anticipatory grief exists, its difference from post-loss grief, the way it affects the post-loss mourning process, and whether it is considered a form of mourning or grieving are all topics that populate the literature on anticipatory grief.<sup>5</sup>

There has been a proliferation of studies and articles in the wake of Lindemann’s insight, and his concept has been redefined several times over. For our purposes, we can understand anticipatory grief as a grief experience where one becomes aware of impending loss and as a result grievously anticipates loss before the loss occurs. This is a unique temporal structure com-

2 Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Routledge, 1969).

3 Camille B. Wortman and Roxane Cohen Silver, “The Myths of Coping with Loss,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 57 (1989): 3 49-357, Scholars Portal Journals

4 Erich Lindemann, “Symptomatology and management of acute grief,” *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 151, no. 6 (1994): 155-160, Proquest.

5 Rachel Hibberd, Rachel Wamser, and Brian Vandenberg, “Anticipatory Grief,” in *Encyclopedia of Child Behaviour and Development*, edited by Sam Goldstein and Jack A. Naglieri, Springer, 2011.

pared to post-loss grief insofar as it is primarily a grieving in anticipation of loss – that is, it is the grieving for an event that has not yet occurred but which will occur. Yet as a grief experience it can include the experiences of grieving for multiple related losses that precede but still signify the anticipated loss.<sup>6</sup> For example, someone undergoing anticipatory grief towards the impending death of a loved one may experience grief reactions at the loved one’s loss of identity, their loss of hopes and dreams, their loss of vitality, and so forth. In this way, anticipatory grief can involve a series of grieving episodes over losses in the past, present, and future. Anticipatory grief can also present with a combination of affective responses. According to Nancy Cincotta, anticipatory grief is “a range of intensified emotional responses that may include: separation anxiety, existential aloneness, denial, sadness, disappointment, anger, resentment, guilt, exhaustion, and desperation.”<sup>7</sup> While both the person facing their death and their loved ones can experience these symptoms of anticipatory grief, this paper will focus upon the latter experience.

I maintain that anticipatory grief does exist, and that it is different from post-loss grief. As a phenomenon it is different from post-loss grief in at least one significant way: anticipatory grief is a grief essentially characterized by its anticipatory structure, or in other words, it is a form of grieving for a loss not yet undergone but one which is inevitably located in the future. I would also argue that anticipatory grief carries significant existential implications. For one, this form of grieving enables a change in (living) relational dynamics between the griever and the (living) person for whom the griever grieves. For example, when a person learns of a loved one’s terminal diagnosis, they may begin grieving in anticipation, and may find that their relational dynamic shifts. One example of this type of shift concerns the tension that arises between the typical grief process of *decathexis* (separation) and a desire to remain close to the dying person while one still has the time to do so.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, I contend that the temporal structure of anticipatory grief may inform the griever’s own subjectivity, and may in turn effect the griever’s perception of their future. Generally we perceive our own futures in a hazy sort

6 Therese Rando, *Clinical Dimensions of Anticipatory Mourning* (Illinois: Research Press Company, 2000), 29.

7 Dory Hottensen, “Anticipatory Grief in Patients with Cancer,” *Clinical journal of oncology nursing* 14, no.1 (2010): 106.

8 Hibberd et al., “Anticipatory Grief,” 111.

of way; they are open to us only as a range of possibilities, many of which are not even seen by us in advance. Yet in the case of anticipatory grief, this range of possibilities narrows, and what we do perceive becomes structured by one particular possibility – our future becomes known to us in advance as a future marked by loss even though this loss has not yet actualized as the griever’s present.

With all this in mind, my contribution towards the discussion on anticipatory grief will be to philosophically justify this insight regarding its anticipatory structure by way of showing how a griever’s perception of their own future is marked by the experience of anticipatory grief. I argue that the anticipatory temporal structure of anticipatory grief shapes how the griever lives their present toward their future. This is an aspect not yet discussed at length in the literature, except for a dissertation on how future-oriented stories of hope can inform experiences of anticipatory grief undergone by dying individuals.<sup>9</sup> In the case of that study, the grieving persons were also the dying persons, but my paper will endeavor to show how grievers respond to the anticipated death of a loved one in terms of how it informs their perception of their own future as a future marked by loss.

I will now turn my attention to these concerns. In order to reveal how the unique anticipatory structure of anticipatory grief informs how grievers perceive their own future, I will describe my own experience of anticipatory grief. Following this, I will turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of temporality and subjectivity from the *Phenomenology of Perception* in order to frame my experiences in light of the question this paper is concerned with. I will then analyze my experience through Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology in order to reveal how a subject’s perception of their future is affected by the anticipatory structure of pre-loss grieving.

In my case, anticipatory grief is the set of grief reactions that I have been undergoing in the face of my mother’s death and it includes each of the affective responses earlier outlined by Cincotta. Moreover, for me, the experience of anticipatory grief is ever-present in the sense that I can escape neither the inevitability of my mother’s death, nor my experience of being-towards her death. Yet there have been moments in which the grief experience has

---

9 Alberto O. Magana, “Hope for Hispanic patients in the context of hospice: The impact of narratives of future oriented stories of hope in the experience of anticipatory grief for hispanic roman catholic hospice patients in the Fort Worth area” (Ph.D. diss., Texas Christian University, 2012).

gripped me most powerfully. I would describe those recurring grief episodes as coming in “waves.” It is one of these episodic “waves” of anticipatory grief that I will describe in this essay. I will describe three stages of this experience: (1) being fully seized by the experience; (2) being released by the experience; and (3) the way that I incorporate the experience and move out of it. I turn now to my personal description.

I was on the bus when the “wave” overcame me. Just the moment before I was sitting still by the window; suddenly I found myself arrested in my stillness and flooded with emotion. I was sitting with my hands resting upon my lap, my legs crossed, my face turned toward the world outside my window. I gazed out the window without seeing the gray blur of buildings and people passing me by. Arrested in my stillness I enclosed myself within, and while I faced the world I was not directed towards the world. Instead, I turned inwards, and the fullness of the presence of the world withdrew. All at once the emotions that were kept at bay by my active participation in worldly activities overwhelmed me: exhaustion, frustration, guilt, sorrow, fear, anxiety, anger. I retreated inwards and hid within my body, but my mind turned towards the inevitable future. I saw what was to come in a confused and hazy way, and I knew that while the truth of it was unimaginable, it was also inevitable. Indeed, it seemed in that moment as though it was the only thing in my life that was inevitable, the only certain possibility: barring my own unpredictable death, my mother would die, and I would live through it. I saw it as my only future. I enacted her death in my mind and I lived through it in a confused yet profoundly disturbing way. I imagined what it would be like, knowing that I do not know the truth of it. Nonetheless my existence was saturated with the intensity of my grief. It was almost as though I had already lost her, except I knew that she was a mere phone call away. I retreated further into my body, away from the conclusion that my mind’s eye so vividly saw. In this retreat my openness to the world was further inhibited, and the phenomena of the world around me grew dimmer.

Eventually, the tide began to ebb away and the experience loosened its grip on me. I was not fully relinquished, however. The bus arrived at my stop, and I got up from my seat and got off the bus. I walked away from the bus towards my apartment. I was still hidden inside myself, but as I walked my attention slowly turned outward. I found myself momentarily distracted by the sunlight which glanced off an ice-covered branch. I heard the motor

of a passing car. And then I actually *looked* at what I was doing, at where I was going, and I listened to the snow crunching under my feet and I smelt a clean, evergreen scent. I was progressively released from my grief as I moved towards my home, but still it haunted me. Even after I had left it behind I could still feel it in the weight of the world upon my shoulders and the hollowness in my gut. I could not escape the inevitability of my grief, nor the inevitability of my mother's death.

Thus concludes my phenomenological description. I will now analyze this description through Merleau-Ponty's theories of subjectivity and temporality, drawing also upon his concepts of "trauma" and "intentional arc." First I will explicate these theories and concepts, and then I will apply them to the example provided by my personal description of lived anticipatory grief. I turn to Merleau-Ponty here because of his unique phenomenological method and his embodied style of philosophy. Though influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty's work in the *Phenomenology of Perception* is innovative and fundamentally revises some of the central concepts of phenomenology as well as phenomenology itself. As a result, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes himself from his peers and his forbearers by describing an existential phenomenology, one dedicated to rediscovering the subject's bodily relationship with the world as it is presented in – and presents – experience. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is descriptive, and attempts to ascertain essences by way of revealing how those essences are discoverable in their facticity.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, the phenomenological method operates as a direct description of experience, and has the goal of revealing how the world presents itself to the perception of the human being. As such it is "actually a phenomenology of the world as perceived rather than of the perceiving act."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, all philosophical insights are situated within a worldly context and should not be abstracted from that context, as is the case with scientific investigation.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, all philosophical investigations are performed by an embodied subject who describes what they perceive. Investigation begins with the subject's reflection upon their perceived world, an act supported by the perceiving body that grounds existence by way of a most "ancient pact"<sup>13</sup> es-

---

10 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2014), xx.

11 Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 545.

12 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xxii.

13 *Ibid.*, 265.

tablished between that body and the world. Embodied perception thus “constitutes the ground level for all knowledge.”<sup>14</sup> If we take Merleau-Ponty at his word, opening up avenues of inquiry begins with reflective description at the level of perception. For this reason, I contend that my description of my lived experience of anticipatory grief provides valuable resources for analysis.

One of the most radical concepts articulated in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology* is the concept of subjectivity. Against Descartes’s *cogito* as a pure core of consciousness, Merleau-Ponty posits a perceptual consciousness that never transcends its being in the world.<sup>15</sup> This perceptual consciousness is incarnate, and the incarnated body is the source of meaning and intelligibility. Subjectivity therefore is not a pure consciousness, nor a mind, nor a mere body. Rather, subjectivity emerges from the dynamic established between the body and the world, a dynamic that is accomplished through expressive, meaningful, embodied action. Living bodies move: they take up projects, they perform routine and surprising actions, in short they respond to the world which has beckoned to them in such a way as to evoke a particular embodied response. That certain forms of movement make sense in relation to particular situations reveals how actions are founded upon the body’s fundamental relationship with the world.<sup>16</sup> According to Scott L. Marratto, subjective movement “reveals the relation between a subject and its world . . . because subjective movement manifests a subject *in* a situation . . . but it accomplishes this only by occluding ‘*itself*’ as the subjectivity *of* situations.”<sup>17</sup> In this way, that one is a subject is revealed by one’s taking up a situation through purposeful and expressive movements that are aimed toward and anticipate the world and in this way manifest a world. In other words, I pick up this pen and begin to write; in this movement the *I* that writes is both manifested as the one that picks up the pen to write and is hidden behind the picking up of the pen and putting it to work. Each time I perform an act of perception, “I” (as a subject) am invoked, and I am perpetually unfolding in the various movements and actions which accomplish my existence.

Important for our case, subjectivity is not just founded upon the sense of movement, but is also deeply interconnected with time. Strongly put, the

14 Ibid., 544.

15 Donald A. Landes, *The Merleau-Ponty Dictionary* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 167.

16 Scott L. Marratto “The intercorporeal self: Merleau-Ponty on subjectivity” (Ph.D. diss., University of Guelph, 2010), 56.

17 Ibid., 57-58.



subject and time “communicate internally.”<sup>18</sup> In the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty’s theory of temporality is deeply Husserlian, though he does additionally cite both Paul Claudel and Heidegger in order to illustrate the interconnection between time, and sense, and meaning.<sup>19</sup> Unlike Immanuel Kant, for whom temporality is the form of inner sense,<sup>20</sup> Merleau-Ponty does not see time as a product of consciousness.<sup>21</sup> For if such were the case, the subject would be a series of unified mental events bound by a temporal order. Nor is time a property of the external world, as if we as subjects were observers who stand outside the flow of time and observe its passage.<sup>22</sup> As is the case throughout the *Phenomenology*, when he explicates his theory of temporality, Merleau-Ponty discourses with two interlocutors, namely the empiricists and intellectualists. In both of these camps, time is understood in the commonsensical way as a “succession of nows,” which misrepresents the notion of a “now,” as well as the manner of time’s passage, and the uniqueness of past and future.<sup>23</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, past and future are not instances of “nows” that are linked together internally or externally. The problem with this commonsense view is that it presupposes a concept of subjectivity: for the empiricist, the subject is outside of time and observes its passage, and for the intellectualist, time is internal to the mind of a subject.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, for Merleau-Ponty, we must analyze time in order to gain access to the concrete structure of subjectivity.<sup>25</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s unique theory of temporality presents time as an ambiguous movement and a dimension of our being immediately tied to perception, subjectivity, and the body.

For Merleau-Ponty, in our field of presence time is revealed as a dimension of our being, where the field of presence is the present field of perceptions bordered by the horizons of immediate past and imminent future.<sup>26</sup> In this moment I am writing, and the horizon of my immediate past involved

18 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 432.

19 Ibid.

20 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 163.

21 Landes, *The Merleau-Ponty Dictionary*, 169.

22 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 433.

23 Ibid., 435.

24 Shahrzad Ghanooi, “The Self as Rooted in the Ambiguity of Time: Merleau-Ponty on Temporality and Subjectivity,” *Gnosis* 13, no. 1 (2014): 16.

25 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 433.

26 Ibid., 438.



other activities such as preparing the tea that sits to the right of my keyboard, or clearing my desk before I sit down to work. The horizon of my past has “gone by behind” this present, and the horizon of my future, my evening and my night, is “out in front” of this moment.<sup>27</sup> The temporal order and position of my perceptions and experiences is determined by their relation to my present insofar as they were once themselves present, or will eventually be present, experienced in my life as my life, and carried beyond my immediate field of presence. Yet my past is accessible not just as a memory, as a copy of a previous moment. Instead my past is accessible through my ability to reopen my time, where I place myself back at a moment and relive it in my field of presence. This field of presence is the originary experience in which “time and its dimensions appear *in person*,” and where future passes into present and into past.<sup>28</sup> These temporal dimensions are experienced and expressed in my body, not as mental representations, but as the exhausting weight of a long day borne by tired shoulders, or the heavy sigh expressed when I face my equally long evening and night.

It follows that my body, as the origin of multiple intentionalities, including perceptual, temporal, spatial, sexual, and motile intentionalities, sketches out my temporality, providing my body’s actions with meanings and tying me to my surroundings, thus giving rise to the sense that constitutes my subjectivity. My living body moves, it acts, and these expressive actions have meaning for us within the world. These actions occur in a present, and they emerge from a bodily history that provides the sense of our lives. The cohesion of these meaningful expressive actions as they constitute a person’s history and identity forms a subjectivity that establishes its unity through taking up its past experiences into its present. It is because I am always already geared into the world that a certain sense is given to my experiences as they occur in time. And as everything given in my experience has a phenomenal sense, all of my experiences are knitted together through the transition from one present to another.<sup>29</sup> Subjectivity is thus understood *as* time because temporality is the “power that holds [events] together by separating them from each other.”<sup>30</sup>

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 439.

29 Landes, *The Merleau-Ponty Dictionary*, 171.

30 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 445-446.

The structure of temporality is hence the structure of the subject.<sup>31</sup> Each moment of time offers the totality of all time to the subject. Each present moment holds on the edge of its horizon the immediate past which preceded the moment. This immediate past has its own horizon of immanence, in which it holds its immediate past, and so forth. In this way, the present retains, takes up, and is sustained by all past moments. The same structures hold true for the immediate future. Merleau-Ponty writes:

But along with my immediate past, I also have the horizon of the future that surrounded it; that is, I have my actual present seen as the future of that past. Along with the imminent future, I also have the horizon of the past that will surround it; that is, I have my actual present as the past of that future.<sup>32</sup>

This view of temporality follows from Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception. Just as to perceive is to be entirely in the world and to grasp the whole of the world before the parts, to be in time is to grasp the totality of all time in a present moment. Time is a single phenomenon that unfolds through the consciousness of the subject who is its time. Moreover, for Merleau-Ponty, though we live in the present, we experience this present as a falling-into-the-past that once belonged to the future. The present is, essentially, the passage from future to present to past in a moment. All of time belongs to this passage, and it is all held within the unfolding movement of temporality. Moreover this all belongs to one moment, a moment experienced in the field of presence as a passage that knits together one's experiences as one's own. Hence, the worldly experiences one has are taken up into this and in this movement they are knitted together, constituting the fabric of one's subjectivity.

There are two additional concepts from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* that relate to temporality and subjectivity, and which I will make use of in my analysis. The first is the concept of "trauma," and the second is the concept of "intentional arc." I will describe each of these in turn. For Merleau-Ponty, trauma is related to temporality. Indeed a trauma is a present moment that stands out in contrast to others, and which does not fade into the generalizable past.<sup>33</sup> As a present moment, trauma restructures each sub-

---

31 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 445.

32 Ibid., 72.

33 Ibid., 85.

sequent moment. Consequently, when traumatized we experience a loss of our authentic encounter with time.<sup>34</sup> More plainly put, there are events which occur in a person's life and traumatize them. Take, for example, the loss of a limb. If the loss of a limb traumatizes the person who has lost their limb, this person remains trapped in this loss. The perception of the event of the loss may move into the past and be replaced by new perceptions, but this is only the case with regard to the *content* of these perceptions. The form of the perception of the event of loss remains and structures subsequent perceptions.<sup>35</sup> In this way impersonal time continues to pass and we experience the passage of time insofar as we age and we have new perceptions, but *personally* we remain locked up in a traumatized temporal structure, and this structure creates a particular style of being in the world. This traumatized style narrows our power of giving ourselves worlds, and instead we privilege one world: in this case, the world of loss. This world is sustained by the memory of the experience of loss, which is sustained by the memory of having had the memory of loss, and so forth.<sup>36</sup> Thus all new content of experience is experienced within this traumatized structure of personal time, and I no longer live in my authentic time but rather remain locked up in my trauma.

The final concept relevant for my analysis is the concept of the intentional arc. The intentional arc unifies all intentionalities, and creates the reciprocal bond between a subject and world. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the way we perceive, move into, take up, and make sense of the world is grounded affectively upon the way the subject is toward the world. When I take up a situation in my present milieu, I do so by virtue of the "intentional arc" which accomplishes my embodied existence. This intentional arc is therefore a feedback loop between the subject and the world.<sup>37</sup> It is a unified collection of original intentionalities that creates the unity of subjectivity. These original intentionalities are the intentional threads of subjectivity and include perception, motricity, sexuality, and representation.<sup>38</sup> It is the intentional arc that "projects around us our past, our future, our human milieu . . ." <sup>39</sup> by way of creating subjectivity through "the unity of the senses, unity of the senses

---

34 Ibid.  
 35 Ibid.  
 36 Ibid.  
 37 Ibid., 137, 160.  
 38 Ibid., 160.  
 39 Ibid., 137.

with intelligence, [and the] unity of sensitivity and motricity.”<sup>40</sup> Our affectivity grounds perception, motricity, and representation upon the arc by orienting us toward the world. Hence it is by virtue of my body’s reciprocal and responsive relationship with the world that I can take up the situation of my present milieu. My existence is thus an accomplishment, one which occurs in each present moment. Indeed, all of existence is re-accomplished with each subsequent moment that takes up its immediate past as a towards-the-future. This is how I make my appearance in the world and take my stance in it.

Having now recognized not only how the structure of temporality informs subjectivity, but also the way that the intentional arc accomplishes individual existence, and the arresting nature of trauma, I am now prepared to examine how the anticipatory structure of anticipatory grief interacts with the griever’s perception of their future as it emerges from their grief-stricken field of presence. There are a number of elements in my description which can be more deeply understood if interpreted through Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. There is the traumatizing grievable moment that is my mother’s pending demise. There is I, myself, a subject who is my time. There is a futural world anticipated and constituted as the only possible future, and there is the resolving movement that opens up the possibility for incorporating the event of anticipatory grief. I will now analyze each element with relation to the description provided, in order to bring to light the way that this grieving subject perceives their future through the experience of anticipatory grief.

In my experience of anticipatory grief, there is a grievable moment that has the potential to traumatize my experience of the present moment. This grievable moment is my mother’s death. Her death had not yet occurred when I experienced this anticipatory grief. Yet as a moment anticipated, it structured my experience almost as though it had happened. All existence became existence towards this event. The passage of time did not carry me away from it, but rather, towards it. It structured my present as an anticipation of a futural event not-yet-had, but one which will inevitably occur. I knew it would happen, I had known it would happen, and I anticipated and moved into its happening. My awareness of my mother’s death as an event that would eventually transpire, at an ungiven yet certain point in time, traumatically restructured my living experience of each present moment in just this way. All novel content of experience was experienced within this trauma. When I

---

40 Ibid.

was gripped by the intense grief episode, I no longer lived in and through my first-person experience of the world. I withdrew from the world, I hid within my body, and I became arrested by the grief which signified my mother's impending death. I enacted in my imagination this death, and I lived through this projected possibility rather than living in the present moment which was originally supported by my body's pact with the world. I turned inwards and faced towards a particular possibility, one privileged possibility: the possibility that I would outlive my mother.

In lieu of a world of possibilities opening up by virtue of my bodily openness toward it, my traumatized structure of personal time privileged a certain world of loss. Accordingly, my style of being became being-towards this loss by virtue of being in a world of loss. My anticipatory grief had "[preserved] through time one of the momentary worlds that I [had] passed through and that I [made] into the form of my entire life."<sup>41</sup> This is a world not yet encountered but one anticipated. It is one where my mother is dead, and it had become real to me the day I learned her prognosis. In the grief episode I found myself abandoned in this world. I was stuck there. I anticipated this world, and in the anticipation it became arrested in my flow of personal time and I with it. There was a narrowing down of possible actions, and other possible worlds were cut off from me. I intended this futural loss and in this way I lived it, even if in a confused sense. I enacted the futural loss in my mind as though I were living it. Yet, at the time of the grief episode, this world was one not yet past – it was yet-to-come.

As each passing present moment moved into the past, the layer of time between the moments when I was seized by my anticipatory grief thickened. During my walk home, I found that my movement "thawed" my arrested personal time. I returned to my active and purposeful body, leaving behind my internal hiding place and turning my awareness out toward the world. This outward turn enabled my reconnection with my authentic time, despite my knowledge that this authentic time would inevitably carry me forth toward the anticipated loss. The world had lost its beckoning power in the moment of anticipatory grief, yet the moment, as all moments must, passed into the past. However the anticipatory structure of the grief did not allow it to fade into the generalizable past. It could not be forgotten. As an immediate past, the experience of my grief lingered on the horizon of my present. The

---

41 Ibid., 86.

grief-world still existed in this sense, but it had receded from my intentional awareness. Nevertheless, my present experience was still colored by it. In this way it remained, and it restructured each subsequent moment. All temporal movement became movement towards the death of the beloved other. Even if it could fade away, the structure of temporality denied this possibility: each present grasps after the totality of possible time such that my past always in a sense remains my present.<sup>42</sup> I can never transcend my past. I could not transcend the experience of anticipatory grief. I could not transcend the grief to be anticipated. I could only look back on the anticipatory grief and take it up. I could take it up in this moment and move forward into the natural flow of existence, re-immersing myself in my authentic encounter with time. Yet to do so was to move again towards the actual manifestation of the content of the grief anticipated. There was no escaping it.

When I was gripped by the experience of anticipatory grief, and my existence was saturated with it, I experienced my future as a particular enactment of a world imagined and preserved. I foresaw a world of loss through the affective experience of being-towards my mother's death, and the representational reiteration of this grievable moment. This can be traumatizing – but it needn't be so. After all, asking how I perceive my future through the experience of anticipatory grief is asking how I take up and accomplish my existence in a present-passing-into-future. It is in this way alone that I can perceive and then “take up” my future. Only by living in the present and maintaining contact with the authentic experience of time can I truly take up my future. To do so requires remaining engaged with the world, which in turn requires activity in my relationships with others, expressive actions, and an awareness of the passing of time. If I remain self-enclosed, drawn up within myself, and allow the light of the world to be extinguished, my perceived field of possibilities remains closed down. If this traumatic experience of anticipatory grief solidifies and becomes permanent, I will remain frozen, and my perceptions will remain structured by this trauma. Yet this same body that can allow me to withdraw from the world is what enables me to enter into it once more. This I know from my walk home, the walk that released me from the suffocating clutch of my grief.

---

42 Ibid., 87.

Through my bodily movement the phenomenal experience of anticipatory grief must loosen its grip on me. When it does, I can move back out into the world. My body opens up to the authentic experience of time, and I again encounter things, persons, and projects. I can reflect meaningfully upon past experiences of anticipatory grief and take these up in such a way that they direct present actions. My perceived future, once narrowed down and stripped of possibilities, begins to open up anew. As the experience moves out of the immediate past, time thickens between it and my present moment. The trauma has not solidified and I am turned once more towards the world. Despite this, I am aware that I am moving toward the inevitability of my mother's death. Nonetheless, I now see my future as one that cannot be assumed by virtue of past circumstances, nor projected into by virtue of the direct contents of my consciousness. There is no substitute for the actual witnessing of my future. I cannot predict the mark my future will make on me until I live it. In other words, I can only live in direct contact with this present.

The temporal structure of anticipatory grief is essentially anticipatory. It shapes how I, the griever, experience the present moment by positing an inevitable future event that will evoke grief. By virtue of being towards that future, I experience the anticipated grief *in* the now. As a grief pre-loss, anticipatory grief is markedly different from post-loss grief. While a variety of examples were given in this paper which demonstrated this, the primary focus has been on the way that anticipatory grief affected how I have experienced my sense of time, particularly my sense of my future. Because I as the griever am a subject who is my time, and because I am embodied and cannot escape my world, I experience my being-towards this futural loss in the form of a suffering that can be traumatizing. The grievable loss, despite its not-yet character, structures the way that the present moment is experienced, due to each present moment being a present-passing-into-future. As such, I always know that I am moving towards the grievable event, and I know that it could happen at any time; a particular future thus dominates the present in its inevitable certainty.

This particular future is one radically stripped of possibilities, such that the only apparent possibility is the possibility of loss. It is in this way that the anticipatory structure of anticipatory grief informs my perception of my future. Nonetheless, despite the trauma of this experience, I needn't remain trapped by this future. Thanks to my body, I have a reciprocal and responsive

## ‡CHIASMA #3

---

relationship with the world, and the movement of time and expressive action are the dynamics that accomplish this relationship. If I open myself up to the world through expressive action and movement, this may in turn open up other futural possibilities. This, in turn, may help prevent the solidification of the trauma of the grievable moment. By living in direct contact with the present, I have found that my future can be neither assumed, nor projected into.



# # THE FUTURE OF CONTINENTAL REALISM

*Heidegger's Fourfold*

GRAHAM HARMAN

It seems to me that Lee Braver is correct when he argues, in *A Thing of This World*, that Continental philosophy has been primarily an *anti-realist* school from the start. We differ only in that Braver heaps praise on this anti-realism, while I view it as an intellectual catastrophe. In any case, an alternative Continental philosophy has begun to emerge, in the shape of at least three major realist approaches in Continental thought in the twenty-first century:

1. The New Realism led by the Italian ex-relativist Maurizio Ferraris<sup>1</sup> and the prolific German *Wunderkind* Markus Gabriel.<sup>2</sup> Given that Ferraris's own realist turn dates as far back as the early 1990s, he may deserve the title of the first blatantly realist philosopher of the Continental tradition. He also paid a heavy price for this, since it put a heavy and permanent strain on his relationship with one-time mentor Gianni Vattimo.
2. The realism of Manuel DeLanda,<sup>3</sup> drawn somewhat counter-intuitively from Deleuze and Guattari, but developed with vigor and passion, and unremittingly realist in spirit.
3. The realism of the Speculative Realists gathered at the 2007

---

1 Maurizio Ferraris, *Introduction to New Realism*, trans. S. de Sanctis. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015.)

2 Markus Gabriel, *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.)

3 Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002).

workshop at Goldsmiths, University of London.<sup>4</sup> This was a loose confederation of separate realist approaches, and the four original members quickly went their separate ways.

Through the influence of these three approaches—and not those of New Materialism, which is a mostly rabid anti-realist movement<sup>5</sup>—realism has finally achieved something like a critical mass in Continental philosophy. Far from fading away quietly, it is the subject of more books, articles, and conferences each year.

Thus, it may be a good time to consider possible future developments in Continental realism. Given the limited space available for the present article, the best I can hope to do is discuss the possible future of my own preferred Continental realism: object-oriented philosophy, or object-oriented ontology (abbreviated OOO, or “Triple O”). Since I cannot assume the reader’s prior familiarity with the object-oriented approach, I will begin by explaining its origins in Husserl and Heidegger, before moving on to consider the future prospects of OOO itself.

## 1 – The Tool-Analysis

We begin with Martin Heidegger, the original inspiration for OOO. Heidegger’s entire philosophy is contained in the celebrated tool-analysis, first published in his 1927 masterwork *Being and Time*,<sup>6</sup> but found as early as his first university lecture course in 1919.<sup>7</sup> In my view it is the pivotal moment of philosophy in the twentieth century, and it is crucial that we draw the right lessons from it if we ever wish to escape that century (Harman 2002). The tool-analysis is best viewed as a response to Husserl, who served Heidegger in the usual double capacity of mentor and rival. Husserl’s phenomenology famously “brackets” the natural world, suspending all theories about atoms, chemicals, and sound waves, with the aim of focusing on the world as it shows

---

4 R. Brassier, I. H. Grant, G. Harman & Q. Meillassoux, “Speculative Realism.” in *Collapse III*. (2007), 306-449.

5 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.)

6 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (New York: Harper, 2008).

7 Martin Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, trans. T. Sadler (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).

itself to us. When a door slams, I simply hear the door slamming, and this experience contains countless subtle stratifications that patient analysis can eventually uncover. If a scientist counters by saying that the slamming door creates percussive effects in the air, which causes vibrations in the eardrum, which sends signals through the nervous system into my brain, this is just a theory—a derivative mode of understanding, while for Husserl the phenomenal experience of hearing the door slam is primary.

Heidegger’s way of deepening this model is both simple and profound. For the most part, things *do not* appear to us as phenomena in consciousness. Most of the things in our environment are hidden from view, silently taken for granted until something happens that makes us notice them. The floor beneath my feet, the oxygen in the air, the neurons in my brain, the English grammar I easily use, generally function with unspoken efficiency unless something goes wrong. This happens often enough: tools do break. When they do, entities reverse from tacit reliability into explicit presence. As a name for such presence, Heidegger chooses the term *Vorhandenheit*, usually rendered in English as “presence-at-hand.” As a contrary name for the silent labor of unnoticed things, Heidegger chooses the term *Zuhandenheit*, or “readiness-to-hand.” It is important to note that these are not names for two different *kinds* of objects, as if shoes and hammers were always ready-to-hand and colors or numbers always present-at-hand. For in fact, reversals between the two modes constantly occur. The functioning hammer easily breaks, reversing from silent readiness-to-hand into explicit presence-at-hand. But even when this happens, the broken hammer lying before me is not available in sheer, unalloyed presence. Many aspects of the hammer are still taken for granted even when I stare at it explicitly. Conversely, a broken hammer might easily be repaired, returning to its previous unnoticed use: but even then it flashes in the sunlight from time to time, and never fades completely from view.

It is safe to say that presence-at-hand is the sole great enemy of Heidegger’s philosophy. His version of the history of philosophy is even somewhat monotonous in accusing all past thinkers of reducing being to presence. Heidegger lists several different ways in which things can be present-at-hand: normal everyday perception, explicit theoretical awareness, and the mournful case of broken tools. What all these experiences have in common is that none of them gives us the *being* of the things. Whether I perceive a hammer, create theories about it, or grieve over its recent malfunction, in all such cases

I merely confront the hammer “as” hammer. This explicit awareness of the hammer “as” having such-and-such characteristics articulates some of its features while inevitably leaving others in shadow. Presence never does justice to a thing’s full reality, which withdraws into a depth no awareness can ever exhaust. The hammer “as” hammer always means the hammer *for* someone who considers it. But this is not the same as the hammer in its own right, which no observer can drain to the dregs.

An additional form of presence-at-hand that Heidegger considers is independent physical substance. Science views entities as pieces of objective matter occupying space and time (or shaping them, as in general relativity). Thus, it views entities as a set of objective properties that can be summarized in a theory. This latter form of presence-at-hand, independent physical substance, is the pied piper that so often leads mainstream Heidegger commentators astray. For these interpreters hold that “present-at-hand” for Heidegger means “independent of Dasein.” And since reality independent of Dasein obviously spells realism, they conclude that Heidegger’s relentless critique of presence-at-hand is also a critique of realism. This leads to the assumption that Dasein’s *access* to the world is philosophically paramount, just as it was for Kant and most of his successors. The mistake is understandable, but a mistake nonetheless. To show this, we need only note that when entities are defined as physical matter occupying space-time coordinates, this is just as much a caricature of entities as Husserl’s phenomena were. After all, physics is an attempt to see physical things “as” what they are via certain mathematizable properties, even though there always remains a deeper layer in the things that is taken for granted. Whether the as-structure results from phenomenological description, or from physical theorization, in both cases it is derivative of a more primal being of the things. The as-structure is a sort of objectification or distortion: or better yet, a *translation* of entities, rendering them in a present-at-hand language that is never entirely apt. In short, the physical things known to the sciences (and to common sense) are not independent of Dasein at all, but only *seem* to be independent. They result from a purely mathematical projection of nature by Dasein, and this will never be enough to exhaust the depths of the being of things. But this means that presence-at-hand actually refers to the *dependence* of things on Dasein, not their independence. Without some phenomenologist, perceiver, scientist, or frustrated handyman observing the hammer, it would not be present-at-hand. Presence

always means presence *for* someone or something. By contrast, readiness-to-hand refers to absence. This latter point will be refused by most Heidegger commentators, and we will soon consider why.

My initial claim, then, is that Heidegger's presence-at-hand means dependence on Dasein, and readiness-to-hand means the independence of that which withdraws from access. The counterargument is easy to find, since nearly all commentators make it. For them it is the reverse: presence-at-hand means independence, and readiness-to-hand means dependence on Dasein. By countering mainstream Heideggerians on such a fundamental point, am I dismissing them as an unruly mob of hacks and fools? No. They have good reasons for thinking as they do. The main reason is that for Heidegger, there is no such thing as "an" item of equipment in isolation from others. Equipment always forms a total system, the very system that Heidegger calls "world." Hammers gain meaning from the houses they are used to build, houses gain meaning from the climate they are designed to resist, and so forth. Every tool exists "in order to" do something else. And further, all this equipment ultimately gains meaning only from that "for the sake of which" they are used: namely, for the sake of Dasein's own existence. If Dasein were not physically fragile, or not in need of privacy, houses would not be what they are. If Dasein is living in frozen Iowa rather than sweltering Texas, rooftop heaters become too costly for Dasein to afford (though this did not prevent my high school in Iowa from installing them). Tools belong to a holistic system that is defined, ultimately, by Dasein itself. This would seem to make an airtight case that readiness-to-hand means "Dasein-dependent," thereby placing my thesis in jeopardy. Yet I will soon demonstrate that my thesis is in no danger at all.

The most widely read Heidegger commentator is surely Hubert Dreyfus.<sup>8</sup> His reading of the tool-analysis is now the standard one. Dreyfus sums up the situation as follows: "Heidegger first notes that we do not usually encounter.... 'mere things,' but rather we use the things at hand to get something done. These things he calls 'equipment,' in a broad enough sense to include whatever is useful: tools, materials, clothes, dwellings, etc."<sup>9</sup> He continues: "The basic characteristic of equipment is that it is used for something.... An 'item' of equipment is what it is only insofar as it refers to other equipment

---

8 Hubert Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

9 Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 62.

and so fits in a certain way into an ‘equipmental whole.’”<sup>10</sup> And true enough, Heidegger grants us a holistic vision in which all tools fit together in a referential whole, none of them existing in isolation. Dreyfus notes further that “when we are using equipment, it has a tendency to ‘disappear.’ We are not aware of it as having any characteristics at all.”<sup>11</sup> And “partly as a joke but also in dead seriousness Heidegger adds that this withdrawal or holding itself in is the way equipment is *in itself*.... This is a provocative claim. Traditional philosophers from Plato to Husserl have been led to claim that the use-properties of things their function as equipment, are interest-relative so precisely *not* in themselves.”<sup>12</sup> In this way, Dreyfus lays the groundwork for the standard anti-realist interpretation of the tool-analysis. Tools withdraw from view. They belong to a relational system of purposes. And to say that withdrawal is how entities are “in themselves” must mean that things themselves are relational, despite the views of “traditional philosophers from Plato to Husserl.” To counter this reading, it needs to be shown that Dreyfus is wrong to identify withdrawal and relationality. Another telling problem is that Dreyfus repeats the frequent but groundless claim that Heidegger’s tool-analysis was anticipated by John Dewey, who “introduced the distinction between knowing-how and knowing that to make just this point...”<sup>13</sup>

To show why it is so wrong to mix Heidegger with Dewey, it simply needs to be shown that the distinction between readiness-to-hand and presence-at-hand is not the same as the difference between pragmatic know-how and explicit theoretical awareness. We begin with the latter point. It certainly seems that Heidegger draws a distinction between our implicit use of tools (*Zuhandenheit*) and our explicit awareness of them (*Vorhandenheit*). But notice that unconscious practice distorts or translates the things of the world no less than conscious theory does. If I suddenly stare at the floor and think about it, I reduce it to present-at-hand features such as color, texture, and hardness, thereby losing the *being* of the floor, which is simply taken for granted. This belongs to the ABC’s of Heidegger studies, and is quickly learned by all newcomers to his work. Yet there is also a less obvious lesson that is equally true: my unconscious *use* of the floor does the same. To sit on the floor does not exhaust its being any more than staring at the floor does. In both cases, the

10 Ibid.  
 11 Ibid., 64.  
 12 Ibid., 65.  
 13 Ibid., 67.

inscrutable withdrawn depth of the floor is reduced to a discrete and limited set of features, even if using the floor can be called “implicit” and staring at it can be called “explicit.” Hence, the difference between presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand is by no means equivalent to that between knowing-how and knowing that. The comparison with Dewey becomes irrelevant—or even hopelessly wrong, given Dewey’s remorseless relational view of the world—since Heidegger’s tools are ultimately what *escape* all relation.

Some readers may object that this is a fanciful projection of bizarre non-Heideggerian ideas onto Heidegger’s own work. I would answer this objection with two points. Point one: tools are not just efficiently handy for Heidegger, but also *break*. Once the tool is broken, it obviously belongs to the sphere of present-at-hand awareness, as an obtrusive sort of obstacle. But what is it *in the tools* that breaks? It obviously cannot be their current smooth relational functioning: by definition, this is a sleek efficiency already fully assigned to other entities. Hence, whatever breaks in the tool must be something that is not fully inscribed in its current use. In short, the invisible use of a tool does not exhaust its reality any more than the visible properties of a tool do. Point two: Heidegger uses the as-structure to refer to *both* realms, theory and practice alike. To see a broken hammer is to consider it explicitly “as” a hammer. But for Heidegger, even to use a hammer unconsciously is to use it “as” a hammer, not as a drill or as some vague indeterminate thing. The first kind of “as” is surely more transparent than the second, but it is clear that Heidegger sees tools as always articulated, whether consciously or not. Yet articulation is always a translation or distortion, and never unlocks the full depths of a thing’s reality. This leads us to a remarkable observation: insofar as an unconsciously useful tool is relationally assigned to other entities, it is *already a broken tool*. To relate is not to be a tool, but to be *broken*, even if human witnesses do not happen to be looking on. The as-structure governs both theory and practice, making them ontologically indistinct. To find the tools themselves, we must retreat not just behind theory, but even behind “tools” in the normal pragmatic sense.

From here we can easily see the problem with Dreyfus’s other, now quite mainstream, suggestion: that withdrawal means the same thing as relationality. *Au contraire*. Insofar as the tool is related to other tools, insofar as it belongs to the system of world, it is merely relational rather than withdrawn. An invisible tool that functions smoothly may be withdrawn from Dasein in

the sense that we are not “conscious” of it. But it is not withdrawn from Dasein at all in the wider sense, since it is fully determined by a system of references that are enslaved to Dasein’s current purposes. To “withdraw” must mean to withdraw from all references, not just from the explicit conscious awareness of humans. Withdrawal is what allows a tool to break eventually, since it holds something in reserve that escapes its current functioning no less than its current presence in consciousness. But this entails that if world is a system of relations, then the world is a system of presence-at-hand. Presence-at-hand means nothing other than relationality: presence for something or someone. The tools themselves are deeper than world, and Heidegger is inconsistent when he identifies tools with world. His famous “ontological difference” between being and beings cannot mean a difference between implicit and explicit, but must be a difference between reality and relation. But this entails that his critique of presence-at-hand gives us realism, not anti-realism.

## 2 –The Thing

Heidegger’s realist attitude toward the thing becomes even more apparent in that classic work of his post-war career, “Insight Into What Is.”<sup>14</sup> The lecture was written down in Heidegger’s Black Forest hut in October 1949, and delivered to the Bremen Club on the easily remembered date of December 1. The opening theme of this lecture is the elimination of distance by modern technology: “All distances in time and space shrivel away.... Yet the hasty elimination of all distances does not bring nearness; for nearness does not consist in a small amount of distance” (Heidegger 1994, 3).<sup>15</sup> Here, the central theme of the tool-analysis is alive and well. To bring distant jungles and tribes close to us through television merely brings them close as something present-at-hand. It is a false nearness that reduces them to superficial outer contours. Likewise, our vast temporal distance from the ancient Greeks would only be a false distance, since it overlooks our deep reliance on their concepts of being, and other aspects of Greek Dasein.

But if technology does not give us nearness, then neither does physi-

---

14 In what follows I will translate the German text myself rather than using the 2012 Mitchell translation.

15 Martin Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA Band 79 (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), 3.



cal science. “It is said that the knowledge of science is compelling. Certainly so. Yet in what sense is it compelling? For our case [it means] that we must renounce the jug filled with wine and replace it with an empty space in which a fluid is extended. Science turns the jug-thing into a nullity, since it does not permit things to be decisive”.<sup>16</sup> Here nothing has changed from Heidegger’s earlier conception of science, which in his view merely reduces things to a series of objectified properties, thereby shoving the thing itself out of view. Science, like technology, gives us a false nearness to the nature of things by inscribing them in a field of accessible, present-at-hand properties. Thus the thing will not be found in the sciences. And neither will it be found in knowing how a thing was constructed: “The jug is a thing as a container. This container certainly needs to be produced. But its producedness by the potter in no way constitutes what belongs to the jug insofar as it is a jug. The jug is not a container because it was produced, but rather the jug must be produced because it is this container.”<sup>17</sup>

What the technological, scientific, and manufacturer’s views on the thing all share is their reduction of the thing to its outward features, its *Vorhandenheit*. Heidegger says that what the jug really is can never be experienced through its outward look: its *idea* or *eidos* in the Platonic sense. In a passage already cited above, he asserts that “Plato, who represents the presence of that which is present from the standpoint of its outward look, thought the essence of the thing just as little as Aristotle and all later thinkers.”<sup>18</sup> If a new way can be found to understand the thing, this will already put us on an entirely new path of philosophy: “The first step to.... wakefulness is the step back from the merely representative (i.e. explanatory) thinking into commemorative thinking.”<sup>19</sup> Such a commemorative thinking would not reduce the jug to its present-at-hand outer contours. For in no way does the thing itself consist in its dependence on humans, despite the Dreyfusian reading of *Being and Time*. Heidegger is quite clear about this: “As a container, the jug is something that stands in itself. The standing-in-itself characterizes the jug as something *independent*. As the independence of something independent, the jug distinguishes itself from an object. Something independent can become an object when we

---

16 Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, 9.

17 Ibid., 6.

18 Ibid., 7.

19 Ibid., 20.

represent it to ourselves, whether in immediate perception or in recollective presentation.”<sup>20</sup> If we avoid the aforementioned technological, scientific, and manufacturer’s versions of the jug and replace it with the Dreyfusian model of the jug as a useful tool assigned to other tools and to human Dasein, we will still have failed to think the jug itself. Dreyfus (and Dewey) have merely replaced the jug with a pragmatic theory and thereby reduced it to a nullity; they have missed the jug *qua* jug. Heidegger says in 1949 that “the jug is not a container because it was produced, but rather the jug must be produced because it is this container.” He might just as well add that “the jug is not a container because it used by Dasein in a referential system, but rather the jug must be used by Dasein in a referential system because it is this container.” The jug is real. Like any other real thing, it cannot be replaced by a set of features belonging to its outward look—or its outward *use*, for that matter. The realism of this 1949 lecture cycle is even harder to deny than that of the earlier tool-analysis.

Now, “realism” can admittedly mean any number of different things. Braver’s book, the definitive account of Continental anti-realism, provides a valuable table including no fewer than *six* possible senses of the term.<sup>21</sup> Two of the six are perhaps the most frequently used: 1) Belief in a mind-independent reality; 2) Belief in a correspondence theory of truth. Heidegger obviously rejects the latter. For him, truth is a matter of *aletheia*: a gradual unveiling or unconcealment that never disposes of shadow, never brings anything forth in total, naked presence. By rejecting correspondence theories of truth in this manner, Heidegger certainly abandons the most common model of truth found among realists. But in no way does this amount to a rejection of realism *tout court*. It is possible to believe in a mind-independent reality while not believing it possible to attain a perfectly lucid grasp of that reality. Indeed, the best proof that such a position is possible is that Heidegger himself maintains it. Braver and others hold that the replacement of correspondence by *aletheia* entails that truth can only be an internal movement within what is already fully accessible to humans. In other words, being is nothing more than the series of historical shapes in which it manifests itself to people; there is no “in itself” hiding behind being’s manifestations, but only an emergent process that

20 Ibid., 5.

21 Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2007), xix.

leads us to yet another manifestation. This Hegelized version of Heidegger ignores Heidegger's incurable hostility to all attempts to reduce being to presence of any sort. For Heidegger, being is nothing if not *absence*, to such an extent that all comparisons between him and Hegel immediately capsize. It is the same reason that leads Heidegger to attack ontotheology—also known as “the metaphysics of presence,” or simply “metaphysics.” When ontotheology claims that one kind of entity (say, atoms) is the ultimate constituent to which all others are reducible, Heidegger complains that this reduces all beings to a single set of present-at-hand features that characterize their component atoms: mass, position, angular momentum. His position is not that there is no true reality lying behind its manifestations; rather, his position is that this reality can never be adequately described through its present-at-hand features. In short, Heidegger's rejection of ontotheology, of “metaphysics,” is merely a rejection of correspondence theories of truth, not of a mind-independent reality.

Yet there is another possible counterargument here, and a reasonably good one. Throughout his career, Heidegger declares that there is no being without Dasein, no Dasein without being, but always a primal correlation or rapport between the two. He finds it nonsensical to ask whether Newton's laws were true or untrue before they were discovered, or to ask what happened in the world before the existence of Dasein. This is the undeniably anti-realist side of Heidegger. But notice that even a permanent being-Dasein correlate does not entail the lack of a mind-independent reality. The fact that being and Dasein always come as a pair does not require that being is fully exhausted in its manifestations to Dasein. Although jugs only exist as jugs for humans, and perhaps for certain dogs and birds, it does not follow that the jug is reducible to its represented features—as Heidegger's jug-analysis makes clear. In similar fashion, the fact that there is no human society without humans or humans without society does not mean that human society is reducible to what humans currently understand about it. Sociology would be an unnecessary discipline if the features of social reality were legible to its members at a glance.<sup>22</sup>

Yet there is a glaring lacuna in Heidegger's thoughts on the jug. As we have seen, he does insist that the jug “as” jug is unattainable by any form of representation; in this respect, he follows Kant's view of the noumena,

---

22 Manuel, DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society* (London: Continuum, 2006).

which lie outside human categories and their determination of phenomena. This is undeniably a form of mind-independent realism, despite repeated attempts to finesse both Kant and Heidegger out of this position. Yet there is also a harmful way, rarely addressed, in which Kant and Heidegger slam the door on a healthy realism. Namely, for both of these thinkers the function of independent reality is simply to exceed human representation, nothing else. The “in itself” is merely a residue unreachable by humans, and does little more than haunt us with dreams or nightmares of our finitude. Phrased more bluntly: what do the things in themselves do *to each other* when humans are not looking? Are there really no relations between these things apart from us? Heidegger dismisses the question as nonsense. Kant ignores it, at least in the Critical period. The same holds true for most post-Kantian philosophy, with Alfred North Whitehead providing the most prominent counterinstance.<sup>23</sup> Endless debates erupt between those who believe in a reality apart from humans and those who see this attitude as retrograde and naïve. But both sides tacitly agree on the main point, implicitly assuming that philosophy has nothing to say about the relations between things when no humans are there to see it. This problem is thrown to the natural sciences, which invariably treats it in materialist fashion: one billiard ball smashes another; an iron filing aligns itself with a magnetic field. Yet it ought to be clear, however controversially, that *materialism is not realism*.<sup>24</sup> After all, materialism idealizes its objects by reducing them to a limited number of mathematizable features endorsed by the accidental state of present-day physics. Yet it is not only for us that the jug and wine withdraw from such explicit features, but *in their own right*. It is not the mere accident of my looking at the jug and wine that transforms them from physical masses into strange, withdrawn residues. In other words, withdrawal occurs not just along a single Kantian fault line where human meets world, but crosses the world itself. The wine does not exhaust the jug any more than we humans do. If Heidegger had admitted this additional point, it would necessarily have led him to develop a metaphysics of objects. The withdrawal of things from all access is not some quirky existential/psychological feature of humans, but infects even the most rudimentary forms of inanimate causation. Veiling and unveiling are ubiquitous: even between billiard balls, even between fire and cotton, and even when humans are not observing, do not yet

---

23 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (Detroit: Free Press. 1979).

24 Graham Harman, “Realism without Materialism,” in *SubStance* 125, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2011, 52-72.

exist, or exist no longer. Those who do not agree to this principle are in fact committed to a form of idealism, since what they really claim is that a certain assemblage of abstract properties can altogether exhaust a thing's reality.

### 3 – The Fourfold

So far I have avoided mentioning the embarrassing open secret that Heidegger's thing is conceived as a *fourfold* thing. The fourfold, *das Geviert*, was first proclaimed in the same 1949 lecture we have been discussing, aside from a brief initial taste in the habitually overrated *Contributions to Philosophy*.<sup>25</sup> No major concept of Heidegger has been so ignored as the fourfold. Only in 2015 did Andrew Mitchell publish the first book in English devoted exclusively to this topic, a welcome development despite the considerable flaws of that book.<sup>26</sup> At first taste, the quadruple mirror-play of earth, sky, gods, and mortals seems so precious and obscure that it leaves his admirers either ashamed or confused. But as I see it, the fourfold is Heidegger's crowning discovery. Moreover, the fourfold is not as obscure as it looks, and can even be clarified with such conceptual rigor that it soon appears dryly schematic and sterile. And finally, I hold that earth, sky, gods, and mortals are the necessary horizon of any future Continental realism. Here is the sort of passage at which the scoffers understandably scoff:

In the gift of the pouring [from the jug] carries the onefold of the four. The gift of the pouring is a gift, insofar as it lets earth, sky, gods, and mortals linger. Yet lingering is no longer the mere persistence of something present-at-hand. Lingering appropriates [*ereignet*]. It brings the four into the light of what is their own. From out of its onefold they are confided to one another."<sup>27</sup>

My goal in the concluding pages of this article is to replace the reader's mockery with genuine interest.

Fourfold structures, quite common in the history of human thought, are almost always generated by the intersection of two separate dualisms. What we seek here are the specific dualisms that jointly act to produce Hei-

---

25 Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, trans. R. Rojcewicz & D. Vallega-Neu (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

26 *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015).

27 Heidegger, *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, 12.

degger’s apparently inscrutable fourfold. The first of these dualisms is so awesomely repetitive throughout his works that at times he seems to have no other ideas at all. I speak of the trademark Heideggerian play of absence and presence, veiling and unveiling, concealing and clearing, withdrawal and as-structure, tool and broken tool, thrownness and projection, past and future, being and beings, and equivalent pairings. The vast majority of Heidegger’s thousands of pages can be mastered simply by noting that these oppositions are all *exactly the same*. Things are withdrawn from presence, yet they come partly to presence “as” such-and-such. The opposed poles of concealing and revealing combine in an ambiguous present, and this is all that Heidegger means by “time”: the simultaneous absence and presence of everything. His fourfold structure will emerge as soon as we supplement this solemnly repetitive dualism with another. And this second duality is not hard to find in Heidegger: all one needs to do is look, but everyone has been too busy laughing at earth, sky, gods, and mortals to take the trouble to look.

The immediate source of Heidegger’s second duality comes from his rather unusual early reading of Husserl. But let’s return briefly to Franz Brentano, that seldom-read grandsire of phenomenology, whose interpretation of Aristotle’s *De Anima* already provides us with a fourfold structure. Here I cannot improve on the account given by Barry Smith: “[For Brentano] we are to imagine two realms, of soul or mind, and of matter.... On both sides we are to distinguish further what we might call *raw* and *developed* forms of the entities populating the realms in question”<sup>28</sup> Though it would not be altogether accurate to say that Heidegger’s two basic poles are those of soul and matter, the resemblance is close enough to be interesting: namely, the realm of jugs and hammers themselves is distinct from that of jugs and hammers as they appear explicitly to Dasein. Smith continues:

The raw form of matter is called *materia prima*. This can become everything corporeal.... In an analogous way, the soul can become everything sensible and intelligible, and does not exist except insofar as it receives the form of something sensible and intelligible. *In each case what gets added is of a formal nature*, and it is the fixed stock of forms or species which informs both the realm of thinking and that of extended (material, corporeal) substance.... *it*

---

28 Barry Smith, *Austrian Philosophy: The Legacy of Franz Brentano* (Chicago: Open Court, 1994), 36.

*is forms which mediate between them.*<sup>29</sup>

For Brentano, then, the fourfold model of Aristotle's psychology involves dual realms of soul and matter, both of them crossed by a second distinction between shapeless matter that can become anything, and a stock of forms that can be stamped into that matter. In short, it is a fourfold based on the dualities of soul vs. world and matter vs. form; the duality of matter and form exists in the world, and exists again on a second level in the mind. Whatever criticisms might be made of this model, it is certainly not laughable.

Now jump forward to Husserl, whose connection with Brentano was much more direct than Heidegger's own. It is admittedly somewhat harder to find a fourfold structure in Husserl, and for a simple reason. For Husserl, the Aristotle-Brentano-Heidegger "reality itself," as opposed to the realm of presence to the mind, is deliberately suspended from consideration. The world itself is bracketed out of the picture, never to return. For this reason Husserl is dismissed in many realist circles as just another idealist, a Johnny-Come-Lately who repeats familiar anti-realist gestures already accomplished more clearly by Descartes, Kant, or Hegel. Yet this assessment of Husserl is disturbingly shallow. While it is true that Husserl suspends reality-in-itself in the name of an immanent phenomenal sphere, a more interesting topic is the duality that occurs for Husserl *within* the phenomenal realm. Consider the following passage from the *Logical Investigations* VI:

The object is not actually given, it is not given wholly and entirely as that which it itself is. It is only given "from the front," only "perspectively foreshortened and projected", etc.... On this hinges the possibility of indefinitely many percepts of the same object, all differing in content. If percepts were always the actual, genuine self-presentations of objects that they pretend to be, there could be only a single percept for each object, since its peculiar essence would be exhausted in such self-presentation.<sup>30</sup>

The same point was already made in Husserl's Second Investigation, where he attacked the empiricist doctrine of objects as bundles of qualities. For Husserl, an object *is not* just a bundle of qualities, since that would make each

---

29 Smith, *Austrian Philosophy: The Legacy of Franz Brentano*, 36.

30 Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Two Volumes. Translated by J.N. Findlay. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 712-713.



shifting percept an entirely new object, and this is what Husserl most opposes. Similar insights about intentional objects over and above their manifest qualities simply cannot be found in Descartes, Kant, Hegel, or anyone else for that matter. Indeed, the presence of intentional objects is what explains the strangely realist *atmosphere* found in the books of the non-realist Husserl: blackbirds and mailboxes resist our perceptions, unattainable behind their various profiles, masks, and perspectival foreshortenings. The important point for us is that Husserl adds a new kind of duality within the phenomenal realm. For Brentano's Aristotle it was a distinction between the wax-like soul and the forms it takes on. For Husserl, by contrast, it is the difference between intentional objects and the changing costumes they wear from one moment to the next, even while remaining the same objects that they were. Yet Husserl has no chance to extend this dualism into the subterranean realm of real things and create a fourfold, since he never accepts such an underground layer of reality.

Heidegger, however, is able to pull it off. His tool-analysis was first presented in the 1919 War Emergency Semester. At the end of that fateful semester, Heidegger turns to an unusual interpretation of his teacher's phenomenological method,<sup>31</sup> and speaks of two types of theory (which he even identifies with Husserl's own "generalization" and "formalization").<sup>32</sup> Normally, phenomenological analysis is bound to a step-by-step progression, leading us through increasingly deeper levels of categorial intuition: I see a blurry patch; the blurry patch is brown; brown is a color; color is a kind of perception; perception is a kind of experience; and so forth. Now it might seem that the final step of this passage through many layers would be the category of "something in general." Yet Heidegger oddly mocks this apparently dry and harmless notion.<sup>33</sup> He insists instead that "something in general" can be invoked immediately at any stage of the analysis, unlike all the others. That is to say, categories normally have a layered, onion-like structure. We cannot pass from saying "this is brown" to "this is an experience" without passing through the intervening categorial layers. But for any layer we *can* say "this brown is something in general" or "this experience is something in

31 Martin Heidegger, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, GA Band 56/57. (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), 109-117.

32 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W.B. Gibson. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1931), 72-74.

33 Heidegger, *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*, 113.



general.” As opposed to the usual “specific bondedness to levels of the steps in the de-living process [the young Heidegger’s term for theory]”<sup>34</sup> we have the principle that “everything experienceable at all is a possible something, regardless of its genuine world-character.”<sup>35</sup> Stated in less boring terms, everything we experience is both something *specific* and something *at all*. This sounds suspiciously close to the classical rift between essence and existence. But more importantly for us, Heidegger sees this same division as repeated on two levels: that of world, and that of the perception of world. In this way the young Heidegger already gives us his infamous fourfold in germinal form. On the level of world, we have the “pre-worldly something” (something at all) and the “world-laden something” (something specific). On the level of explicit awareness, we have the “formal-logical objective something” (something at all) and the “object-type something” (something specific).<sup>36</sup> To phrase it as an example: if I encounter a pencil, it is both something specific and something at all, and then *outside* our relationship and in-itself the pencil is also something specific and something at all.

In this way, the 1919 Heidegger gives us a rather dull-sounding fourfold in contrast with the all-too-flashy *Geviert* of 1949. The 1949 model is also different in one important respect. Although in 1949 the first dualism still lies between the world itself and our encounter with world, the second axis changes for Heidegger. Instead of being a duel between the existence and essence of every object, it is now a distinction between “world as a whole” and “specific beings,” repeated on the veiled level as well as the unveiled one. Earth and gods belong on the level of veiled reality. We know this for “earth” because earth is always a Heideggerian term for that which invisibly withdraws from view. We know it for “gods” because he often tells us that they merely hint without ever coming to presence. “Sky” replaces what was called world in the famous essay on artworks, and this makes it take on the role of visibility against earth’s concealment. “Mortals” also belongs on the level of

---

34 Ibid., 114. Emphasis removed.

35 Ibid., 115. Emphasis removed.

36 See the table in my book *Tool-Being*, p. 203. Theodore Kisiel is also alert to the fourfold structure in this important early lecture course. Kisiel’s chapter on the course in his *The Genesis of Heidegger’s Being and Time*, (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1995) also includes a diagram of these four terms, though without relating them to Heidegger’s later *Geviert*, a puzzling oversight given Kisiel’s peerless scent for the subtleties of Heidegger’s development.

the visible, since he openly associates mortals with the as-structure. As for the second principle of division, earth and mortals are assigned to “world as a whole,” gods and sky to “specific beings.” This decision is somewhat trickier, but I have made a full argument elsewhere and will not repeat it here.<sup>37</sup> In short, the tension between earth and gods can be found in the jug itself, while that between mortals and sky can be found in how the jug is present to us.

Now it seems to me that the young Heidegger’s fourfold was better, even if the manner in which it was presented is significantly more boring. But a more intriguing fourfold would be one that Aristotle, Brentano, Husserl, and Heidegger never quite pieced together. Under this model, we would retain Husserl’s phenomenal realm, with intentional objects emitting various profiles that shift constantly without changing the underlying intentional unit: the tree remains the same tree even as its colors and shadows change. But unlike with Husserl, we would have the same drama underway in a non-phenomenal reality that he could never accept: *real* objects would also be distinct from their qualities and not just a bundle, in the same way that his intentional objects are not just a bundle of accidental profiles. On both layers of reality (the real and the intentional) we would have a tension between unified things and their plurality of traits. The question would arise of how the four poles of the thing interact, and this is the very question to which Heidegger’s fourfold has led us. There can no longer be a question of calling *das Geviert* “absurd.” The question, instead, is how to make productive philosophical use of it. And this, I think, is the future of Continental realism.

---

37 Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 190-202

## ‡ THE FUTURE OF PLASTICITY

CATHERINE MALABOU

INTERVIEWED BY KATE LAWLESS

Catherine Malabou is a leading figure in contemporary French philosophy. She is currently professor at two esteemed European institutions: The European Graduate School and the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) at Kingston University. Her dissertation was completed under the supervision of Jacques Derrida and published as *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (2004). Other notable publications include: *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* (2009) and *The New Wounded* (2012). Malabou is best known for her concept of plasticity, which she draws from Hegel and extends through investigations in neuroscience. For Malabou, plasticity is the paradigm *par excellence* that both advances a new theory of trauma and anticipates the need for a total redefinition of the subject. Her latest book, *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality* (forthcoming June 2016, Polity Press), comes to terms with speculative realism and develops a new approach to the Kantian transcendental.

This interview was conducted during Malabou's visit to London, Ontario in February 2016 to deliver her keynote lecture at "Passionate Disattachments: The Work of Catherine Malabou," a conference hosted by The Centre for Advanced Research in European Philosophy at King's University College and The Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism at Western University. I wish to express my sincere thanks to Professor Malabou for her warmth, generosity and assistance in making this interview possible.

**Kate Lawless:** I'd like to begin with the question of trauma. Contemporary theories of trauma often follow a psychoanalytic framework, where trauma is a form of belatedness. We might also think about this as a kind of futurity. Can you tell me about the relationship between trauma and temporality in general, or trauma and the future in particular?

**Catherine Malabou:** So, as you know, my elaboration of trauma is not exactly that of psychoanalysis. The kind of traumas I'm interested in involve a question of temporality, but they are immediate, not belated. They strike the person. I'm thinking here of cerebral lesions. The psyche has no time to prepare itself for the trauma, but also no possibility of reinterpreting it after the fact because most of the time the lesion affects language and memory. So, I'm interested in the kind of trauma that, according to me, Freud has omitted, which is the physical trauma happening in the brain.

**KL:** Yes, he brackets that, doesn't he?

**CM:** Let's say he immediately recuperates it into his genealogy of the psyche.

**KL:** So, would you say that in your theory or understanding of trauma there's no mediation? Is that one of the main differences?

**CM:** That's right. There's no mediation. This is why emergency therapies were invented, like debriefing, making people talk immediately. Because if you don't do that then there is this neurotic imposter that is a kind of storytelling after the fact, which, contrary to Freud, does not really help the trauma but upholds it. So, there are good narratives and there are bad ones. And generally the ones that come after cerebral trauma are not helpful.

**KL:** What would an example of a good narrative look like?

**CM:** Oliver Sacks worked a lot on this. A good narrative: this is what he calls neurological novels. The good narratives are not necessarily linguistic; they don't necessarily require speech. Generally speaking, what Sacks says is that the patients have to find means other than language to work through the trauma. And for Sacks it was music. It was patients' reactions to music that he

transformed into a narrative.

**KL:** How does this idea relate to the question of futurity? Does the future exist at all in this conception of trauma?

**CM:** I think you have two possible versions. Either you say: the future consists in redemption because at one moment or another there will be a kind of salvation. According to me, Sacks is very much into that – that there will be a way, not to cure these people, but to, in a certain sense, accomplish a kind of spiritual metamorphosis. So, either you say that, or you say that there is no future. And this is my position. There is no future, just a temporary progress – not even progress, but wellbeing. You can only bring some comfort.

**KL:** Are you suggesting that metamorphosis operates simply to allow a being to continue?

**CM:** Yes. Yes, exactly. That's it. I don't think you can go beyond that. A metamorphosis is not a resurrection; it is just a tentative effort to bridge the gap that opened at the core of identity. It seems to me sometimes that Sacks is more confident than I in a sort of mystical conception of metamorphosis as redemption.

**KL:** So fascinating. Tell me, how does this relate to your analysis of metamorphosis in Kafka?

**CM:** Kafka precisely provides us with a vision of a destructive metamorphosis, which has no redemptive power at all. When the story begins, the metamorphosis has already taken place, so that the process is hidden from view, and appears since the beginning as meaningless. This is what is so strong in that story, is that the metamorphosis does not happen. So, in that sense, your question about temporality fits in here because while Gregor spends his time asking himself what happened, he never comes to a conclusion. So there's an attempt at re-elaboration, but it doesn't work.

**KL:** Let's return for a moment to recent theories of trauma, in which the concept of belatedness lends itself to a linear conception of history. Benjamin

and Debord are early critics of this abstract, homogenous idea of history. I wonder: what do you think your concept of destructive plasticity might offer here in terms a reading of history? What is the future of history?

**CM:** I don't even know if the term history would still be helpful in this context because a cerebral event absolutely cannot be recuperated. It is not something that can genuinely be integrated in the course of history, it is a brutal accident, deprived of any meaning, a pure interruption. I know that there exists a history of catastrophes. If we take history in that sense, and in that sense only, then it works.

**KL:** And history always involves some kind of recuperation or mediation of the past.

**CM:** A mediation, reflexivity, narrative, self-representation, self-genealogy. In the case of cerebral lesions, this doesn't exist. There is no diachrony, only a kind of perpetual present.

**KL:** Let's return to some of your work on Hegel, where you first discovered the concept of plasticity. In an earlier essay, you talk about plasticity as a form of mediation between the future and temporality. Can you elaborate on this idea – plasticity as a form of mediation?

**CM:** It's true that in the beginning I elaborated a positive concept of plasticity, and then, later on, I went to the destructive one. So, let's say – if we're going to focus on the first one – that I was trying to challenge Heidegger's reading of Hegel. Heidegger says in the last paragraph of *Being and Time*, that Hegel has no concept of future because his concept of time in general is just a paraphrase of Aristotle, a succession of nows. In a certain sense, it's just a perpetual present. There's no past and no future.

**KL:** That sounds a lot like the lesion moment.

**CM:** Yeah. Absolutely. Except that in Aristotle, this privilege conferred to the present has quite a different meaning. He states that the "now," as long as it lasts, gives us an image of eternity, even if brief, even if transient. The present

time, and the present tense induce a permanence, a pure adherence of my psyche to the immediate being of what is. Memory and anticipation don't yet intervene. Heidegger was the first to underscore this insistence on the present. The problem is that he sees it everywhere, in every philosopher. Therefore, he does not perceive that Hegel's concept of time is certainly not contained in the moments explicitly devoted to the question of "nows," that it is elsewhere, in the dynamisms of the system. Time is the way the system works – and the system is plastic.

**KL:** Right. And you found that concept in Hegel.

**CM:** Yes. So, it's absolutely not when he talks about time that plasticity appears. It's on the side. And so it designates a general movement. It's the way in which the subject, what he calls the subject, which is not necessarily the human subject or the real subject or the real in general, but everything that constitutes a kind of system of anticipation. It's about predicting the future and at the same time getting blind to it. It's this double relationship to the event that constitutes Hegel's notion of time.

**KL:** How does plasticity fit into that conception of time?

**CM:** First of all, Hegel opposes plasticity to flexibility – that is, an excessive liquidity, and rigidity, an excessive hardness. So, to be plastic means that everything that happens to you fashions you but at the same time does not destroy you. Plasticity is the way in which time shapes or fashions us, constitutes our subjectivity and at the same time allows for resistance.

**KL:** Is this where the concept of sculpting comes in? Does this suggest plasticity has an original connection to the aesthetic as opposed to the philosophical?

**CM:** Yes. The term *Plastizität* appeared at the end of the nineteenth century in Goethe. In the beginning, it was specifically devoted to aesthetics and also to education – the child is plastic because he can learn, etc. But Hegel displaced it from the aesthetic realm into the metaphysical one in order to characterize subjectivity and time in general. So, in some sense, he stole the concept from Goethe. And the concepts that existed before *Plastizität* were

*die Plastik*, and the adjective *plastisch*, which explicitly referred to sculpture. So, Goethe invented the substantive, *Plastizität* to designate the capacity to be sculpted. And Hegel distorted that to make it characterize the temporal being of subjectivity.

**KL:** And you mobilize this distortion to talk about the formation of the subject in the context of trauma and lesions.

**CM:** In the first part of my work I studied mostly this shaping and sculpting in the positive sense. And then, because I started to work on trauma, I discovered that trauma could also have this fashioning power out of destruction – like when you have the former identity that gets destroyed by the lesion, and then, you become someone else, so there’s a formation of a personality, but it’s a formation out of destruction.

**KL:** So your concept of plasticity is really dialectical; and your work on trauma in some senses helped to illuminate this dialectical dimension. But there is no trauma in Hegel’s version of plasticity. How did you become interested in trauma?

**CM:** Well, actually, I discovered there was something missing in my treatment of plasticity, which was this negative sense that Hegel thematizes very clearly: the meaning of destruction. After my PhD, I realized that I had only emphasized the “good side” of plasticity, its positive values of construction and formation. I think it came, then, from a question I got after a conference or a talk. Someone asked me about the negative implications of plasticity. What exactly is the explosion? So, that’s how I started asking myself how we could possibly conceive of a negative kind of shaping, and this led me to the question of trauma.

**KL:** I hope you won’t mind if we change directions slightly and move into the realm of politics. I’ve been thinking about the fact that many philosophers today, especially the children of May ’68, seem quite concerned about the impotence of politics. There’s a quote by Jameson, in which he says: “It seems as if there are no political solutions present or visible on the historical horizon.” He wrote this back in the 80s, but I think it’s a common sentiment now too.



Two questions emerge from this lament: Can plasticity address the impotence of politics today? And, if so, what is the relationship between plasticity and politics? What is the plasticity of politics?

**CM:** I quite agree with Jameson. I think it's very difficult at the moment to see anything new on the horizon. So, I'm rather doubtful when I see people so sure of themselves, when they're firm in their belief, like Badiou, that the revolution, or whatever, is coming. I don't believe this is true. Of course, it's very seductive; it's very attractive. I don't believe that communism is on its way. But I do think that something is happening at the moment, which is the total redefinition of the subject, much bigger than what I imagined in the beginning with my little plasticity, something enormous that I will address in my talk tonight, which is: who is the Anthropos of the Anthropocene? I think we have to admit that we have to rediscover the part played by human nature within our subjectivity, which means that at the level of identity, it changes everything, whether we are geological or biological or both. The question is how to deal with this non-conscious, indifferent, neutral aspect of our subjectivity and what to do with it.

**KL:** There's a material aspect to this obviously.

**CM:** One hundred percent, a material aspect, which means that it might be that politics is not a question of will or intention or a project any longer, but a way to figure out how to deal with the non-intentional part of us. This is very interesting because I recently discovered that Guattari has a book, which is called *On Three Ecologies*. It's very small, and not extremely good, but it has some very compelling ideas. He says that ecology implies a total redefinition of subjectivity. And he says something like: this will force us to invent new forms of singularization – not of subjectivation, but singularization, a kind of farewell to subjectivity and a creation of new territories, which for him will be absolutely singular. It's the end of the global; it's the end of vast political projects for the whole of humanity.

**KL:** Can you elaborate this idea of singularization?

**CM:** If we refer to the last meeting in Paris, the CoP for environment, it was

clear that two kinds of policies were debated: the universal one, we have to lower the temperature and this is global; but also the local one, little workshops on what to do in this or that African village, very singular. I think that the divorce between the global and the local will become massive and that we have to invent a singularization or ways of living here and there which escapes the global.

**KL:** Is this because the global has some kind of imaginary or mediated quality to it, whereas these singularities are moments of immediacy?

**CM:** Yes. Yes, and it means that we have to stop waiting for the State or political parties or organizations to help us. These inventions of singularities will necessitate a total redefinition of the subject and I'm afraid that people are not really ready for that.

**KL:** There has been much talk recently, especially in leftist political circles, about a return of the commons. How does this fit into your framework? Do you think this return is a kind of nostalgia for a previous and now anachronistic form of community specific to the modern epoch? Or can we think of the commons in terms of Guattari's idea of singularities, or local agglomerations?

**CM:** This idea of the commons is very important. For example, in Spain, all the political frames are exploding because of the multiplicity of approaches to the common and the rise of parties like Podemos. This brings up another interesting point. In Catalunya,<sup>1</sup> they are very much nationalists, but this nationalism is precisely a way of singularizing. This is a kind of local fight against the global, which at the same time relies on the idea of a community. So this is a very interesting example. In the beginning I hated that kind of movement – nationalism – because it's very ambiguous.

**KL:** Of course. Well, Jameson talks about this too, right. And he says that in some ways – and I'm going to paraphrase him here – that nationalism is only

1 Since the discussion of the political situation in Catalonia hangs on the idea of local nationalism as a point of singularization (against that of nationalism as a globalizing force) we have chosen to retain the Catalan spelling of their own region: thus it appears throughout as 'Catalunya' [Ed.].

a problem in the context of a powerful nation like the United States, in which nationalism leads to the globalization of America or Americanization. But a nationalism that responds to and resists these kinds of global dictatorships is different. Do you think that nationalism or national projects of the second variety might in some ways represent some kind of singularity?

**CM:** Yes. I mean, the main question is: what is the cement of this community? Is it good? Or is it reactive and racist? This is my problem with autonomy movements like the ones in Catalunya for example in Spain. On the one hand, I am very much in favour of an independence of Catalunya, and I think that the government's decision to prohibit a referendum is perfectly inadmissible. At the same time, I cannot help thinking that there is something dangerous in the desire of a region or a people to close themselves to alterity, in that context to break with the whole country and other regions that Spain represent. Local nationalism is a kind of double bind.

**KL:** I'd like to pose a rather playful question, so perhaps you'll grant me leeway for some wordplay. I want us to think about the polysemic character of plastic in order to link the concept of plasticity to what we might call the polymerization of everyday life. The word plastic has at least two basic meanings: one the one hand, it is an adjective meaning pliable or easily molded and, on the other hand, it is a noun describing a synthetic material whose structure is polymeric. If we hold these two versions of plastic in our minds, can we ask what the concept of plasticity might tell us about the future of plastic? And perhaps even the future of ecological crisis?

**CM:** Yes, but you also have another contradiction, formation and explosion, which is also about the simultaneity of, say, democracy and terrorism! In our world, everything that appears as a creation of form is immediately getting destroyed. This is again the double meaning of plasticity, emergence of a form and explosion of this same form. What interests me so much in this concept of plasticity is that it is dialectical – the enemy is inside, the contradiction is inside. Terrorism is not our utterly “other,” it is the inverted image of globalization, it is produced by it, produced by capitalism. There is an immanent negativity of our world, and ecology is an example – we are in total self-destruction, and we understand it too late. Plasticity is both the form of our

lives, the mode of being of our bodies, and what destroys us. You can have this double logic, this dialectic – because I don't think we're out of Hegel, not at all – this permanent negotiation between the two contradictory aspects of everything. And this is what we have to deal with.

**KL:** Certainly, and in some ways this is connected to historical development of interiority, that is, the interiority of the subject. And so, I think what you are suggesting in a certain sense is that this interiorization has become generalized.

**CM:** There is no transcendence; there is no way to defend these ideas against this kind of opening to an absolute alterity.

**KL:** One final question: is the future plastic?

**CM:** Ah, yes, totally, if by this we understand the double logic, which doesn't mean that it's beautiful. It means that it can be beautiful and also internally threatened by its own contrary. But it won't be given from the outside, from any promise or whatever. It will for sure be whatever we make of it.

## ‡ A FALSE EXPLANATION OF MY STORIES

*Translated with introduction by Jaime R. Brenes Reyes*

FELISBERTO HERNÁNDEZ

Although not very well known, Uruguayan author Felisberto Hernández is regarded by influential writers such as Julio Cortázar, Italo Calvino, and Gabriel García Márquez as one of their main influences. Hernández's oeuvre has not yet been translated completely into English, and research into his stories has only recently begun to gain momentum. Mostly a writer of fantastic literature, Hernández poses questions on memory, subjectivity, and phenomenology, with himself admitting William James, Edmund Husserl, and Henri Bergson to have repercussions on his writing. His story "Las hortensias" ("Daisy Dolls"), for example, plays on the motifs of music (Hernández was a professional pianist), noise, and space, in order to create an atmosphere of fogginess.

In the same vein, the text that I have translated deals with the process of writing a "cuento" (a short story, or a tale). On his account, Hernández prefers not to explain how he writes, but rather to offer a "false explanation"; that is, he accepts in advance that he is not in control of what will come out of his pen. His "explanation," then, makes an analogous move by introducing the figure of the story as a plant, which is not a flora to be seized upon; that is, if the gardener intervenes, the plant would die. The plant grows with its own poetry and rhythm, unknown to itself, Hernández "explains." Drawing on the theme of the future, Hernández's text offers an insight into the strangeness of the process of writing: an act shaping itself in the present without knowing in advance what to expect in the future. Hence, my translation of the text, as is the case in the original text in Spanish, may not make much sense to the reader looking for a graspable or easy to understand explanation. As a false attempt explain how the stories that the writer himself does

not understand come into being, the words I have chosen are also an attempt to transmit the confusion in the writer's mind as well as the sensation that falls upon "the alien" reader as the plant grows at its own pace and rhythm.

‡ ‡ ‡

Obliged or betrayed by my own self to say how I cultivate my stories, I will use an external explanation of them. They are not completely natural, in the sense that consciousness does intervene – that, for me, would be unpleasant. However, the stories are not under some type of theory of consciousness. That would be extremely unpleasant. I would prefer to say that their intervention is mysterious. My stories do not have a logical structure. Regardless of the constant and rigorous vigilance of my consciousness, the latter is also unknown to me. At a given moment it occurs to me that there will be a plant growing in a corner of myself. I begin to haunt it, thinking that something strange has occurred in that corner, and that it could take an artistic path. Happy it would be if the idea did not fail. Nonetheless, I must wait for an unspecified amount of time. I do not know how to make the plant grow, or how to help it, or how to take care of it. I only wish that there are leaves of poetry; or that it turns into poetry if certain eyes fall upon it. I must watch that the plant does not take much space, and that it does not try to be beautiful or pretentious. Instead, I make sure the plant grows into what it was destined to be, and help it do so. At the same time, the plant will grow in accordance with its viewer, to whom it does not matter if there are too many big expectations. If it is a plant that knows itself, it will have a natural poetry, unknown to itself. The plant has to be like a person that would live for who knows how long, with its own needs, with discrete pride, at times flippant and improvised. The plant would not know its own principles, even though, deeply, it has laws that its consciousness cannot grasp. The plant will not be able to know to what extent consciousness will intervene; but in the end the plant will affirm itself, and it will teach the consciousness to be disinterested.

What is for certain is that I do not know how I cultivate my stories because each of them has a strange life of their own. But I also know that these stories are continuously fighting consciousness to avoid the strange ideas it recommends.

## ⚡ REVIEWS

# ‡ THE THING: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF HORROR

By Dylan Trigg, Hants, UK: Zero Books, 2014.

REVIEWED BY MIKE THORN

Dylan Trigg's *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror* is aptly titled: it names itself outright as both horror and philosophy, and it is at this intersection of genres that the book's most exciting work takes place. In formal terms, it indeed recalls a well-paced horror novel, with premonitory epigraphs gesturing to the destabilizing and, yes, horrifying contents within. Dissociation results from these introductions, and tension builds. Fitting, then, that the gradual unfolding of Trigg's phenomenology itself achieves a similar result: first unease, then discomfort, and finally an eruption of horror, which culminates in the closing chapter (intercut throughout by scene descriptions from John Carpenter's *The Thing* – an apt counterpart). This kind of content-in-form rigor underlines the complex phenomenology within, which serves as both a vital entry-point and a divergence for new horror scholarship. The text's destination is a stirring one: "we have encountered the unhuman realm manifest precisely at the edge of experience," Trigg tells us, "as that which evades language, reshapes subjectivity, and, finally, establishes itself as that most familiar thing – *the body*."<sup>1</sup>

How does he bring us there? The book begins with a powerful claim, that the history of phenomenology (and, in fact, of philosophy more widely) has long been hampered by subject-centric, anthropomorphic focus—broadly exemplified by post-Kantian commitments to the Heideggerian phrase, *being-in-the-world*; Trigg clearly delineates his opposition to these limits, writing that "the phenomenological tradition, once a beacon of integrity, has become emblematic of a failure in thought to think outside the subject" (Trigg 2014, 3),

<sup>1</sup> Dylan Trigg, *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014), 146.



and he aligns this failure with the above-mentioned Heideggerian schematic. Anticipating pre-emptive assumptions, the book states outright that it is *not* a work of posthuman theory. In fact, it takes open issue with the now-long-standing belief that posthuman study is the only alternative to the philosophical barrier of narcissism (a term that Trigg deploys without hesitation). Trigg makes it clear that, in his project, “human experience is a necessary point of departure for philosophical inquiry” and that, as such, “beyond humanity, another phenomenology persists.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the text promptly situates itself in the phenomenological tradition, and maintains that position throughout; to do so, it predominantly picks up the trail left in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s elliptical late work, and finds peripheral context in the works of both Emmanuel Levinas and F.W.J. Schelling. In the early stages of the study, a question arises: is it possible to stage an *unhuman phenomenology*, as he describes? The text resolves the question quickly (although initially in silhouette, the way an author of horror fiction might first describe the narrative’s threat): the answer is *the body*. Irrevocably bound up in the body is Trigg’s titular horror; indeed, the text states clearly that one of its main efforts is “to demonstrate phenomenology’s value by conducting an investigation into the horror of the body.”<sup>3</sup>

In the context of Trigg’s thought, however, the body itself undergoes substantial and necessary reframing. In unhuman phenomenology, the body is *not* defined by the subject, nor by the sociocultural-historical conditions in which it is inscribed. These foundational distinctions are, in fact, inevitable consequences of Trigg’s project. The body, moreover, is not necessarily human at all, and Trigg also makes this clear at the outset: “What survives the end is a thing that should not be, an anonymous mass of materiality, the origins of which remain obscure. The thing is no less than the body.”<sup>4</sup> As such, the body carries with it an anteriority—invisible but always-present—that remains fundamentally *unknowable* to the subject, and the conclusion is inevitable: the self and the body are inherently distinct from each other. They are, in fact, divided—but bounded in their division, belying a convenient Cartesian schematic: “If we were to invoke the Cartesian method of doubt to arrive at a foundational ground to account for this matter,” Trigg writes, “then we might reformulate the cogito less in terms of an *I think* and more in terms of

---

2 Trigg, *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror*, 5.

3 Ibid., 4.

4 Ibid.

an *It lives*.”<sup>5</sup> As such, this phenomenological frame always finds its gravity in the substance of horror. The text then foregrounds itself with this challenging framework: how to imagine phenomenology without the subject? How to imagine the body without the self? And how, exactly, can we define this anterior alterity? These inquires, although tracing back to Trigg’s philosophical project, pose similar questions for the field of horror studies: how can we study horror while radically decentring the self? Recalling here John Clute’s entry of “Affect Horror” in *The Darkening Garden: A Short Lexicon of Horror*, another question arises: can a genre that is entrenched in affect reconstitute its affective qualities outside the realm of the human? If so, does affect theory carry with it the potential for unhuman observations as well?

These questions are too large to take up here, but Trigg’s text encourages them nonetheless. His project does arrive at its own end-point of sorts, and that end-point is aptly and unavoidably Lovecraftian: *The Thing*’s conclusion brings the macrocosmic to the utterly cosmic, positioning the Earth as body and the blackness of the cosmos as that still-unthinkable anteriority. Through a nuanced reading of Lovecraft’s novella *The Shadow Out of Time*, Trigg’s phenomenology develops form, but the macrocosmic suggestions only develop into their final shape during the closing chapter. It is through the move to the macrocosmic, then – which reveals itself alongside the described unfolding of Carpenter’s film, *The Thing* – that the text arrives at its stirring conclusion: “to speak of the horror of the body, is also to speak of the horror of the cosmos.”<sup>6</sup> And it is here that Trigg’s phenomenology reveals its infinite relationality; its horror lies in the masking of a deep past rather than in any threat of futurity. To gravitate this relational terror, Trigg names the unnameable as *the flesh*, and herein lies the necessity of Carpenter as filmic resource. Here and elsewhere, Trigg’s aptitude for cinematic examples lends both weight and clarity to his phenomenological practice – who better than Carpenter to demonstrate the anteriority and unrecognizability of the cosmos? And what better films than those comprising Carpenter’s self-titled, thematically-linked “Apocalypse Trilogy” (*The Thing*, *Prince of Darkness*, and *In the Mouth of Madness*)?<sup>7</sup>

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 146.

7 As a brief aside, it is worth noting here that Carpenter now considers his 2005 *Masters of Horror* entry, *Cigarette Burns*, to be part of that same “Apocalypse” cycle (I had the opportunity to ask him a question about the trilogy during his visit to the 2013 Calgary Comic &

My main point here, however, is a laudatory one: Trigg stages his philosophical project *within* horror, and he makes it clear that it could be no other way. That is, *The Thing*'s philosophy cannot coherently exist without the available articulation of horror cinema and fictions. And while the *affect* of horror is itself connected to the subject (a tension that I gestured to previously), Trigg finds a way of temporarily dislocating the self-centred potentiality so often affixed to the genre itself. It makes perfect sense to lend close attention to horror's psychological and subjective traits when acknowledging the genre's underpinning of affect; horror lends a very genre-specific insight into the self, the social, and the historical. However, as Trigg demonstrates here, there also resides within horror a capacity that extends far beyond the limited parameters of the self, and not only in terms of its posthuman iterations. *The Thing* affirms that we can effectively theorize the horror of the unhuman, without reclaiming that horror in reductively "human" terms. Referring back to Carpenter, I find in his films' horror an implicitly phenomenological thread that underpins *the body* (according to Trigg's definition of the word) much more readily than any sociohistorically-anchored *self*. Trigg addresses this point, peripherally making note of *Christine* and *The Fog* in addition to the aforementioned Apocalypse works. In addition to those filmmakers and authors cited by Trigg (he also draws from J.G. Ballard, Thomas Ligotti, Georges Franju, William Friedkin, and many others), we might use his phenomenological practice to read the works of Tobe Hooper, Kathe Koja, Stephen King, Richard Matheson, Rob Zombie, Kiyoshi Kurosawa... the list continues.

What exists in *The Thing*, then, is not merely an exceptionally new phenomenological frame; and it *is* a new frame, one that belies the posthuman term to locate unhuman theory. To this reader, the text's most valuable offering is its exploration of horror within philosophy, and vice versa. In comparison to the theories that underlie, say, Eugene Thacker's nihilistic *In the Dust of this Planet*, Trigg's horrific phenomenology is inescapably a theory of

---

Entertainment Expo, and he corrected me when I left *Cigarette Burns* out of the self-contained "trilogy"). It would be compelling, then, to see Trigg's phenomenology of horror conceived within *Cigarette Burns*, which depicts cinema destroying its spectators. On the note of Carpenter, it is also exciting to see Trigg acknowledge *Prince of Darkness* as the auteur's most underrated work; if I have any qualm with Trigg's text at all, it is simply that the reading of this particular film – while tightly designed and informative – is so brief. *Prince of Darkness* is the lynchpin of Carpenter's philosophy, aesthetic, and horror: it is Carpenter's purest cinema.

*life*. The fear inherent to his reading is not one of morbidity, or of prescient apocalyptic dread (an important, but altogether different stream of thought). Instead, the fear in Trigg's work is a dislocation of the self; it is a distinguishing of the self from the body, and an absolute othering of the body-in-itself. To explicitly conceptualize this notion, Trigg turns to Levinas to suggest that "any anxiety experienced is not simply underscored with the knowledge that one day we will die," but rather "it is the 'anonymous state of being' that marks a constant threat against the contingency of *being a subject*" (Trigg 2014, 48, emphasis added). This section is where Trigg's work veers closest to the previously-mentioned first volume of Thacker's *Horror of Philosophy* sequence: Trigg mobilizes Levinas' concept of *il y a* ("there is"), which imagines the world-without-us.<sup>8</sup> However, Trigg conceptualizes "the night, which becomes synonymous with the 'very experience of the *there is*'"<sup>9</sup> as the flesh that constitutes our always unreachable shadow of existence. As mentioned above, the suggestions in Merleau-Ponty's later works also lend philosophical foundation to this effect; in the realm of horror, Cronenberg's work provides yet another entrance. The Canadian auteur's Freudian proclivities delimit his works' applications to this phenomenology, though, and the endpoint can be none other than the one at which Trigg arrives. The endpoint is necessarily John Carpenter, and this marks an exciting moment for horror scholarship. There's philosophy *in* horror, this text tells us, and there's horror in philosophy, too.

---

8 Trigg, *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror*, 49

9 Ibid.



## REASON AND REENCHANTMENT:

*The Philosophical, Religious and Political Thought of David Ray Griffin*

*Ed. John B. Cobb, Jr., Richard Falk, Katherine Keller  
Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2013.*

REVIEWED BY RANDY SCHROEDER

David Ray who?

Theory mavens will no doubt be familiar with the umbrella term speculative realism (SR), and with thinkers who opened the umbrella, including, especially, Graham Harman and Quentin Meillassoux, and with the acceleration of thinkers who are contributing to the acceleration of sub-fields that can be placed beneath that umbrella. Such mavens will also be acquainted with the name Alfred North Whitehead – in no small part because of Harman’s periodically wondrous explications of Whitehead’s work – and with some of the speculative realists more in tune with Whitehead’s vision, including Steven Shaviro, Jane Bennett, Bruno Latour, and Isabelle Stengers. We have heard that metaphysics – or at least a proper set of ontological questions – is back, and that Kant is out, and that continental philosophy can now discard what Meillassoux calls “correlationism,” the sturdy insistence that we cannot ever prize apart thinking and being in order to consider one in isolation from the other.<sup>1</sup> We have also heard that deconstruction – and the entire catalogue of over-textualized, finitude-celebrating, anti-humanist, anti-realist post-whatevers – has turned out to be a failed attempt to prize thinking apart from itself, and has, in the process, simply opened the back door to more correlationism. And, finally, we have heard that Whitehead’s unapologetic metaphysics of becoming – re-discovered, reconstituted and even respectfully

1 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Continuum, 2008), 5.

rejected – might have helped to energize and catalyze the new directions of SR, which, like Whitehead, drops the arrogance and ups the ambition. It’s an oversimplification, like all genealogies: Slavoj Žižek, for example, has argued that Meillassoux’s critique of Hegel actually out-Hegels Hegel.<sup>2</sup> But it’s an interesting tale.

When theory mavens gather for drinks, however, the tale not often told, at least not with much enthusiasm, is that there are whole other genealogies, evolutions and “grey literatures” of Whiteheadian thought, both in and out of philosophy, and that at least one of them – situated in and typified by the Claremont Center for Process Studies – was up and running long before the advent of SR, and that one of the School’s primary originators is philosopher and theologian David Ray Griffin. Along comes *Reason and Reenchantment*, straight out of the Center’s press, based on a 2012 conference on Griffin’s influence and legacy. Sixteen diverse thinkers, including Griffin himself, remind us that the flickering coal of Whitehead’s process thought, which matured in the late 1920s, was long kept alive in ostensibly shady precincts like theology, education, and even parapsychology.

What an intriguing collection, especially for scholars who like to stray from the path. John Cobb Jr., Griffin’s teacher and collaborator (and still perhaps the clearest, surest explicator of Whitehead), admits already in the preface that Griffin’s willingness to embrace wide-ranging and controversial topics is “sometimes a source of embarrassment to other Whiteheadians.”<sup>3</sup> Catherine Keller, Cobb’s co-editor, characterizes Griffin’s work in a similar way, as possessed of a “swashbuckling lucidity,”<sup>4</sup> a phrase that captures both the daring and danger of Griffin’s multiple enterprises, many of which are, from the vantage point of careful scholarship, naïve, and many of which deeply violate the sanctions and warrants of “serious” academic politics, and certainly the temperamental inclinations of any good theorist or Anglo-American philoso-

2 Slavoj Žižek, “An Answer to Two Questions,” in *Badiou, Žižek, and Political Transformations: The Cadence of Change* (Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy), Adrian Johnston (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 174-230, especially 225.

3 John B. Cobb, Jr., Preface, *Reason and Reenchantment: the Philosophical, Religious and Political Thought of David Ray Griffin*, ed. John Cobb Jr., Richard Falk and Catherine Keller (Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2013), i-xiv.

4 Catherine Keller, “God, Power and Evil: David Griffin Revisited,” in *Reason and Reenchantment: the Philosophical, Religious and Political Thought of David Ray Griffin*, ed. John Cobb Jr., Richard Falk and Catherine Keller (Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2013), 3-14.

pher. And yet, would it not be important for any process-relation thinker, SR or otherwise, to know something about Griffin's contributions to the onflow of process-relation thought, since process-relation thought is all about process and relation? Griffin's interventions have been subsumed into many crucial events in the unfolding of process thought; given the nature of onflow, it is likely that the sheer intensity of his endeavours may yet be prehended by future events and novel unfoldings, in ways that are unpredictable.

*Reason and Reenchantment*, like its subject, is variable in quality and usefulness (acknowledging immediately that both values are perspectival, and subject to evolution and adaptation). The most immediate challenge I faced was bewilderment: because Griffin's wide-ranging curiosity mirrors Whiteheads own, and because the contributors to *Reason and Reenchantment* are themselves curious and wide-ranging, especially with regard to the relations between past and future, the collection contains a blizzard of topics and perspectives that exceed the typical anthology. The reader will be confronted with everything from global taxes to black swans to afterlives to Chinese politics to the "real" Plato to 9-11 to deep excursions into epistemology; the preceding is already such an acutely truncated list as to misrepresent the book. Further, the reader will be asked to consider the possible relations that are evolving between disparate topics, for example, between the truth of 9-11 and the management of ecological crises. These challenges are then exacerbated by the shared vocabulary of the contributors, namely, a serious array of Whiteheadian terms – e.g., concrescence, prehension, superject – all of them crucial, none of them completely sensible without some understanding of all the others, all of them still evolving and infinitely evolutionary. To put all of this in another way, *Reason and Reenchantment* can be a bit of a rude welcome to the process-relational metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead, which is a banquet of distinct flavours and, possibly, acquired tastes. There are philosophies of becoming, and then there's Whitehead, whose kaleidoscopic mental habits, especially as expressed in his 1929 masterpiece *Process and Reality*, drove him to speculate from an absurdly daunting categorial scheme and vast inventory of neologisms, even as he insisted, in *Process and Reality* and in later work, that all attempts to fix and fasten language enact the "fallacy of the perfect dictionary."<sup>5</sup> Whitehead is a life's work, as Griffin has literally demonstrated.

---

5 Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, (New York: The Free Press, 1968 [1938]), 173.



To further complicate matters, the contributors, collectively, perform just how many ways there are to read Whitehead's scheme and terms, in addition to Griffin's own. In a long concluding response essay, Griffin thanks the contributors for their insights, but also notes where he thinks those contributors have been misleading or incorrect.<sup>6</sup> Some of the essays, in turn, speculate on how Griffin himself has been misleading or read Whitehead with an imbalance. What are those of us not steeped in the lineage of the Claremont School to make of all this? Qualification and genealogy are familiar to everyone in theory or philosophy, but rarely to this extent. Whiteheadians, for better or worse, take their process and relation very seriously, and their praxis can feel relentless, unfinished and vertiginous to those of us disciplined by the protocols of academe.

But these challenges, to my mind, turn out to be an advantage: the various Whiteheadians in *Reason and Reenchantment* perform, over and over, the unique reflexive mode of Whiteheadian process thought, hinted at above, especially as regards the seeming tension between rationality and experience, and inherent in the distinctions and categories offered up by the rational thinker in order to interpret experience. To take one example (and there are many): Nancy Frankenberry is the most "correlationist" of all the contributors, and the most likely to reject all correspondence theories of truth. Yet even she demonstrates just how nimble the process thinker needs to be when finagling the necessity of positive empirical declarations with the impossibility of symbolic closures: "we do not need to elide the distinction between experience and interpretation... Yet we cannot say just how we should preserve and account for such a distinction. The intransigent tension is that the distinction can be preserved only at the cost of forfeiting any account of it" (121).<sup>7</sup>

And so the reader of the collection is often immersed in a mode of thought that is somewhat familiar, especially to fans of ethically inflected late post-structuralism, yet with a cadence and lilt that is foreign to mainstream theory, and antecedent to it. In his response to Frankenberry, Griffin points

---

6 David Ray Griffin, "Responses," in *Reason and Reenchantment: the Philosophical, Religious and Political Thought of David Ray Griffin*, ed. John Cobb Jr., Richard Falk and Catherine Keller (Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2013), 261-326.

7 Nancy Frankenberry, "The Vagaries of Religious Experience: David Griffin's Reenchantment in Light of Constructivism and Attribution Theory," in *Reason and Reenchantment: the Philosophical, Religious and Political Thought of David Ray Griffin*, ed. John Cobb Jr., Richard Falk and Catherine Keller (Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2013), 111-130.



out just how generously Whitehead recovers what he deems useful in the history of philosophy, and how confidently he leads a Kant or Wittgenstein to the conclusions they should have made, given their own insights.<sup>8</sup> (It's worth noting, as a relevant aside, that Whitehead was a big fan of Kant, though not of Kant's unbalanced subjectivism.) Fans of speculative realism might be intrigued by Whitehead's refusal to choose between the histories of anti-realism and realism (or realism and pragmatism, for that matter) and find in *Reason and Reenchantment* a launching pad to *Process and Reality*, where subject and object are theorized not as opposites, but as two contrasts or "poles" of every event, together converting past into present and creating the possibilities for the future.

As must be obvious, this is a rich book, often because it is really about Whitehead, viewed through the various perspectives and parameters that have characterized Griffin's intellectual life. Part One, "Philosophical and Religious Perspectives," contains chapters that the doctrinaire academic may give a pre-emptory dismissal, for example, those in which parapsychology or full-force theology are under discussion. That's too bad, because Part One offers up a kind of midrash on Whitehead, a preliminary sense of his philosophy from a confederation of thinkers who demonstrate how multiple perspectives can integrate and evolve within respectful community. Further, whatever the discipline, each chapter throws out some provocative process claims that reveal unique and evanescent perspectives on perennial philosophical questions both familiar and urgent: the relations between epistemology and ethics; the possibility of intersubjectivity; the status of science; the role of intuition. Other claims reveal unique and evanescent perspectives on questions that are only recently gaining more familiarity: panexperientialism and panpsychism, for example. If nothing else, Part One is worth reading in that it will introduce theory fans unfamiliar with Katherine Keller to her unique processual mode, which has sought for decades to read Whitehead together with the poststructuralists, always at the cloudy edges of speech and silence, presence and absence, knowing and unknowing, finite and infinite, *kataphasis* and *apophasis*. (If one wants to see Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, Walt Whitman, and quantum physics together at last, Keller's recent *Cloud of the Impossible* is a must-read.) My own idiosyncratic view is that Keller's stream of work, perhaps more than any other, prehends the delicate flickers, vibrations,

---

8 "Responses," 292.

transmutations and superpositions of *kataphatic* and *aphophatic* knowing at the heart of Whitehead's enterprise, which treats language with warm welcome and chilly dismissal, each yin to the other's yang. So this last exhortation may be more of a sermon than a review.

Part Two introduces the quirky uses of process thought that Griffin is more fully responsible for, in that it contains topics that Whitehead never explicitly engaged. Perhaps the two most intriguing, provocative and frustrating of these topics are the status of official 9/11 explanations and the outsize influence of "constructive postmodernism" on contemporary Chinese scholarship and politics. Both topics are intimately tied to the unfolding vectors of Griffin's life. If nothing else, both topics are fascinating in that they enact just how processual and relational a process-relational thinker's – or anyone's – life is, just how dramatically the future can flow from vectors of subtle, determinate and unrecoverable antecedents, just how novel the future can be.

First, the dicey issue of 9/11 and truth. I was not even aware that Griffin was a seminal figure in the disparate set of voices we sometimes term the "truther" movement. But it turns out that Griffin began his critical analyses of the official account in 2003 – after Baudrillard and Žižek, but still relatively early – and has written no less than ten books and forty articles on the subject since. According to geographer Tod Fletcher, Griffin's first book on 9/11, *The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions about the Bush Administration and 9/11*, was itself a completely novel event, with no clear precedent.<sup>9</sup> If true, this is interesting intellectual and political biography, but readers might be forgiven for wondering whether that biography finds a process-relational context, or whether it simply represents the dashing and haphazard pursuits of Griffin himself. The answer is the former, though, for my tastes, that answer is somewhat muted in the two chapters on 9/11.

At least for Fletcher, Griffin's work on 9/11 is tenacious and rigorous, in a fashion characteristic of Griffin's own persistence to "go wherever the evidence leads,"<sup>10</sup> and damn the consequences. Griffin inherits this commitment from Whitehead, who describes his own "unflinching determination to take the whole evidence into account," against the "fluctuating extremes

9 Tod Fletcher, "Championing Truth and Justice: Griffin on 9/11," in *Reason and Re-enchantment: the Philosophical, Religious and Political Thought of David Ray Griffin*, ed. John Cobb Jr., Richard Falk and Catherine Keller (Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2013), 201-220, esp. 202.

10 *Ibid.*, 203.

of fashionable opinion,” in his precursor to *Process and Reality, Science and the Modern World* (187).<sup>11</sup> Taking on an unfashionable but urgent topic, whatever the price, is part of the Whiteheadian temperament. But, just as importantly, insisting on the “whole evidence” invokes not so much a conventional empiricism and appetite for thoroughness as the pragmatic tradition of radical empiricism taken up and adapted by Whitehead in later life: it places the political within a radicalized epistemology where propositions are pried from their logical vacuums and associated with values and intensities. If I understand Whitehead correctly – never guaranteed – propositions continue their traditional capacity: they are true or false, conformal or non-conformal. But their genuine aim is not judgment in an arid conceptual vacuum, but rather the co-production, with other elements of experience, of novel events. Whitehead insists that propositions are distinct from judgments: judgments are one type of feeling, to be mingled with other types in any occasion of subjective consciousness, in a variety of possible consecutive phases. Propositions are data – or lures – for many kinds of feeling in addition to judgment, including everyday “physical” feelings. Whitehead’s brash (and pretty famous) insistence that “in the real world it is more important that a proposition be interesting than that it be true”<sup>12</sup> probably requires a book-length series of qualifications, but it opens the possibility of political action that rejects, as too finite and unambitious, rationales and pretexts in which propositions stand on their own, and are adjudicated through limiting conceptual standards like consistency or coherence. The key processual habit, once again, is to view object and subject as two shades or poles of the same transactional event, in which past rushes into present and creates objective possibilities for future subjects. Propositions can then be seen as determinate data from the past, and as constituents of new formulations coalescing in the present, which, in process-relational ontology, are two ways of saying the same thing. The future always holds the possibility not only of new combinations of feeling, but of new propositions. I can’t claim to fully understand radical empiricism, let alone its full range of political implications, but readers of William James, especially as taken up by the likes of Brian Massumi, are sure to find something intriguing here.

Perhaps more interesting yet is the contextualization of 9/11 within

11 Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, (New York: The Free Press, 1967 [1925]).

12 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected edition, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 259.

the possibly distressing implications of Whitehead's process ontology. Peter Dale Scott, a former English professor, most clearly notes how Griffin's dogged work on 9/11 is driven by his more fundamental interest in American empire, which, in turn, is driven by his sense of the "demonic." The demonic, for Griffin, is not some supernatural force. It is the almost logical teleology of process as it rushes – with increasing momentum – *away* from the good. For many process thinkers in the Whiteheadian tradition, once a trajectory of events has a set of properties and momentum, there is almost no limit to how far and long it can intensify itself (a kind of ontological plasticity). It becomes recognizable and persistent – "canalized," to use a term Whitehead sometimes borrowed from Henri Bergson – and has a temporarily enduring identity. Process theology usually imagines a universe in which "god" lures rather than coerces; the lure instigates an overall trajectory that is negentropic, characterized by vectors that aim toward greater complexity, harmony, intensity, beauty, novelty, communion. But, by the same processual logic, the qualities of feedback and momentum apply equally when a vector, for whatever reason, aims at future events that are harmful and destructive. Vectors can canalize away from harmony and beauty, and instead intensify disconnection, harm, alienation, anomie, destruction, violence. Griffin calls these vectors and possible vectors the demonic. And demonic is exactly how Griffin has come to see the more noxious aspects of American Empire, manifest in conspiracy and coverup: 9/11. Whether he is right or not I leave to readers. But this demonic potential of process-relation is an intriguing field for further political and ethical speculation.

Finally, the business of Griffin's so-called "constructive postmodernism." Through a series of books published by SUNY press, Griffin and others offered what they took to be a simultaneous correction of modernist excess and recovery of modernist possibilities. Further, those "post-modern" corrections and recoveries were supposedly antithetical to the "deconstructive" versions of postmodernism, which most writers in the series deemed relativistic, nihilistic, narcissistic, impotent and obsessed with negation. It hardly needs mentioning that this project never really took off in Western Humanities departments, nor anywhere in the West, really. But it does need mentioning that the notion of, indeed the very phrase, "constructive postmodernism,"

has also been used by thinkers more dubious than Griffin, like Ken Wilber,<sup>13</sup> and by thinkers less known than Griffin, like Martin Schiralli, who, in 1999's *Constructive Postmodernism: Toward Renewal in Cultural and Literary Studies*, set out a similar program that was not part of the SUNY series and Claremont project. Indeed, Schiralli only mentions Whitehead once, in passing, and Griffin not at all.<sup>14</sup>

More importantly, Keller has argued – in the SUNY constructive postmodernism series itself – that Griffin's positioning of constructive postmodernism against "eliminative postmodernism" or "most-modernism" is a strawperson move, pitted against an imaginary opponent that is exemplified, at very best, not by French poststructuralists, but by impoverished readings of French poststructuralists by well-meaning Anglo-American critics. While Keller admires Griffin's rigorous critique of modernism itself, she notes with some puzzlement his choice of Richard Rorty, and other non-French and not particularly deconstructive thinkers, as the emblems of French postmodernism. Stranger yet is Griffin's decision not to engage anyone who was ever actually identified as a continental poststructuralist or postmodernist: not Deleuze, Foucault, Irigaray, Kristeva, and, most puzzling of all, not even Derrida (Schiralli, on the other hand, takes on everyone from Saussure to Derrida to Baudrillard). As Keller argues, it is fine to take issue with the "liberal ironism" of Rorty; it is ridiculous to identify such ironism with Derrida. Keller furthers her critique by dissolving the opposition that underpins Griffin's historical account and curative injunctions: "...reconstructive postmodernism depends upon deconstruction as much as deconstruction depends upon the speculative schemes it deconstructs."<sup>15</sup> To pile on a bit, Griffin's constructive postmodernism – despite its rejection of modernist claims to therapeutic rationality – relies on some highly modernist values, like progress and communal problem solving. Griffin would not disagree. But, as such, constructive postmodernism

13 Ken Wilber, "Schools of Postmodernism," *Integral World: Exploring Theories of Everything: An Independent Forum for the Critical Discussion of the Integral Philosophy of Ken Wilber*, accessed November 13, 2015, <http://www.integralworld.net/postmodernism.html>, paragraph 4.

14 Martin Schiralli, *Constructive Postmodernism: Toward Renewal in Cultural and Literary Studies*, (Westport, CT and London: Bergin and Garvey, 1999).

15 Catherine Keller, "The Process of Difference, the Difference of Process," in *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernisms*, ed. Keller and Anne Daniell (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 2-4.

can hardly be less “most-modern” than any other most-modernism it denounces, imaginary or otherwise. Its terminology trades accuracy for cuteness. Also, and regardless of Griffin’s re-staging of intellectual history, I have long questioned whether the general term “postmodernism” is particularly useful, beyond its historical deployment as an easy and vacuous pejorative or compliment. The obvious exception would be Fredric Jameson’s carefully articulated and influential formulation.<sup>16</sup>

So, for a variety of reasons, it would be easy to dismiss Griffin’s project as ill-informed, misdirected, and ultimately feeble. As usual, actual history intervenes (and my claim about the vacuity of “postmodernism” gets whirled into a novel onrush that forces me to rethink). In a chapter by Chinese philosopher Zhihe Wang, we learn that Griffin’s “Claremont” version of constructive postmodernism has, since at least 1995, become a major influence on Chinese scholarship of ecological management, sustainability, economics, law, democracy, religion, philosophy, and even education. According to Wang, Griffin’s constructive postmodernist approach holds great appeal for Chinese intellectuals wrestling with questions of tradition and modernization, intellectuals who were never thrilled by what they took to be the anemic anti-humanist rebellions of Derrida, Foucault and Co. According to Wang, the spirit of constructive postmodernism has percolated through much of Chinese society, such that even speeches by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao reflect the “postmodern tone” of Griffin’s experiment.<sup>17</sup>

Wang is hardly a disinterested observer, given that he got his PhD at Claremont, and is the director of the Center for Constructive Postmodern Studies at China’s Harbin Institute of Technology (among many other process-friendly appointments). Nonetheless, he notes that the serious study of Whitehead dates back to the 1930s in China, and that the interruption of that study by historical forces, like the Sino-Japanese War, was overturned by the refreshing interventions of Griffin and Cobb in the mid-nineties.<sup>18</sup> Wang

---

16 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

17 Zhihe Wang, “The Chinese Encounter with Constructive Postmodernism,” in *Reason and Reenchantment: the Philosophical, Religious and Political Thought of David Ray Griffin*, ed. John Cobb Jr., Richard Falk and Catherine Keller (Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2013), 241.

18 Zhihe Wang, “The Chinese Encounter with Constructive Postmodernism,” 254

goes on to mention the journal *Chinese Process Studies*,<sup>19</sup> twenty-two Chinese Centers for constructive postmodernism<sup>20</sup> and hundreds of Chinese publications on constructive postmodernism.<sup>21</sup> Throughout his chapter he cites numerous Chinese sources, all of which point at the usefulness of Griffin’s project for navigating modernization, while rejecting the toxic elements of Enlightenment and recovering the most nourishing elements of Chinese history and tradition. Constructive postmodernism is, according to Wang, an indispensable adjunct to many Chinese projects at the nexus of scholarship and policy, especially those projects that require a skilful negotiation of harmony and difference<sup>22</sup>, community and singularity. He quotes Xiaoman Zhu, president of the National Central Institute for Education Studies, who claims that, “Whitehead’s process philosophy is the way of thinking that is most convergent with the aim of China’s education reform and with deep Chinese tradition.”<sup>23</sup>

Now, I have absolutely no expertise in Chinese culture, politics or history, and cannot make any meaningful valuation of these claims. But I can say that this chapter gives me pause. It demonstrates how plastic and surprising the future can be given the initial conditions we predict from, a central implication of process relation ontology (and of the many disciplines of non-linearity, which align well with process). The chapter also, from a Chinese perspective, revives an old and familiar knot in theory: was *The News From Paris* finally just for Eurocentric fanboys? Or is the question itself an either/or fallacy of the type that Whitehead often rejected, and that Whiteheadians, especially Keller, continue to reject as yet more fruitless search for that perfect dictionary? Does the question itself enact the kind of simplistic de-historicization Whitehead so fully dismissed? Indeed, does the question unzip its own assumptions, given the surprising vectors of “postmodernism” – *whatever* it is – as it migrates, evolves, and transposes in new contexts?

Whatever we think of Griffin’s “constructive postmodernism,” it directs us back to the novel unfoldings of history, and the unique mode of process thinking that springs from Whitehead’s genius. As Harman has shrewdly noted, Whitehead’s notion of time and futurity is very different than that of

19 Ibid.  
 20 Ibid., 255.  
 21 Ibid., 238  
 22 Ibid., 253.  
 23 Ibid., 247.



Deleuze, Bergson, Delanda, et al.<sup>24</sup> Whitehead rejects any overemphasis on either becoming or relation, and insists on a distinctly non-monist evolutionary process, in which perpetual onflow is characterized by singularities that “concrese” as distinct subjective perspectives, then perish to become objective data that constitute the past and set up the future of new subjective perspectives. In such bold declarations, Whitehead seems to me both more and less certain than most other champions of becoming, more likely to welcome both silence and speech, knowing and unknowing, reason and intuition, presence and absence, negation and affirmation, singularity and multiplicity. He insists on rationality, precisely because it maps the journey to the limits of rationality, but also because it offers the way back, and thus the possibility of endless new journeys. As many of the contributors to *Reason and Reenchantment* remind us, the Whiteheadian mode demands a constant agitation between rationality and experience. The former is finally subsumed by the latter: for conscious subjects, the act of being rational is itself an experience, one that somehow arises from more anterior and chaotic pulses of experience that do not seem to “contain” any precedents to the very rationality that succeeds them, and that attempts to theorize them. So, in typically Whiteheadian fashion, “agitation” turns out to be the wrong word, but the best that will do. How is this possible? Well, not even Griffin has solved that one. But nothing could be more Whiteheadian than this productive turbulence, which reminds us that our selfhood is a flow of events, and that we live in the gush where subject flows forward to object and object forward to subject, where the distinction between the world “for us” and the world “in itself” turns to mist. Whitehead finally refuses to choose between reason and reenchantment, indeed, would see it as a false choice. And, as co-editor Keller notes in her own chapter, no one has done more to keep alive this “constructive alternative,” this refusal to concede boundless *différance*, than David Ray Griffin,<sup>25</sup> despite – or perhaps because of – his unique and sometimes contested emphasis on rationality. No one has been a better foil for thinkers like Keller. *Reason and Reenchantment* offers a welcome set of entry points into Griffin’s work, and, in turn, the vast set of evolutions and relations that connect to that work, including those that

---

24 Graham Harman, “Response to Shaviro,” in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 292-295.

25 Keller, “God, Power and Evil: David Griffin Revisited,” 14.



lead back to Whitehead and forward to the speculative realists. It is an excellent introduction and handy supplement to the theory maven who continues to expand and evolve her interest in the infinite topic of becoming, especially the Whiteheadian vision that the future, though always cascading from a determinate past, is never already here.





*engaged · evaluative · experimental*

Taking the democratized, dispersed nature of the Internet as its basis, KAPSULA offers a venue for critical stances, unconventional formats and provocative subject matter.

*Dip into our archive:*



**ART THAT MAKES  
US ANGRY 1/2**

Volume 1 · Theme 4  
April 2014



**GOOD  
MEASURE 1/3**

Volume 3 · Theme 3  
January 2016

*Subscribe for free:*

**KAPSULA.CA/SUBSCRIBE**

