

# Identities

identities

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politics,  
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culture

- ▶ Ray Brassier
- ▶ Reza Negarestani
- ▶ Anthony Paul Smith
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**Identities**

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**Special Issue: Heretical Realisms**

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# I Articles



Ray  
Brassier

## The View from Nowhere

“True” is a sign that something is to be done,  
*for inferring is a doing.*

(Sellars 1991b, 206)

Philosophy, said Wilfrid Sellars, is the attempt “to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.” (Sellars 1991a, 1) Despite its apparent vagueness, this is as good a way of encapsulating the concerns of philosophy as anyone has ever given, since we can specify what the “broadest possible sense” of the terms “things” and “hang together” is here. For Sellars, “things in the broadest possible sense” covers everything from theorems to fermions. By the same token, the philosophical sense of “hanging together” should furnish an insight into the link between things as disparate as logical norms and elementary particles. The philosophical vision ought not only to encompass but also to *explain* the intrication of conceptual ideality and physical reality. Is this to reiterate an antiquated dualism? No. A dualism is a distinction that fails to explain the connection between the terms it distinguishes. Philosophy discriminates, it distinguishes and separates, but always with a view to

ultimate integration. In this regard, philosophy discriminates precisely in order to avoid dualism. The animus towards dualism should not excuse insensitivity towards distinction. To distinguish between the normative and the factual is not to promulgate dualism once it is understood that this distinction furnishes the precondition for understanding the intrication of the conceptual and the physical; an intrication that is constitutive of what we call “reality.” Philosophy is synoptic in that it strives to reconcile a basic disjunction in our conception of reality. This disjunction is a consequence of the fundamental conceptual discrepancy bequeathed to us by philosophical modernity. If Sellars’ work (unlike that of many of his analytic contemporaries) retain its contemporaneity for us today, fifty years after the bulk of it was written, this is because, over and above its sometimes forbidding difficulty, it represents one of the most sustained attempts to think through the implications of a fundamental diremption which extends into our very conception of what we are. This is the diremption between our self-understanding as rational subjects and our scientific understanding of ourselves as physical objects. Throughout his work, Sellars sought to arbitrate the conflict between these two increasingly divergent *images* of man-in-the-the-world:



the *manifest* image of man as a self-conscious rational agent and the *scientific* image of man as a “complex physical system.” Yet Sellars was careful not to portray this divergence as a conflict between naïve pre-theoretical common-sense and sophisticated theoretical reason. Rather, he insisted it be understood in terms of the tension between the disciplined and critical *refinement* of common-sense through which a perennial tradition of philosophical reflection has taught us to conceive of ourselves as rational beings bound by conceptual norms; and the methodical *extrapolation* from ordinary perception through which modern science has taught us to explain manifest phenomena by postulating increasingly complex systems of imperceptible entities (e.g., molecules, electro-magnetic radiation, gravitational fields, etc.). In this regard, the fundamental contrast at issue is one between man’s manifest self-image as a rule-bound rational agent participating in but not governed by the realm of physical law, and man conceived through the optic of natural science as a “complex physical system” whose capacity for agency can ultimately be accounted for in terms of concatenations of spatio-temporal causation.

Yet there is a persistent ambiguity in Sellars’ account of the relation between manifest and scientific images. On one hand, he seems to insist that the philosophical task is to recognize the *parity* of the two images. The acknowledgement of parity follows from the realization that the images are not in fact competing over the same territory. Philosophy can adjudicate between the competing claims of the manifest and scientific images by distinguishing the *normative* privileges of the former from the *ontological* rights of the latter. Thus, apparently undermining his commitment to parity, Sellars upholds

the *priority* of the scientific image by famously insisting that “in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is, that it is, and of what is not, that it is not.” (Sellars 1991, 173) This apparent inconsistency can be defused once we recognize that the commitment to parity and the commitment to priority operate at two distinct levels: that of conceptual interpretation (giving and asking for reasons) and that of ontological description and explanation. Parity at the level of conceptual interpretation is compatible with priority at the level of ontological description and explanation. The claim for parity follows from the recognition that the manifest image furnishes us with the fundamental framework in terms of which we understand ourselves as “concept mongers,”<sup>1</sup> creatures continually engaged in giving and asking for reasons. But we are able to do things with concepts precisely insofar as concepts are able to do things to us. It is this capacity to be gripped by concepts that makes us answerable to conceptual norms. And it is this susceptibility to norms that makes us subjects. The manifest image is indispensable insofar as it provides the structure within which we exercise our capacity for rational thought. Hence the parity between images: both are governed by the norm of truth, understood as maximally warranted assertion, despite the conceptual incommensurability between manifest and scientific truth claims. Yet the manifest image remains indispensable as the originary medium for the normative. To the extent that this normative framework does not survive, Sellars warned, “man himself would not survive.” (Sellars 1991a, 18) But it is man qua rational agent, not anthropological object, which Sellars wishes to safeguard here. The manifest image remains indispensable because it provides us with the necessary conceptual resources we require in order to make sense of ourselves as

persons, that is to say, concept-governed creatures continually engaged in giving and asking for reasons. It is not privileged because of what it describes and explains, but because it renders us susceptible to the force of reasons. It is the medium for the normative commitments that underwrite our ability to change our minds about things, to revise our beliefs in the face of new evidence and correct our understanding when confronted with a superior argument. In this regard, science itself grows out of the manifest image precisely insofar as it constitutes a *self-correcting* enterprise. Indeed, for Sellars, a proto-scientific theory lies at the heart of the normative structure of the manifest image. We had to learn to postulate thoughts as unobservable inner episodes in order to explain publicly observable speech. Only in doing so did we acquire the ability to understand ourselves as rational agents operating in the concept-governed space of reasons. Once ushered into this normative dimension, we developed ever more sophisticated resources for describing and explaining what we observe in terms of what we do not observe. Thus Sellars is a resolutely modern philosopher in his insistence that normativity is not found but *made*. The rational compunction enshrined in the manifest image is the source of our ability to continually revise our beliefs, and this revisability has proven crucial in facilitating the ongoing expansion of the scientific image. Once this is acknowledged, it seems we are bound to conclude that science cannot lead us to abandon our manifest self-conception as rationally responsible agents, since to do so would be to abandon the source of the imperative to revise. It is our manifest self-understanding as persons that furnishes us, qua community of rational agents, with the ultimate horizon of rational purposiveness with regard to which we are motivated to try to understand the world. Shorn of this horizon, all

cognitive activity, and with it science's investigation of reality, would become pointless. Is this to say that the manifest image subordinates the ends of enquiry to human interests? Does the manifest image predetermine our understanding of what a person is? I think the answer to both questions is no.

Sellars aligns himself with a rationalist lineage that postulates an intimate link between rationality and subjective agency. It is encapsulated in this Sellarsian dictum: "‘True’ is a sign that something is to be done, *for inferring is a doing*." The capacity to draw inferences requires the ability to be bound by a rule. This binding is spontaneously undertaken by a subject, not passively submitted to by an object. The agent is a subject precisely insofar as she is able to submit to a rule. Our capacity to do things with concepts presupposes that concepts can do things to us. Our grasp of a concept requires that we be gripped by the concept. But if rationality is indissociable from subjectivity, and subjectivity is synonymous with selfhood, does this mean that the capacity for rationality requires the existence of selves? Does the institution of rationality necessitate the canonization of selfhood? Not if we learn to distinguish the normative realm of subjective rationality from the phenomenological domain of conscious experience. To acknowledge a constitutive link between subjectivity and rationality is not to preclude the possibility of rationally investigating the biological roots of subjectivity. Indeed, maintaining the integrity of rationality arguably obliges us to examine its material basis. Philosophers seeking to uphold the privileges of rationality cannot but acknowledge the cognitive authority of the empirical science that is perhaps its most impressive offspring. Among its most promising manifestations is

cognitive neurobiology, which, as its name implies, investigates the neurobiological mechanisms responsible for generating subjective experience. Does this threaten the integrity of conceptual rationality? It does not, so long as we distinguish the phenomenon of selfhood from the function of the subject. We must learn to dissociate subjectivity from selfhood and realize that if, as Sellars put it, inferring is an *act* - the distillation of the subjectivity of reason - then reason itself enjoins the destitution of selfhood.

\*

It is instructive to contrast Sellars' account of conceptual parity and explanatory priority between the manifest and scientific images with Jürgen Habermas' recent attempt to adjudicate the relation between the factual and normative in a controversy over the implications of cognitive neurobiology. In a 2008 paper entitled "The Language-Game of Responsible Agency and the Problem of Free-Will," Habermas invokes the Sellarsian schema in order to refute what he sees as the attempt by contemporary neuroscientists to undermine the norm of rational agency which plays such a fundamental role not only in ethical and political theorizing, but also in legal and psychiatric discourse. (Habermas 2008, 13-50) Habermas' text is largely concerned with responding to a manifesto in which eleven distinguished German neuroscientists claim that our ordinary concept of "free-will" is on the verge of being overthrown by recent advances in cognitive neurobiology. As Habermas himself notes, "neurologists expect the results of their research to lead to a profound revision in our self-understanding." (ibid., 14) According

to these neuroscientists themselves: "We stand at the threshold of seeing our image of ourselves considerably shaken in the foreseeable future" (Elger et al 2004, 37). The Sellarsian resonances of both formulations are striking. But Habermas accuses the neuroscientists who would deploy the methods of natural scientific investigation to explain some of the fundamental features of our manifest self-conception - specifically, our understanding of ourselves as agents - of illegitimately extending the resources of objectification beyond their proper remit. For Habermas, the attempt to study first-person subjective experience from the third-person, objectifying viewpoint, involves the theorist in a performative contradiction, since objectification presupposes participation in an intersubjectively instituted system of linguistic practices whose normative valence conditions the scientist's cognitive activity. Attempts to interrogate the normative status of agency within the manifest image unwittingly undermine the very concept in whose name every rational investigation is ultimately undertaken, since it is the collectively instantiated norm of agency that provides the rationale for producing "truer," more accurate descriptions of reality in the first place. Thus, according to Habermas, attempts to explain agency naturalistically fail because "the social constitution of the human mind which unfolds within interpersonal relationships can be made accessible only from the perspective of participants and cannot be captured from the perspective of an observer who objectivates everything into an event in the world." (Habermas 2008, 34) Habermas characterizes this intersubjective domain of rational validity as the dimension of "objective mind," which cannot be understood in terms of the phenomenological profiles of the community of conscious selves comprised in it. Accordingly, it is the intrinsically intersubjective status of the normative realm

that precludes any attempt to account for its operation or genesis in terms of entities or processes simpler than the system itself. Neither the phenomenological nor neurobiological profiling of participants can be cited as a constituting condition for this socially “objective mind” since it is the source of the capacity for intentional objectivation presupposed by both:

It is not the subjectivity of our conscious life that distinguishes humans from other creatures but the intentional stance and the interlocking of the intersubjective relations between persons with an objectivating attitude to something in the world. The linguistic socialization of consciousness and the intentional relation to the world are mutually constitutive in the circular sense that each presupposes the other conceptually. (ibid., 35)

The objectivity of social mind is grounded in the relation of reciprocal presupposition between an inherently *linguistic* (and hence constitutively social) consciousness and the cognitive relation to the world. For Habermas, the interdependence between language and intentionality implies not only that neither can be studied independently of the other, but more strongly, that neither can be intelligibly distinguished from the other. Here Habermas certainly echoes Sellars, whose attack on “the myth of the given” challenges the idealist attempt to ground “originary” intentionality in transcendental consciousness. Consciousness construed as originary condition of givenness becomes an unexplained explainer. This brand of transcendental idealism is inimical to naturalism, since if consciousness is the originary condition of objectivation, of which science is one instance, it follows that science cannot investigate consciousness. Upending this idealist order of explanation, Sellars roots the intentionality

of the mental in socially instantiated linguistic practice. While the normative order retains a quasi-transcendental status, its linguistic embodiment allows us to understand how it is embedded in the empirical order. Thus, while Sellars maintains the irreducibly normative status of intentionality, the fact that it is always linguistically embodied allows us to investigate when or how this normative dimension might have arisen in the course of our evolutionary and social history.

Habermas, for his part, rightly emphasizes the necessity of distinguishing the normative from the natural, or reasons from causes, and accurately diagnoses the contradictions and confusions attendant upon any pre-emptive collapse of the former into the latter. But because his account is so largely reactive, unlike Sellars, he is unable to propose any positive account of the *intrication* between concepts and causes. Conflating naturalism with empiricism, Habermas upholds Sellars’s distinction at the cost of eliding its scientific realist corollary, viz., that mind, and hence the normative order, possesses a neurobiological as well as socio-historical conditions of emergence. As a result, Habermas pre-emptively disqualifies by conceptual fiat every scientific attempt to describe and explain the transition from pre-linguistic to linguistic consciousness, from the sub-personal to the personal, and from neurobiology to culture. For Habermas, the explanatory resources required in order to provide such an account threaten to cost too much: they would incur a self-objectification which would irrevocably estrange us from ourselves. As he puts it: “The limits of naturalistic self-objectification are trespassed when persons describe themselves in such a way that they cannot recognize themselves as persons anymore” (ibid., 25). Such an

objectification of the human, Habermas maintains, would bring about a “fictionalization” of selfhood which would conjure “the image of a consciousness that hangs like a marionette from an inscrutable criss-cross of strings” (ibid., 24). Yet such depersonalization remains impossible, Habermas contends, because it could only come about through the attainment of a hypothetical “view from nowhere” which science cannot realize:

The resistance to a naturalistic self-description stemming from our self-understanding as persons is explained by the fact that there is no getting round a dualism of epistemic perspectives that must interlock in order to make it possible for the mind, situated as it is within the world, to get an orienting overview of its own situation. Even the gaze of a purportedly absolute observer cannot sever the ties to one standpoint in particular, namely that of a counterfactually extended argumentation community. (ibid., 35)

This dualism of epistemic perspectives invoked by Habermas is the dualism of observer and participant. And in fact, Habermas recodes the Sellarsian distinction between manifest and scientific images in terms of a dualism of theory and practice wherein the former indexes the objectifying stance of scientific naturalism while the latter expresses subjective participation in intersubjective discourse (the “argumentation community”). Yet even as Habermas insists on the complementarity of scientific theory and discursive practice, he inscribes the former within a horizon of conceptual possibility entirely delimited by the latter. Thus, he insists, “the conceptual constitution of domains of enquiry, the construction of designs and measurements, and the experimental production of data are all rooted in pre-scientific practice” (ibid., 38). Yet as Habermas knows, there is a crucial difference between

methodological priority and nomological dependence, and the fact that pre-scientific practice enjoys *chronological* precedence over scientific theorizing in no way entails that the latter is *logically* dependent upon or reducible to the former. In his determination to ward off the naturalistic dissolution of the normative, Habermas resorts to an instrumentalization of science - of the sort Sellars repeatedly warned against - which inadvertently suggests that nothing we learn about ourselves from the perspective of scientific theory could force us to revise the content of our subjective or “participatory” self-understanding. Habermas’ epistemological dualism of objectifying theory and discursive practice is in many ways an exacerbation of the more familiar dualism of first and third-person perspectives in Anglo-American philosophy of mind. Ultimately, the dualism of epistemic perspectives seems to point toward the conceptual impossibility of arriving at a synoptic vision that would finally bridge the gap between the conceptual and the natural, or the subjective and the objective. What Anglo-American philosophy characterizes as the “explanatory gap” between mind and brain, or first and third person perspectives, Habermas rashly inflates into a “pragmatic contradiction” between the neuroscientist’s practico-discursive reliance on intersubjectively instituted semantic norms and her conceptual disavowal of those conditions in her theoretical propositions.

\*

Is it possible to describe and explain the correlation between first-person experience and neurobiological processes without lapsing into the sort of conceptual incoherence denounced by Habermas? In *Being No One: The*



*Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (Metzinger 2004; originally published in 2003, four years prior to Habermas' article), Thomas Metzinger describes and explains *in principle* how normatively regulated social interaction between conscious selves supervenes upon un-conscious, sub-symbolic neurobiological processes. Moreover, Metzinger does so by explaining how the phenomenon of selfhood, and hence the first-person subjective perspective, can be understood as arising out of sub-personal representational mechanisms. First however, it is necessary to stave off a potential misunderstanding. Although unequivocally naturalistic in its methodology and uncompromisingly "materialist" in tenor, Metzinger does not adopt the kind of straightforwardly "reductionist" strategy espoused by traditional mind-brain identity theories, whether in their strong versions, where identity is construed as obtaining between mental and physical *types*, or in their weaker formulations, where the identity in question is merely between mental and physical *tokens*.<sup>2</sup> Rather than postulating direct token or type identities between psychological and neurological states, Metzinger proceeds by elaborating a naturalized theory of representation wherein the latter is construed as a dynamic process involving three distinct types of state - internal representations, which are always unconscious; mental representations, which are only sometimes conscious; and phenomenal representations, which are always conscious. Furthermore, every representational state comprises a relation between a *representing* - i.e., the concrete internal state of the system - and a *represented* - the particular feature of the world or of the system itself about which the representational state carries information. In many ways, Metzinger's distinction between representing and represented corresponds to the familiar distinction between the "vehicule" and the "content" of

representation. However, for Metzinger, the representing or "vehicule" does not have its boundaries at the skin of the organism but can extend out into the environment from which it extracts a represented "content." Consequently, in Metzinger's account, the representing may be defined as "internal" to the representational system even when it is constituted by spatially external events. Moreover, where much philosophy of mind tends to hypostatize the vehicule/content distinction, with the result that vehicule and content are construed as distinct entities which can then all too easily be interpreted as instances of mental or physical events respectively, Metzinger insists that representing and represented be conceived as conjoined aspects of a single informational process whose deep-structure needs to be mapped according to five distinct levels of analysis: phenomenological, representational *sensu stricto*, information-computational, functional, and neurobiological. Although each level of representational structure remains conceptually distinct, its autonomy is constrained by the minimal requirement that any "slice" of the representational process remains correlated with events at the neurobiological level. Thus, rather than trying to directly identify the mental with the physical, Metzinger maintains the relative irreducibility of these distinct levels of description, carefully distinguishing the structural properties and features specific to each, while insisting that every representational state invariably supervenes upon the neurobiological level - the guiding hypothesis being that there must always be minimally sufficient neural correlates for every representational state, even in those cases where we are not yet in a position to identify them.

On the basis of this characterization of conscious states as a variety of representational states, Metzinger is able

to propose a novel account of the nature of conscious experience as a special case of phenomenal representation in which an individual information processing system generates a *reality-model*. At its simplest level then, consciousness can be defined as obtaining whenever a representational system generates a *phenomenal world model*: “Conscious experience then consists in the activation of a coherent and transparent world model within a window of presence.” (ibid., 213) Metzinger goes on to specify three minimal constraints for the experience of phenomenal consciousness:

1. *Presentationality*, or the generation of a window of temporal presence through which the system represents the world.
2. *Globality*, or the availability of information for guided attention, cognitive reference, and control of action.
3. *Transparency*, defined as “inversely proportional to the introspective degree of attentional availability of earlier processing stages.” (2004, 165)

Transparency, the third constraint, is arguably the most significant for Metzinger’s entire account. Here again, it is important to distinguish it from more familiar philosophical definitions of “transparency” in terms of the inaccessibility of vehicle as opposed to content properties (or of the properties of the representing as opposed to those of the represented). Metzinger refuses this orthodox construal of transparency because, once again, it encourages the temptation to reify the distinction between content and vehicle in terms of traditional distinctions between the mental and the physical. Thus, the

mental would be defined as transparent in contradistinction to the opacity of the physical. But on Metzinger’s account, it is simply not the case that the representational vehicle is a physical entity while its represented content is mental: both vehicle and content, representing and represented, are indissociable aspects of an informational continuum wherein each can switch role and serve as content or vehicle for another, higher order representation. Consequently, transparency is fundamentally a phenomenological rather than epistemological notion: phenomenal content is not epistemic content: “The transparency of phenomenal representations is cognitively impenetrable; phenomenal knowledge is not identical to conceptual or propositional knowledge.” (ibid., 174) Accordingly, the fact that something is phenomenologically transparent does not entail that it is cognitively accessible to the system itself; as we shall see, the reverse is far more often liable to be the case. In fact, phenomenal transparency implies the unavailability of the representational character of the contents of conscious experience:

Truly transparent phenomenal representations force a conscious system to functionally become a naïve realist with regard to their contents: whatever is transparently represented is experienced as real and as undoubtedly existing by this system. (ibid., 167)

Thus, in a move strikingly redolent of Kant, Metzinger characterizes what U.T. Place originally identified as “the phenomenological fallacy” - “the mistaken idea that descriptions of the appearances of things are descriptions of actual state of affairs in a mysterious inner environment” (Place 1970, 42) - in terms of the abstraction of the represented from the process of representation. Transparency understood as the occlusion of the process

of representation to the benefit of its phenomenal contents encourages the system to remain a “naïve realist” about what it experiences. It generates the subjective impression of phenomenological immediacy. As a result, phenomenal transparency, which is among the defining features of the subjective experience of conscious immediacy, is in fact “a special form of darkness.” (Metzinger 2004, 169)

Once consciousness is minimally defined as the activation of an integrated world-model within a window of presence, then self-consciousness can be defined as the activation of a phenomenal self-model (PSM) nested within this world-model: “A self-model is a model of the very representational system that is currently activating it within itself.” (ibid., 302) Metzinger identifies three regards in which the system may benefit from the ability to consciously represent its own states to itself:

1. The possession of phenomenal states clearly increases the flexibility of the system’s behavioural profile by amplifying its sensitivity to context and its capacity for discrimination.
2. The PSM “not only allows a system to make choices about itself but adds an internal context to the overall conscious model of reality under which the system operates.” (ibid., 308)
3. Lastly, the PSM exerts an important causal influence, not only by differentiating but also by integrating the system’s behavioural profile. Thus, “as one’s bodily movements for the first time became globally available as one’s *own* movements, the foundations for agency and autonomy are laid. A specific subset of

events perceived in the world can now for the first time be treated as systematically correlated *self-generated* events.” (ibid., 309)

Through the PSM, a system becomes able to treat itself as a second-order intentional system - one capable of entertaining beliefs about its own beliefs<sup>3</sup> - and is thereby transformed from something merely exhibiting behaviour into an entity capable of exerting the sort of self-regulation characteristic of what we call “agency.” Accordingly, given any system for which the constraints of presentationality, globality, and transparency obtain, the acquirement of a PSM will necessarily entail the emergence of a *phenomenal self*. Yet the latter is not an autonomous or independent entity but merely the represented of a phenomenal representation. Moreover, it is precisely the system’s lack of access to the process through which it generates its own self-model that engenders the condition of “autoepistemic closure” whereby the represented of the system’s self-representation occludes the representing that gave rise to it:

Phenomenal selfhood results from autoepistemic closure in a self-representing system; it is a lack of information ... The phenomenal property of selfhood is constituted by transparent, non-epistemic self-representation - and it is on this level of representationalist analysis that the refutation of the corresponding phenomenological fallacy becomes truly radical, because it has a straightforward ontological interpretation: no such things as selves exist in the world ... What exists are information processing systems engaged in the transparent process of phenomenal self-modelling. All that can be explained by the phenomenological notion of a “self” can also be explained using the representationalist notion of a transparent *self-model*. (ibid., 337)



Ultimately, the PSM is simply the shadow cast by the occlusion of global, attentively available information about the workings of the system. But why should this transparency have come about? Metzinger's answer is that autoepistemic closure is imposed by the need to minimize the amount of computational resources required in order to make system-related information consciously available. Transparent self-modelling provides systemic information without generating a potentially debilitating regress of recursive self-modelling, for if the system had to include every representing involved in generating its self-represented within the latter, then it would also have to incorporate within it the representing required in order to generate this new, second-order self-represented, and so on ad infinitum. Phenomenal transparency is a cheap way of minimizing the neurocomputationally exorbitant cost of representational opacity.

Metzinger concludes by summarizing his principal claim in terms of three heuristic metaphors: the neurophenomenological cave; the phenomenal map; and total simulational immersion. The first is a reworking of Plato's allegory of the cave. Recall that according to the latter, the human mind's relationship to reality is akin to that of a prisoner held captive in a cave - the prisoner has never seen anything but the shadows cast onto the wall facing her by puppet-simulacra of objects which are paraded in front of the fire that is burning behind her. In Metzinger's version of this Platonic allegory, the cave is the physical organism or information processing system as a whole; the fire its neurocomputational dynamics; the puppet-simulacra of objects its mental representings; and the shadows cast on the cave wall its phenomenal representeds. But according to Metzinger, there is no prisoner

in the cave; indeed there is no-one there at all. The conscious self is not an entity but a *shadow*; not an individual object, but rather the ongoing process of *shading* through which a multidimensional neurocomputational representation is projected as a much lower dimensional phenomenal model onto the surface provide by the system's world-model. Thus the PSM is not the shadow of a captive individual, nor the avatar of a supposedly authentic or even "transcendental" subject beneath or behind the conscious individual, but rather a shadow cast by the cave *as a whole*: "It is the physical organism as a whole, including all of its brain, its cognitive activity, and its social relationships, that is projecting inward from all directions at the same time ... The cave shadow is there, the cave itself is empty." (ibid., 550)

In Metzinger's second metaphor, phenomenal experience constitutes a dynamic, multidimensional map of the world. And like the maps in subway stations, the phenomenal world model features a little red arrow in it that allows the user to locate herself within the map. The PSM is analogous to this little red arrow saying "You are here:" "Mental self-models are the little red arrows that help a phenomenal geographer to navigate her own complex mental map of reality by once again depicting a subset of her own properties *for herself*." (ibid., 552) But whereas the red arrow in the subway map is *opaque* to the map user, and hence explicitly apprehended by her as a representation, the PSM is transparent: its status as a representation is occluded for the system because of the introspective unavailability of all those earlier processing stages through which it has been produced. Yet this is not to say that we are mistakenly identifying ourselves with our own PSM - there can be no question of misidentification

here since the PSM is all we are. There is no transcendental or noumenal self who could mistakenly identify itself with the phenomenal self since, as Metzinger insists, the cave is empty. But its multidimensional neural self-image generates a condition of “full immersion.” Thus, in the third and last of Metzinger’s heuristic metaphors, the PSM operates like a *total simulation*: “A total flight simulator is a self-modelling aeroplane that has always flown without a pilot and has generated a complex internal image of itself within its *own* internal flight simulator.” (ibid., 557) The PSM is this internal image which functions as an invisible interface for the interaction between system and world. And just as the total flight simulator generates its own virtual pilot, the human brain activates its PSM when it requires a representational instrument to integrate, monitor, predict, and remember the activities of the system as a whole:

As long as the pilot is needed to navigate the world, the puppet-shadow dances on the wall of the neurophenomenological caveman’s phenomenal state-space. As soon as the system does not need a globally available self-model, it simply turns it off. Together with the model, the conscious experience of selfhood disappears. Sleep is the little brother of death. (ibid., 558)

Ultimately then, Metzinger explains the phenomenological experience of selfhood as a specific type of representational content: the self is the represented of a phenomenally transparent self-model. But it is not necessary to postulate the existence of entities called “selves” over and above the dynamic web of relations between the complex physical system known as the human organism, its internal representational economy, and its physical environment. All the salient cognitive and phenomenal data

can be accounted for in terms of the PSM. Is this then to say that the notion of “the self” as an autonomous reality can be dispensed with and relegated to the dustbin of intellectual history? Before we address this question and some of the objections voiced against Metzinger’s thesis, let us consider some further implications of the latter.

According to Metzinger, even if it is the case that we cannot help experiencing ourselves as “selves” and find it impossible to phenomenologically imagine selfless experience, the latter remains an *epistemic* possibility. Clearly, organisms can satisfy the minimal constraints for phenomenal consciousness (presentationality, globality, transparency) without being in possession of a PSM. Undoubtedly, many forms of animal life provide instances of selfless consciousness in this sense. But they remain incapable of generating sophisticated conceptual representations of themselves and their world. Thus, for Metzinger, the philosophically interesting question is whether it is possible to envisage systems capable of generating sophisticated conceptual representations of themselves and their world without the benefit of a PSM. Metzinger suggests that such systems are indeed envisageable, but would have to be characterized as systems whose representational models have been rendered *fully opaque*. Recall that phenomenal transparency is a function of epistemic *darkness*: for any representation, its degree of transparency is inversely proportional to the degree of available epistemic information about the representational processes that preceded its instantiation. But it is possible to imagine systems endowed with the same cognitive capacities as humans, but for whom the transparency constraint, specifically as pertaining to the PSM, would not obtain. Thus, “earlier processing stages would be attentionally available

for all partitions of its conscious self-representation; it would continuously recognize it as a representational construct, as an internally generated internal structure.” (ibid., 565) Such a system would possess a system-model without instantiating selfhood. It would retain the functional advantages of possessing a coherent self-model (integration, monitoring, prediction, memory) but without experiencing itself *as* a self. It would be burdened with an additional computational load, which it would have to find some way of discharging without getting trapped into infinite loops of self-representation, but if it could find some means of solving this problem without resorting to the transparency solution, then this would indeed constitute an example of a cognitive system operating with a non-phenomenologically centred model of reality. Such a system would be *nemocentric*: it would satisfy a sufficiently rich set of constraints for conscious experience without exemplifying phenomenal selfhood. It would quite likely remain *functionally* egocentric, in order to satisfy the requirements of biological adaptation, but it would remain phenomenologically selfless. Moreover, such a system’s reality-model would be richer in informational content than our own, because at every stage of processing, more information about earlier processing stages would be globally available for the system as a whole. Thus such a system would instantiate what Metzinger calls a “first-object” perspective because it would experience its own phenomenal self-model not only as a *represented* but also and simultaneously as a *representing*. It would be aware of the representational vehicle as well as of the represented content.

the transcendental perspective of pure phenomenological consciousness as effected by what Husserl called the “transcendental reduction.” The goal of the latter is to “bracket off” or suspend the assumption of the autonomous reality of objects in order to isolate the ideal objectifying acts through which intentional consciousness generates its objective correlates. Obviously, in Husserl’s idealist schema, this reduction is carried out by and for a transcendental subject, the better to separate the world-less realm of intentional consciousness as originary source and locus for the possibility of scientific objectification. By way of contrast, the hypothesis of the nemocentric perspective suggested by Metzinger is one in which the representational process’s reincorporation into the represented object serves to foreground the sub-personal dimension of neurocomputational processing that underlies objectifying representation, and hence the objective processes through which objectivity is partly produced. Over and above its status as a phenomenological anomaly, the hypothesis of nemocentric consciousness provides a possible model for the new type of experience that could be engendered were scientists to succeed in objectifying their own neurobiological processes of objectification. The nemocentric subject of a hypothetically completed neuroscience in which all the possible neural correlates of representational states have been identified would provide an empirically situated and biologically embodied locus for the exhaustively objective “view from nowhere,” which Habermas and others have denounced as a conceptual impossibility. Yet here, as Metzinger’s work suggests, empirical possibility outstrips a priori stipulations of conceivability. In railing against the possibility of the mind’s complete theoretical self-objectification, Habermas inadvertently reiterates the conflation of personhood as conceptual norm with

There is an interesting comparison to be made between this hypothetical nemocentric perspective and

selfhood as phenomenological reality - the very confusion he initially sought to denounce. Here we have an example of what could be called “the philosopher’s fallacy:” a failure of imagination paraded as an insight into necessity.<sup>4</sup> Habermas refuses to envisage the possibility of a convergence between self-objectification and self-knowledge because he continues to assume that self-knowledge must be knowledge *of* the self:

[N]euroscientific enlightenment about the illusion of free will crosses the conceptual border into self-objectification ... For this shift in the naturalization of the mind dissolves the perspective from which alone an increase in knowledge could be experienced as emancipation from constraints. (Habermas 2008, 24)

But what Habermas fails to see is how the genitive in the proposition “self-knowledge is not knowledge of the self” is at once subjective and objective: if the subject is not a self, then the subject who knows herself to be selfless is neither the proprietor of this knowledge (since it is not *hers*) nor its object (since there is *no-one* to know). Ultimately, Habermas’ inability to articulate the distinction between theoretical objectification and discursive practice ends up promulgating a dualism of theory and practice, objective and subjective, which results from the refusal to acknowledge their interpenetration. For as Sellars so clearly saw, it is precisely the norm-governed domain of subjective practice that demands the conceptual integration of the subjective and the objective, reasons and causes, in the obligation to attain a maximally integrated understanding of the world and our position within it as creatures who are at once conceptually motivated and cause-governed. Unlike Sellars, Habermas pushes the irreducibility of the normative to the point where it generates a schism within the conceptual

order in the form of a dualism of the normative and the natural. Lacking any understanding of the interplay between subjective practice and objective explanation, Habermas’ account of rationality becomes internally contradictory: it seeks to defend rationality by excluding a key part of it, viz., the naturalistic explanation of empirical subjectivity, which can only increase, not compromise, our understanding of the conceptual, both in its distinction and emergence from the empirical. Disregarding the imperative to understand the latter, Habermas posits a distinction that he reifies into a substantive dualism of reasons and causes.

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Critics have objected that the notion of “self” which Metzinger claims to have eliminated is a straw man: Hume, Kant and Nietzsche had already demolished this (supposedly) Cartesian conception of the self as an autonomous metaphysical substance. Others have responded to his work by insisting that phenomenology in the Husserlian tradition abjures precisely this metaphysical reification of the self: phenomenology construes the subjectivity of conscious experience in terms of a pre-reflective dimension of *ipseity* according to which phenomenal experience is necessarily “owned.” One of Metzinger’s phenomenological critics, Dan Zahavi, insists that it is in terms of the unobjectifiable “mineness” of conscious experience - which Heidegger called *Jemeinigkeit* - that selfhood ought to be understood once liberated from its metaphysical reification as *res cogitans*:

Whether a certain experience is experienced as mine or not does not depend on something apart from the experience,

but on the givenness of the experience. If the experience is given to me in a first-personal mode of presentation, it is experienced as my experience, otherwise not. To be conscious of oneself, is consequently not to capture a pure self that exists in separation from the stream of consciousness, rather it just entails being conscious of an experience in its first-personal mode of givenness. In short, the self referred to is not something standing beyond or opposed to the stream of experiences, rather it is a feature or function of their givenness. It is the invariant dimension of first-personal givenness in the multitude of changing experiences. (Zahavi 2005, 9)

It is this focus on the allegedly transcendental dimension of “givenness” (which is “ontological,” as opposed to the merely “ontic” given) that distinguishes phenomenology from psychology, and phenomenological experience *stricto sensu* from any merely empirical cataloguing of introspectively accessible psychic states or processes. Indeed, Zahavi cites Husserl approvingly to the effect that the phenomenological domain is “neither psychic nor physical:”

Rather, phenomenology is interested in the very dimension of givenness or appearance and seeks to explore its essential structures and conditions of possibility. Such an investigation is beyond any divide between psychical interiority and physical exteriority, since it is an investigation of the dimension in which any object - be it external or internal - manifests itself. (ibid., 14)”

Thus Zahavi insists that for phenomenology, the self is not something given - it is precisely never something given at the level of content of experience - but rather the *form* of givenness or of experience as such. This form is precisely what Heidegger called *eigentlichkeit*

or “mineness:” the *owning* of experience. Consequently, Zahavi contests Metzinger’s use of the PSM theory of subjectivity to explain the fracturing of selfhood and the anomalous phenomenologies involved in pathologies such as anosognosia, schizophrenia, and Cotard’s syndrome. He objects that even in cases of thought insertion, where the subject experiences thoughts that she ascribes to another, she continues to own the experience, since her very estrangement from the thought reveals how, even in disavowing that the thought is hers, she continues to own the experience in which this estrangement is registered and this disavowal occurs. Thus, Zahavi insists, selfhood remains an ineluctable phenomenological feature of the form of the given, rather than of its content. The schizophrenic continues to experience alien thought episodes as occurring to her, rather than to someone else: “Rather than involving a lack of a sense of ownership, passivity phenomena like thought insertions involve a lack of a sense of authorship (or self-agency) and a misattribution of agency to someone or something else.” (ibid., 6) Zahavi demotes subjective agency to the level of empirical content, the better to elevate selfhood into a formal condition of experience. Accordingly, he concludes, even schizophrenic depersonalization presupposes this irreducible proprietary relation to experience, which phenomenology identifies as this dimension of “ownness.”

But *who* owns experience? What remains of the self once it has been de-substantialized and transposed to the level of form? If phenomenological selfhood pertains to the form rather than the content of experience, then what formal property (or set of properties) can we invoke to *identify* an experience as our own, or discriminate one self from another? What characteristics distinguish my



experience from yours at the level of phenomenological form? The problem is that everything that distinguishes my self from yours subsists at the level of experienced content, not the form of experiencing. Phenomenology inflates selfhood into a structurally necessary property of experience, the invariant form for the givenness of the given, when precisely what distinguishes my self from yours is something given, rather than its givenness. To insist that it is given *to me*, rather than *to you*, is simply to beg the question as to the identity of the dative, by reiterating a distinction experienced at the level of given content and projecting it back onto the form of its givenness. So what is the explanatory worth of the phenomenological postulate according to which selfhood is a formally necessary property of experience? In descriptive terms, all that distinguishes the phenomenological postulate of “mineness” as originary form from the self-model theory of subjectivity is the fact that the former stipulates as a necessary condition of experience a phenomenon that the latter derives as a conditioned experience. Instead of providing some property or set of properties, whether conceptual, qualitative, or experiential, that would mark the difference between the phenomenological structures governing the possibility of appearance and those of its phenomenal counterparts, which can be accounted for in terms of the sub-personal mechanisms mapped by Metzinger, Zahavi invokes a dimension of givenness which, although defined using all those features of phenomenal consciousness accounted for by the PSM, is nevertheless “neither physical nor psychological.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the claim that this givenness provides the dimension wherein any object “whether internal or external” must manifest itself remains unpersuasive: in what sense does a saccadic eye movement or a lesion of the occipital lobe appear as phenomenologically

“given” in the same way as a pub conversation or a religious experience? The fact that saccades and lesions can be turned into intentional correlates of consciousness does not make them “phenomena” in the same sense in which conversations and sensations are said to be. Just as unconscious phenomena can be viewed as intentional correlates, conscious phenomena can be turned into objects and investigated from the third person perspective. The former is no more a vindication of phenomenology than the latter is of naturalism. Playing on the inherent ambiguity of the word “phenomena,” Zahavi elides the distinction between intentional and conscious phenomena and reduces the former to the level of the latter. But he adduces no argument for the claim that phenomenological “givenness” remains irreducible to psychological and/or cognitive experience; he simply stipulates it.

Ultimately, the claim that givenness itself must be accepted as an undeniable datum is merely the most radical version of the myth attacked by Sellars.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, subjectivity understood as “mineness” is precisely an aspect of experience that Metzinger is at pains to describe and explain via his PSM theory. Having relinquished the metaphysical postulate of a noumenal self subsisting behind or beyond appearances, the phenomenologist cannot then maintain that the reality proper to the experiencing self is *more* than just an experience. To understand the subject as a structurally necessary condition of experience in the Kantian sense is precisely not to construe it as a self exercising a proprietary grip over its experiences, since the Kantian subject is an impersonal function, not a titled individual proprietor endowed with deeds of ownership. The relation between subjective condition and conditioned object does not map onto the relation between

proprietary self and owned experience. Questions as to the reality of experience are undoubtedly metaphysical. Zahavi denounces Metzinger's denial of the existence of selves as a dubious piece of scientific metaphysics. But Zahavi cannot then proclaim the indubitable reality of selfhood simply because it is given as an experienced content. For as both Metzinger and Sellars point out, phenomenal transparency is not *epistemic* transparency. To insist on the epistemic authority of conscious experiences is to reiterate the dogmatic pre-Kantian postulate according to which experiences are cognitively self-authenticating. It is one thing to insist, as Descartes did, that where phenomenal seeming is concerned, doubt is inappropriate, since there can be no appearance-reality distinction of the sort subject to epistemological adjudication. But where doubt is inappropriate, so is certainty. The corollary of the admission that we cannot doubt how things seem is the recognition that we cannot be certain of it either, since certainty is doubt's epistemic obverse. It is as inadmissible to proclaim the indubitable epistemic authority of phenomenal experience as to denounce it as illusory.

Thus, just as Metzinger exposes phenomenal transparency as a kind of epistemic blindness, Sellars (like Kant before him) insists that self-knowledge is mediated by knowledge of objects. The phenomenon that Metzinger describes and explains subtends the epistemic assumption that Sellars diagnoses and analyses in his critique of the given. Zahavi reiterates this assumption when he insists that "At its most primitive, self-consciousness is simply a question of having first-personal access to one's own consciousness; it is a question of the first-personal givenness or manifestation of experiential life." (ibid.,

7) Self-knowledge certainly comprises a dimension of non-inferential immediacy that endows us with a privileged epistemic access to our own internal states, but only within certain limits, since the immediacy of self-knowledge is itself the result of conceptual mediation and cannot be evoked to ratify the appeal to an allegedly intuitive, pre-conceptual self-acquaintance. The prejudice that immediacy is not the result of a mediating self-relation seduces us into absolutizing phenomenal experience. Phenomenology's absolutization of givenness as such is the most extreme variant of the myth dismantled by Sellars.

Consequently, Zahavi is no more entitled to infer the reality of selfhood from its experience than Metzinger is to deny it. Here it is important to bear in mind the distinction between different levels of analysis: *concepts are not phenomena*. The concept of the subject, understood as a rational agent responsible for its utterances and actions, is a constraint acquired via enculturation. The moral to be drawn from Metzinger's work here is that subjectivity is not a natural phenomenon in the way in which selfhood is. But Metzinger need not even deny the reality of the self (we might say that self-models are "real" in some suitably qualified sense - though justifying this would require working out a full blown metaphysics), only the phenomenological postulate of its absolute explanatory priority. He draws a metaphysical conclusion where a methodological one would be more apt: the self-model theory of subjectivity describes and explains the phenomenon of selfhood in a way that allows it to be reintegrated into the domain investigated by the natural sciences. It forces us to revise our concept of what a self is. But this does not warrant the elimination of the category of agent,

since an agent is not a self. An agent is a physical entity gripped by concepts: a bridge between two reasons, a function implemented by causal processes but distinct from them. And the proper metaphysical framework for explaining the neurobiological bases of subjective experience is that of a scientific realism rooted in an account of conceptual normativity that supervenes on, but cannot be identified with, socially instantiated and historically mediated linguistic practices.

#### Notes:

1. The phrase is Robert Brandom's.
2. For canonical statements of the position, see the first four papers by Herbert Feigl, U.T. Place, J.J.C. Smart and David Armstrong in Borst 1970, 33-79. See also Armstrong 1968, Feigl 1967, and Smart 1963. Donald Davidson's "Mental Events" is the classic statement of the case for token identity (Davidson 2011).
3. "Let us define a *second-order intentional system* as one to which we ascribe not only simple beliefs, desires, and other intentions, but beliefs, desires, and other intentions *about* beliefs, desires, and other intentions" (Dennett 1978, 273).
4. Daniel Dennett was of course the first to identify this fallacy.
5. The claim that for phenomenology consciousness is neither psychological nor physical is of course made by Husserl in the second volume of his *Logical Investigations*. Zahavi (2005) cites it approvingly on p. 13.
6. "Many things have been said to be 'given': sense contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real connections, first principles, *even givenness itself*" (Sellars 1991, 127; my emphasis).

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### Globe of Revolution. An Afterthought on Geophilosophical Realism\*

The legacy of the Copernican Revolution - that is the revolution by and according to the open universe - is comprised of three components: The speculative drive of “an extreme line of thought”, the revolutionary vocation of “disturbing the peace of this world in still another way” and the true-to-the-universe logic of delivering all expressions of isolation and discreteness “remorselessly into the open.”<sup>1</sup> This text seeks to incorporate these three components in order to construct a rudimentary model of geophilosophical realism. According to this model, the synthesis between the cerebral, the socio-cultural, the political, the territorial, the historic, the economic and the geological is determined and driven not by a self-centred or axiomatically veritable earth or horizon of interiority but by an open universal continuum.<sup>2</sup> The universal continuum is the unbound and continuous relation of the universe to itself that is free from any intrinsic transcendental bound, absolute expression of discreteness and fundamental obstruction. All general-particular and global-regional dialectics signify the unbound and continuous relation of the universe to itself, or the universal

continuum. In this respect, since geophilosophy examines the earth as the regional horizon of thought, it must be pursued by means of a Copernican and coherent thought of the universal continuum (i.e., the universe in an unbound and continuous relation to itself). Therefore, geophilosophy is no longer approached as a philosophy *of or for* the earth; instead it is understood as a *universally focused*, or more precisely, *systematically regional* philosophy capable of approximating an unrestricted open conception of globality that cannot be exhausted by the body of the earth or any collection of multitudes therein. In this sense, geophilosophy reconstructs the universal field of thought by synthesizing regional fields into a synthetic earth in a way that the earth is conceived both synthetically (a sheaf of regional fields) and as a regional site of alternative relations to the universal continuum or the open. Thus geophilosophy is concerned not with a true-to-the-earth thought but a thought whose topos is a realist true-to-the-universe earth. Synoptically defined as a realist philosophy that systematically broadens and deepens the regional horizon of thought in relation to the open, geophilosophy approximates an earth where free expressions of the universal continuum interweave with free or alternative regional relations (syntheses)

\* This essay could never have been written were it not for the never-ending moral and intellectual supports of Robin Mackay, Gabriel Catren and Manabrata Guha.

to the open. The introduction of this synthetic and fully Copernican earth, however, requires a conception of terrestriality or regionality that cannot be thought in terms other than the absolute reflexivity of the universe, that is to say, the relation of the open universe to itself. The terrestrial horizon as the regional horizon of thought or what is required in approaching the global thought of the open *in a focused manner* is then understood not in terms of privatized or locally overdetermined relations but strictly in terms of the unbound relation of the universe to itself. For this reason, regionality (of the terrestrial) is conceived bottomless-up from the abyssality implicated in the unrestricted relation of the universe to itself - a bottomless reflexivity into which all local or regional relations are perpetually descending. Geophilosophical realism thus understands synthesis or the relation of a regional horizon to the open in no terms other than the unrestricted and abyssal reflexivity of the universe and its universal synthesis. The peculiarly geophilosophical question of synthesis, or more precisely, relation to the outside (the open) ramifies into a series of topics which shall be separately addressed and investigated throughout this text:

1. *The relation of regional horizons and interiorized enclosures - a wide range covering the cerebral horizon of the human, the interiorized domain of the organism, territorial regions, states and the body of the Earth itself - to the universal continuum (or the open) from which they have been cut.* Since the regional-universal relation is characterized by tensions and syntheses, this open relation shall be explicated in terms of a generalized conception of trauma or cut.<sup>3</sup> This is a cosmologically deepened account of trauma drawn on the works of Freud, Ferenczi, Reich,

contemporary neuroscience, mathematics of unbound continuum and a unified concept of astrobiology that interconnects the particulate, the galactic, the stellar, the chemical, the biological, the socio-cultural and the neuropsychological within a continuous - albeit topologically counterintuitive - universal gradient. Here trauma is not a rupture marking the centrality or discreteness of the regional subject with regard to its outside, but a regionalizing cut made by a higher universal order in its own continuous field. Accordingly, at this stage, the regional horizon or local interiority is cut or conceived from the open universe in a way that under no circumstance can the horizon be separated from the abyssal relation of the universe to itself.

2. *Not only speculative and synthetic opportunities but also perils and illusions brought ashore by such tensions and syntheses.* The revolutionary import of the universal synthesis especially in terms of its relation to the open demands a systematic scrutiny of different types and valencies of tensions and syntheses. Moreover, since traumatic configurations or cuts determine the position of regional or interiorized horizons - as well as their tensions and syntheses - with regard to the outside, such critical scrutiny should be construed as a general examination of different types of trauma or cut.

3. *The regional condensation of the universal synthesis or the universal force of openness associated with an unbound universal continuum.* How does the universal synthesis engender its own revolutionary subjectivity or regional condensation, and how can the revolutionary subject - i.e. a subject revolutionized by and according to the open - of the universal synthesis

be mobilized? What is the shape of the revolutionary subject or the realist local fibration of the universal synthesis? Where is the site (earth) of the revolutionary subject? And what are the scientific, philosophical and even socio-cultural outcomes of mobilizing the revolutionary subject of the universal synthesis?

Once the geophilosophical synthesis - as the drive of earthly thought - is freed of its grounded relation to the earth and absolutized by the geocosmic continuum, it can be remobilized as a realist asymptote of the open - this is the basic contention of this text: Constructing the asymptotic thought of the open and examining such thought's revolutionary import.

**Trauma, or: It is not the psychoanalyst who knows the difference between amputation and transplantation; it is the surgeon. And it is the revolutionary who can't tell the difference between one and many, not the psychoanalyst**

Less than two years after the Great War, in his trenchantly written *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud presents an energetic model for the dynamism of the entire array of organic struggles on earth. According to this model, the emergence of the organic from the so-called originary inorganic state can be seen as a trauma which marks the temporary estrangement of the organic from the inorganic, the transient establishment of a zone of interiority excised out of its inorganic precursor. The traumatic scission, accordingly, brings about the possibility of life and concomitantly, a roundabout regression to the inorganic source from which the organic has been distracted, temporarily and under external influences,

and to which it must return by any means and at all costs. Hence according to this model, the organism is energetically driven - in the sense of being relentlessly pulled back - toward the inorganic whose reality cannot be experienced and whose incommensurability with the temporal verity of the interiorized horizon generates a form of tension and subsequently a form of synthesis. This tension is produced between the reality of the inorganic that cannot be experienced (because it is diachronic to the organic subject) and the interiorized horizon or the subject of experience. In short, this tension is the expression of the incommensurability of the diachronic contingent reality of the inorganic outside that is now - thanks to the topological militancy of trauma - dynamically posited inside and outside the interiorized horizon. In the wake of trauma, in order to determine and capitalize on its interiority, the horizon must stave off the ingressing flood of the outside (*überschwemmung*). Yet even more significantly, in axiomatizing its own interiority, the organism must expose itself to the inassimilable index of the precursor exteriority that is now resident within it because it could never be completely assimilated by the temporal conditions of the organism.

The traumatic cut, accordingly, generates two modes of tension for which two corresponding syntheses toward resolution are subsequently formed. We will carefully examine these two tensions and their corresponding syntheses. This step is necessary to evaluate the implications of these regimes of synthesis for the economy of the interiorized horizon and the binding of the universal continuum from which the horizon has been cut. In other words, how do tensions and their respective syntheses occasioned by the traumatic cut affect the axiomatization

process whereby the horizon's interiority is posited as a veritable ground or founding axiom for its relationship (synthesis) with the outside?

The traumatic cut brings about the possibility of two tensions which, as we shall see, correspond to the function or topology of the cut. These two tensions are *exogenic* and *endogenic*. As the exteriorizing absolute (the unified and absolutized universal continuum) excises itself, the interiorized set or cut is exposed to two registers of exteriority:

I. One register exerts the external reality of exteriority in the form of an energetic index that is exorbitantly set against the outer threshold of the horizon, moulding it from the outside. Correspondingly, a form of tension emerges as the horizon tries to preserve its somatic integrity against the exorbitant index of exteriority that simply engulfs the interiorized horizon. This is the exogenic tension often associated with sublime force or exorbitance. This exogenic tension is the product of a traumatic cut that splits or creates incisions that unilateralize the exteriority as an external excess or “an influx of excitation vastly in excess of the binding capacities.” (Brassier 2007, 236) It therefore corresponds to an incisional form of trauma that simultaneously separates the interiorized horizon from its exterior backdrop and sets it against the exteriority which is posited as external and exorbitant. In short, exogenic tension is an economical tension insofar as the incisional cut reformulates the exteriority in terms of capacity, hence the energetico-reductivist realization of exteriority as exorbitance or excess. We can trace different forms of the exogenic tension in the Freudian

account of shell concussion, the protectionist strategy of the vesicle through the auto-mortification of its outermost surface, and ultimately in the relation between the terrestrial biosphere (the history of earthly thought included) and the sun. Once we have inspected the second register of exteriority, we shall have occasion to examine these forms of traumatic cut more carefully. We will be able to see how the traumatic synthesis or drive corresponding to exogenic tensions is indeed the motor of a peculiar mode of binding exteriority or openness. This curious mode of binding exteriority or openness, it will be argued, is not only at the base of all strategic modes of thought or systems of binding (from libidinal materialism to capitalism) but also is the ultimate counter-revolutionary tool whereby the system, instead of staving off or dismissing exteriority, economically binds it within the affordable duplicity of capacity and exorbitant external world.

II. The other register of exteriority does not exercise an exorbitant influence; quite the contrary, it is the concomitantly neutral and incommensurable identity of the open continuum as such. The trauma is but the self-excision of the universal continuum into its own localized and temporalized fields.<sup>4</sup> Local and interiorized horizons are excisions of the open universal continuum; instead of being posited against the open universe from which they have been excised, they bring the unbound relation of the universe to itself into focus through regional horizons. Trauma as excision is, accordingly, the bottomless-up relation of the universe to itself from an unrestricted globality in the direction of localization and regional horizons (of the universal continuum). The self-excision of the open continuum is rooted in universal contingency, that is to say, trauma is the very expression of contingency

in the gradational transition from the universal to the local or the regional and a contingency entailed in the absolute freedom of universal continuum from the necessity of its multitudes and particulars. Self-excision of the universal open into its regional fields in such a way that the open retains its absoluteness both within the regional horizon and beyond it, is what we should identify with an absolutized variant of Sandor Ferenczi's *sururtrauma* or *archi-trauma/cut*. The *ururtrauma* of the universal continuum (the open) replaces the secondary function of trauma as division (or secession) with the primary function of the universal continuum's self-experience or self-excision. No matter how originary and precursory a trauma is, there is still another trauma to which it can be deepened, another trauma by which the infinite inter-connected traumas can be widened - it is the one that makes sure the narcissistic wound keeps bleeding. The diagonal immediacy of *ururtrauma* with the open and its universal contingency bears a number of consequences:

(a) The contingency of trauma not only means that it can happen anywhere and at anytime, it also means that trauma transplants universal contingency into regional spatiotemporal fields.

(b) The diagonal immediacy of *ururtrauma* with the open or the universal continuum means that isolated or single traumas do not exist - that is to say, trauma is intrinsically plural and traumas are but linked and interconnected. This means that each particular regional trauma should be understood and thought in terms of the unbound genericity (or generality) of the universal continuum or with reference to Charles Sanders Peirce's synthetic philosophy of continuum,

in terms of a supermultitudinous generic collection. The supermultitudeness of the continuum means the field of the universal - while determinate for itself - is always indeterminate in size for its regional horizons and particulars. In Peirce's own words, "A supermultitudinous collection is so great that its individuals are no longer distinct from one another." (Peirce 2010, 192) The *ururtrauma* of the universal absolute, for this reason, has a significant connotation: It suggests that the transition from the universal to regional fields (of individuals, particulars, etc.) and conversely, from local interiorized horizons to exteriority takes place in terms of a truly generic - that is supermultitudinous - *continuum*. Moreover, due to the genericity of the continuum (i.e. its unbound and indeterminate order of magnitude), regional fields and individual traumas must be regarded only in terms of indefinite neighbourhoods (rather than discreteness), weldedness and fusion (i.e. plasticity) and boundlessness with regard to other regional horizons or localized fields of trauma (i.e. unrestricted continuity to the universal).

(c) And lastly, in view of the previous conclusions, every horizon or regional field of the universal continuum is formed by more than one traumatic cut, and for this reason, the traumatic inflection upon the universal continuum does not follow a monistic or purely integral regime of synthesis. To put it differently, there is always an alternative mode of traumatic synthesis by which an interiorized horizon can be opened to exteriority, an alternative way by which the open universal continuum inflects upon itself from the same regional field. To this extent, the non-exorbitant - that is the neutral and absolute - register of exteriority is nested along multiple interconnected points of



entry within an interiorized horizon. In short, *ururtrauma* unbinds trauma as an alternative cut, a *real* alternative posited by the absolute freedom of universal continuum (the open) and its line of synthesis. Consequently, *ururtrauma* brings about the possibility of an always-alternative system of traumatic synthesis or drive toward the open. The *ururtrauma* or the self-excision of the absolute continuum redefines both the reality and the function of trauma not in terms of a pathologic/therapeutic system of anthropomorphic emancipation but in terms of universal and contingent transplantation of the exteriority and regional realization of openness. Trauma - in the sense of the open continuum and not in the sense of the economical capacity of the interiorized horizon - is perforation; its method of cutting is not incision and splitting but piercing from multiple points of view, and nesting; it does not amputate, but transplants. Accordingly, the tension that “trauma as perforation” creates is endogenic. Such a tension originates from the remobilization of the universal as the regional and the transplantation of exteriority within interiority.

Examples of endogenic tensions are to be found more in Ferenczi’s and even Wilhelm Reich’s later writings than in the works of Freud, in particular in their accounts of child abuse (Ferenczi) and the myths of UFO abduction (Reich). Freud’s insistence on seeing exteriority in terms of exorbitance and trauma as splitting - the former rooted in an embryonic physics of thermodynamics, the latter in the now questionable division between inorganic chemistry and biology - prevented him from foraying into the realm of endogenic tensions associated with *ururtrauma*. The earth as conceived by *ururtrauma* is not a scar formed upon the solar electromagnetic inundation; it is

a contingently posited and gradationally accreted field of complicities that has been excised by and out of the universal continuum along manifold nested traumatic cuts (isotopic traces, fields of gravitation and chemical eruptions). The regional (the earth), in this sense, is a cosmic constellation of alternating and nested traumata of the absolute continuum which twist the shape of the regional along their contingently erupting points of intrusion and zones of transplantation. In this broadened scenario, the terrestrial field of complicity is encompassed as much by the stellar trauma of the sun as it is by the trauma of stellar death via the effective binding of iron (produced in the silicon burning process marking the end of stellar radiation) - the role of iron in gravitation of the earth, the polymorphic presence of water and chemical processes or agencies such as hydridic fluids which have formed the planet and stirred life from within and without.

Endogenic tensions express the inassimilable presence of the universal continuum within the regional field, a resident yet alienating presence that has been bored and nested into the horizon from different angles, contingently, gradationally, infinitesimally. We call this resident yet inassimilable index of the open that can neither be expelled nor reintegrated within the interiorized horizon, the Insider. It will be argued that endogenic tensions wrought by the Insider deform the interiority of the horizon beyond recognition and necessitate forms of synthesis that progressively sabotage the axiomatic verity of the horizon’s interiority. Under the auspices of the Insider, endogenic tensions call for a non-economical inflection upon the absolute continuum that breaks free from the models of critical emancipation and anti-critical transgression: A revolution - that is to say an irreversible

and radical change - made by the openness of the universal continuum and instigated by a universal synthesis.

Now we know that both endogenic and exogenic tensions inherent to trauma are dialectical tensions between the universal continuum and its regional fields. However, the insurmountable traumatic tension here cannot be explained in terms of a full dialectical sublation. Why? Firstly, because the interiorized horizon and the precursor exteriority are not precisely antithetical (one is merely the inflection or focalization of the other). Secondly, because the reality underpinning trauma cannot be sublated through assimilation or cancelation. The reality of the inorganic qua precursor exteriority is only interiorized through the remobilizing and redeploying power of trauma, but due to its diachronicity and exteriority cannot be fully assimilated in any way whatsoever. Therefore, the traumatic topology of tensions is dialectical insofar as the universal continuum (whose global index is, in this case, the inorganic - the precursor exteriority of the organism) sets itself against its extensively realized horizon (which in Freud's biological account is the organism). Trauma is the self-dialectic of exteriority. Yet what is amiss in this dialectic is the sublation. That is to say, all that is present in the exteriorizing dialectic of trauma is the insurmountable tension immanent to the absence of any possibility for sublation. This necessary and irreversible lack fuels a synthesis between the universal continuum and its regional field, a synthesis that determines the course and the unbinding power of the dialectic with/of the absolute continuum. Moreover, the type of synthesis or the relation to the open is also determined by the locus of this lack or the insurmountable resistance to complete assimilation. Depending on whether this resistance takes place

outside or inside the regional horizon, the synthesis or relation to the open will be different.

With traumatic tensions being explained in terms of binding or unbinding different registers of exteriority, we can now proceed to examine modes of synthesis or openness associated with these tensions and the exact role of traumatic cuts in determining such syntheses.

### **The dialectical synthesis of the traumatic subject, or: How can we tell the difference between counter-revolutionary traps and revolutionary tools?**

Regardless of its nature, the traumatic tension must be brought to a resolution in one way or another. But what is this resolution? Freud relates this resolution to the restoration of an earlier stage before the conception of the nervous system or the organic horizon - a global state from which the regional horizon has been excised and into which it must be loosened. The tension drives the horizon toward a resolution, which in Freud's account in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, is the full restoration of the reality of trauma qua the inorganic. The reality of inorganic exteriority is, however, diachronic in time and exterior in space with regard to organic interiority. For this reason, the synthesis toward such reality neither strictly conforms to principles of the interiorized horizon nor the unconditional neutrality (or nullity) of the "anterior posteriority" indexed by the inorganic. (Brassier 2007, 233) The binding of exteriority, accordingly, conforms to the *synthesis* (as the motor of the drive) between



the interiorized horizon and the exteriority, or more accurately, between the universal gradient and its regional focalization. The mode of inflection or openness toward the open depends on the behaviour of the traumatic synthesis which itself is determined by the complicity between global and regional gradients. But the mode of complicity between the universal continuum and its regional fields is also contingent upon the traumatic re-mobilization of the absolute continuum and deployment of the exteriority. It depends on how trauma posits the absolute continuum in regard to its regional horizon. To summarize, the traumatic binding of the universal freedom associated with the open continuum is, at its base, neither the question of the subject's strategy in binding what lies beyond it nor the "anterior posteriority" of radical exteriority, but the question of how trauma ushers in the universal contingency of the absolute or unbound continuum and the will of the open.

In order to see how amputating and transplanting modes of trauma determine the type and mechanisms of traumatic binding of the universal or the dialectical synthesis with the absolute, we shall examine the syntheses of exogenic and endogenic traumatic tensions:

I. *Traumatic synthesis where trauma incises exteriority from the interiorized horizon and thereby generates exogenic tensions* (examples: Freud's account of the vesicle whose baked-through [*durchgebrannt*] crust shields the organism against the flood of excitation and energy; Georges Bataille's earthly life or grounded biosphere as the scar of the Sun upon the Earth): The traumatic cut is in this case a form of splitting that sets the exteriority as

an exorbitant register outside and against the interiorized horizon. It is identical to what Ray Brassier associates with François Laruelle's unilateralizing cut of non-dialectical negativity which possesses "a power of incision or dismemberment." (ibid., 146) The unilateralizing traumatic cut amputates the universal from the regional; consequently, it creates a grounded level of interiority in relation to the surface or the plane of amputation - an instance of separation or scission. Yet more significantly, the amputating cut or the unilateralized difference between the interiorized horizon and the exteriority economically repositions the universal absolute as that which is now outside the affordances of the traumatized horizon of interiority. This external rearrangement of the universal with respect to the regional, positions the universal absolute as an unbindable exorbitance on the geocosmic continuum. In short, the unilateralized universal absolute is repositioned as an exorbitant external world or surplus outside with regard to the interiorized or regional horizon which paradoxically cannot be successfully bound but must be economically afforded as the only way out.

The unilateralized conception of the universal absolute as the exorbitant - which the regional horizon can never access except by means of dissolution - flattens the difference between *universal absolute as exorbitant* and *manifested exorbitance as the global expression of the universal absolute*. The one-sided or amputating traumatic cut creates an amphiboly within the economic semantics of the interiorized horizon: The contingent traumatic position of exteriority as an exorbitant index can no longer be distinguished from an economic condition wherein the exorbitant manifestation of exteriority is but the necessary essence of the absolute continuum.

Although the amputating trauma contingently realizes the universal absolute as an exorbitant *for* the interiorized horizon, it also opens a new outside for the regional horizon wherein exorbitance is necessarily correlated to the absolute. This flattening of difference, or to be more exact, the confusion between the necessary and contingent positions of *the absolute as exorbitant* resides not only at the heart of contemporary capitalism and its excesses but also in the bone-marrow of the history of philosophy - especially when it comes to the relationship between thought and the Earth or what can be called the geophilosophical synthesis. Such confusion seems also to be at play in variant glorifications of excess and exorbitance such as Bataille's notion of general or solar economy. Capitalism feignsits universality and inevitability for Man by means of this traumatic confusion between contingent and necessary manifestations of the universal absolute as exorbitant. Its machinery continuously postuladesits excesses not as products of unnecessary processes and violent methods of conservation and protection but as the unavoidable consequence of its regional binding of the universal, of its becoming-universal. Accordingly, averting the path of capitalism is no longer a matter of disobedience but the folly of the impossible - trying to walk away from the world. In the next section of this essay, we will argue that only by rigorously embracing this folly can we develop a genuine non-restricted dialectical synthesis with the universal absolute and unbind a world whose frontiers are driven by the will of the open and whose depths are absolutely free.

For the geophilosophical synthesis where both the individual organism and the surface biosphere are under various energetic influences of the sun, the confusion between contingent and necessary positions of the universal

absolute as inherently exorbitant leads to a chronic form of terrestrial myopia: The universal absolute cannot be thought except as an exorbitant index of exteriority. Likewise, in the same myopic vein, cosmic exteriority cannot be inflected upon except through a sun or an energetic equivalent whose excess blinds the interiorized regional horizon. The sun becomes a blind spot barring the scope of the abyss. Ironically, the unilateralizing cut only "sharpens one-sidedness" at the cost of establishing a regime of exorbitance which can only be bound through the synthesis of affordances inherent to the economical correlation between the interiorized horizon and the exorbitant exteriority. (ibid., 147)

If the incisional mode of trauma contingently sets exteriority as an exorbitant index against the interiorized horizon, this does not mean that the exorbitant exteriority is non-dialectically posited. On the contrary, since the interiorized horizon cannot successfully bind the exorbitant exteriority and simultaneously, the pull-back toward the reality or the source of trauma is inevitable, then the horizon has no choice other than affording the excess. The interiorized or regional horizon gradually and indirectly - that is, in conformity with its own economic terms and conditions - binds the excess of exteriority over interiority, the dismembered universal over the amputated regional. For this reason, the unilateralized or non-dialectical conception of exteriority associated with the universal absolute is translated into the *energetic dialectic* of the interiorized horizon. The unbindable exorbitance of the unilateralized or amputated exteriority determines the affordability of the interiorized horizon and demands an economical binding. This economical binding operates by *affording* (a dynamic expression of an

axiomatic capacity) the excess of the outside. As a binding method, affordability regulates the course of synthesis toward the outside according to the axiomatic function of capacity. A synthesis not conforming to this dynamic capacity is avoided at all costs (*viz.* the horizon is open to the outside only according to its affordability). For this reason, the incisional traumatic cut and exogenic tensions entail a type of synthesis which is but an *economical solution* to bind the exorbitant index of exteriority.

Therefore, the synthesis inherent to exogenic tensions becomes that of constant translation of exorbitance to affordances of the regional horizon. It accords with what Freud recognized as energetic re-experiencing (simultaneous affirming and buffering) of the traumatic incident in order to move toward the source of trauma whilst energetically preserving the cohesion of the traumatized subject or the interiorized horizon. The synthesis between the unbindable excess (the exorbitant external world) and the horizon of interiority forms a fully bilateral type of economical correlation between the sources of tension. On the one hand, what we have is an exteriority whose external excess to the interiorized horizon coercively necessitates the economical binding (i.e. affordability) of the unbindable exorbitance as the expression of its inevitability. On the other hand, the regional horizon economically assimilates the aforementioned excess as the basis of its drive, establishing an affordable continuity, between the negentropic excess (originary trauma) and the entropic excess that will eventually dissolve it. Daniel R. Brooks and E.O. Wiley find the biological expression of this affordable continuity in the cohesive but economically conceived ontogenic continuity that blurs the distinction between the boundary demarcated by the

originary excess that has been partially warded off and the excess that simultaneously pushes the dynamic boundary of the organism further (hence accounting for its dynamic behaviors) and eventually dissolves the organism.<sup>5</sup>

The synthesis brought about by the unilateralizing excess is realized as an accelerative curve of conservative-dissipative rates circuitously constructed through regional affordances of the horizon. This synthetic curve (*umwege*) simultaneously aims for regional complexification and dissolution of the entire horizon. The acceleration, or precisely speaking, the socio-economic and cultural appropriation of such synthesis is therefore devoid of any revolutionary potency with respect to the universal openness. The embracing of the traumatic binding of the exorbitant exteriority via an accelerative synthesis of exogenic tensions either switches affordances for those which afford more or unleashes the anarchy of exorbitance within the system. But the anarchy of exorbitance is merely an extreme form of conservatism since it dissolves the system according to its own economical ambit. The outside it opens up for the horizon is merely an exorbitant manifestation which was never absolute or unbound in the first place. The psychological image of this accelerative strategy is the isolated mad individual reduced to a vegetative state or the incendiary hypermanictransgressionist - the burnt-out and violent sides of the same coin, the productive/anti-productive double-bind.

The dialectical synthesis built upon exogenic tensions with the unilateralized qua exorbitant exteriority is not just impotent, it is a counter-revolutionary trap. The traumatic binding of an exorbitant manifestation of the outside is

limited to the economical correlation between the mandating excess and the conservative sphere. In short, the synthesis is limited to the available affordance between the interiorized horizon and the exorbitant exteriority. But what are the implications of this conformity to affordance or economical correlation? It means that the traumatic subject will be forced to bind the universal absolute in one way and one way only. To put it differently, the interiorized horizon follows a mode of binding or a type of synthesis that can be afforded and for this reason it is not unrestricted or modally free. The organism wishes to die in one way and one way only. The traumatized subject only wishes to bind the exorbitant source of trauma by re-experiencing it over and over in dreams. Any other mode of binding that does not correspond to the economical correlation between the conservative ambit of the interiorized horizon and the exorbitant manifestation of exteriority is forestalled. Such alternative modes of synthesis would generate radical disturbances in the axiomatic economic sphere of affordances. Accordingly, the dialectical synthesis toward the universal absolute through exorbitant manifestations of exteriority is characterized by its intrinsic closure toward alternatives (i.e., modally unbound syntheses). The adherents of such a counter-revolutionary dialectical synthesis - whether disguised as systems of thought, orders of change or ways of living - are distinguished by their reactionary and restrictive attitude against alternatives, their dismissal of tactical improvisation and unwritten plans, and their fear of asymmetrical fields of synthesis or relation to the open.

The revolutionary dialectical synthesis of the traumatic subject is marked by its ability to unbind alternative modes of traumatic inflection upon the absolute and by its improvisation in the science of asymmetrics. Or, in

allusion to Peirce's pragmatic philosophy and reappropriation of his *architectonics*, the revolutionary synthesis is that of ternary logics. It extricates the synthetic third out of the first (the uno) and the second (the duo) by meshing relational and modal webs wherein the mediating function of the third unifies all regional perspectives and localized hierarchies into a synthetic global or universal function. To this end, we shall argue in the next segment, concerning the type of synthesis immanent to endogenic tensions, that trauma as a transplanting cut precisely assumes the role of this mediating and universalizing function between regional horizons. It beaks the symmetry-in-asymmetry of the dyadic cut by arranging and negotiating the relationships between the universal and the regional, exteriority and interiority, via transplantations and the plastic logic of gradients and nestedness. Correspondingly, the dialectical synthesis brought about by ternary logic constructs its modally bottomless and free relation to the open through interconnected webs of traumata; it inflects upon the universal continuum through the implicitly twisted logic of asymmetry-in-symmetry, liquefaction-in-solidity, exteriority-in-interiority, universal-in-regional, global-in-local. Openness becomes as much an asymptotic relation to the boundless universal continuum (the open) as it is realized as the expression of modal and relational freedom of the synthesis - that is, openness by *real alternatives* instead of *affordable options*.

II. *Traumatic synthesis immanent to endogenic tensions. Here trauma as the self-excision or self-reflection of the absolute, transplants exteriority within interiority and fabricates topologically nested gradients of the universal* (examples: Ferenczi's account of autotomia and the

alien will in which the autoplasmic [as opposed to alloplastic] nervous system of the child is moulded around the inassimilable presence of the abusing adult; Maria Torok's theory of deep burial of traumatic humiliations in vast inter-vaulted ego-crypts which have their own cryptonymical patterns; and the so-called "chthonic" geochemical determination of life and its various aspects as the regional expression of cosmochemical processes and events such as isotopic fractionations **during the formation** of the solar system out of the molecular cloud): Trauma as the regionalizing self-reflection of the absolute draws a third function from the unilateralizing function of radical exteriority and the interiorizing function of the regional horizon. It synthesizes the extensive incision with the intensive interiority of the regional horizon and brings forth the perforating cut. Perforation or the transplanting cut is to amputation what the synthetic order of the third is to the dyadic hierarchy. Through trauma as perforation, the universal - contingently and from alternative points of entry - transplants its global expressions and properties within its localized zones. The regional horizon, in this sense, is a focalized gradient or continuum occasioned by transplantations and nested continuity of the universal which bring about the possibility of regional *grades*. Accordingly, the transplanting mode of trauma does not unilateralize exteriority; it can be defined as a nesting function that changes the local gradation (with regard to the universal), or more accurately, the plasticity of the regional horizon. The synthesis associated with endogenic tensions, for this reason, should be understood not in terms of regression or unsuccessful attempts in reestablishing the precursor exteriority, but in terms of gradational changes in the plasticity of the regional horizon as it asymptotically approaches the universal gradient from all directions. This is how the deepening of

the geophilosophical synthesis into the geocosmic continuum by way of transcending the dialectic of endogenic tensions occurs: Regional horizons whose endogenic tensions are generated by traumatic transplantations across the universal continuum can also *gradationally* reflect upon the universal through the continuous and mediating function of traumas. But this emphatically means that the universal absolute is reflected upon not as external or exorbitant, but as that which is infinitesimally and gradationally within and outside the regional field.

The dialectical synthesis immanent to endogenic tensions is characterized, firstly, by its unbound modality. If the ururtrauma of the absolute unbinds the trauma essentially as an always alternative way for transplantation of the universal inside the regional and nesting of one regional horizon within another, then the synthesis of endogenic tensions toward the absolute is identified by its asymmetric approach toward the absolute across and through multiple non-isolated fields of traumata. Secondly, the dialectical synthesis originating from endogenic tensions is not constituted on the primacy of the inevitability of pull-back toward the universal absolute (the inevitability of extinction, the inexorable reckoning day); it is built upon the complicities between the regional horizon and the universal, the interiorized horizon and indices of exteriority already nested within it. Acceleration toward the inevitable, as it was argued earlier, is not only an impotent avowal of the conservative-dissipative ambit of the interiorized horizon, but also a counter-revolutionary trap by virtue of safeguarding the horizon against alternative ways of inflecting upon the universal absolute (alternative modes of openness). Complicities between the resident indices of exteriority and the interiorized horizon, on



the other hand, absorb this so-called inevitability merely as asymptotic expressions of the universal continuum: Interiorities as nested asymptotes of exteriority, embodiment as the traumatic asymptote of disembodiment (*viz.* the unfeasibility of physical embodiment in the pure extensity of expanding space) and so on. Complicities or dialectical synthesis immanent to endogenic tensions deepen and widen the regional interiorized horizon across the universal gradient and along these asymptotic lines. The asymptotic approach of the traumatic binding/synthesis means that the complicities of regional horizons with the universal absolute along zones of traumatic transplantations are no longer emptied of significance or purpose. Everything matters, every complicity counts, every field of materialization or materialist perspective has a global import, every regional function has a value to be mediated with the universalizing function of trauma and interpolated by the asymptotic synthesis toward the open. This is why the revolutionary subject celebrates the Copernican Revolution and its traumatic legacy as a revolution by widening the regional across the universal continuum and asymptotically approaching the open.

Within the post-Copernican universe, the revolutionary dialectical synthesis widens the regional horizon as an asymmetric tactical field. Each trauma that mediates the regional and the universal, each zone of traumatic transplantation, is a field of tactics opened by complicities of the regional and the universal, the local resistance of the former within the traction of the latter. The alternative traumas of the regional horizon constitute its tactical dynamism within the universal continuum. Since the propensity of tactics is to fade away from the sight of command and endanger the integrity of the ground

control, the tactical mobilization of trauma reinvents the regional horizon outside of its grounded field as a platform for complicities between anonymous materials or forces of the open. The revolutionary subject of the Copernican project restlessly searches for alternative syntheses or modes of traumatic inflection upon the universal absolute. It improvises out of *its* traumas, or to be more exact, out of traumas which mediate between its regional horizon and the outside: Endogenic tensions generated by contingent and alternative traumatic cuts nourish the drive for partaking in complicities with different indices of exteriority across the unbound universal continuum.

The dialectical synthesis associated with exogenic tensions always takes the form of a compulsion to repeat the originary trace of trauma qua incision. Since the originary trace of incision is traumatically conceived as exorbitant, this compulsion to repeat is always performed energetically, namely, by means of affording the unbindable exorbitant trace of trauma. The energetic re-experiencing of trauma concomitantly buffers the excess and circuitously moves toward it. Correspondingly, the synthesis firmly reestablishes the interiorized horizon as the ground or the *central sphere* from which - in a Ptolemaic fashion - contact with the alien outside should be conducted. Once it is denuded of its complexity-disguises planted along its economically detoured path, the course of exogenic synthesis is revealed to be obsessively straightforward. The interiorized horizon is not allowed to relocate its position outside of itself on the universal continuum; instead it must locate itself with regard to the exorbitant gravity of trauma. Moreover, since the unilateralized exteriority enjoys an exorbitant external



ubiquity, its impact upon the horizon is mainly that of what Freud identifies in terms of scarification, scorching and rigidification of the exposed regions. Whereas for transplanting traumas, the effects of the inassimilable exteriority and universal hijacking of the regional horizon are gradational and zonal changes in the plasticity of the horizon, or even sometimes contingent anomalies in the internal topology of the traumatized sphere. Finally, since the dialectical synthesis emerging out of exogenic tensions is determined by the externality of the source of trauma and the economic internality of the regional horizon, its logic is foreign to the possibility of nested spaces (or multi-connected traumas) and the possibility of universalization of regional categories (or trauma as a mediating function between regional gradients of the geocosmic continuum). In short, the dialectical synthesis inherent to the trauma of exorbitance is allergic to three branches of the mathesis of trauma: topology, differentiable functions and categorical morphisms.

In the above differences and characteristics of the two traumatic syntheses - one modally unbound and the other modally restricted - echoes of two different geophilosophical systems can be heard:

(a) A geophilosophical realism in which synthetic relations with the source of trauma are conceived as gravitational relocation in the universal continuum *versus* a geophilosophical system in which the regional horizon (*erde*) changes its location according to an exorbitant gravity (for example, the earth as a regional gradient of the cosmic continuum *vs.* the earth as bound to the sun and its own ground).

(b) Two geophilosophical systems in which the exteriority has different effects on a given sphere (earth): gradational changes versus rigid changes.

**A geophilosophical synthesis whose science of openness requires topological, differential and categorical approaches and one that is too confident in the axiomatic integrity of its horizon to see perforations, lines of intrusion and inassimilable residues of the outer space within its own sphere.**

The realm of traumatic syntheses is that of a geocosmic expanse where the transition from the nervous system to geophilosophy and geophilosophy to cosmology becomes increasingly blurred and porous. This gradational transition owes to the general function of trauma as that which mediates between the regional and the universal, interpolates discontinuities or ruptures, brings about all types of eccentric neighbourhoods between regional horizons of the universal continuum and establishes topological-transfers between seemingly discrete regional domains - between “infant politics” (Robin Mackay), streets politics, geocosmology, biology, cerebral plasticity, etc. It is interesting to point out that some of the psychoanalytical explications regarding the realm of endogenic syntheses brought about by traumatic transplantations are strikingly similar to deep earth and extra-terrestrial stories. Ferenczi’s theory of alien transplant develops an alternative account of traumatic synthesis for children who have been victims of sexual abuse. According to Ferenczi, the psychic plasticity of the child is mainly susceptible to take forms (autoplastic adaptations) rather than giving

forms so as to make self-destruction and self-recreation unnecessary (alloplastic adaptations). In confronting with a force whose communication is ambiguous (meaning either it cannot be separated into its characteristic components or the child cannot determine the nature and category of this communicating force), the plastic psychic horizon of the child takes the shapes of the force. This communicationally ambiguous force that leaves its deep imprint on the child's plastic neuropsychic structure is the adult's act of molestation which in families is usually disguised under different semiotic patterns of parental love, playing and adult punishment all at once. Since this adult presence cannot be reintegrated within the psychic structure of the child while it has already been interiorized as a component of the self, it begins to change the cohesion of the psychic horizon according to its inassimilable negativity. It commences its course of deterioration by entirely changing the formation of the psychic sphere from inside-out. It sinks deep within the psychic horizon and produces an inner gravitational core that differentiates the child's psychic horizon to different strata of an "individuum." (Ferenczi 1995, 10) Each stratum is formed out of the complicity of the psychic fabric with the contingent will of this alien transplant. Even the immediate external atmosphere of the growing child which is formed by alloplastic adaptations is also determined by this sunken alien core. The alien transplant now determines the psychic life of the child from inside and outside, in all directions, and through different spaces that it has improvised out of the available "material resources" of the psychic sphere. The only stratum that is left relatively untouched so as to properly shield the alien will and supply the individuum with some sort of quasi-alien life is the outermost layer, the thin surface

of personhood. The outermost layer of the individuum is constituted of a surface biosphere where the person carries out its everyday life. It is a seamless façade of superficiality where nothing is out of the ordinary, even though at times its trans-vacuous consistency is challenged by displacing volcanic eruptions of burnt-out remains of the original person and purposeless energetic discharges. To be exact, on the surface the sky is calm. This was never meant to be a children's story but a moral lesson on the formation of the earth and its lively biosphere.

The degradation of the *terra verita* of the psychic sphere from the inside through contingent complicities of an alien transplant with horizon's axiomatic components undergoes a full-blown eversion in the later works of Reich.<sup>6</sup> Seemingly distorted by hyperbolic turns and twists, Reich's entire oeuvre should be seen as a meticulous exfoliation of the same philosophical flower. First, there are psychoanalytical, vital and anti-fascist works. Despite their controversial nature, Reich's writings prior to his move to the United States possess a robust coherency. These earlier works can be seen as a continuous series of inquiries into the effects of energy disturbances, traumas and repressions within different spheres of earthly life: sexual, physiological and socio-political domains. However, as Reich settled in Maine, his project took a drastic turn - unusual even in terms of his European adventures in eclecticism. For one decade from 1947 to 1956 (up to the completion of *Oranur Second Report*), Reich's writings, research and personal life were secret facilities where humanity consolidated its last lines of resistance against aliens: "There was no escape from the fact that we were at war with a power unknown to

man on earth.” (Reich 1957) **Everything that is developed** during this period verges on pseudo-science and cosmophy: system-toxifying deadly orgonegradations, gravity and anti-gravity equations, models of alien visitation, studies on the inherent susceptibility of water as the vitalizing substance of the terrestrial life to extra-terrestrial chemical forces, theories of desert formation and the clandestine role of UFOs in desertification processes on a cosmic scale. We have heard about tales of alien abduction as refabricated accounts of sexual child abuse developed by victims. In these scenarios, the worldly and everyday reality of adult exploitation slowly twists into extra-terrestrial events of alien sighting, contact, encounter, abduction and return. Rather than energetically re-experiencing the trace of trauma in dreams, the sexually abused subject twists again and again the incident of “close encounter” - the trauma of molestation - into an extra-terrestrial odyssey. The so-called grades of the encounter (the first, the second, the third and so on) delineate the order of the traumatic synthesis whereby the subject sights the alien on the earth, in its home, in its innermost horizon, next it is visited by the alien, then it is abducted by trauma, taken out of this world, reconfigured and brought back to the earth where now everything is twistedly alien, that is to say, human. Whereas Ferenczi’s account of trauma is concerned with alienation of the internal sphere/*erde*, Reich - himself a molested victim of socio-political traumas - in his ufologic reports presents trauma as a close encounter that relocates the subject (“the Earthman”) from its totalized and discrete earth to a new alien field of gravity where the subject is reconstituted outside of its own center once and for all. (ibid.) The subject’s previous grounded horizon where the social sphere, the home and the psyche were totalized into one veritable earth, is now re-experienced and sighted from a synthetic

terrestrial and extra-terrestrial viewpoint.<sup>7</sup> From here, the earth is always a UFO, my home I can no longer remember or care for, myself is a continuously relocating extra-terrestrial field of observation, the groundless base from which all planets are and will be alienated.

These are no longer bewildering fictions of psychoanalysis but fully-fledged cosmological scenarios unraveled by the mediating function of traumas and their universalizing syntheses.

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Now we know that the question of dialectical synthesis or binding of the universal absolute, and hence the question of revolution - *viz.* universal change by and through the open - is precisely the question of inflective relationship of the subject qua regional with the universal continuum.

In light of a conception of trauma unbound by the universal synthesis and a Peircean thought of continuum (as explicated in a deservedly exquisite fashion by Latin American mathematician and philosopher Fernando Zalamea), fields of trauma and tensions should no longer be strictly subjected to the purported adequacy of analytical modes of inquiry. Psychoanalysis, political theory and axiomatizing approaches possess neither the sufficient universal competency nor multi-modal synthetic fields of inquiry for delving into the ramifications of the Copernican Revolution and examining the nature of traumas (whether of individuals or collectives). In this

respect, the so-called fertile syntheses and reunions of analytical-continental philosophies which have been proposed by some as the veritable locus of realist thought should be justly unmasked as a contemporary cubbyhole for the exhausted survivors of both philosophical camps: Either those who are myopic enough not to see the scope of universal syntheses that passes through their regional fields of knowledge, or those who are conservative enough to strategically safeguard the traditions of their camps by being open only to certain facets of the opposite camp so as to postpone their inevitable demise. To this extent, a true science of openness built upon the legacy of the Copernican Revolution and traumatic (that is constituted in ineradicable tensions between the regional and the open) syntheses toward the universal absolute must be conceived by an unrestricted synthetic vision. Realist thought - the offspring of a science of openness and an ethics of humiliation - is a modally unbound synthetic thought. It is simultaneously an *absolutely* and *trans-modern* thought. It is “absolutely modern” by the virtue of “overcoming the Ptolemaic and narcissistic counter-revolution” and shedding its transcendental limitations in its katabasis into the absolute. (Catren 2011, 338) It is “transmodern” insofar as it is “essentially *topological*, open to all sorts of continuous transformations (pragmatic maxim, triadic semiotic, classifications of sciences, synechism, etc.), and ... is particularly able to represent a bimodal net (Petitot) of *both* differentials and invariants, providing a full understanding of the *TRANS*prefix.” (Zalamea 2009, 118)

If both the emergence of capitalism and the inception of Western (Greek) philosophy are - as Gilles Deleuze and FélixGautarri acknowledge - outcomes of terrestrial

contingencies, then realist synthetic thought is also prone to erupt from its own contingently positioned geographic locations on this planet. Whilst the universal excises its own regional fields and positions them according to its own universal freedom, the regional fields also determine - based on their constitutive universal contingency - their sub-regional horizons and this continues *ad infinitum*. The regional synthesis is consequently everywhere but it is only highly mobilized wherever the transition between regional fields and their tensions with the outside are more convoluted, modally charged, topologically ambiguous and synthetically widened by condensed entangled clusters of traumata (from individual to collective, from personal to social traumas). Accordingly, if we choose to roughly locate those geographical regions which are more hospitable to the germination of true synthetic philosophies of trans-and-absolutely modern man because they already - and of course, contingently - satisfy the conditions for the emergence of such thoughts, we have to make a new navigational map. On this map we do not have points or discretely territorialized locations but obscure and fuzzy regional gradients, contingently distributed tectonic subduction zones for the focalization (rather than emergence) of the trans-and-absolutely-modernist thought, areas which are inherently susceptible to give rise to carriers of synthetic thought, revolutionary subjects of their regional fields of trauma - patient zeros capable of blending in with the unsuspected terrestrial population and embark upon pandemic syntheses. Patient zeros of synthetic thought are epidemic phantoms, they are untraceable links between regional outbreaks, highly mobilized and contagious reservoirs of synthetic tensions capable of linking isolated regional horizons to the universal continuum in the most improvised fashions and esoteric topological configurations.

On the geocosmic navigational map of synthetic thought, the closer you get to the supposed centers of the world, the weaker synthetic tensions become and the more difficult it is for the revolutionary subject to emerge and come into focus. When you reach certain self-proclaimed discrete *points* like London, Tokyo, New York, Paris, Dubai, and other so-called centers or capitals of the world, the synthetic tensions almost verge on zero, the emergence of the revolutionary subject becomes a distant dream and narcissistic regional phantasms are feigned as universally modern synthetic thoughts.<sup>8</sup> The liberalist illusion of having real alternatives, capitalism's accelerative yet modally restricted synthesis, the bifurcated and hence narrowly conceived tensions between the Left and the Right in these regions circumscribe true universalist syntheses. The universal is merely reinstated at the level of population diversity or in rare cases, at a culinary level - the miracle of the so-called fusion cuisine is all that can be afforded. Diversity becomes only an excuse to keep other forms of universal syntheses bound or precluded as unnecessary or potential threats. In such regions the universal or realist synthetic thought is but a mirage, a Fata Morgana to lure the clueless into the heart of illusion. On the other hand, on the same navigational map, there are regions which are rife for outbreaks of synthetic thought, broadening the scope of geophilosophical realism and developing universalist subjects. Although such nebulous regional gradients cannot be geographically exhausted, that should not prevent us from applying vague geographical names to these generic regions:

*Latin America* - “[w]here ubiquitous *diagonal passages* have molded the Continent” and “‘transculturación’... opens the way to *transit gluings* which escape dualisms

between foreign culture (‘aculturación’) or forced culture (‘inculturación’).” (Zalamea 2009, 122)

*Middle East* - where excessive syncretism create dynamic and incessant antagonisms which explode into coiling cyclonic transitives of distorted universal proportions, and where everyday life is mobilized across integrals and differentials of socio-political decay: The ever-shrinking but integrally persistent residues of a despotic past (the ruined) and germinal vectors of decomposition which open differential continuities or alternative paths to fresh air where “creativity can [finally] expand without brakes.” (Zalamea 2011, 171)

*Maghrib* - where the everyday trauma of human survival forces the subject to improvise life and tactics on a daily basis despite diminishing resources and tightening pressures.

*Eastern Europe* - where balkanization is no longer deemed as an identitarian or national stigma (the crippling wound of the victim) but as an expression of an entirely new multi-frontal tactical formation against alien forces and assimilation - fragmented shards whose lethality against assimilation matches their diffusive versatility or what Ferenczi identifies as the advantage of “creating a more extended surface towards the external world” and a complex form of asynchronic distribution of effects and adaptive interactions between fragments. (Ferenczi 1994, 230)

The universalist subject conceived and mobilized by such regions cannot be envisioned or realized in the confines



of geopolitical domains of revolution - let alone within the well-worn saga of world politics or the seemingly street-friendly revolutionary politics of Britain which has grazed on both the comforts and depressions of not having a revolution. The modern man of these vague synthetic regions neither basks in the postulated privilege of such comforts nor is he distracted by the guilt associated with the lack of revolution and comforts associated to it. Not because he has gone through revolutions retrogressive or progressive, but because he is no longer able to discretely extract and isolate the everyday feats of survival from the revolutions in the nervous system, from the revolutions in the home, the streets, the continent, the earth and the unbound universal continuum. Through their eccentric historical topologies, their undulations between integral and differential formations and socio-political traumatic syntheses they harbor, these regions not only increasingly generalize the supposed veritable locus of revolution but also blur their geographical location. Latin America, Middle East, Eastern Europe and Maghrib are as much geographic regions as they are generic synthetic models of thinking, improvisation of everyday life, survival and multi-modal engagement with the world or being-in-the-universe. The generic site of the revolution can only be traversed by a general yet regionally appropriated model of synthesis and a generic yet focused geography for the mobilization of the revolutionary or the subject of the open.

The synthetic horizon of the trans-and-absolutely man generates various types of cobordism, nestedness, tangled neighbourhoods, topological convolutions and porosities between the brain, the streets, the national territory and the earth through which the revolution spreads from one region to another. The differentials of the universal

synthesis - the revolution - cover and build upon integral conditions of regional horizons while smoothly interpolating them and asymptotically approaching the open i.e. the unbound universal continuum. Since it is driven by syntheses of the open, the revolutionary subject is not particularly prejudiced where the revolution takes place, in the brain, in the streets or in space. This is because endogenic tensions and syntheses render any disposition toward a discrete or an axiomatic site of revolution problematic and precarious. What the revolutionary subject is concerned with is how the revolution can be mobilized from one regional gradient to another, from one interiorized horizon to another enclosure, from isolated fields of trauma to the open. Far from credulously asserting that scientific, social, cultural and cerebral revolutions are identical or one essentially leads to another, the revolutionary task of the trans-and-absolutely modern man is to find alternative transits and asymptotes, design intimate neighbourhoods and overlappings between various regional loci and expressions of the revolution.

The investigation of the revolutionary subject - his traumas, his earth, terrain, everyday tasks and revolutionary duties i.e. searching for alternatives (freedom) and ultimately, exporting the revolution or broadening the scope of synthesis - is but the continuation of the Copernican pursuit of the open by treading along the great chain of humiliations: The orbital subversion of the geocentric earth, the Darwinian erosion of Aristotelian essentialism, the Freudian deprivatization of man's inner sanctuaries, and the expropriation of discrete worlds or fields of knowledge on behalf of an open synthetic continuum under the auspices of neuroscience, synthetic mathematics and unified astrobiology. Consequently, the inquiry into



regional excisions of the absolute continuum (openness) and correspondingly, nested traumatic cuts or regions (fields for the alternative pursuit of the open) comes into focus in the generic figure of the post-Copernican revolutionary subject who widens his region across the universal continuum through mobilizing endogenic tensions and syntheses immanent to his region. And in doing so, he embarks upon a revolution that is constituted of the line of universal synthesis - the modally free and non-axiomatic force of openness. For this reason, in the next section, we shall have the occasion to examine regional horizons of the revolutionary subject more intimately and inquire how such horizons are traversed or at times, overturned by the universal line of synthesis.

**Unanchoring the revolutionary import of modern man, or: It is time to take the revolution out of the streets and into space, or: Revolution was never meant to be strictly terrestrial**

Only through dissecting the dialectical syntheses of the traumatic subject with the open, can we identify the revolutionary subject, i.e., the subject that brings a universal and irreversible change by and through the universal continuum within its localized and temporalized horizon. Through its dialectical synthesis, the revolutionary subject embarks upon the traumatic binding of the geocosmic continuum so that the axiomatic verity of its horizon is uprooted by the ceaseless self-renegotiating verity of the universal absolute.<sup>9</sup> The revolutionary subject breaks away from the isolationist regime of trauma and plunges into the ever deepening and widening

universal constellations of traumata. To put it differently, through the traumatic binding of the universal absolute, the revolutionary subject deepens and widens the geophilosophical synthesis of its horizon into and across the geocosmic continuum. In doing so, the revolutionary subject finds an asymptote between its horizon of interiority, its regional horizon and the universal and exteriorizing absolute. The unbound dialectic of the latter with itself becomes the regional dialectic and the synthetic drive of the former.

Here we should pause and in order to avoid possible and further misunderstandings define *the subject* that we have been exploiting so far in conjunction with the word revolution. The subject is only constructed traumatically along the lines of the universal continuum's self-excision so that the purported centrality of the subject to the universal continuum becomes the universal's regional - that is, contingent and traumatically concentrated - *focalization*. In other words, the subject is but the traumatic focalization of the universal continuum. Its regional horizon is no longer a somatically integrated earth, its interiority is no longer axiomatically veritable, because it is now a gravitationally bound cluster of traumata suspended on the geocosmic continuum of the universal absolute. If modern man is defined by traumas which take him in and out of focus, then in order to reclaim him from current planetary regimes of myopia (religious fundamentalism, totalitarianism, rampant capitalism, ...) and finally from his own arrogance, his traumas must be mobilized as revolutionary dialectical syntheses toward the open. The mobilization of modern man prepares him in his long overdue run in the revolutionary course of the universal

absolute where reactionary enemies abound and he himself is at the centre of fear and hostility.

The concomitant decentralization of the subject's position in regard to the unbound universal continuum (the open) and deaxiomatization of its somatic integrity through traumas constitutes the very identity of the revolutionary subject. If the subject can no longer be critically and universally investigated without traumas that contingently and convolutedly determine its horizon, then the mobilization of the revolutionary subject needs to take into account - as its utmost critical discipline - the *universal mathesis* of trauma. The revolutionary subject is *measured* simultaneously by the concentration and involvedness (*com-plexio*) of traumas that position and traverse it, bringing it in and out of focus. In its fuzzy collective and individual field, the citizen of the modern territorial system is an all-encompassing traumatized horizon. But the magnitude of its traumatization does not particularly reveal the significance of its membership role in the set of the state, or more accurately, the territorial system to which the subject belongs. Although the territorial system is a set by virtue of its citizens and its territorial fields, the axiomatized subject qua citizen quite literally does not count except within the scope of its membership. It is only the function of the citizen - that is to say, the axiomatizing function of citizen's membership - that is safeguarded by the system. The territorial system is only interested in resting its purportedly axiomatic and veritable interiority upon the axiomatic and veritable interiority of its citizens, namely, membership in the system as the given function of human subjects. Yet precisely because of this axiomatization, the system cannot fathom the bottomless relation of the subject with the open or

the universal continuum. One can say that citizen is not only the traumatized subject of the territorial system; it is also the focal point for the convergence of innumerable traumas which hijack its axiomatic sphere into the open:

As the event immanent to the *polis*, the citizen is the horizon whereby the trauma of the human organism is transplanted within the territorial trauma of the city and the modern territorializing system. It effectuates the organic trauma within the trauma of the human organism whose retarded (Bertalanffy, *et al.*) or fetalized (Gould, *et al.*) slow pattern of growth exposes the juvenile human species to a wide array of traumas. During this differentially retarded or neotenic period, the plastic traits of the human species including its neural plasticity are highly susceptible to change at the synaptic level and can be easily traumatized by external familial, social and environmental disparities or excesses. The link between the brain regions with the highest structural plasticity formed during the prolonged period of maturation, neurodegenerative diseases and trauma events is yet to be fully explored. The slow formation of the human's juvenile plastic traits causes the traumatization of the human (child) to be somehow invisible and occur at the level of what Ferenczi might call "deep or phantom transplantations" i.e. traumas which only later during adulthood - or more politically speaking, during full-fledged citizenship - will begin to burgeon and manifest. To sum up, the organic trauma is nested within the *homo sapiens* trauma whose neotenic or retarded neuropsychic traits are efficaciously configured with invisible traumas, the traumatized *homo nervus* is in turn grafted onto the demographic trauma immanent to the territorialisation of the human population; but this is not the end of the

burrow yet. The trauma of territorialisation extends to the terrestrial trauma whereby the surface biosphere is set against the exorbitant exteriority of the sun and stirred by the inorganic chemistry of the deep earth. Both the sun and the planet earth are also, respectively, traumatically conceived against their cosmic backdrop. Concentrated within this profound trauma of the geographical territorialisation is the geopolitical trauma of the city where the human population is eventually mobilized and distributed. The citizen is the contemporary terrestrial focal point of the concentrated traumas of the polis and the human population. The trauma of the modern man qua citizen is not only expandable to traumas of man and the earth but also extendable to traumas which plunge its putative verity into cosmic depths. It is for this reason that for the post-Copernican revolutionary subject who is determined to deepen the geophilosophical synthesis of its regional horizon along the geocosmic continuum through traumatic binding of the universal absolute, the traumatized figure of the citizen or the modern man appears as the here-and-now field of universal synthesis. Brought into focus by innumerable traumas, the modern man is an abyss no political agency is prepared to stare directly into. The modern man is a designated zone of universal synthesis or a non-trivial relation to the open.

The deepening of the ostensibly local traumas of the modern man qua citizen from the grounded earth to the geocosmic continuum reweaves the Copernican Revolution to the great chain of humiliations yet to come. But, far from scorning and deriding man's mortality in chorus with political Leviathans who gorge and fatten on the fears of the ephemeral man, this is simply to turn the

perishability of man into the traumatic asymptote of the universal absolute, its interiority into the homotopy equivalent of radical exteriority. In deepening and widening its traumas, the modern man unbinds the universal will of the open within its regional and territorial field. In doing so, the modern man transcendently extirpates the axiomatic function of its so-called veritable interiority upon which the territorializing system grounds itself. By supplanting its territorial, organic, terrestrial and human verities with the ceaseless self-renegotiating verity of the universal absolute (the unbound and absolute continuum), the modern man turns its axiomatic horizon into an anti-axiomatic surprise. If we accept the non-controversial and rudimentary formula "anti-axiomatic surprise (i.e. the surprise turn from axiomatic to non-axiomatic) = terror" then capitalization on the modern man as an axiomatic resource is a matter of binding terror in its Ferenczian sense. Here the Ferenczian concept of terror simply addresses a vertiginous effect caused by the loss of the founding axiom and fraying into the open. This anti-axiomatic terror is "described as a frightening whirlwind, ending in the complete dissolution of connexions and a terrible vertigo, until finally the ability, or even the attempt, to resist the force is given up as hopeless, and the function of self-preservation declares itself bankrupt." (Ferenczi 1994, 222-223) In the same vein, the deepening of the geophilosophical synthesis of the modern man - that is, its relation to the territory, the state, the polis and the contingent natural history of the earth - through remobilizing the mediating function of traumas harbours a certain anti-axiomatic surprise or a vertiginous effect. This, as argued, is an expression of the non-local turn from the axiomatic (indexed by the territorializing system) to the non-axiomatic (inherent to the universal synthesis of the open).

By undertaking modally unbound traumatic syntheses toward the universal absolute, the modern man comes into a *twisted immanence* with the abyssal open. First, the modern man binds the universal synthesis by unraveling itself along and through the traumas that traverse and conceive its regional focalization. Through the mediating function and the nested logic of traumas, the modern man finds a materialist asymptote with the unbound universal continuum which is free from the necessity of embodiment and materialization. It is a materialist asymptote insofar as it traumatically passes through the organic and terrestrial horizons of man as it tends toward the universal continuum where even matter is traumatically conceived and enjoys no axiomatic priority or interiorized privilege. In short, the materialist asymptote of the universal continuum is drawn by nested traumas which excise the modern man from the human-organism and the earth-territory. As the modern man universally deepens its geophilosophical synthesis, it also begins to realize itself as a materialist asymptote of the boundless continuum qua the open. Yet this materialist asymptote of the open indexes that terrible vertiginous effect caused by a surprise turn from the axiomatic to non-axiomatic. As an asymptote of the open, the modern man is pregnant with this non-local twist from the foundation to the abyss, the axiom to universal contingency; it carries an implicit surprise element within itself that is detrimental to systems in general and capitalism in particular.

At the height of its business acumen, capitalism is also a system for the traumatic binding of the outside, a mode of openness, a search for fresh air. Yet in complete conformity to its productive-antiproduktive curve, the outside it binds is only an outside by the virtue of its

exorbitance, the trauma it embraces is the incisional cut that sets the terrestrial horizon against a register of exteriority wherein the openness of the universal continuum is turned into an exorbitant event horizon. Capitalism only undertakes its dialectical synthesis with the outside by heavily capitalizing on the logic of exogenic tensions and their corresponding drive. In binding the exorbitant register of exteriority, capitalism is able to present its dynamism as an intrinsic planetary system. In line with the organism that circuitously evolves through the exorbitant influence of solar energy by weaving its inevitable dissipation and internal conservative conditions together, capitalism develops a strategic scenario wherein the annihilating exorbitant exteriority is only an excuse to economically afford more. The traumatic binding of the exorbitant outside is a consumptive solution that can be entrenched deep within various aspects of organic life because it already corresponds with the energetic horizon of the organism. But this is not the only reason why capitalism adopts a model of accelerative dissipation. For capitalism's traumatic binding of the outside as an exorbitant exteriority does not simply turn the presumed inevitability of dissipation into a strategy for affording more. Strategic capitalization on the exogenic tensions of trauma and the exorbitant registers of the cosmic exteriority ensures that the system's dialectic with the outside is conducted only in a way it can afford and thereby, any other mode of binding the outside extrinsic to this affordance is staved off.

Modes of traumatic binding which do not correspond with the exogenic tensions of the interiorized horizon or are not in conformity with the economic qua affordable model of binding pose a threat against the axiomatic

function of the interiority and the somatic integrity of its horizon. Endogenic tensions, as has been elaborated, challenge the axiomatic verifiability of the regional horizon's interiority (such as the earth or the human). But all systems of capitalization and strategic binding work precisely from a ground which is but the axiomatic verity of the interiority. A horizon can only be capitalized on or strategically thought if its interiority and somatic integrity are taken as axiomatic and veritable, only if the system is exposed to the freedom of contingent depths from its outside and not from the inside. The axiomatizing system of capitalism can only function if it grounds itself on the *ur-axiom* of capitalization and strategic qua economical binding. The *ur-axiom* states that the earth on which capitalism expands its limits and horizon, does indeed enjoy a veritable interiority and an axiomatic somatic integrity. Accordingly, the *ur-axiom* posits the earth as the axiomatic resource of capitalism and the ground upon which expansion of the horizon through the economical binding of the outside can be conducted. The perishability of the planet does not essentially problematize the fundamental interiority of the earth; it mainly reinforces capitalism's search for new limits and expanding its horizon from this earth to a new one. On the other hand, any endogenic tension that vitiates this assumed pre-given correlation between the terrestrial horizon and the necessary ground on a regional level will radically disturb the system as it converts axioms to anti-axiomatic surprises. In tandem with Freud's contribution to the great chain of humiliations, the traumatized subject of the Copernican Revolution no longer enjoys the self-centred privilege of having an axiomatic relationship with the interiority of itself. When this vertiginous turn from axiomatic to non-axiomatic is indexed by the terrestrial resources of capitalism - earth, humans,

intelligence, technological sphere and so on - the blow will be less a humiliation and more a terrible vertiginous effect leading to "maximal pulverization." (Ferenczi 1994, 223) Ultimately, the reason for capitalism's traumatic binding of the exorbitant outside is to block alternative modes of traumatic synthesis or inflection upon the open universal continuum. By corresponding to endogenic tensions of the horizon, such lines of exteriorization can emerge anywhere within and throughout the horizon and for this reason, they are capable of replacing the axiomatic verity of any given horizon with anti-axiomatic surprises, turning all potential resources of capitalism into concatenated nightmares.

In order for capitalism to prevent its terrestrial resources from converting to toxic assets, it must first isolate and abstract traumas so that one field of traumata can never be deepened or connected to another field. This is because the interconnection and deepening of regional fields of traumas activates the universal line of synthesis which instigates the revolution - i.e. change by and according to the open - from "The inside". If there is a sustained form of suppression that capitalism exercises, it is the isolation of traumas and topologies of tensions. It is the active vigilance in isolating fields of trauma opened by science, in separating the trauma of life, the trauma of *homo nervus* and the trauma of the territorializing system from one another. One can say that in order to save its systems of capitalization and markets, capitalism must be, first of all, a regime for calculative isolation and regulation of traumas so as to forestall the universal deepening of the geophilosophical synthesis along free or alternative modes of binding. This is why the revolutionary subject of the open who deepens its regional horizon through



linking and mobilizing nested fields of traumas possesses an irrepressible anti-axiomatic import for capitalism that is reminiscent of Freud's account of "shock of the fall." (Freud 1914, 192) The revolutionary dialectic with the universal absolute is reinscribed as a traumatic force that abolishes the axiomatic relationship with the interiority, starting from a specific regional field and extending it to other horizons of interiority, turning the earth of capitalism into a multiverse of traumatic vertigos generated by this sprawling shift from axiomatic grounds toward freedom of the unbound universal continuum. Since modern man is interiorized by capitalism as an axiomatic resource but its truth is determined by anti-axiomatic traumata which form it, an entirely new interpretation of man - its capacities, roles and potencies - must be thought and developed.

The revolutionary unanchoring of modern man not only enables the subject to drift away through the multiverse of traumata toward the open, it is also an indispensable part of exporting the revolution, of breaking and entering into isolated fields of trauma and broadening the scope of the relation to the open. Against this imperative and in line with the therapeutic legacy of psychoanalysis which has recently paid some of its taxes to neuroscience, philosopher Catherine Malabou warns us not to remodel or replicate the world in ourselves. In a conclusive remark that signals a new phase in the life of anti-Copernican celebration of discrete worlds and the reactionary fear of the open, she writes:

The problem of a dialectic of identity - between fashioning and destruction - poses itself all the more pointedly as global capitalism, currently the only known type of globalization, offers us the untenable spectacle of a simultaneity

of terrorism (daily detonations - in Israel, Iraq, Indonesia, Pakistan...) and of fixity and rigidity (for example, American hegemony and its violent rigorism). It is as though we had before our eyes a sort of caricature of the philosophical problem of self-constitution, between dissolution and impression of form. Fashioning an identity in such a world has no meaning except as constructing of counter-model to this caricature, as opposed simply to replicating it. Not to replicate the caricature of the world: this is what we should do with our brain. To refuse to be flexible individuals who combine a permanent control of the self with a capacity to self-modify at the whim of fluxes, transfers, and exchanges, for fear of explosion. (Malabou 2008, 78)

Whilst in theory it is all right to confuse the difference between plastic and explosive, real plasticity and plastic only by association (*plastique*), in real life such confusion, whether willful or inadvertent, is harmful: it can literally blow up in your face. Only when the world is narrowly seen as "this world" or even a wider world but not as an unbound universal continuum whose regions are being mediated by traumas, can we identify ourselves as veritable victims whose cerebral responsibility is to shy away from the traumatic imprints of this so-called bipolar world. Anti-Copernican myopia is neither capable of seeing these explosions as different yet inter-connected regional eruptions in the world, nor is it capable of envisioning the world as a unified world where the cerebral, the territorial, the terrestrial and the cosmic are already nested within one continuum. The illusion of the counter-Copernican reactionary is that the blight of terrorism in the streets and planetary exploitations of capitalism both belong to "a world" (whether this or that world) that can be extricated from the brain at the whim of the subject, the glorified "new wounded." (Malabou 2007) Or perhaps it is the other way around: the subject believes



that the cerebral world can be separated from the outdoor traumas which are all spectacles of the same value anyway whether they happen in Israel, Iraq, Indonesia, Pakistan, ... or in space. The individuum, as Freud, Ferenczi and Reich have emphasized, is precisely the continuum of all these worlds, the brain, the streets, the earth, and the cosmos; it is a focalized gradient from the unbound universal continuum. Only the Ptolemaic advocate of discrete and centralized worlds is deluded with separating these horizons and their influences from one another. Rational confrontation with the problem of violence - whether disguised as excesses of capitalism or manifested as atrocities of terrorism - calls for stepping out into the open and effectively bursting the speculative bubble-world of the pro-Ptolemaic dreamer once and for all. Only in the open, myopic interests are expropriated, grounds for justification are shattered and fundamentalist axioms are evaporated. The protean continuity of the universal continuum is able to magnify subtle webs of causation and complicity behind planetary instances of violence and bring into focus traces of hidden histories of violence from the cerebrum to the streets and beyond.

If violent traces of capitalism and fundamentalism are transplanted in our daily spheres with such ease that we can no longer see them as threats to the plasticity of our brains, so do the other traumas from which capitalism, territorializing systems and religion actively protect themselves. Within the traumatic horizon of modern man, fundamentalism and capitalism are exposed to contaminating neighbourhoods where they can no longer stave off alternative modes of openness or protect their regional horizons from the free expression of the universal, or keep their isolated fields of trauma (their colonies of capitalization) away from the

universal line of synthesis that breaks and enters from one field of trauma to another by cutting through them, synthesizing them, nesting them within one another. As opposed to capitalism and other grounding systems which preserve their verity by isolating fields of trauma in order to shield their horizons against syntheses of the universal absolute, the brain has the ability to reconnect all isolated traumas within its plastic field and expand along the mediating functions of trauma. The obligation of the post-Copernican revolutionary subject with regard to exporting the revolution is not to shun traumas, since this refusal or disavowal contributes to the strategy of capitalism and fundamentalism in isolating traumas, forces and resources in order to govern and monopolize them within this or that world. On the contrary, the obligation of the modern subject is to absorb and interiorize traumas so as to expose "isolated traumas" (*this* or *that* regional world), interconnect them to its regional horizon and widen them across the geocosmic continuum and deep into the open universal continuum. Modern man is a surgeon who does not amputate himself from the worlds of capitalism and religion to isolate the trauma of his individuation from other traumas and establish a new discrete world for himself. Instead, he transplants himself and these worlds inside one another in order to reconnect his actual regional horizon (cohabited with capitalism and fundamentalism) once again to the freedom of the universal continuum - the open. To this end, the revolution on the geocosmic continuum that is the revolution rekindled out of the Copernican commune should not be paved on the politico-philosophical corpus of those who impose on us wanton discrepancies and excesses of the earthly life but those who delude us with the axiomatic verity of ourselves and reform the ground of the terrestrial thought in one way or another.

### Closing remarks, or: The Inquisition is far from over

The unbinding of the universal continuum understood as the principal drive of the Copernican opening of the world is tantamount to the affirmation of a modally unbound synthesis or relationship to the open and consequently, a revolution in breaking from the autocratic interpretation of the world in terms of discrete regions. It is an emphatic end to millenniums of acute myopia and repression associated with isolating or treating regions of the world as discrete points and the inability to grasp the universal synthesis as the positive force of openness that is primarily driven by the open rather than local necessities, interiorized capacities or regional imperatives. The basic attribute of the universal synthesis is modal and relational freedom insofar as the first expression of universal openness - *viz.* the active renegotiation of frontiers of the universal continuum - takes shape in and between regional spheres. First and foremost, the openness or boundlessness of the continuum is realized as (a) the relational openness between regions of the continuum and (b) a thoroughgoing expropriation of any discrete existence or *necessary* bound on behalf of a public abyss. Modal and relational freedom guarantees the synthetic expression of the open by conceiving regional openness (openness to other regions and to the outside) in terms of universal synthesis - that is, in terms of *modes* by which the universal continuum transplants its global properties within regional horizons and drives them toward the open along *paths or relations* which do not strictly conform to capacities and economical requirements of regional openness. Therefore, modal and relational freedom cannot be solely thought in terms of boundlessness as such, because it denotes the freedom of a synthesis

whose simultaneous expressions are the freedom of alternatives and the freedom of universal expression in the regional horizon. Whilst according to the former conception of freedom, there is always another alternative mode of openness by which the regional horizon can be opened to its outside, the latter conception of freedom denotes that the universal is able to transplant its global properties in the regional horizon irrespective of temporal regional necessities and in unrestricted functional and topological ways.

Modal and relational freedom is closely associated with the realm of endogenic tensions and syntheses as the site of the revolutionary subject, the trans-and-absolutely modern man. The revolutionary subject thinks openness in terms of alternative modes by which his region - his earth - can be opened to other regions, deepened and widened into and across the universal continuum. The trans-and-absolutely modern man is no longer the master or the victim of his traumas; he is a universal vector of synthesis between regional traumas - *i.e.* traumas associated with his brain, his house, the system, the earth and the universe that is free from his temporal necessity. Moreover, the revolutionary subject does not abide by regional or earthly myopias, since he is not anchored by a self-centred discrete earth or a monad-point in the universe. On the contrary, he is driven by an unbound universe and a revolutionary earth whose hierarchies and histories are fields for the transplantation of global properties of the universal continuum into the regional: The plasticity of the brain or the cerebral region as the homomorphic equivalent of the global plasticity of the continuum; the organism as a region where the inassimilable residues of global phases of the (external) world are nested ("It is possible that we harbour in our

organism inorganic, vegetative, herbivorous and carnivorous tendencies like chemical valences” (Ferenczi 1994, 229)); the modern city - the urban continuum - where convoluted neighbourhoods of different multitudes (human or non-human) and manifolds result in numerous types of cobordism, regional overlaps, exchanges, complicities and collusions which highlight global-local passages of the universe. Every region of the unanchored earth is an asymptote of the absolute continuum and hence, a locale for revolution and embracing the universal synthesis of the open.

The inception of the trans-and-absolutely modern man takes place on this earth, in this brain and in this city where the modal and relational freedom of the absolute continuum can be easily expressed synthetically as *alternative* modes of openness. Whilst such alternative modes of openness are brought about by the line of the universal synthesis which breaks and enters on its own, it is the effective regional binding of such alternatives (beyond the confines of regional myopias and affordances) that incites revolution in the regional horizon. This is a revolution that “pendulates between integrals of the region and differentials of the open,” between synthesis and analysis, between the contemporary politics of the Left-and-Right and synthetic alternatives, between internalized and externalized indexes of cosmic exteriority, subjective openness *toward* the universal synthesis and being opened *by* the universal synthesis, freedom and compulsion (i.e. a pull-back toward an absolute continuum free of its particulars and multitudes).<sup>10</sup>

horizons) where alternative opportunities for synthesis are able to circumvent the economical double-bind of “capacity/exorbitant external world,” it entails a mode of thinking capable of germinating its viewpoints along lines of complicity between antagonistic or incommensurable fronts (drawn on contamination), through the medium of nested closures and continuous transformations (open to topological thinking) and through twists (non-trivial dialectics between the local and the global). Since the abyssal, unbound and continuous relation of the universe with itself - i.e. the open universal continuum - contains the germ of all asymptotic behaviours, neighbourhoods, overlaps and universal passages between regional fields, the responsibility of the revolutionary subject is to adopt and grow these germs as alternative modes of openness. Asymptotic thinking (asymptotic approach to extinction, contingency, radical exteriority and the absolute) and search for non-trivial relations whereby the universal line of synthesis between different fields of knowledge or regions of the world can be drawn typify such alternatives. It is through such asymptotes, transplantations and regional fibrations of the open brought by the universal continuum that the revolutionary subject is able to - through deepening and widening its traumas - attain topological and categorical equivalence with the universal absolute. Through such alternatives, likewise, the regional horizon of the revolutionary earth - as a relatively open set excised from the universal continuum - finds its equivalence with the open through asymptotic deepening of its geophilosophical synthesis and stretching its nested traumas.

Insofar as the revolution for and by the open begins from the inside (*viz.* regional enclosures and interiorized

Just as a politics devoid of the logic of real alternatives - concerned with both the question of methodological or

trans-modal freedom and the question of actively seeking alternatives to its very own existence - is but a counter-revolutionary mantrap, a realist philosophy without a science of openness and an ethics of humiliation can hardly be anything more than a testament to the overgrown lineage of planetary myopias.

#### Notes:

1. In order of the quotes: Freud 1961, 31, n.2; Freud 1977, 353; and Ferenczi 1994, 93.
2. On a systematic account of the open continuum as generic/super-multitude, reflexive/inextensible and modal/plastic, see Zalamea 2003, 115-162.
3. Here, trauma should be understood not as what is experienced but as a form of cut made by the real or the absolute in its own unified order; a cut that brings about the possibility of a localized horizon and a regional condensation.
4. In order to understand excisional cut of trauma, it would be helpful to make an analogy with the excision theorem in algebraic topology. According to the excision theorem, the subspace  $V$  can be excised or cut from the subspace  $U$  of the topological space  $S$  without affecting the relative homology: The closure of  $V$  lies in the interior of  $U$ , and  $U$  lies in  $S$ . The relative groups  $h(S/U)$  and  $h(S-V/U-V)$  are isomorphic. The excision of the set  $V$  does not affect the relative homology.
5. The ontogenic continuity of the organism manifests in the way the information content of the system is organized "in such a manner that the organism exhibits spatiotemporal continuity during ontogeny and that each stage maintains the viability of the organism." The continuity of the organism in terms of the unity and organization of its information is manifested by "such phenomena as cell adhesion and physiological integration". See Brooks and Wiley 1986, 48.
6. Eversion is the process of turning inside-out. Here it denotes Reich's concomitant turning of Ferenczi's theory of child abuse into an account of alien abduction and turning the deep-earth model immanent to Ferenczi's traumas inside-out so as to transform it into a Copernican recalibration of the earth in space.
7. This synthetic perspective especially becomes evident in the claims of those who return from abduction. Their physiology and somatic integrity have apparently been left intact save for inexplicable subtle changes experimented on their reproductive organs during abduction. The *abductee* is a mongrel capable of reproducing synthetic populations / perspectives which are neither strictly human nor purely alien proper.
8. The geophilosophical disillusionment of the "world centers" in the name of the trans-and-absolutely modern man disabuses as much the purported sponsors of culture and thought who are deluded with the geopolitical glory of world capitals as it thwarts the all-too-familiar scheme of those who search their own mastery and independence in self-seclusion, the morality of self-victimhood and the opportunistic discourse of the Other.
9. The self-renegotiation of the universal absolute does not slide into anything other than or outside of its absolute field. Yet in so far as it determinedly overcomes itself through ceaseless renegotiation of itself, it becomes territoric (rather than terrible) for any regional determination imposed upon it.
10. On the synthetic thought of the universal continuum as a pendulum weaving between integrals and differentials, see Zalamea 2009.

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### The Real and Nature: A Heretical Nature contra Philosophy's Nature

Philosophy is always at war with nature and nature respects no philosopher. But the nature, or "Nature" with the capital-N, that philosophy is at war with is a golem, or, in reality, a kind of negative-golem. For if the golem is an anthropomorphic being, created out of the mud and animated through quasi-religious magic, philosophy's golem is an anti-anthropomorphic being that is set loose tearing apart humanity bit by bit through the processes of decay and decomposition. This is the vision of nature we are presented by philosophers: either it is a transcendent quasi-divinity, which is beautifully teeming with life, or it is its corollary, a place where nothing is respected and only the order of death reigns. The nuances do matter, but in the end it is always the same: nature is something to be at war with. This with in "at war with" is ambiguous. It may mean that the philosopher, like a Deleuze, goes to war alongside of nature to struggle against the sad passions engendered by individual death. Or it may mean that one goes to war against nature, like a Badiou, in order to raise above any whole the grandeur of the Idea.

The creation of a subject, ultimately that is what philosophy's nature is, a subject to the rules of philosophy,

to the syntax of philosophy, that is then is then taken to be the grounding of those same rules and syntax. A non-anthropomorphic golem, a golem taken to have nothing to do with humanity except that humanity, like all bodies, will be devoured by it. Let us try a different strategy, one that refuses the philosophical construction of nature and instead looks to a nature that is radically immanent in-person. This notion comes, of course, from the non-philosophy of François Laruelle. The notion of thinking from radical immanence is an equivalent term to the Real. This Real, this radical immanence, is always unilaterally related to the process of creating a subject. While some have confused Laruelle's non-philosophy as an intense valorization of the de-humanizing powers of science, Laruelle's non-philosophy does not denigrate subjects, it only claims to understand them as not absolute. This de-absolutization of the subject is related to a scientific *posture*, but is not a scientism that grabs at empirical evidence and expands their significance. Instead it raises the subject into the grandeur that is the equality of all things before the Real. But this Real isn't a transcendent One, but the One that is radically immanent in what is lived. Not, to be clear, in what is within life, or what is living, but in the concrete actuality of the lived. This radical



immanence, then, is the lived reality of what it means to be prior to all subjective processes. And trying to think from that is much more difficult than to think only from the realm of the subject.

In this essay I give a brief argument for a theory of nature that is heretical.<sup>1</sup> From the perspective of philosophy's amphibology of nature as creative plenitude or the kingdom of death. It is heretical because it makes the claim that we can understand this amphibology as a process of creating a subject and as such open to radical revision, to a radical fabrication or philo-fiction. The non-philosopher is not at war with nature and she is unconcerned with the pettiness of whether or not nature "respects" her. So it is heretical because it refuses the conditions of war which philosophy labours under and it refuses them on the basis of a *gnosis*, a knowledge of those conditions. One of those conditions of war is the division of labour that philosophy has set between philosophy and science.

Consider the way that perhaps the most brilliant philosopher of science there has been, Edmund Husserl, has radicalized that separation. Husserl is not often thought of as a philosopher of science, but in developing his phenomenology he takes pains to create a truly interesting relationship between science and philosophy. Rather than simply providing a theory of science, he radicalizes the method of his philosophy incorporating a certain scientific attitude within his critique of science. It should be clear that, within the realms of philosophy, Husserl was practicing a guerilla war against the sciences, by using the resources of science against it in the name of philosophy. Husserl rejected a certain philosophy of science that

he saw at work in European human society. This he called the positivistic reduction of science, where science merely provided facts. This limiting of the meaning of science to the "factual sciences," or rather simply to those aspects of the sciences that are concerned with uncovering facts, is what is of concern for Husserl. His engagement with science, then, "concerns not the scientific character of the sciences but rather what they, or what science in general, had meant and could mean for human existence." (Husserl 1970, 5) The crisis of the sciences, then, is actually a crisis of human existence.

Husserl's claim is that the life-world is "dressed up" in the notions of mathematics which are absolutized, and though this leads to discoveries Husserl considers important, these notions ultimately confuse "true being [for] what is actually a method." (ibid., 51) What science requires, because science is in crisis, according to Husserl, is a philosophy that remembers the life-world, which is its "meaning-fundament." (ibid., 50) That is to say that the natural sciences remain naïve without any kind of fundamental inquiry into the very life of things, a transcendental subjectivity. How he gets to that transcendental subjectivity, however, is what is ingenious in Husserl. Notice that he accuses science divorced from the life-world as being naïve. (ibid., 59) Yet, the solution to that naivety is to plunge into it intentionally, whereas before one simply acted in it. This may become clearer if one considers this in light of Plato's familiar cave myth. There we have the prisoners, chained to a wall since birth and made to watch shadows of people, animals, and the like, dance on the wall of the cave. This is their only frame of reference so that they take, completely naturally, these shadows as truth. When one of the prisoners escapes,

whether through accident or intention, and emerges into the “real world,” he begins to see things as they really are or, at least, as *more* real than they are in the cave. Husserl, though, sees no reason to leave the cave. In fact, we have every reason to question the notion that outside the cave is the “real world.” What is outside the cave is just the world beyond the cave, the cave itself is part of the real world, as are the materials in the cave that hold the prisoners to the wall and the materials for projecting the shadows upon the wall. No, what the usual telling of Plato’s myth serves to do is provide a cover for a more insidious cave.

Husserl’s radical step is to perform an epochē, what is also called the reduction or bracketing, on what appears: “What is required, then, is a *total* transformation of attitude, a *completely unique, universal epochē*.” (ibid., 148) Where we stand, then, in this transcendental epochē is above the world, above the validity of the pregivenness of the world. (ibid., 150) This transcendental stance is above the flux of the world, above the subjective-individual consciousness and intersubjectiveconsciousness, it is in some sense grounded in a kind of cosmic dirt taken as separate from the world. This “unnatural attitude,” transcendental to the world, bestows on the philosopher a position above worldly interest. (cf. ibid., 175) The epochē is but a deepening of the scientific approach to thinking. The description of the philosopher who has undergone this transcendental epochē is not far off from the description of the scientist unconcerned with the consequences of his actions for the rest of humanity: he simply wants to know. Think of the scientists involved in the Manhattan project, who did not know what the effect of the atomic bomb would be, but who went out to the

desert, put on their goggles and detonated it to find out. They did this knowing that one possible scenario would be the complete destruction of the atmosphere, meaning the complete annihilation of all life on earth. This allows us to trace philosophy’s self-constructed division of labour with regard to science. In that regard it is telling that Husserl’s discussion of transcendental subjectivity, a life that runs through things, has nothing to do with the way that science thinks life. Because for Husserl the notion of being “scientific” is the equivalent of taking the red pill, falling into a second matrix, but falling deeper into illusion for thinking you have escaped it: “Thus nowhere is the temptation so great to slide into logical aporetics and disputation, priding oneself on one’s scientific discipline, while the actual substratum of the work, the phenomena themselves, is forever lost from view.” (ibid., 120)

Laruelle offers a radically different understanding of the relationship between philosophy and science. Rocco Gangle deftly captures the power of Laruelle’s non-philosophy when he writes, “François Laruelle’s non-philosophy marks a bold attempt to think the One, or Real outside of any correlation with Being and without reference to transcendence. It is an arduous and painstaking theoretical enterprise that must skirt the twin dangers of positivism on the one hand and false transcendentalism on the other.” (Gangle 2010, vi) In other words, Laruelle must navigate both scientism, or the erstwhile philosophical projection of science, and philosophy that takes itself as the guardian of thought - philosophy that takes itself as that which provides thought for science. This leads Laruelle to practice various “unified theories” where philosophy is introduced to other practices of thought. The goal in these dual introductions is not

to overdetermine the unphilosophical material (science, religion, etc.) with philosophy, but to challenge philosophy through the introduction and to treat both as simple material for thought.

In this way Laruelle radicalizes Husserl's guerilla war on science, for science is both treated as material and is materially a *posture* that thought takes in defense of the radical immanence of the human. The second aspect is the immanent aspect of science, in so far as it thinks from the Real rather than attempting to circumscribe and affect the Real.<sup>2</sup> The first part, however, has special status in this essay as it deals with the particular ideas and concepts operative in particular sciences and their relationship to non-philosophy. The goal of non-philosophy's thinking of the Real is always to free thought from the boundaries placed on it by specular forms of thought by, perhaps counter-intuitively, locating the radical autonomy of the Real from thought. With this in mind alongside the understanding of the generic identity of science as posture, we can see that not every science provides particular and specific forms of thought for freeing a non-standard philosophy, a wild thought (which is artificial as it is natural). Laruelle himself asks the question, "But is every science able to be utilized for this ultra-critical liberation of philosophy?" and answers, with obvious reference to Badiou, "Not every science is liberating for conceptual thought, for example set-theoretical mathematics seems to be by nature rather authoritarian, closed, and reinforces the sufficiency of philosophy, which then dreams of fiction only at its margins, a little bit like Plato." (Laruelle 2010, 490) The reference here to fiction is, again, a reference to the freeing of thought as practice in a philo-fiction, but what is important, again, is

that Laruelle is able to recognize the need for an organon of selection with regard to scientific material that is, in the light of the Real, equivalent to all material.

In Laruelle's latest book, *Philosophie non-standard*, the material that Laruelle thinks with philosophy, like two waves that come together to form a genuinely new wave that is not a synthesis of the two waves but is produced by them, is quantum mechanics. According to Laruelle quantum mechanics provides a true liberation for conceptual thought because, while remaining in the scientific posture that has a privileged relationship to the Real, it also "Weakens and disempowers philosophical sufficiency in order to free its power of invention [*pouvoir d'invention*]." (ibid.) One of the reasons that Laruelle is critical of Badiou's use of set-theory is because it replaces the Principle of Sufficient Philosophy with a Principle of Sufficient Mathematics. Instead of freeing thought, Badiou casts a metaphilosophy where philosophy may not be able to produce truths, but it alone thinks them across the multiple terrains of knowledge. Or, while Badiou argues that we must not suture philosophy to any particular truth-procedure, he nevertheless sutures Being to mathematics as revealing the Real of Being and thereby sutures the Real yet again to Being. The generic science that non-standard philosophy aims to be requires scientific material that under-determines philosophy, again in the manner already discussed.

So does scientific ecology meet this test or is it already too philosophical? Does it have its own Principle of Sufficient Eco-logic? It would seem that political ecology does provide this authoritarian, closed, reinforcing of

a kind of philosophical sufficiency. Often times in popular discourse this is the role that political ecology takes in the minds of some self-styled ecological philosophers and theologians, similar to Latour's understanding of capital-S Science that is mistakenly taken to provide the objective end to deliberation. It is this element of political ecology that Žižek, despite his underlying ignorance of scientific ecology, has rightly challenged in a number of his popular contrarian pieces and I suspect that Laruelle too is distrustful of political ecology. That said, Laruelle has never, to my knowledge, written deeply about ecology in his published books and the few places he does mention ecology it is also ambiguous as to his true view.

Nevertheless, let us consider the only sustained discussion of ecology I know of in Laruelle's work, which comes to us not as one of his published pieces but as one of the occasional "Non-Philosophical Letters" that he has posted on the website for the Organization Non-Philosophique Internationale entitled "L'impossible foundation d'une écologie de l'océan." The letter, published on May 7<sup>th</sup> of 2008, performs a thought experiment taking the common metaphor of philosophy as a dangerous sea and the philosopher as he who navigates that sea or the fisherman who fishes from it (found in Leibniz, Kant, and Nietzsche most famously, but most recently in Deleuze's book on Foucault) as its starting point. There is of course an obvious problem with this metaphor for the non-philosopher since the philosopher takes himself to be above the dangerous ocean, suggesting that there is a kind of foundation for an ecology separated from that ocean itself. In contradistinction the non-philosopher takes herself to be the boat: "Her posture (if we can put it this way) is that of a boat, and so her being-in-the-water can no longer be

a being-in-the-world." (Laruelle 2008) This will bear on his final remarks on the impossibility of the philosophical foundation in a rigorously immanent ecology of the ocean, but there is a less obvious problem and one that connects directly to his idempotence of philosophy and quantum mechanics in *Philosophie non-standard*.

Philosophy, Laruelle says, thinks in the posture of an element. It privileges thinking then from the dirt (called earth usually) or sometimes as fire, and this is reflected in its "corpuscular" posture tied to old forms of physics. Non-standard philosophy thinks according to the undulatory character of the waves and so the sea (rather than simply water) becomes an interesting metaphor-element to think from, though it should be noted that soil has a certain "wave like" quality as well. Instead of being tied to a corpuscular earth, secure in our foundations, or burning ourselves up in a divine fire, the non-philosopher sets out with wild abandon on the sea. This wild abandon renounces any claim to foundation, to the idea that the philosopher owns some bit of the earth, but instead that they are in-the-water without property rights, without ideational security: "It is against 'foundation' and other similar notions as transcendent idols against which we oppose the immanence of energy or the energy of immanence." (ibid.)

This then is where Laruelle's seeming distrust of ecology stems from; does it as a science engage in the same kind of philosophical idol-making as those philosophers who tie themselves to a secure foundation? Laruelle ends the article by calling for a "human ecology," a remark that might seem to parallel Pope Benedict XVI's nefarious

call to focus on human ecology after which the environment will benefit. This, however, is not the meaning behind Laruelle's use of the phrase "human ecology." Rather it speaks to a more rigorously immanent understanding of ecology that is called forth, but not developed, by Laruelle. To understand this better consider the final remarks of the essay. Laruelle first begins with his survey of the "situation of ecology:" "Ecology's situation is as always theoretically divided between philosophies that metaphorize *physis*, theologize it as a transcendent entity of 'Nature' [*la nature*], and the physico-chemical sciences, free in themselves, which inevitably break it up. Between all of them there are the juridico-political ideologies of the 'ecologists.'" (ibid.)<sup>3</sup> While Laruelle does not demonstrate a particularly strong understanding of the specifics of scientific ecology, this does suggest that he nevertheless accurately understands how ecology functions in philosophy, theology, and as distributed amongst a number of other scientific disciplines.

Laruelle suggests that a more unified form of ecology could be brought about by way of non-philosophy's "last instance:" "A human ecology in-the-last-instance will be theoretically more rigorous. As the man of the Last Instance is never a foundation, he must renounce or give up every 'earthly' or 'land-owning' foundation of an ecology of the ocean and start thinking the sea not as such but from itself, *according to the sea which is also human in the way which the human is every Last Instance*" (ibid.)<sup>4</sup> The meaning of "human ecology" then refers to the particular immanence of man (as species-being) that non-philosophy has tried to think from its inception, rather than measuring the worth of things according to a transcendent notion of Man (what Laruelle would call

the-Man): "Man can finally see his fixed and moving image, his intimate openness as the greatest secret in the ocean. 'Free men always cherish the sea...'" (ibid.)<sup>18</sup>

The purpose of engaging with scientific ecology is not simply to accept its concepts and ideas as if the project was simply a kind of ecological positivism. Rather, the task is to think infect philosophical and theological thinking on nature with certain ecological concepts that will free philosophy to think nature free our thinking from the golem of nature, either as secular kingdom of death or as quasi-divinity. As Laruelle writes, "Nature is given an other-than-reductive meaning in this impossible ontological foundation and/or that physical powerlessness in this giving does not have definitive limitations but inhuman misunderstandings or disoriented interpretations." (ibid.) We can change the way we understand nature philosophically by thinking from the foundation-less posture of a philo-fiction derived from philosophy and science.

For the remainder of this essay I will sketch out just such a philo-fiction combining the ecological theory of niche with the philosophico-religious figure of Job. Biodiversity is a well-known ecological concept that has a lesser known, and lesser understood, corollary concept that ecologists refer to as the niche. If biodiversity is the recognition that there is a principle drive to diversification within the biosphere, niche theory is the attempt to give shape to the functioning of biodiversity. For biodiversity is a principle derived from the research into the proliferation (one might even say clamour) of species that are identified by the ecologist as those populations that can freely breed under "natural" conditions. Niche theory is able to locate



the ways that clamour comes into a stochastic harmony. This stochastic harmony is described by Paul S. Giller as population interaction with other populations (this grouping of populations is called the community) and the wider ecosystem (Giller 1984, 1, 9). Giller clarifies the strict definition of a community writing that a community is “a combination of plant, animal, and bacterial populations, interacting with one another within an environment, thus forming a distinctive living system with its own composition, structure, environmental relations, development and function.” (ibid., 1)

Niches are tied more closely to the community rather than the ecosystem as a whole, though again the confusion with regard to scale of ecosystems makes this a somewhat unclear point. Giller helps clarify the place of the niche when he writes, “The ecological niche is a reflection of the organism’s or species’ place in the community, incorporating not only tolerances to physical factors, but also interactions with other organisms.” (ibid., 7) In a non-technical sense, though none the less true, niche refers to what lines of sustenance are open to the organism or species. That is, a niche is that place, within a network or mesh of interactions (these are always approximate analogies for the mathematical model of the energy exchange), where an organism can find enough energy to continue to live while passing on its genetic information. Now the niche of one species may be wide enough to allow that species to spread across the ecosystem, and even, as in the case of human beings, to dominate the ecosystems they exist within. This idea of domination refers to the intensity of the effects that this species has on the particular ecosystem. So the human being has obviously had a high magnitude of effects on the ecosystems they inhabit and has even shaped them.

This limits the niches of other animals, while opening up other niches. If the human species were to disappear the ecosystems they had inhabited would no doubt change fundamentally, which is not necessarily true of species who have smaller niche widths. (cf. Wilson 2001, 217)

In practice most organisms and species are limited or “checked” by other organisms and species. This should not suggest a rather medieval notion of hierarchy based on an anthropocentric understanding of power, but in ecological theory hierarchy is always more complex and open to reconceptions of power more akin to the focus on potentiality that has been somewhat common in European political philosophy since the 1970’s. For bacteria, that black hole of biodiversity, may end up being a dominant species or at least one that checks the niche width of other organisms and species in a significant way. This may seem like a strange statement but it is because “in the real world” the environmental gradient (or space) where niches exist “is not measured in ordinary Euclidean dimensions but in fractal dimensions. Size depends on the span of the measuring stick or, more precisely, on the size of the foraging ambit of the organisms dwelling on the tree. In the fractal world, an entire ecosystem can exist in the plumage of a bird.” (ibid., 196-198)<sup>5</sup>

Yet, even with this  $n$ -dimensional space of the bird’s plumage or the single stick in the forest, there is always some check on the hypervolume. This check is referred to as the principle of competitive exclusion, which holds that if two or more species coexist there should be some ecological difference between them. (Giller 1984, 9) This is not an iron-clad law as Wilson reminds his readers.



For even though one dynasty of species cannot tolerate another dynasty of a closely similar kind and “when one group radiates into a part of the world, another group must retreat,” this is only a statistical tendency that clues the ecologist in to the likelihood of some ecological diversity at work where two seemingly similar species do coexist. (Wilson 2001, 111) There is something interesting at work here which tells us something about the weakness of a crude quantitative measure with regard to dealing with the ethical issues raised by ecology, for it may seem that a species should simply be considered endangered if it has a relatively small quantitative population. Yet, it is its niche wide that is really the matter of concern, such that a population can be large and even widespread, but if its niche is scarce the species resilience is weak and it is threatened. A change in the wider community structure could lead to disaster for the species. (ibid., 217)

The concept of niche is a good example where the philosopher goes wrong with his vision, where the attention he gives is determined by his philosophical faith, allowing him to cast derision on the unthinking scientist, and so he may see the niche as the old philosophical idea of balance. Or take the theologian, with his own faithful attention, who may see in the niche nothing but an ontology of violence. In truth, neither balance nor ontological violence is required by the concept of the niche when it is placed in an immanent posture and extended to thought itself. *The* concept of the niche has to be thought through the concept of the never-living *rather* than in the dialectic of life and death that both the philosopher and theologian persist in thinking through. What the niche concept does point to is a generic posture of all living organisms. Not that of violence, if by violence one means Greek *agon* or of the

violence committed against the hostage, but of immanent struggle in the World as separate from the notion of a “whole.” Each community is a stranger to the biosphere in so far as it can be identified as a community and if it plays its part in the functioning of the whole it does so without some kind of intentionality. The biosphere simply is the various community-identities functioning within the same *n*-dimensional space.

The niche is the production of the living against the requirement of death at work also in nature. Yet, this protest would be in vain if it simply hoped to overcome death by destroying death. Biologists have a name for the living form of this desire, they call it cancer. For cancer is simply a living cell refusing to expire, refusing the programmed death of apoptosis and thus destroying the wider system it is within. The niche is an expression of protest against the necessity of death in so far as it pays no attention to death *as such*. Death never determines the niche in the way it determines philosophical ethics or religious fantasies of overcoming death.

We can illustrate this argument by way of a creative recasting of the persona of Job; a persona that has been used both by philosophers and theologians. For if we think of the niche as a resistance to death, as a resistance to the terms set by Nature that philosophers hallucinate, then what the niche shows is that we can discuss nature as perverse against the terms set by Nature, just as Job perversely stood up against the terms set by God refusing to accept the parameters set by God that his friends hallucinated. I will use the construction of Job found in Antonio Negri's *The Labour of Job: The Biblical Text as a Parable of Human Labour* because of its ontological and ethical reading (the

two are the same thing for Negri and, he argues, for Job). In other words, being and ethics are not divided and separated in the story of Job. If this is true then neither is the human and non-human divided and separated, for both share some common ontological basis, the same basis that Negri reads into Job (while himself not going so far to the creatural generic as we are): the experience of immense, immeasurable pain. Here the biblical text is not a parable of human labour alone, but of generic creatural labour.

According to Negri's reading of Job, this figure is not pitiful as he stands in pain against a backdrop of tragedy, but is a figure of power as ability or potentiality against Power as constituted and oppressive. In his power Job calls the amoral omnipotence of the divine to account for itself. Such a demand is rhetorically complex, for the protest of Job must not make an appeal to God simply as judge, for "*God is both one of the parties and the judge. The trial is therefore a fraud.*" (Negri 2009, 27)<sup>6</sup> For when Job opens his mouth he will have already condemned himself before the one who judges:

Though I am innocent, I cannot answer him;  
I must appeal for mercy to my accuser.  
If I summoned him and he answered me,  
I do not believe he would listen to my voice.  
For he crushes me with a tempest,  
And multiplies my wounds without cause;  
He will not let me get my breath  
But fills me with bitterness.  
If it is a contest of strength, he is the strong one!  
If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?  
Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me;  
Thought I am blameless, he would prove me perverse  
(Job 9.15-20 NRSV)

By making a defense Job would have to capitulate to the value of justice implicit in the omnipotency of the divine. He would capitulate to an image of value whereby it is just that God, as immeasurable Power, is both the judge and a party to the trial. But in refusing to demand such a trial, in demanding that the omnipotent reveal himself, there is a recognition of the impossibility of a real dialectics in the face of the immeasurable. This parallels precisely the same problem of orthodox theology which sees only death in the struggle of niches as well as in the naturalist who sees "the natural" as the immeasurable Power and source of value.

Negri thinks this relationship and its refusal in the light of the political and philosophical problem of measure:

*The immeasurable has become disproportion, imbalance, organic prevalence of God over man. The fact that God is presented as immeasurable demonstrates - once again - that all dialectics are impossible. The trial is not dialectical, it is not and cannot be. It is not dialectical because it cannot be "overcome;" or rather, it can be only by negating one of the terms - but this is not dialectics, it is destruction. (ibid., 28)*

Instead Job matches this immeasurable of Power with the immeasurable of his pain. Power in the sense of ability to act or potentiality is the daughter of pain. The creature, as witnessed to most obviously for human beings in the human creature, is able to turn the immeasurable of pain into a source of immeasurable charity and grace. Pain becomes a means of grace, but not a means that comes from the outside of the creature, but an immanent means to the suffering flesh. The immeasurable of charity shares in

the immeasurability of pain, for both are that which measures. They become the true measure as immeasurable, as that which can never be measured much like the never-living is beyond the measure of the dialectic of life and death (more on this below). Pain and grace/charity measure the World and reveal that the immeasurability of the world as a immeasurable shame; as a system organized by death and alienation as common (somewhat different from Negri's use of the concept of World and closer to Laruelle's gnostic understanding) the World is but a hallucination of value. Rather, the creation of the World is birthed from the pain and grace of the creatural earth and sea. The World is only absolute as a contingency of the creatures creating it. Again, consider the words of Negri when he writes:

But charity cannot be measured because it allows us to participate in the power of creation. In this way the problem of the reconstruction of value can be placed on a new footing. When power opposes Power, it has become divine. It is the *source of life*. It is the *superabundance of charity*. The world can be reconstructed on this basis, and only what is reconstructed in this way will have value; it will continue to not have a measure, because the power that creates has no measure. (ibid., 75)

Death orders the World because death becomes a common measure to all of life. (ibid., 81) But in pain this common measure is rendered as simply the object of desire. A desire to eliminate death and pain. To subsume the relative measurable cause of the immeasurable of suffering into a messianic future where the immeasurable of grace reigns. Such grace is the power of production produced by pain. In the story of Job there is a direct correlation between the mismatched dialectical relationship between God and the human being that produces suffering. Job

breaks this mismatched dialectic by seeing God. By his protest Job demands that God reveal himself and in so doing Job tears away the absolute transcendence of God. By seeing God, through the immeasurable of God revealed as a body open to vision, Job is able to share in the divine. The immeasurable character of pain and grace is no longer organized hierarchically, but through a simple vision, a knowledge that is salvific.

Negri at points comes close to affirming the dialectic of life and death, and we must mark out a non-philosophical difference. The immeasurable of man is indeed pain, but the creation of pain arises out of the relationship between the living, the dead and the never-living. Thus, whether it is the dialectic between life and death or a non-dialectical relationship between the two, there is a third term that stands apart from this relationship and determines it. This is neither God nor the Being of man where the singular meets the universal, but simply the earth as such (and by this I am of course expressing under a more poetic name the biosphere, which includes all the foundationless fluxes of earth, ocean, atmosphere, molten lava, etc.). The never-living aspect of potential action, the appeal to the earth as immeasurable source of creation, is what allows for Job to go beyond not just death, but the life that births it. For what is it that God appeals to in his justification of himself? In Chapters 38-41, where God makes his justification, he appeals to creation, including all the living things as well as some fantastic chimeric monsters. These monsters, the behemoth and the leviathan, are interpreted philosophically by Negri respectively as primordial force and the primordial chaos and violence that are the ground of production, without measure or law. (ibid., 52) In appealing to his strength, his Power, God shows

that Power to be contingent on being able to master this ground. Interestingly, in the biblical text, while God takes credit for the creation of both he never comes out and says that he can control them, but in a rather bombastic style depending on a series of rhetorical questions merely suggests this.

So what does this ancient biblical story have to do with the contemporary ecological concept of the niche? Negri's retelling of Job is not merely a parable in a weak sense, but it is an argument concerning the ontological constitution of power as resisting Power. The lived reality of what it means to be a human subject in pain. We can extend the persona of Job to creation generally simply by changing some of the terms. So, rather than Job innocently suffering in the face of a disproportionate and amoral Power, we have all creatures suffering before a disproportionate and amoral Power of Nature. The creation of a niche by a species witnesses to the contingency of such a Nature. It would not exist without perverse production on earth of new species. Every time a new species emerges and a niche is formed (remember immanence is at work here) the suffering of that species calls for Nature to account for itself. If this cry of violence from the earth and the response from Nature were to be given in language, what could Nature appeal to in its justification? For the violence at work in creation is not immeasurable. It may be overwhelming at times. It may even be evil. But, it is always relative and dependent upon the creation of niches for its existence and in this way the niche, the creature, is not alienated in its identity by that violence. By coming into the ecosystem, exchanging energy, it comes to resist and go beyond death, if only for a moment. The creativity of the niche is the immeasurable and as such is a certain

site of the perversity of nature. Just as Job was perverse in his acceptance of God's unlimited Power and yet still required that God answer for it, so the niche is perverse in the face of the unlimited Power of Nature.

What is common to creatural being is pain. One species causes pain to another in the working out of niche boundaries. But corollary to this pain the necessity for biodiversity that niches witness to. There is then a certain creatural sociality as universality at work in the pain of living amongst one another.<sup>7</sup> This pain is primary and emotions like fear or anger are but secondary effects that are contingent upon the organization of that pain in the creatural socius. Even violence is secondary to this pain, in so far as that violence can be turned into a peaceable force by way of creation. It isn't my intent to argue for an overturning of death in the ecosystem, but simply to disempower death, just as Job disempowers God. The niche shows that death, as well as life, is secondary to a more immanent creative power at work as nature against Nature. Niches witness to the exile of nature from hypostasized Nature. The refusal of the value of Nature as hallucination of the immeasurable in the name of a grace of nature that is witnessed to in the perverse creative power of new species producing ways of living indifferently to death.

This then is a philo-fiction created by way of a relativized analogy. Within a wider ecology (of) thought analogy can come to function as a kind of energy that is exchanged between and connects various creatures to one another in terms of fabulative likeness. That is, rather than a complete rejection of anthropomorphism, we can begin

to think of the relative analogies between human beings and other creatures as an effect of the Real. The complete rejection of anthropomorphism is a false dream of philosophers for ends up putting a barrier between human beings and other creatures as it sets up the old division between humans and Nature. Human beings are part of the biosphere, they are natural, and as such there are things in nature that have the form, *morphe*, of human beings. That form will have commonalities with other creatures, while of course having limits as well. But this thinking of a kind of relative analogy between creatures can be creative of not just anthropomorphism but also arbormorphism or elephamorphism, This relative form of analogy is productive of an inconsistent and open ethic. Such an ethic operates through the direction of attention to the suffering and exile common to all creatures. This ethic of attention needs no other reason than their existence to care for others. By way of a certain productive analogy of beings with the human we can begin to change our attention. But this attention is always guarded from being misdirected from suffering by way of a recognition of its ungrounded character as a fabulation. Thus, when we speak of the human or any creature we are free to do so in terms of a mass creatural subject that includes the human alongside of the tree and elephant, but we do not move from there to a conception of the Real as such.

#### Notes:

1. I have made a much more sustained argument in my doctoral thesis *Ecologies of Thought: Thinking Nature in Philosophy, Theology, and Ecology* (introduction and table of contents available in Smith 2011a).
2. See my forthcoming *A Stranger Thought: An Introduction to the Non-Philosophy of François Laruelle* for a longer discussion of the intricacies of non-philosophy (Smith 2011).
3. Laruelle often indicates he is talking about a false transcendent version of a concept by emphasizing the definite article. This works better in French than in English, as “the nature” is not idiomatic. Often, though, I am forced to translate it this way to retain Laruelle’s meaning. In this case, however, a capital N serves the same purpose.
4. For a historical discussion of the difficulties capitalism has encountered with the ocean as regards property rights see Radkau 2008, 86-93.
5. Cf. Giller 1984, 10 where he writes “Each environmental gradient can be thought of as a dimension in space. If there are  $n$  pertinent dimensions the niche can be described in terms of an  $n$ -dimensional space, or hypervolume.”
6. As is common with translations of Negri and Deleuze and Guattari, when power is spelled with a lowercase p it is translating the French *puissance* or the Italian *potenza* and when it is spelled with an uppercase P it translates the French *pouvoir* or the Italian *potere*.
7. Cf. Ibid, 50, 73 for a discussion of this idea as it is found in the Book of Job.

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Artan  
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### Provocation to a Final Resistance of Truth: Ethics of a Heretical Discourse

It often happens that we are compelled to look at the World through the spectre of established discourses of thought and announcements that attempt to think, explain and speak of the *World* in a Foucauldian manner of systematization. The postmodern explosion of discourses that has produced an unprecedented vastness of numerous philosophical theory has inescapably been pinned to the regularities of Foucauldian discursive formation. In criticizing the essence of this pinning process of philosophical theory Katerina Kolozova in *The Real and "I: On the Limit and the Self* deploys a radical criticism of the inherent auto-legitimization and auto-constitution present in the founding conceptual constructs of the discourse, providing a way-out through Laruellian non-philosophy (Kolozova 2006). Non-philosophy's *thought in terms with the Real*, which would escape the present doctrinal discursive regularities, is what she proposes for an entirely different discursivity. It is precisely that kind of discursivity, one that operates in Laruellian terms of the *Real* that I will put in line with Badiou's ethics in order to move towards a possible ethical discourse.

Namely, Badiou's ethics is one of truths, one that reveals itself in the fidelity to the events that supplement

a situation by thinking that situation according to those events. Events come upon the subject as unpredictable and mean nothing according to the prevailing discourses, thus truth is nowhere to be found in the discourse un-supplemented by events. Foucauldian discursive construction of truths through relational analyses that remain within the predictable world of established knowledge and prevailing language is thus an unethical discursive procedure (*in relation to truths*). With thought and language as discourse's main operatives, an ethical discourse must therefore inherently involve ethics of truth in their respective operations.

To do this, Badiou requires a constitution of a subject of truth, the one that will link the discursive things he knows via the effects of being seized by the unknown (*the experience of the encounter*, Badiou 2001, 40-57). It is the decision of fidelity to what has seized a subject that produces him through the event as a subject of truth in relation to his situation (*or his World*). Thus events are only possibilities for truth procedures dependant on the *decision* of the subject to enact his fidelity in relation to the situation. *Thus the truth is reducible to a subjective decision of fidelity!* Badiou himself points to the

uncertainty of fidelity, which is a matter of interest as the sole principle of perseverance (*of the human animal or the "some-one"*) as *perseverance in being* as opposed to a disinterested-interest that would count for a pure interest which would preserve "some-one" into eventual fidelity. It is exactly due to this uncertainty, he says, that there is a place for the ethics of truth (ibid., 69). Making this assertion, Badiou does nothing unexpected, he actually entirely employs the known philosophy of differentiation, differentiation of the ethics of truth *through its other* that is the one of the non-fidelity. At this point Badiou's ethics do not help to fully move towards sketching out, as Kolozova says, *a radically different (ethical) discourse*. It does not help simply because its founding operational method is one of (philosophical) decisions which throw us back to the ones employed by the classical discourses. To be clear, Badiou sets in motion a whole new set of radical (in philosophical terms) ethics of truth in relation to the prevailing discourses, but the very problem of these ethics is its radicality beyond philosophy. In continuing to relate to his ethics, I will depart from his philosophy taking along only his radical concept of truth (coming from the unknown/unpredictable) in a quest for a radical ethics out of philosophy, into non-philosophy.

In a fashion similar to Badiou's one of the truth procedure, Laruelle seeks the production of truths as a result of an encounter (event) with the Real that puts forward a *posture of thought*. That is a way of theorizing in correlation with the Real, a correlation that does not attempt to grasp it, but it only correlates with it by way of acknowledging it to be the decisive instance of legitimization of the produced truth. (Kolozova 2006, 69) It might seem at this moment that the posture of thought (or thinking in

terms of the Real) is the way forward in sketching an ethical discourse, one that appropriates Kolozova's reading of Laruelle:

...Hence, the Thought in terms of the Real is "absolute" in a very distinct sense: it is solitary in its singularity, an effort of Thought exposed in its ultimate incapacity to grasp and control the Rule-of-the-Real, yet attempting to correlate but with it, without the support of a doctrinal web made of philosophical decisions. (ibid., 41)

It is exactly this *indifference* to the philosophical decisions that is radically different in non-philosophy's account of a different doctrine.

Since the sole element of truth production-procedure is the fidelity to the truth that has emerged through the experience with the Real (*the lived*), then we must explore the performance of this fidelity (already explored above in Badiou's philosophy) within the field of non-philosophy. Precisely here, non-philosophy offers a radically different account for fidelity, one that is indifferent to decisions (present in Badiou) and that is more faithful to the true nature of the encounter/event. Badiou says on the effects of the event that "being altogether there (in the eventual site) one is also suspended, broken, annulled and disinterested." Finding himself in the midst of an event, the some-one that has experienced an undergoing passing through him that has supplemented his being (the excess beyond himself) is faced with the imperative of dealing/linking with the things he knows, the present in the situation (language/discourse). While Badiou draws a lot of his philosophy of the event/encounter (with the Real) from Lacanian psychoanalysis, he misses the

crucial moment (which in Badiou is *a choice* to move within a situation supplemented by the event) of fidelity formation. Whereas Lacan ascribes a deterministic nature to the event (or *Tuché* which he borrows from Aristotle and translates it as *the encounter with the real* (Lacan 1998, 53)) over what Badiou calls fidelity (where I believe Kolozova does more justice to the nature of its formation by naming it “a call to action” by Trauma): “Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the Real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it - in the form of the trauma, *determining all that follows*, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin?” (ibid., 54-55) It is exactly the traumatic nature of the encounter/event that *determines all that follows* rendering a decision to fidelity impossible. Thus there cannot be any talk of uncertainty (over the possible course of the interest, that of preserving in being or preserving in the disinterested) which in Badiou is the reason why there is a place for ethic of truths. What remains from Badiou’s philosophy of the event are the radical truths steaming out of truth procedures, but what fails the test in much of Badiou’s own terms is the ethics which is reduced in the classical philosophical decision of differentiation through the other. This move fundamentalizes the decision as such, as the core principal move of ethics which then can easily be applied to the discursive production of truths, running from one decision to another, which is in contradiction with Badiou’s truth procedures.

A radical question appears when exploring the fidelity/call to action of the subject who has experienced the trauma as the effect of the Real, One that is related to the post-traumatic actions of the subject. This question

can be summarized as follows: How does the subject (of truth), which Kolozova sees as the one that is borne out of the very necessity to incessantly strive to avoid the traumatic experience - the immediacy of the Real (Kolozova 2009, 9), continue to think in terms with the Real (the immediacy of which is Trauma) which he strives to avoid? Striving to avoid the real does not lead to successful avoidance of the Real, it is rather exactly this possibility that brings forward the subject himself (who as such can then think in terms of the Real). Kolozova brings up Žižek’s epistemic possibility that is one of antagonism, further claiming that “Antagonism as Real or, rather, the Real as antagonism is what conditions the Subject, what grounds its very possibility.” (Ibid..) If this antagonism that produces the subject who is born in the escape from the experienced is The Real, then thinking in terms of The Real would imply thinking in terms of some antagonism, which implies some kind of opposition. Self-opposition in thinking by the subject fulfils the non-philosophical proposal for thinking in terms of the Real as thinking by way of abandoning Thought’s auto-referential obsession (by way of self-situating with respect to the Real) performs the theoretical gesture of its own self-suspension. (Kolozova 2006, 74) Thus this gesture of self-suspension of thought (in Terms with the Real) can be said to be inherent in the Real itself (as antagonism).

I believe that it is possible to explore another possibility in the form of a motivation to think in terms with the Real which rests on the search of some presence (an element of trauma) induced in the subject that has experienced an encounter with the Real in the form of a more primordial motivation than the trauma, but which is itself induced by the experience of that trauma. This motivation, different

from the trauma (which induces the subject to avoid the immediacy of The Real), fascinates the subject as a sheer possibility of trauma (first effects of the taking place of an encounter). This motivation/fascination correlates with The Real through establishing the fidelity in terms with it (the Real) which then makes the immediacy of the Real (traumatic experience) possible. The traumatic experience conditions the motivation/fascination in as much as it conditions its own taking place. Without this fidelity, a primordial fidelity, the “some-one” might attempt to avert the continuation of the taking place of the traumatic experience, which is needed in order for the subject to be born out of the very necessity to incessantly strive to avoid it. Such is this primordially of the motivation/fascination, which is always already inscribed in the subject as a condition for his becoming. *A fidelity par excellence* which, by the virtue of the experienced, gives birth to the subject who is “called into action” by the very (traumatic) experienced. The call into action is a “call to think” in terms with the Real.

The always occurring fidelity/“call to action”/*Continuer!* (Lacan) of the lived is a fidelity to think according to the event (Badiou) or in terms with The Real (Laruelle). The subject who was created by the passing through him of the undergoing, the subject that is born out of the very necessity to incessantly strive to avoid it, is always a subject (without the Badiouian uncertainty whether the “some-one” will answer the call). This subject in Laruellian terms is based on the Lived as its prelinugual real from which it is alienating through the instance of the Stranger (constituted by the trauma of estrangement). In Badiou, subjectivity originates in the event as that interruption of consistency through which the void’s inconsistency is summoned to

the surface of a situation, but the problem here is that the interruption in consistency is decisional.

To phrase this in Badiou’s own language, the truth’s procedure that is initiated by pure chance/accident in multiple situations is indifferent to the “subjective” decision of the subject to enact his fidelity or not to do so in regard to thinking the situation according to the event. Fidelity understood in the sense of relentless alienation from the inalienable immanence is the kind of fidelity that always produces a subject. This contention, that the subject resulting from an event/lived is a subject of truth, has nothing in common with what Hallward calls a moralizing presumption that “every human animal is a subject.” (Hallward 2003, 143) It is so simply because we employ the term subject here (and now) only to denote the stage at which the truth procedure/trauma *real-izes this subject* (through the process of subjectivation) and who as such is devoid of any worldly/discursive/social connotation. This is exactly what Hallward says further about Badiou, Lacan and Žižek, that to them subjectivation is essentially indifferent to the business and requirements of life as such. (ibid., 143) The claim that I make is that it is also *indifferent* to any ethical possibility at this moment. This is so because thought in terms of The Real/in accordance with the event is not a recognizable truth, although it is *transmitted to the subject* from the event in the lived which is coded. Kolozova defines this thought as “absolute” in a very distinct sense: it is solitary in its singularity, an effort of Thought exposed in its ultimate incapacity to grasp and control the Rule-of-the-Real, yet attempting to correlate but together with it, without the support of a doctrinal web made of philosophical decisions. (Kolozova 2006, 41)

The thought in terms of the Real/according to the event, always takes place in a particular situation to which the void of the event has belonged, and thus the truth to be produced is a truth for that situation. We can term “*the site of primary resistance*” the instance of thought correlating with the Real, the one that Laruelle calls a posture of thought. I call this process a *primary resistance*, exactly because it is here that the thought liberates itself from the obsession of genuinely being a (philosophical) thought, it is just a posture and it is a thought only because it correlates to the Real. Without this correlation, a pure posture fails to be any thought that can force the mediation of what is remembered into the discursive, and thus it is not a thought. Therefore, a posture is not a characteristic of the thought, it is what remains of thought which is exposed to The Real in its attempt to grasp it, but which fails to do so in the last instance. It is exactly this failure that leaves the thought in terms of The Real emptied and thus it appears, as Kolozova says, as a purposely produced crack within the always already contextualised thought. (ibid., 71)

To preserve this posture - keeping the opening alive - means keeping the “link” of the “primary resistance” alive while engaging in “*the last resistance*,” the one of the effectuation/mediation of the truth in the discursive world (of the Language).

The “site of the final resistance,” being the discourse/language, is all that we have at our disposal as subjects (thinking in terms/accordance with the event/Real) to effectuate the fidelity that is to us a truth which is already actualized as a new (discursive/linguistic) situation. Thus

the “final resistance” amounts to this actualization of the truth as a new situation, the *becoming of the truth through language*. Both Badiou and Laruelle engage in the operation of handling the “last resistance” before a truth actualizes as a new situation, an engagement that follows the same line, although I believe that Badiou has a higher (disinterested) interest to preserve that which itself opposes perseverance, being in correlation with the Real.

In understanding Laruelle’s handling of the actualization of the truth in a new situation it is valuable here to quote Kolozova:

The Real imposes its own syntax - it cannot and does not establish perfect correspondence with a doctrine (a “philosophy”), it cannot be reflected by or reflect an entire theoretical universe. The Real, inasmuch as it is “the Lived,” produces a “syntax” consisted of the symptomatology it displays in its uniqueness; the “behavior” of the Real can be “cloned,” says Laruelle, into and from a concept. The Concept (the “Transcendental”) and the Real belong to two entirely different orders, the first to that of Transcendence and the latter to that of Immanence. The two can never be reduced to one another - the Transcendental can attempt to “describe” (to “clone”) the Real by virtue of acknowledging that it can never have the “same structure” (Laruelle 1989, 50, Kolozova 2009, 7).

When Badiou, on the other hand, brings in what he calls “subject-language,” the language in which the truth is denominated, he immediately points to the fact that this language does not have a referent in the situation (knowledge/the discursive; Badiou 2005, 398) which means that it voids the phrases of this language of any referential (primitive) content.



The subject-language involves the logic of difference which is visible only from within. (Žižek 2001) This language does not attempt to describe another meaning (hidden in the kernel of the real), it essentially empties the language of what it refers to in the situation, which Badiou calls *primitive givens of knowledge*. The reference will be given to the statements only when the situation will accommodate the truth by which it has been supplemented. Its emptiness refers to the fullness to come in the Lacanian manner: “A subject always declares meaning in the future anterior.”

Elaborating the method of nomination (naming), Badiou points out that the crucial matter is what a name refers to which is precisely an indiscernible part of the situation. The nomination by the subject (language) is always under condition constrained to refer solely to what the situation presents. The names do not refer to anything in the situation, but they do designate terms “will have been” presented in a new situation that comes about through the very operation of the subject and his fidelity. (Badiou 2005, 400-406)

We find in Badiou this *naming* which is something that is similar to Laruelle’s cloning. Laruelle clones The Real into and from a concept, while they both belong to two different orders and Badiou names the truth “to be,” which verifies the name by virtue of its becoming. The language present in the discursive world/situation involves the Real through concepts, through attempting to describe it, and in Badiou it involves the truth through a creative process of naming. What is essential is that the discursive language that we know does not change under

the effect of the Real/event, but it rather says the truth through the same (old) names which refer to something in the new situation, that something which is the truth that was accommodated in the situation through those names. It is thus the resistance which exists in this process of cloning and naming, the resistance of concepts becoming *radical concepts* and the resistance of names becoming truths that fights the *primitive* in the self-legitimizing nature of the discourse. The concepts and names perform this resistance through what Badiou calls “Forcing” and what Laruelle calls “thought of force.” Forcing is the making of a statement (which uses naming) that can only be verified in a future situation, one which the forcing itself helps bring about, while it is the truth (referenced by a name by the subject in the new situation) that forces the situation to accommodate it. The statement, says Badiou, can be forced by certain terms and not by others and this depends on the chance of the enquiries (ibid., 404). This presupposes that there is a generic truth in existence (outside the world), but which nonetheless can be believed by the subject who, through his fidelity to call into action by the event, moves on to discover what he has invented through the process of experiencing the encounter with the real and resisting (creatively naming) in the last site, that of language. Laruelle’s “thought (of) force” comes from its determination in the last instance, which uses radical concepts that correlate with the Real (as naming correlates with the event), which are necessary to achieve this “thought of force.”

The subject in the linguistic (final) site (of resistance) is the very operator of truth inasmuch as he produces it, without knowing it in the new situation. Heunder takes these operations without knowing the truth, because the statements of the subject-language he has made for the event can, by

chance of enquiry through *Forcing*, force the situation to accommodate the truth. Similarly, the “thought (of) force,” which I call the “*final site of resistance*,” cannot be such without cloning the real using radical concepts.

An ethical question arises here. It seems that in order for the language to mediate the truth, through naming or radical concepts, it must operate through a kind of requirement that the concepts must be radical and names should not mean anything for the discursive/language of the situation. To clarify the possible confusions, that might arise from embarking on a search for unique privileged concepts and names (as qualified bearers of truth to be mediated), the best way is to go from the supplemented situation by the event/encounter in which the truth is always already mediated (through concepts and naming) to the nature of the encounter/real, to what happens when the real/event disposes its effects on the subject. Thus, there must be some new meaning present in the language that addresses/describes the supplemented of the situation in relation/ac-cordance with that which has supplemented it (the Real/Event). Only then can we speak of a procedure of truth to have taken place. So it seems that the actualization of the event (truth) is bound by some change (novelty in Badiou) which effectuates itself only after that event has taken place as a result of that effectuation.

What has happened, then, if there is no change in the discourse/language/situation after the *resistance* which happens as the result of the fidelity to the event/the Real? If there is no way to decide (Badiou) upon the fidelity and if there is always a *potential subject* produced by the event/encounter/trauma which, via the traumatic/

fascination, induces his fidelity/“call into action” to link (primary resistance) what has happened to him with what he knows, then we must look at what takes place in the final resistance. The instance of the mediation of the truth (always already mediated, but not in the last instance) via the language/the discursive. I propose to name this second site of resistance of the truth *the site of the ethics* (of truth). Cloning the real through radical concepts and naming the unnameable which might later become a truth is, radically, a *provocation*, not a prescribed procedure (with characterisations of proper concepts and names for the purposes of truth). The concepts are termed as radical only because they distinguish from the ones (which always retain the potential [Badiou] of radicality in another supplemented situation) the “thought (of) force” cannot use in order to fulfil its induced unilateral fidelity (of primary resistance) to the sheer taking place of the Real. Thus these concepts are not radical in the sense that they differ from other concepts present in the discourse, their radicality stems from the fact that they succeed in correlating with the real, in and for a given situation, to which the event of the void belonged.

Similarly, the names of Badiou’s subject-language are not particular names that have the affinity to be emptied of (a primitive) reference according to the knowledge of the situation in the midst of an event of that situation. This language is used to denominate the truth as an enquiry in order to state what an event has inaugurated/promised, the truth which is not yet mediated (it is still indiscernible), but denominated. The names are not predetermined in their ability to name the truth in the supplemented situation, but, to the contrary, it is the fact that their enquiry succeeds in referring to something different (the

indiscernible, by accommodating it as a truth in the situation), then what they referred to in the situation (when the truth was indiscernible) makes them names for the purpose of truth, which has been produced through the event of the void of that particular situation. The subject thus becomes a subject only by the chance of that enquiry.

Thus, the subject being unaware of the truth that is brought through him into a situation is not aware of which names to use in denominating the event, up until when these terms/names refer to the truth, thus producing him as a subject of truth. Badiou says that we must abandon any definition of the subject which supposes that he knows the truth or that he is adjusted to the truth.

If the names used by this *provoked subject* fail to refer to the truth, the subject fails to become a subject (of truth) and thus the whole procedure of truth has failed. Similar to that, if the concepts fail to correlate with the real (they are not/do not become radical), then they will not clone the real, and so the encounter will not mediate any sheer experience with the real into the world. It seems here that, since the subject is unsure which names will term the truth, or which concepts, after being able to correlate with the Real, will clone the Real, all options for an ethics of truth are lost. This attempt to sketch an ethics of truth simply leads to pure coincidence, or Discursivity of Coincidence (for the purpose of truth), and therefore ethics is rendered impossible.

To address this crucial issue of ethical possibility of the discourse, I propose to focus on the procedures that

Badiou and Laruelle explore. While Badiou mentions *a practising* of a creative process of naming, Laruelle insists on *a correlation* with the real of the concepts. Although Badiou's subject cannot verify whether a term that forces a statement belongs to the indiscernible or not, he does undertake a certain procedure. And from Laruelle we see the insistence on fidelity, the actuality of fidelity to the fidelity, induced by the encounter with the real, in correlating with the real of the concepts that belongs to the order of the transcendence, not the real. Thus, both Badiou and Laruelle speak of something that is of the type of the encounter/event but is not made of the same material as the ones that occur in the encounter with the Real/Void. A kind of fidelity is present, a fidelity to this creative practise, a fidelity to the correlation which becomes an imperative at the level of the transcendence (radical concepts, names that are emptied) which attempts to "describe the real" by virtue of acknowledging that it can never have the "same structure." That *one-of-a-kind-description* is the one that Laruelle undertakes in using radical concepts and the one that Badiou does with the subject-language. This description is the *truth-promised*, not yet mediated in the discourse/language, which *provokes* the subject. The transference of this unmediated truth-as-a-promise into the language/discourse requires a fidelity to that which is (now) known (but is not yet referred to with a name in the language) as opposed to what is still unknown during the sheer taking place of the Real/event. This is a fidelity that is not of the order of the encounter, but is a radical *provocation*. It is a provocation that does not fall into the Badiouian trap of maintaining an uncertainty of fidelity, which enables a decision for ethics. An ethical decision to fidelity that is needed for the transference of the promised truth in the language/discourse would revert the whole process back to the

point of philosophical decision and thus dismantling the whole process of the ethics of truth, a truth which resides outside of the philosophical/discursive thought, but which is always already mediated into philosophy/discourse. This provocation (a-kind-of-fidelity) could be described as a provocation to “try the correlativity,” “try the denominating,” it is a *provocation* and not a choice precisely because the subject does not (and cannot) know whether the concepts he uses will correlate with the Real or the names that force the situation will belong to the indiscernible - the truth. It is a provocation and not a fidelity (to encounter/event), of the order of the encounter, simply because in the transference/exchange between the transcendence and the discursive/linguistic there is no encounter/event that will induce fidelity.

An ethical discourse still remains a discourse, it does not operate with anything else other than thought and language. An ethical discourse is the one that does not search for truths through Foucauldian regularities, through which the postmodern discourses arrive at their own truths (within what is already known), because it implies that this kind of operational referencing of thought and language involves from its very beginning a decision which is a decision to refuse what is outside of the World, that is, to refuse the Real out of their operations. As such, those kinds of discourses limit the operational possibilities of thought and language to only those possibilities which fall within this established limit (prescription) of regularity, that use primitive givens of knowledge - resulting in dogmatic discourses (from the perspective of chance beyond knowledge of the situation). It is not only the philosophical decisionism that is the main problem at stake here, a problem of employing decisions as a

method of seeking truths, but it is also the concrete decision to refuse the real. We know from Lacan, Badiou and Laruelle that the subject's experience cannot be limited only to what he knows, but he is rather exposed to the possibility of surprisingly being “hit by the Real” or to suddenly finding himself in the midst of an event. It is this experience, which as Lacan says, *will determine all that follows* that implies a *heretical approach to ethics* - abandoning the established knowledge (of the situation). This experience with the real/event is, as described earlier, an experience that is completely new, non-reflected and non-decisional for the subject, and as such it cannot follow the discursive prescribed regularities. A part of philosophy and psycho-analysis has indeed been dealing with the Real but it has never accepted to think in correlation to the real. Laruelle's criticism for these thinkers (of philosophy and psychoanalysis) shows the radical approach of non-philosophy to the Real and thus the difference from philosophy, which is why I believe this quite lengthy quote of his is worth sharing here:

In other words, Lacan and Derrida are moved by antithetical motives with regard to the real: the former wants to exclude all relation, while the latter is content to differentiate relation through its other and hopes to find the real in an affect of absolute Judaic alterity. Their difference can be situated between two conceptions of the other, but it does not basically touch on the real. Both cases remain within the realm of philosophy and seek immanence, the without-relation, through opposition or in terms of an ultimate reference to transcendence. Under these conditions, the real cannot be radically relationless, even in Lacan where the real and the symbolic are linked through topology...This is the place of the non-philosophical concept of uni-laterality: between Hegel who reduces it to an abstraction of the understanding; Lacan who ultimately does not understand it and tolerates it only in order to cancel it in the

signifying chain through which he thinks he acknowledges it; and Derrida and others, who try to give it a status but still within the realm of philosophical exteriority. (Laruelle 2004)

The *ethical problems* that Laruelle notes in philosophy's approach to the Real, as I claim as well here cannot as such amount to an ethical discourse, precisely because to its (philosophy's) thought and language the Real is an exteriority. Ethics of a discourse is inescapably linked to operations of language and thought, but to a thought that thinks in terms of the Real (Laruelle) or according to the event (Badiou), and a language that does not put limits to radical concepts to become such within its always already discursive nature and which does not exclude the chance for certain names that force a statement to belong to a truth *only because in the situation before the event they referred to something else*.

Bearing Laruelle's criticism in mind, we can say that the essence of ethics (of truth) relies on our theoretical approach to the Real. And the "theoretical" will always (already) remain discursive. A proposal for an ethical discourse is not an anti-discursive proposal, since thought and language are the only two operatives at our human disposal to mediate the lived/experienced (non-reflected) in the world (which is reflected). It would be seemingly disastrous to destroy Discursivity as an attempt to push the reality/world into the realm of the Real, which is an impossible and absurd attempt. The discourse that can be ethical is the discourse that does not seek to remove or replace the reality/world/positive, even though it brings radical change through the truths that it produces. The operations of an ethical doctrine only give positivistic

tendency to the always already positive (World), which is one of failure to grasp the unknown/void/the Real in the last instance. What is possible is only the failure to grasp the void (in the last instance); thus the world is always already a positive. An ethical doctrine stands for more positivity in the positive/world/discourse which is achieved through the failure (in the last instance) of a successful event. It can never grasp (in the last instance) the Real/void, therefore it will never cease to be positive itself. It is thus *heretical* in relation to the conservation of a finite positivity of the discursive/world.

I called primary resistance all that happens to the truth in the midst of an event/encounter, and I called final resistance all that which happens in the transmission of that truth in the language/discourse. Since for the primary resistance the subject receives via the trauma an induced fidelity, without any choice over a possible decision which always determines all that follows, the possibility of a truth is always unilaterally generated and therefore we always have a possibility of subject of truth who cannot decide whether to experience or not an encounter/event. This is why there cannot be talk of any ethics in this site of resistance. *The primary site of resistance is the site of truth, of the primary truth, the first product of a truth procedure.*

I call the final resistance, the provocation that this truth has brought upon the subject, the provocation of its transmission into the language/discourse. And it is, again, not a matter of decision to take the challenge or not, simply because the subject does not know anything that informs his choice. All he knows is the provocation, put



in Badiouian terms, to link what he has experienced with what he knows. And what he knows is the language/the discursive, so he will use this site for the chance of a final result of a truth procedure, the always already discursive truth. The chance of success or failure for this provocation lies beyond the subjects' decisions. For we cannot know if the names that the subject uses as his subject-language in the midst of an event will belong to the truth or if they will belong to the situation to which they belonged before the event. In the latter case, the subject will fail to become a subject of truth and thus we have an indication that the truth procedure has failed. In both cases the language will remain the same, the only thing that will change is what it accommodates. Destroying the language is the disastrous destruction of the discourse mentioned earlier. So it is exactly in the language that we already know where the radical concepts of Laruelle and the names of the truth of Badiou are located. It is in the concepts used by Marx where Laruelle is looking for those radical concepts and his success (which does not depend on him) can in the future amount to Badiou's Haydn event.

It is this site of resistance (of language/discourse) that, if it accommodates the statement forced by a term that will belong to the truth, produces the subject as a subject of truth and this is why I name it the "site of final resistance" of the truth. If the primary site of resistance was the one of the truth, the second one is of ethics. I claim that an ethical discourse is a discourse in which its two main operatives, thought and language operate through two sites of resistance, the first being that of truth, and the second that of ethics, an ethics of a provocation. A provocation to our knowledge. Badiou says something

similar for the truth. "Truth is always a challenge, a challenge to what we already know." But then he moves on to say that it is openness and commitment. And here I take my distance from him, because, as I have explained earlier, the subject cannot decide to "close" himself to the encounters with the Real. They happen to him unpredictably and unwillingly (the subject is borne out of the very necessity to incessantly strive to avoid the traumatic experience [Koložova]). And, further, the subject cannot enact his commitment, since, as Lacan says, the encounter (for which the subject also cannot decide whether it happens to him or not) will determine all that follows. And this "all that follows" might fail to produce the truth but it will produce a provocation, of the result of which the truth will appear or will fail to appear in the language/discourse. Therefore, although truth, through the truth procedure, will bring about a provocation, provocation is not truth itself, it is the way to truth, and thus - it is ethics.

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Ben  
Woodard

**Plotting Nature's Havoc:  
Potential Realisms between Transcendental Materialism  
and Transcendental Dynamism**

**0. Introduction**

This text attempts to address how the transcendental relates to the material (whether via realism or materialism) comparatively between (and across) Deleuze's transcendental materialism, Nick Land's commentary on transcendental synthesis and Iain Grant's nascent Schellingian transcendental dynamism. Whereas transcendence and the transcendental have traditionally been thought as hovering high above reality, in the thinkers above the transcendental is a kind of movement within the material though, admittedly, the very presence of transcendence then questions the usefulness of the term materialism vis-a-vis the term realism as well as transcendence vis-a-vis immanence. Or put otherwise, in the above fields transcendence seems to operate within immanence thereby complicating and perforating the boundary between realism and materialism.

If thinking is to grasp being without over-determining it (as a realism), it seems necessary to materialize the transcendental and render the dynamic un-prethinkable yet productive of thought. Yet, these acts cause an apparent

de-realization of the material (if it bears the capacity of transcendence and not immanence), an intellection of nature that synthesizes (bordering on panpsychism) as well as an unknowability that threatens to sabotage the applicability of theory in practice.

Ultimately, I wish to argue that the problem of transcendence vis-a-vis immanence, speaks to the necessity of regionalizing metaphysics and grounding transcendence as the ontological shift between Transcendental Materialism, and Transcendental Dynamism within those registers or stages. Deleuze's (and Land's) Transcendental Materialism begins from the regime of sense and excavates the material which is cemented in the immanent whereas Iain Grant's Schellingian Transcendental Dynamism attempts to adhere to the progression of stages (or *Stufenfolge* in Schelling's parlance) as transcendence itself, which, in the real, is deduced as a series of potencies or powers.

Or, to put it yet another way, transcendence in transcendental materialism transcendentalizes sense into intensity, in

transcendental realism transcendence transcendentalizes cognition into reason, and in transcendental dynamism, transcendence transcendentalizes the progression of nature into metaphysical progression.<sup>1</sup>

I will begin by exploring Deleuze's materialism by way of Brassier's critique of it. Following this I will show how Nick Land expands on Deleuze's materialism and shows its radical difference from Kant through Land's critique of the critical project. Finally, I will outline Iain Grant's Schellingian Transcendental Dynamism and how it differs from Deleuze and Land's uses of materialism and the transcendental.

### 1. Brassier and Deleuze or Transcendental Immanence to Transcendental Materialism

The expansive work of Deleuze is a theoretical delirium, a materialist carnival that dabbles in philosophy, the sciences, literature, aesthetics and other realms. Because of Deleuze's wide range yet enigmatic insistence that he was a "pure-metaphysician," the degree to which his materialism is material is easily obfuscated. Yet several attempts have been made to make Deleuze into a realist.

Deleuze (and Guattari) are thinkers of the horizontal, the plane, the rhizomatic, of lines of flight. Their materialism is an expansive horizon, but a materialism imbued with an ideal glow as this strange world, in its broad view, is thinkable. This thinkability is not due to apperception or to Kantian transcendental categories, nor to post-Kantian intuition, nor objective or pragmatic grasp of the world via

the powers of reason, but a formulation of phenomenologized sense in which materiality and the productivity of that materiality is the work of a machinic unconscious. Deleuze's philosophy is the expansive self-churning of thought which is at worst, in François Laruelle's terms, philosophy playing with itself but, at its best, a radical empiricism conscious of its realist limits. (Laruelle 2009, 163-164)

François Laruelle's condemnation of Deleuze is that of philosophy on the whole and its use of transcendental synthesis, its mental characterization of the real (and reality) that is then worked on with the instruments of philosophy as if these entities, or packets of data, were not already made philosophizable. Deleuze becomes the bearer of all of philosophy's over-determining and over-reaching talons.

Laruelle's as well as Ray Brassier's critique of Deleuze, can be read against various realist readings of Deleuze, where for the former Deleuze's thought is self-sealed storm of thoughts for the latter Deleuze's articulation of empiricism and sense points to the limits of thought. Or, put another way, Deleuze can be seen as being too out of this world for his realist critics where for De Landa and others Deleuze merely indexes the otherworldliness of the world (namely the virtual for De Landa) the ontological reservoirs which make change, individuation, becoming, and so forth.

The two intertwined issues become the knowability/sensibility of the ontological unknowns as well as the

ontological status of knowing and sense. The crux of this relation is that of transcendental materialism, and of those terms in relation to one another as well as sense and knowing all of which are frequently couched within representation. These terms are, of course, all too broad to fully flesh out in one go, but the attempt will be made to show how the communication and connectivity between them is particular to Deleuze's philosophical work.

As Ray Brassier puts it "as far as the empirical realm is concerned, the business of a genuinely critical transcendentalism lies in articulating real conditions of ontological actuality rather than ideal conditions of epistemological possibility." (Brassier 2001, 54) Brassier goes on to say that the transcendental, for Deleuze, is a methodological flattening of subject and object whereby the transcendental is immanentized.

It is here we circle back to the thoughtful horizontals previously mentioned as the opera of Deleuzian work. Deleuze's horizontality is accomplished chiefly by placing the transcendental below ground in order for it to expand rhizomatically sideways. This planting is supplanted by Deleuze, again following Brassier, in Deleuze's attack on the transcendental as from the I (or subject, or thinker, or from consciousness) immediately atomizes the processes and powers attributed to that subject thereby eroding the efficacy of representation. (ibid., 55) Deleuze's "circumvention of the first person phenomenological perspective," Brassier argues, "effectively explodes the very kernel of subjectivity, subverting it as its originary root by dismantling the principle of ontological individuation through which it is constituted." (ibid., 56) Deleuze's atomization

of the transcendental has, as we've already suggested in passing via De Landa, of opening up the sub-representational or pre-individual. Again, following Brassier: "This pre-individual, impersonal transcendental field sought for by Deleuze constitutes the empirically inexhaustible realm of virtual singularities" which are nomadically (ibid., 57-58) distributed.

This wide field of transcendental immanence means, in relation to our privileged terms of knowing and sense, that the real becomes a philosophical singularity (ibid., 58) as a means of the real to think itself. (ibid., 59) The philosophical singularity then maps the unrepresentable reservoirs via an altogether different sense of sensibility provided by the great smashing of the world into ontological univocity. Continuing through Brassier's critique, it is the disjunction of difference and repetition which keeps representation at bay while allowing for breaks between various singularities, between what is thinking and what is being thought (ibid., 60) but this difference presupposes the presupposition of an unthinkability which is in thought itself. (ibid., 65)

It becomes necessary here to avoid the vertigo of terminology and return to the onto-epistemological scaffolding being deployed. The problem becomes if thought is self-productive, then the unthinkable is only a byproduct of the process of thought expanding outwards via the very process of thinking: "the unthinkable is at once absolute limit and ground of deterritorialization ... and pre-supposition which is internally posited as unthinkable exteriority via the self-positing of thought" (ibid.) which seems to simultaneously invoke qualitative differences between being and thinking while asserting their unity. While an obvious response would be that the being

of the world is that very play of differences it seems difficult, if not impossible, to localize the genesis of thought given the havoc of horizontality.

Or, to dip into terminological vertigo, the defense of Deleuze's strafing, would be where the disjunction occurs between the virtual and the actual in the process of individuation occurring from the intensities within the broad plane of immanence. But since the process of individuation requires the actual and the virtual, both of which are within the plane of immanence, it becomes difficult to know, or sense, what the difference of actuality means in relation to knowing or sensing. To quote Brassier yet again:

individuation as sufficient reason for the virtual's self-actualisation inscribes a circuitous loop; a relative asymmetrical parallelism between virtual intensity and actual extensity; a reciprocal co-implication whereby every actual differentiation of the virtual immediately implies a co-responding virtual differentiation of the actual. (ibid., 69)

Thought is already there, as Laruelle warns against all philosophy, rising from the seed of its always already-ness, which is ultimately a "hyletic indiscernability" where there is possibility of discerning between anything and the processes which allow various forms of thingness. (ibid., 82)

Tying this problem to immanence Brassier states that "Deleuze insists, it is necessary to absolutize the immanence of this world in such a way as to dissolve the transcendent disjunction between things as we know them and as they are in themselves." (Brassier 2008,

3) That is, whereas Kant relied on the faculty of judgment to divide representation from objectivity (ibid., 2) Deleuze attempts to flatten the whole economy beneath the Juggernaut of univocity.

But given the pulverization of the difference between thought and being and the disabling of knowing, how is it that Deleuze justifies access to the world? Again, as Brassier shows, Deleuze reinvigorates the function of sense to magnify empiricism through the unbinding of the aesthetic dimension. (ibid., 17)

The ecstatic aesthetic binds several themes which will continue throughout this paper. Nick Land engages the relation between judgment and aesthetics (via the sublime) making this the jumping off point for diagnosing the limitations of Kant's structured reason yet, at the same time, it questions the limits of sense in Deleuze. That is, despite the more realist readings of Deleuze (De Landa) and the more phenomenological (Massumi) Deleuze's ontology relies problematically on the pseudo-physicalized empirical namely in terms of the concept of sense and, even more specifically, intensity. It is for this reason that while the terms here are not that of judgement, aesthetics, and the sublime, these terms lead into the limits of the transcendental.

Steven Shaviro in his text *Without Criteria*, explicitly links Deleuze and Kant in the following way: "Deleuze's own 'transcendental empiricism' centers on his notion of the virtual. I think that this much-disputed concept can be best understood in Kantian terms. The virtual is the transcendental condition of all experience" which utilizes Ideas as

unpresentable but real, thereby avoiding both dogmatism and skepticism. As Shaviro argues however, there are substantial differences between Kant and Deleuze specifically the fact that Kant's transcendence is in the realm of the subjective whereas for Deleuze it is impersonal and pre-singular. (Shaviro 2009, 33-34) In an argument similar to Land, and summing up this relation, Shaviro concludes: "the virtual is entirely distinct from the possible. If anything, it is closer to Nietzsche's will-to-power, or Bergson's *elan vital*. All of these must be understood, not as inner essences, but as post-Kantian 'syntheses' of difference: transcendental conditions for dynamic becoming, rather than for static being." (ibid., 35)

The obvious, perhaps even silly question here, becomes how does an apparatus of sense that is becoming (whether human, non-human) senses becoming? While a common Kantian deflection is that critics of Kant misunderstand the role of the constitutive and the normative, it does not adequately explain how the normative structures Kant invokes came into being but merely dismisses such questions as operating with in a form of philosophy already always dismissed by Kant. This dismissal merely metastasizes the decisional (or correlational) structure of philosophy so that not only does the critical project think thinking as the only legitimate form of philosophy but also asserts that to attempt a break out of the circle isn't even philosophy yet later moves in Kant's own work (especially in the *Opus Postumum*) suggest that he yearned for some grounding of the speculative that was somehow non-structural.

Advocating for an ontology of becoming must then explain the genesis of the structural that is not purely

thinkable. Given this problem it is perhaps unsurprising that one of Deleuze's most interesting commentators François Zourabichvili argues that there is no ontology of Deleuze, and that, one could argue, that Deleuze's philosophy is one of sense and not unsensible metaphysics. Given that, Brassier's response following from his critique of transcendental immanence and transcendental materialism outlined above, it is unsurprising that in Brassier's own project he seeks to exclude thought from materiality but not by given it ahistorical a priori forms but by binding it to nothing.

But what is unsatisfying here is the ground of thinking in relation to the status of material or materialism, and hence our interest in transcendence not as different in kind from immanence, of arching over materiality but being a modality of immanence and or ground. To this end we will engage Nick Land and Deleuze.

## 2. Land and Deleuze or Transcendental Materialism to Transcendental Synthesis

Nick Land's work has often been described as a hyper (or mad black) Deleuzianism given Land's nihilistic tendencies (as opposed to Deleuze's cloying positivity) and his, in a sense, Deleuzian attack on Deleuze himself. I do not wish to challenge this representation. Here, following the above remarks on Kant and Deleuze via the issue of sense, we will map how Land's utilization of sense and synthesis further problematizes the immanence-transcendence relation as it crosses the connection of thinking to being as was articulated above in Brassier's critique of Deleuze.



Throughout the texts in *Fanged Noumena*, Land pulls the extra-philosophical from Kant (Land 2011, 6) as he is specifically interested in synthesis. (ibid., 7-9) Land argues that Kant's transcendental is "productive synthesis" as the transcendental is the eruption of synthesis from unknown materiality, from an intensive matter (ibid., 13). As Robin McKay and Ray Brassier put it in the introduction:

there is no real difference between synthesis as empirical conjunction at the level of experiences and synthesis as a priori conjunction of judgement and experience at the transcendental level. (ibid., 13-14)

Furthermore, Land critiques Kant for the concept of synthetic a priori knowledge (ibid., 64) which indexes a kind of unintentional excess (ibid., 70) and that transcendental thinking is only ever thinking about thinking (ibid., 92), which perhaps indexes Laruelle's critique of the decisional status of philosophy itself. Beyond this, Land argues that the sublime is one form of thinking that self exceeds as intuition (ibid., 135, 145) which he then argues speaks to being the very generation of reason and not its excess (ibid., 137) - the generative excess of the sublime, of specifically the dynamic sublime is subsumed under the experience of our vulnerability. (ibid., 138) "Thought is a function of the real, something that matter can do." (ibid., 322)

Land continues to lay into Kant for restricting faculties of thinking as it defangs nature when he writes: "Far from having been domesticated by the transcendental forms of understanding, nature was still a freely flowing wound that needed to be staunched" (ibid., 148) nature becomes

a dangerous surplus of energy as material as it is libidinal (ibid., 151), it is unplanned synthesis. (ibid., 17, 313) Later on he continues:

Kantian transcendental philosophy critiques transcendental synthesis, which is to say: it egresses against structures which depend upon projecting productive relations beyond their zone of effectiveness. (ibid., 321)

On the one hand Land wishes to critique the audacity by which Kant attempts to override or disavow thought's grasp on non-thought but he doesn't want to disregard thought's capacity to be an active materialism, a dynamic materiality. It is difficult however to qualify this materiality in a positive sense beyond its constructivism though this constructivism can function as a positivization of a critique of the critique.

Because the fangedness or uninhibited nature of nature is not defined or further articulated Land's Schellingianism is under evolved although they both entertain a fractured absolutism. As Mackay and Brassier state in the introduction Land nominates his own project as Schellingian but develops a far more Deleuzian project. (ibid., 22) Put otherwise, Land (in an odd twist) forms a kind of urgrund of the project of Schelling's positive philosophy (critiquing both Kant and Hegel) by completing Schelling's transcendental Spinozism "in which the corrosive dynamic of critique ceases to be compromised by the interests of knowledge, but proceeds instead to fully absorb thought itself within the programme of a generalised ungrounding, now materialised and operationalised as destratification." (ibid., 28)

Land's material codification of thought moves between Spinoza, Schelling and Deleuze, utilizing Schelling's dynamization of transcendence as well as Spinoza's substance falling into the intensive zero or body without organs functioning as the brain-dead engine of all failed identity. Thinking becomes a capacity of matter itself (ibid., 172, 188) while at the same time "Matter cannot be allowed a category without being certified for ideality." (ibid., 210) Land's materialism moves beyond all judgment while allowing all the turbulences of matter to serve as paths of exploration and not instances of inhibition or individuation. (ibid., 211)

The tension in Land is between the faulty utilization of philosophy as thinking itself versus the resultant materiality of thought becoming an expression of the material. That is, Land is critical of Kant's transcendental idealism yet it remains unclear how materialism relates to Kant's articulation of the transcendental vis-a-vis idealism and realism.

Land notes and privileges Schelling's critique of Kant's transcendental program (ibid., 263) and expresses the importance of the inhumanization of cognition (ibid., 293) opposed to transcendental philosophy as the consummation of judgment. (ibid., 300) Yet this machinic unconscious raises the problematic of whether or not the atomization of subjectivity which Brassier critiques in Land and Deleuze moves to far towards the phenomenological. (ibid., 303)

That is, while Land rightly critiques Kant for relying on trans-historical categories to suppress both nature and

creative modes of thinking, kinds of thinking which leave themselves open to madness in Kant's eyes. Yet, a total eradication of systematization, or formalization, material or otherwise, complicates the structures of thought, whether thought and materiality can be differentiated.

While Schelling moves between mechanism and vitalism Land feverishly runs Deleuze and Guattari's machinic model where both arrive at a processual nature that chews and gnaws at formal solidity the difference between how both thinkers relate being and thinking given a flowing nature.

Land's strategy, borrowing from Brassier's critique, is the materialization of critique where for Schelling it is the atomization of intuition. Brassier argues that Land's philosophy is problematic since he eschews the necessity of a noetic fall back it becomes difficult or maybe impossible, to distinguish between thoughts and things a distinction imperative for any claim to realism.

This is further complicated by immanence in Land as a kind of non-divided energy. In *The Thirst for Annihilation* Land connects immanence to time (time being that which is necessary for Schelling to maintain a heterogeneity in his monism). "Time," Land writes, "is thus the ultimate ocean of immanence, from which nothing can separate itself, and in which everything loses itself irremediably." (Land 1991, 95) Further on Land writes: "transcendent matter loses the perfection of its inertia (design), and nature implodes into the spasms of its own laceration." (ibid., 96)

The universe as time takes apart nature while nature infests time with materiality in various forms. Yet these forms then are original, they coexist with the very emergence of time bringing materiality back to zero intensity, a body without organs, a unit of materiality that seems only to self-present itself as an is-ness, or being, that is thinkable and intensive. It becomes difficult to determine the limits of Schelling's holistic monism versus Kantian monadic individualism as the two fall into the jaws of Land's relentless nature. The degrees of difference, in Land's case, are remanded to the domain of intensity but this brings up a host of other issues. Put another way the question becomes: Is there a tension between construction and the unplanned - that is, where there might be some rawness or unthinkability to synthesis for Land, sense is still sensible despite this chaotic ground. The categories of intensity question the ontological validity of sense (or the aesthetic or judgment or for that matter affect) in so far as they presuppose some sensitivity at least partially translatable into thought or the thinkable.

Or, to put it yet another way, in Deleuze the transcendence of transcendental materialism transcendentalizes sense into intensity, where Land tries to reverse the formula tracing the roots of various stratifications of intensity back to a sensing material which harbors a modal difference which can be read as transcendence in the Schellingian sense if not in the Kantian sense. Following this argument, Land would seem to fall more into the Spinozist camp where the heterogeneity of a materialism (whether that material is transcendent or libidinal) is caused by varying qualitative difference registered within that materiality and caused by that materiality. The clearest outline of this is expressed by Land in the following:

The thing is the instance of a petrified separation - a fetish - which represses both indistinct immanence and the difference from indifferenciation. This is because the immanence buried beneath the crust of things is the common but complex source of difference in (intensive gradations of) transcendence; the generative materiality in which everything real in transcendence must abysmally participate, and from which every separation or isolation must draw its force. (ibid., 196)

For Land transcendence is merely the differentiation of immanence - the mechanism by which nature stratifies itself, strata by which transcendence extends out unilaterally and horizontally. (ibid., 170) In this sense Land again sways toward German Idealism and Kant (particularly the later Kant). But whereas Land locates zero in a kind of Spinozistic substance Kant domesticates thought by turning it into pure consciousness. (ibid., 116) Again, Land circumvents this by appealing to sense since sense for Land, allows for one to detect the locality of an intensity. But, as has already been noted, despite transcendental materialism as self-differentiability, it becomes difficult if not impossible to register the difference between difference as due to reason and difference as ontological, or difference in itself.

As we will address in the next section, Schelling, in a proto-Deleuzian faction, practices a radical conception of unity (a monism beyond Spinoza because of the capacity of individual bodies within the realm of freedom) but only at the cost of difference-in-itself. The difficult relation of Deleuze and Schelling stumbles upon the possibility of heterogeneity within unity vis-a-vis the work of reason. In this, Land's transcendental materialism struggles with many of the same issues of Kant's somewhat mysterious

use of the manifold and the problem of extensity in the *Opus Postumum*. The problem becomes that materiality is intensive yet some not material register (some separation or formalization) which for Deleuze and Land (and arguably Kant) is sense yet if Land wants to ground or horizontalize (or make rhizomatic) transcendence than materiality thinks and senses itself. Synthesis becomes auto-synthetic and there is no registerable difference between thought and non-thought only a self-determined meter of intensity, but this receptivity must be either fundamentally separated from materiality (as Kant does) or self-differentiation must make a difference that is simultaneously ontological and not.

This problem, I want to argue, leads one to dynamism and not materialism as materiality does not adequately address heterogeneity, a heterogeneity necessary which suggests, and is required by, any kind of realism however weird, heretical, or speculative that realism be.

### 3. Deleuze and Schelling or Transcendental Synthesis to Transcendental Dynamism

If Deleuze is an ontological astronaut (with Land pushing this towards the theoretical equivalent of Science Fiction Horror) then Schelling is surely an ontological archaeologist. Schelling is endlessly haunted by the past, by the time before the world, by the chaotic darkness, of nature as primal forces, of the absolute. As Christopher Groves points out, Deleuze's relationship to Schelling is half criticisms and half praises. Groves in "The Ecstasy of Reason" points out that Deleuze defends Schelling from

Hegel but also lambasts his absolute for not being able to properly maintain difference in itself.

It will be argued that Schelling's non-sense based (yet non-Kantian) usage of the transcendental as well as Schelling's dynamism (*contra* Deleuze's immanence and materialism) allows for a form of realism that Deleuze's philosophy does not.

Grant closes *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* by examining the differences between Deleuze and Schelling specifically through the lens of dynamism as transcendental physics. (Grant 2006, 187) This physics is transcendental as it simultaneously explains the emergence of things while presupposing the unity of thought and matter that is, Schelling's transcendental physics is the method by which unity explains difference. (ibid., 188)

The central difference between Schelling and Deleuze is that for the former continuity is the possibility of difference whereas for the latter it is difference in itself, the former occurring through a self-fracturing identity. (ibid., 189) Key to this distinction is the fact that Schelling's utilization of the transcendental is a form of ontological regime change and not a marker of sensible intensity. Furthermore, Schelling's dynamism provides to be more useful than transcendental materialism simply because instead of receptivity and sense being separated in order to be barraged by intensive material, all things are shot through with force (ibid., 190) making them intuitable if not completely sensible. Grant sums up this difference in the following fashion:

For Deleuze as for Schelling, limited objects are exceeded on both sides by the forces and actions of matter and Idea. What differs between the two accounts is on the one hand, the focus of the forces, and on the other, the nature of the Idea. Concerning the first, for Deleuze, the teeming subterranean multiplicity of becomings have as their antithesis the unshakable vertical radiance of the solar One, in a struggle over the determination of sensible bodies and the balance of powers between those exercised between them, and those exercised upon them. For Schelling, by contrast, the becoming of being consists in passages and transitions, while identity consists in potentiations and de-potentiations, determining the limited thing as a power of the unlimited, while limited things are in turn “approximations of productivity.” (ibid., 191)

The problem then swings to the original force, or central activity, or how dynamism relates to temporality, and to the problem of ground as it manifests in the relation of immanence to transcendence as well as in regards to the concept as construction in Schelling in relation to the Platonic Idea as generative (and pre-conceptual) pattern contra Deleuze (and Guattari). Schelling's concept is opposed to Deleuze's formulation as a virtual multiplicity<sup>2</sup> since it is not the act of construction (dialectical or otherwise) and since one cannot rely on a ground without the horror of the previous *urgrund* (Schelling 1997, 122) one must begin to view reality as that which is the stoppage and simultaneously continuation, of processes, powers, and so forth.

Dynamism must precede materiality as Idea must precede concept due to the fact that, as Grant argues: “The a priori is nature. ... Unless there were a nature there would be no thinking. The *prius* of thinking is necessarily nature” (Brassier, Grant, Harman and Meillassoux 2007, 342) and “there's a necessary asymmetry, if you like,

between thought and what precedes it, and it's this asymmetry which means that thought is always different from what precedes it and always at the same time requires that what precedes it as its necessary ground.” (ibid., 343)

Furthermore, Grant demonstrates that thought's (or any entity's) inability to capture its preconditions is an aspect of nature and not only thought. Schelling's suggestion that there is something prior to thought (nature as *prius*) as well as that the transcendental (the most extensive capacity of thought) is thoroughly naturalized as part of nature, have serious ramifications for the trajectory of philosophy and the possibility of realism as it relates to the being of potency.

Schelling's somewhat turgid discussion of being in *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy* demonstrates the contours of this trouble. Being is the potency to be but not in that it has not yet become the being that it already is: “Being, therefore, is immediately, just as much being as it is the capacity to be. Indeed, it is *pure* being, entirely and completely objective being, in which there is just as little of a capacity as there is something of a being.” (Schelling 2007a, 143)

Matter (and/or being) is comprised of forces and is thereby non-conceptual due to both the limit of the concept and the dynamic exceeding matter or being as we know it as being (conceptual being). Schelling connects this difficulty to the inability of philosophy to hold onto intermediary concepts. (Schelling 1997, 150) It is due to this difficulty that being is often not that which is but is not a thing, as well as matter which is dynamic yet cannot be explained solely by its initial primordial process.



Furthermore, any necessity of being must necessarily be before necessity, before the demands of the conceptual, dynamics must allow for the conceptual, the conceptual cannot necessitate anything. (Schelling 2007a, 207) This pre-necessary necessity is the transcendent concept (devoid of anterior potency) opposed to the immanent concept. (ibid., 208) The transcendent is only that which transcends something else and is therefore only transcendence in, and about, thought. Concepts are “mere infinitudes” (Schelling 1984, 143) meaning that they are infinitely individual or infinitely finite. (ibid., 150) In opposition to this powers and potencies are that which describe the activity proper to being. The first primordial being (the transcendent absolute) self inhibits in order to generate a bifurcation thereby causing a succession of powers. (Schelling 1994a, 203)

This succession of powers does not seem to directly correspond to succession of things as appearance:

In Nature, therefore, the whole absolute is knowable, although appearing Nature produces only successively, and in (for us) endless development, what in true Nature, exists all at once and in an eternal fashion.” (Schelling 1995, 272)

Nature is dynamic yet appears substantial as a result of nature being an inhibited infinity, absolute activity inhibited ad infinitum.” (Schelling 2004, 15)

Against Deleuze, and in service of a non-substantial dynamism Schelling writes: “there is an end to all those absolute qualitative differences of matter which a false physics fixes and makes permanent in the so called basic substance: All matter is intrinsically one, by nature pure identity; all difference comes solely from the form and is therefore merely ideal and quantitative.” (Schelling 1995, 137)

Immanence, which does not properly enter Schelling’s vocabulary, is that what follows the self-inhibition of transcendence, following transcending its initial inhibition (where it leaves itself and the originary contingency or primary potency is left as nothing or no-thing) as attraction and contraction and becomes non-identical, it begins the series, or succession of things. (Schelling 1994, 114-116) For Schelling materialism fails as it is simply atomistic and cannot explain the genesis of intelligence (Schelling 1993, 57) without turning matter into something else (which Deleuze does but by turning materialism into a conceptual thinkability). Schelling utilizes the concept as that which is the thinkability of the Platonic Idea (Schelling 1995, 31) to utilize concept beyond this is only for the pleasure of the philosopher as Laruelle suggested above. The concept is only a small part of retransforming reality into ideality mimicking the unknown transition from ideality into reality. (Schelling 1966, 13) This model of genesis is Anti-Kantian and anti-Deleuzian.

Schelling dispatches with the Kantian categories of a priori and a posteriori and secondly Schelling places the very function of subjecting or thinking in nature and not any subject as a formal gap or other form of aleatory structure. For Schelling nature performs the ontological and epistemological work thereby subordinating the ideal to the real in terms of genesis, or ontological, if not philosophical priority. The very status of this work, of the productivity of nature rewires the Kantian-Hegelian orientations of both immanence and transcendence as both become part of real nature and not ideal constructions. In the *Grounding of Positive Philosophy* Schelling critiques Kant’s form of transcendence as an empty gesture, as a



transcendence which is not transcendent to any particular thing. (Schelling 2007a, 208) For Schelling transcendence is when movement occurs from idea to existence or brings the real to the ideal. (Schelling 2004, 194)

Whereas for Schelling the materialist and idealist projects are separate the idealist project is always subordinate ontologically to the materialist project or the philosophy of nature. Schelling writes: “we require to know, not how such a Nature arose outside us, but how even the very idea of such a Nature has got into us; not merely how we have, say, arbitrarily generated it, but how and why it originally and necessarily underlies everything that our race has ever thought about Nature.” (Schelling 1995, 41) Since the very idea is part of nature and nature is in us, then thinking as such is nature thinking through us attempting to think itself.

This thinking nature flirts with Platonism, as already suggested, as the idea no longer belongs to any particular engine of consciousness (human or otherwise) as ideas becoming living or merely a part of an always changing nature. (Schelling 1966, 116) Ideality then is, following Schelling, nature's attempt to become an object to itself, an endeavor which is always futile given the dynamism of nature and subsequently, of the idea.

Throughout his texts, Schelling constantly articulates the idea as something outside the limits of both logic and empiricism, presenting the idea as an infinite potentiality (ibid.,) where the thing is only the appearance of the idea (Schelling 1994a, 177) the idea is part of nature. (Schelling 1984, 12)

It should be argued then that thought is a force in itself that, as Grant puts it, “nature thinks” as the nature of thinking, and particularly philosophical thinking, is that of a mobility, knowing that this mobility is not contained in the notion but always referring to nature as substrate. (Schelling 2007a, 133 and Grant 2006, 17)

Or as Grant nicely puts it: “If being is necessarily indeterminate, then this indeterminacy must precede its determination, since the converse would entail that being is determinate in advance of its determination.” (Grant 2009, 449)

Here Schelling begins to approach the machinic constructivism of Deleuze's atomized consciousness but we can see an attack on Deleuze's concept of conceptualization and his relation of immanence and transcendence. The very ground of material necessity, which is the focus of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, is the infinite potentiality of natural ideation, which is why transcendence, instead of marking the work of ideation from the ground of human phenomenality or reason, is the movement of these natural, unthinkable ideas, to existence, to discernible reality. This relation, and Deleuze's relation to the transcendental complicates the generative stance of the idea:

The transcendental cannot be “induced” or “traced” from the ordinary empirical forms of common sense. The being of the transcendently sensible is that which can only and involuntarily be sensed ... Experience, then, being immanent to itself and not to an individualized subject, is thereby transcendent. (Mullarkey 2007, 14)

As Mullarkey explains, Deleuze utilizes the transcendental as generative of experiences as his response to Hume is essentially in opposition to that of Kant's. That is, whereas Kant seeks a priori synthetic categories to explain the unity of apperception, Deleuze attempts to materialize or physicalize Hume; as Mullarkey writes, "So, by adopting the position that runs immanence and transcendence together by making immanence absolute, Deleuzian empiricism converges with materialism, finding in purely physical matter the conditions which generate the self, such that experience no longer needs a host in a (non-material) subject." (ibid., 14)

While this empiricism, as radical as it is, would seem to provide a realistic model (albeit one of deep access to the cosmos beyond thought) it, as Brassier argues, merely returns the world to an original and enchanted state where the world is automatically thinkable. (Brassier 2008, 28) The difference between concepts and objects is problematically flattened.

The problem of Deleuze, of his hyper philosophy of thinkable immanence is, again following Mullarkey, one that can be tied to the absence of the negative in his work. Without the negative, without points of epistemological limit or disruption, his materialism becomes a dense canitude, where everything seems permissible.

#### 4. Conclusion

While much of Schelling's philosophy, as we have seen, is redolent of Deleuzian transcendental materialism, I maintain that the above described transcendental dynamism is,

at its base, fundamentally different from Deleuze's system and stands as a better candidate for realism.

In Schelling's system there are grounds and powers as matter and substance are insufficient to the task of philosophy unless thought is to be integrated into those substances or matters.<sup>3</sup> For Schelling, the first being, or first essence, must be contingency. (Schelling 1994, 116) Schelling also, similarly opposes yet integrates necessity and freedom. (Schelling 1966, 16) Yet this freedom cannot be reduced to human freedom or human will but works to connect the very anarchy of ground (Schelling 2007, 29) to nature as being in us and working through us.

While transcendental philosophy and a philosophy of nature are formally separate, or we might say operationally separate, they do not speak to two different worlds but only two different functional regimes; transcendental philosophy is the dynamics (and history of ) the mind. Grant writes: "the final phenomenal link between the act of thinking and the experience of the content of thought has been broken; to reinstate it is thereafter the function of transcendental philosophy, the only science with such a 'double series.'" (Grant 2005, 54) This is not to say, *pace* Hegel, that the Naturphilosophie is obliterated by transcendental philosophy but that both transcendental idealism and naturphilosophical realism are subjectivities, sciences which are both rooted in nature but methodologically apart (Grant 2006, 174) adhering to both monist continuity and processual (or dispositional) heterogeneity.

Continuity in Schelling marks the necessity of a non-Kantian transcendence in order to make nature as self-organizing subject possible as well as making

idealism possible. Heterogeneity separates Schelling from Deleuze since for Schelling there is no difference-in-itself and there is an All but a non-all which expands and contacts outward. Continuity is a problem for Schelling where in Deleuze this is explained as the folding and unfolding of expression in the One substance while Schelling is unwilling to allow substance to do this degree of ontological work. The production of things in Schelling's transcendental dynamism is a progression of that very dynamism, as constructing an anti-thesis of forces, as self-inhibition towards non-dissolution. (Schelling 1995, 132)

Making energies, or activities the primary metaphysical building blocks (or building fluids more accurately) circumvents and shifts many problems of philosophizing about the world. The problems that arise from a Transcendental Dynamism, in a properly anti-correlationist sense, shifts the problems from being the world's to be being for us. Centrally, for our discussion here, thought becomes another kind of power (Grant 2009, 446) which behaves modally like other powers, potencies, processes and so forth. (Grant 2006, 202-203)

How does this relate to realism as opposed to materialism? While Grant's text mentions Schelling against historical materialism, (*ibid.*, 46) against Fichteian "vital materialism", (*ibid.*, 100) while suggesting the possibility of an "absolute materialism," (*ibid.*, 91) it remains unclear how exactly the term materialism relate to Schelling. Materialism, as Graham Harman has noted, becomes a kind of cover for idealism or, perhaps more specifically, it names a philosophy that wishes to remain

between naïve idealism and naïve realism or empiricism, it wishes merely to remain intellectually immune. Grant, in his essay "Does Nature Stay What-it-is?" addresses the difficulties orbiting materialism as a philosophical endeavor. Grant notes that contemporary materialisms are, more often than not, without matter (Grant 2011, 70) and that dynamism is restricted to the region of logical space. While Grant discusses transcendental materialism in the above essay as Fichte negatively defines it and suggests it as a positive project, at least so far in it argues that nature constructs the I (and not vice versa as Fichte would have it) the term transcendental materialism remains wedded to both the above Deleuzian and Landian systems as well as the Hegelian-Lacanian works of Slavoj Žižek and Adrian Johnston.

I would propose that transcendental dynamism replace transcendental materialism for the sake of methodological distancing as well as conceptual clarity.<sup>4</sup> In transcendental dynamism being is an original heterogeneity which produces identities/unities and continuities/differences in modal activities (forces, powers, processes, and procedures) in which materiality is secondary, as is sense and intelligence.<sup>5</sup> Being, as the real, transcendently shifts into different modes of being which provide different forms of epistemological access and from which different philosophies can be constructed. In this sense we can say Deleuze's philosophy operates from within sense (immanence being its intra-modality) whereas Schelling's (and Grant's) double series, attempts to show how idealism attempts to address the relation of sense and thought where the Naturphilosophie mines the shift from the real qua dynamism to the formation of materiality.

## Notes:

1. In each of these cases then I am utilizing transcendence and the transcendental in ways (at least partially) antithetical to Kant's usage. For Kant, the transcendental refers to "all knowledge which is occupied not so much with all objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is possible a priori" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, "Introduction," VII). Whereas Kant's transcendental is methodological, Schelling's transcendence/transcendental is metaphysical dynamic both with idealism and realism and across both.
2. For a different view, see Alberto Toscano's essay "Philosophy and the Experience of Construction" (Toscano 2004, 120-124).
3. It could be argued that this is what Bergson attempts throughout his oeuvre.
4. The term Transcendental Dynamism is not widely utilized and not in terms relevant to the discussion here. One notable exception is Xavier Zubri's utilization of the term (in Zubri 2003).
5. While numerous philosophies of dispositions, following in generally Aristotelian and anti-Humean strands, seek to construct a realist theory of powers, there remains a reluctance, in many if not all thinkers, to allow for powers all the way down instead relying on substance which, according to thinkers such as Andrew Bird, lead to quidditism or dualism.

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“X, Welcome!!!”

### Michael O’Rourke in conversation with Stanimir Panayotov

**Stanimir Panayotov:** Your work has been concentrated on bringing together continental philosophy and queer theory at one, with a special emphasis on Derrida.<sup>1</sup> Before we are able to assess what this truly means for *academic* philosophy, let’s speculate on the *geopolitics* of such a unity.

There exists a normalized transcontinental asymmetry for both fields: (European) continental philosophy has been radically transplanted and celebrated in the USA, and queer theory too accelerated in importance in the old continent. This inter-lodging might be in itself oppressive and colonial, but still it bears significance for the contradictory institutional status of these fields in both continents. Both are asymmetrical to the mores and likes of their society at large. So there are two asymmetries: one concerns academic geopolitics and one has to do with the mis/representation of society’s ethics.

Are these asymmetries - or, better, trans-Atlantic “mutual blackenings” - relying on any national sovereign ground(edness)? What is the importance of transplanting queer in the age of weak sovereignty (Europe) and rogue one (USA)? Assuming that queer has never had stable coordinates and has always resisted bibliographical index tied to the despotic signifier of some given ground - namely, the USA - implies that there is an inherent anti-Platonic operation at play here. And, if queer is groundless - *sans-fond pace* Deleuze - this perhaps questions the importance of the very academism and normativization of queer theory. That is to say, by resisting embeddedness, queer theory might well be a geopolitical unruly “theory of everything.”

**Michael O’Rourke:** I think it is important, Stanimir, that we begin with the question of “place” or space given that it is temporality, or more properly, temporalities in all their strangeness and disjointedness, which have preoccupied queer theorists in the last five years or so. I don’t separate myself out from this trend of course since my own work, heavily indebted in all sorts of ways to Jacques Derrida, has argued in various places that queerness is a “messianicity without messianism” and is always “*à venir* (to-come).” These questions, or concerns, are, as we shall



see, not unrelated to space or place (or to stepping out of space and time). However, it is important to note that there has been a general *topophobia* operating in contemporary queer theory (one must, of course, exempt work in geographies of sexuality from this tendency). And, it seems to me, it is crucially important that queer theory becomes more “open” both theoretically and politically (which is why your word “geopolitics,” which you quite rightly underscore, is precisely the correct one although I have also recently been using the Stengerian word “cosmopolitical” too). And this is one of the many places where speculative philosophy and queer theory can potentially meet. For example, Reza Negarestani’s work has consistently envisioned and mapped out philosophy as a science of openness and geophilosophy as a regional or “universally focused” philosophy *qua* science of openness (for example, see Negarestani 2008).

But, let me begin by talking a little bit about the *place* of Derrida in my own work, the project of which has been, as you note, to bring out (often unlikely or even unwarranted) *rapprochements* between queer theory and continental philosophy. Many figures have been prominent in this overall design including Deleuze, Rancière, Irigaray, Nancy, but Derrida has always been the philosopher around whom my work circles. I endlessly return to him as if he were my teacher (However, I only ever saw him speak once, in Dublin in 1996, where he gave a lecture which would subsequently become the chapter on the lie in *Without Alibi*). *As if*, such a Derridean locution. However, I have no formal training in philosophy (either analytical or continental) and have also placed myself outside the institutional location of philosophy (or at least what gets taught in philosophy departments). So, in a way, my entire project to bring continental philosophy (or what gets called *French Theory* in the United States) together with queer theory, is always already *outside* or I would say parergonal (to borrow a concept from Derrida’s *The Truth in Painting*) to what you call “academic philosophy.”

Now, I am not an academic, nor am I a philosopher (and I will say a bit more in a moment about my own *place* when it comes to both queer theory and the academic institution). So, perhaps this makes me either uniquely placed or supremely unqualified to comment on such matters. This is why, I imagine, I have been so drawn to speculative thinking and to the work of the authors clustered around the journal *Collapse*, who Robin Mackay (the editor of this journal of philosophical research and development) has referred to as “amateurs.” I quite like to think of myself as an amateur (apart from some grounding in classical literary theory and Enlightenment philosophy I really cannot claim to be well versed in Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel or some of the other major figures I really ought to be knowledgeable about). But I am much more drawn to, and have started to use, the term “para-academic” to describe my position in relation to academic philosophy. And I guess that I was initially seduced by Derrida because of his own status as someone hovering at the margins of philosophical respectability. And one concept in particular of Derrida’s which has come to describe or stand in for my own understanding of queer is “khora.”

And it is felicitous that this concept, or rather *quasi-concept*, of Derrida’s describes a kind of *placeless place*. Anyone familiar with Blanchot or Derrida will recognize this “x without x” structuration and queer for me is best

described in terms of this logic of the *sans*. Queer is an identity without an essence, as David Halperin famously put it. (Halperin 1995). The “X” has been a recurrent figure in my work and we might recall that an early intervention into queer theory by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner was called “What does Queer Theory Teach us about X?” (Berlant and Warner 1995, 343-349) And the X of Berlant and Warner’s title takes on a particular function for me in several ways. Firstly, the X designates the ways in which we might describe queer theory’s refusal to settle on a stable “referential content” for queer; the X stands in place of the empty or floating signifiers that are put to work in queer theory where key terms such as “queer,” “theory,” “heteronormativity” and “politics” are infinitely open to recitation and revisability; typographically, the X also allows for the kind of openness which stands at the four extreme or outer points of the letter X while also signaling the ways in which we might attempt to intertwine and knot queer theory and continental philosophy. X, then, marks the spot where my work intervenes: the conjoining, binding or setting in motion (an open gravitational mobility) of the “inter-lodging” between queer theory and philosophy. (see my essay “X,” O’Rourke 2011b, xiii-xxiv)

My X is marked by the “khora,” by the place, or non-place, called *khora*. As Derrida says in his essay of that name, *khora* “eludes all anthropo-theological schemes, all history, all revelation, all truth.” (Derrida 1995, 124) On the one hand, in the history of philosophy (the academically legitimated history of philosophy for those well versed in Plato) *khora* has a proper place *inside* philosophy. And it is little wonder that *khora* means womb or matrix (and it is hard not to think of Butler’s brilliant reading of Irigaray and the *khora* in *Bodies that Matter* here). But, the *khora* that intrigues me, the one that Derrida plays with, is the one that is an *outsider* to philosophy, to anthropo-theological schemes, to History, to Truth, and so on. This is what I mean, in various places, when I call queer theory a non-sovereign, rogue theory, a theory with no proper place. Jean-Luc Marion talks about “God without Being” and “Love without Being” (Marion 2007) and sometimes I like to call queer theory a *weak force*, a “theory without being” which means it has nothing to do with identity, affirms the fissuring of identitarian discourses (or identity politics). Queer as *khoral* (de)ontology is, as John Caputo puts it in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (the book which, upon reading it shortly after Derrida’s death in 2004, changed *everything* for me) “neither present nor absent, active nor passive, the Good nor evil, living nor nonliving.” (Caputo 1997, 35-36) What I am arguing here, as elsewhere, is that the term queer is khorically, spectrally indeterminate. As Caputo puts it when he talks about the *khora* as non-receptacle: it is “neither theomorphic nor anthropomorphic - but rather atheological and nonhuman.” (ibid., 36) This is why queer in its very anessentiality, beyond phenomenality and beyond being, is so compatible with speculative realist thinking. It is both non-correlationist and non-anthropocentric. As Caputo also says “*Khora* has no meaning or essence, no identity to fall back upon. She/it receives all without becoming anything, which is why she/it can become the subject of neither a philosopheme nor a mytheme. In short, the *khora* is *tout autre*, very” (ibid.). In short, although I realize I have gone on for a very long time about this, queer is *wholly other*, very. *Queer is without essence, nature, or identity*. Derrida found *khora* simultaneously impossible to speak of and impossible *not* to talk about: “the singularity that interests me is that the impossibility of speaking of it and giving it a proper name, far from reducing it to silence,

dictates an obligation by its very impossibility; it is necessary to speak of it and there is a rule for that.” (Derrida 1992, 107) Queer is another name, another good word, a paleonym (I will come back to this word shortly) for this wrenchingly, radically *dis*-placing place, and it is this harbored promise which my own work has tried to make good on.

Before I say a few words about the asymmetry you describe between hegemonic US queer theory and European queer theory and continental philosophy let me anatomize my own “place” in academic queer theory and academic philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

But, as I have already said, I am not entirely at ease when talking about academic philosophy or my place in it. As Avital Ronell writes in *Fighting Theory*: “if philosophy resembles in the first place a love story, then the love in question would have to be a little perverse for me to be comfortable with it.” (Ronell 2010, 1) And one other name, a good one I think, for the work I try to do is *pervo-theory*. It is perverse because, as Ronell admits, “what you and I call philosophy is disappearing.” (ibid., 2) It is no longer “radiant,” “openly positive” or as loving as its etymology might lead one to believe. The same goes for queer theory which is neither as radiant nor as openly positive as it once was. For queer theory (like philosophy) is no longer on the side of life: “it does not guarantee a mobilizing energy, it does not affirm, it does not respond, or it no longer responds, to our vital needs.” (ibid.) When I talk about the “mutual blackening” of queer theory and speculative philosophy it might mislead people about the internal velocities of my own thinking. I am, it must be admitted, an incurable affirmationist. And this is why, when I diagnosed “the roguish future of queer studies” some years ago now I talked about the need for queer theory to autoimmunize itself, to give itself over to its own interminable self-criticizability if it was to remain open to the future, to that which will arrive. (see O’Rourke 2006) What irritates me about death-driven queer theory right now resonates with Ronell’s own anxieties about philosophy:

Philosophy, if it still exists, is worn out, it’s threadbare. Our culture... is marked by deficit, exhaustion, chronic fatigue. Metaphorically, our culture can be said to be directly threatened by one of those autoimmune diseases that we generate ourselves, and this is what interests me: regions, territories, bodies, corpses, discourses that attack and defeat themselves. (Ronell 2010, 2-3)

While automimmunity might be taken as a negative term in Derrida’s corpus, I have used it positively to imagine queer theory’s future to-come, an auto-co-immunity which makes it possible to *open up* fields, to be roguishly relational. The queer theory without condition, without institutionality (or foundation) I have been mobilizing for works against the “end of queer theory” agument that we have been hearing for some considerable time now. Rather than the end, I prefer to talk of the “afterlives,” the (borderline) living on, the *survivance* of queer theory, where the “end” becomes - in topological terms - not a closing off but an opening up, or a being *opened by*, in Negarestanian terms, the outside. If I talked earlier about my work as para-academic, then I would like to designate the place of queer theory itself as a *para-site*.

Perhaps this is a good place to describe my own relation to queer theory. While others have remarked that my perspective on queer thinking is unique because of its “Irish” or “non-US” positioning, I am uncomfortable. Because, this fails to recognize the ways in which my writing and thinking (my *pouvelications* to use a delightful Lacanian pun) has been routinely deligitimized over the last ten years or more by the academy here. My work has been treated like shit and this excrementalization has, perhaps perversely, spurred my interest in that which is out of place, left over, waste, exorbitantly and riskily excessive. I am intrigued by that which chafes against the so-called proper, legitimate objects of inquiry. My partiality, as with my recent writing on Black Metal Theory, has been for philial deviations and cross-breedings and most recently these pathways or back roads have been between speculative philosophies and queer theories (see for example Black Metal Theory 2011). Rather than feeling at home in either queer theory or philosophy I have always felt homeless. And that undomesticatability is where the very promise of queer theory, at least for me, resides. If it becomes institutionalized, then it becomes routinized, all too much at home, when it should be a squatter, or out on the streets, “exuding some rut” and embracing the indecorous as Berlant and Warner once so devilishly put it. (Berlant and Warner 1995, 348) I am a parasite but I would like to think that my writing is not simply destructive, but rather deconstructive in the sense that Derrida gave it, as a work of love in so far as it does justice to that which is rendered useless. For Derrida, love, justice, hospitality are undeconstructables and I have tried to add queer to that list. In any case, my own predilection is for the constant displacement of - theoretical, philosophical, geographical, disciplinary - boundaries.

But, as you say, there have been problems with the traveling of queer theories across geographical borders and boundaries. I was at a conference recently in Vienna where the theme was “import-export-transport” and the participants were invited to consider the ways in which queer theory gets exported from America to Europe and elsewhere. The traffic is almost always considered to be one-way (and to be fair English is the *lingua franca* of queer studies and there is little sense, when you go to conferences like these, that the Americans are actually reading the work that goes on here). In his keynote lecture Jack Halberstam meditated on the three terms of the conference title. Firstly, import: “What,” he asked, “do Europeans do when they bring US queer theory here?” And his answer was that the type of queer theory that gets imported back to Europe (in a strange kind of Lacanian *méconnaissance*) is heavily influenced by Franco-German continental philosophy. The examples he gave were Butler’s Hegel, Lee Edelman’s Lacan and Jasbir Puar’s Deleuze. Halberstam then proffered an entirely different model which “should” be imported and argued that there are totally different discussions going on in the US which apparently are not happening in Europe. And what is getting “lost in translation” is work on race and sexuality or what has been called “queer of color critique.” The examples of this which Jack put forward were all figures who are, of course, being read and cited here: Roderick Ferguson, Chandan Reddy, Martin Manalansan (incidentally, all three are cited in my “The Roguish Future of Queer Studies” article from some years ago...). Secondly, export: Jack asked “what does the US do when it exports?” and clearly the answer is that it has failed to export the model that it ought to in his opinion. Equally though, Jack claims that there has been a concomitant failure to “restore disorder in the US

sex/gender system” which then, in turn, given the cycles of knowledge production, gets exported to Europe. And, finally, transport: Halberstam talked about how bodies (actual bodies, theoretical bodies) travel and how one might stretch the boundaries of the easily readable (easily readable as US) sex/gender system in order to render that system politically illegible.

But, let me finish up answering this question by thinking *after* Halberstam about the ways bodies of knowledge production travel. As many of the contributors to a recent collection *Queer in Europe* (edited by Lisa Downing and Robert Gillett and published in my *Queer Interventions* series) make clear, “queer” is a term that brings problems of translation, transmission, transport and dissemination with it as it travels across borders. (Downing and Gillett 2011) Song Hwee Lim has argued, following Cindy Patton, that “the travel of queer theory, like a stealth bomber” challenges and problematizes any position which would assert a one-way globalizing traffic from the US-outward, rather than trans migratory flows of knowledge and ideas. (Hwee Lim 2009, 257) So, rather than seeing a unidirectional, transcontinental line of flight going from the US to Europe, we could argue for a constant ebb and flow. Indeed, if we go back to the etymological roots of the word queer we can find some possibilities for thinking about crossings, reborderizations, and traversals. In *Tendencies* Sedgwick is very committed to thinking about queer as meaning something different, about thinking otherwise, and about multiple criss-crossings of definitional lines. She wants the *gravitas* (by which she means also the centre of gravity) of the term to “deepen and shift.” She says there: “queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive - recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. The word ‘queer’ itself means *across* - it comes from the indo-European root - *twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*.” (Sedgwick 1993, xii.) So, however untranslatable it may be, queer has been stealthily taking root in various European countries (Poland and Germany for example) perhaps *because of* its very relation to transversality. However, rather than seeing this foreign loan word queer as a McDonalizing American exportation we could argue that the usage of queer in these countries has exciting possibilities, and not only for the development of conceptualizations of sexuality, but for broader philosophical questions too. As queer anchors itself in the transverse “quer,” in crossings, the concepts of queer theory that arise in Europe and elsewhere will emphasize more the sense of crossing boundaries and of cultural cross-fertilizations (but what became apparent at the conference in Vienna was that there are also problems in the way queer travels *within* Europe). Joseph Boone has talked about the *geopolitical* stakes of these multiple crossings. He points out that “new resonances [are] given to the metaphor of going West [which] explicitly overwrite the scenario of conquest with a global vision of frontiers and of imaginative possibility. In this vision, the West becomes a liminal space rather than a final goal or resting place, a borderland traversed on the way to a new dispensation that lies beyond the horizons of the seen or known. Queer theory and queer studies, too, may be conceived as a borderland and a frontier, a space of transition and a still largely unexplored geography.” (Boone 2000, 3)

Now, let me offer a Derridean take on these geopolitical criss/crossings and under-explored geographies. If *khora*, as I have said, has no place, is an outsider (or, as Caputo puts it, has “no place to lay her/its head” (Caputo 1997,



35)), then Derrida offers us a way to think about other headings, other transports for queer theories. Europe, too, has been conceived by Derrida, across a wide range of texts, as a “borderland traversed on the way to a new dispensation that lies beyond the horizons of the seen or known” and in *The Other Heading* he insists that Europe must set sail for a radically other (non-phallogocentric) heading. Ulrika Dahl’s chapter in the *Queer in Europe* volume takes up “geopolitical” and topological issues and she points out that queer theory in Europe is often cast as “an immigrant vested with the power of Anglo-American imperialism” which is “in need of ‘nationalization’ through translation.” (Dahl 2011, 145) This “territorialization of ideas and strategies” has, she recalls, often depended upon an “Americanization of ‘European’ philosophical traditions.” (ibid., 148) To counter this Dahl asserts that “a key part of telling queer stories thus centres on how ‘we are different from ‘them’ and, as I have shown, the imagined ‘we’ in this case are those implicitly linguistically and culturally located in the region and ‘they’ are the Anglo-Americans who simultaneously colonize ‘our’ thinking and ignore what ‘we’ are doing (but for whom ‘we’ should write).” (ibid., 154)

If telling queer stories requires Europeanizing queer, it *does not* mean installing a *Eurocentrism* in place of US homogenization. Michael Naas has explained that “the ‘Europe’ to which Derrida is referring is not simply for Europeans but for anyone in the world, whether in or out of Europe, who hears this call” and this “goes well beyond the commonly defined geographical and political boundaries of what is today called Europe.” (Naas 2008, 84) Naas goes on to say that:

It is this “Europe” that is perhaps also related to a certain “United States” that is, to *our hope*, to a “United States” that will resist the Americanism - the globalization - to which the United States might think it is beholden or destined but that is in the end merely the slogan for a program that will be global in only the worst ways, that will actually concentrate wealth and power in unprecedented ways, that will, in the end, be a betrayal of that other “United States,” of what is best about our American past in relation to the promise of this Europe. We can only hope - though, clearly, for Derrida, hope is something more than just wishful thinking. It is the very draw or *aspiration* of the future.” (ibid., 94)

Europe, for Derrida, here and elsewhere, is a paleonym, an old word with a new meaning grafted on to it. “Europe,” in quotation marks, is an old name which paleonymically remains a good name for the promise of resisting *mondialisation*. Europe is a name which Derrida thinks is still a good one to graft on to a certain hope even if, as with democracy, it is a name which might need to be revised in the future. Queer, if it is epistemologically humble, also contains within it the very name (or names) of a kind of promise or aspiration.

Derrida gives us one way to think about the topo-geo-politics of queer theory across the terraqueous globe. We can also look for some speculative solutions as to how we might cast queer theory adrift, how it might distance itself from stubborn hegemonies (the homogenization of queer as fully present, as an identity) and how it might make good on its promise to invent a new but incalculable future. In *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* Negarestani ungrounds the Heideggerian topology of the earth by developing what he calls the ( ) hole complex.



This model is a way in which to understand the earth not as a solid Whole but rather as a “destituted whole” and a “holey-mess.” As the earth becomes an insurgent, holey-mess, when it is ungrounded, the “polytical” erupts: “for every inconsistency on the surface, there is a subterranean consistency.” (Negarestani 2008, 53) What we could call Queer Theory’s ( ) hole complex would be an ungrounding, desolidifying, and destabilizing of the intact Whole body or corpus of queer thinking. Queer theory then might be reimagined as a leaky ontology or science of absolute openness: “holes prostitute themselves.” (ibid., 59)

In my opinion, one of the most promising sites or places for the re-opening of queer theory has been Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). In his book *The Democracy of Objects* Levi R. Bryant (whose work has become increasingly vital for me in the last year although I was already familiar with him from the Lacan list-serv many years ago) looks at Lacan’s graphs of sexuation where the flow of arrows could be seen to map the endlessly reversible directionalities of queer theory from Europe to the US and back again. (Bryant 2011d) On the masculine side we see an arrow pointing from the barred subject (\$) to object a (a) and the “logic of metaphysics of presence” generates a situation in which “withdrawal is seen as a loss rather than as a constitutive dimension of being” but on the feminine side of the graph, which is on the side of object-oriented ontologies, there is a very different logic at work, a multiplicity of flows. To condense his argument, Bryant reimagines that barred other in terms of what Timothy Morton has called in various places the *strange stranger* (see in particular Morton 2010 and 2010a), a figure akin to Derrida’s monstrous *arrivant*: “the logic of desire underlying object-oriented ontology would emphasize the excess of all substances over their local manifestations (there’s always more) and *would welcome difference* or those eruptions within stable regimes of local manifestation where the strange stranger surprises and indicates this excess.” (Bryant 2011b) This is one way we might diagram queer theory’s being constitutively open to the world and constitutively open to its unanticipatable future. Because for Bryant, every “entity is a becoming that promises to become otherwise,” then this is why entities are not only strange strangers to other entities but are also strange strangers to *themselves*. Morton has extended his idea of the strange stranger to queer (hyper)objects, developing a theory of withdrawn objects beyond phallic totalization which recognizes the strange strangeness to *everything*. This flattened ontology reminds me of Michel Serres’ spread out handkerchief which he uses to describe the mapping of historical moments and periods. When the handkerchief is crumpled up moments that should be held far apart are suddenly unexpectedly adjacent. Flipping Serres’ metaphor from time to space reminds us that queer is about relation *and* non-relation, proximity *and* the impossibility of proximity. If it is “groundless” and “unruly” as you say, then queer theory is always capable of being redrawn and could be diagrammed as a *cosmopolitical* (I’m further extending your word geopolitical) theory of precisely *everything*. And I mean a “theory of *everything*” insofar as queer theory (in all its uncanny weirdness) could open up to and mesh, in Morton’s terms, with the strangeness of others, the strangeness of objects, *the strangeness of anyone and anything*. But this enmeshment will always be provisional. There will always be excess and remainder while queer theory refuses to stay in *place*.

**S.P.:** Your words provoke me to speculate a bit more on the ideatic topologies of that curvature that the enmeshing of queer theory and post-continental philosophy is. Seeing queer through - or really that it is - *khora*, a place without place, reminds me that Derrida was very keen on declaring that *khora* surpasses the logic of non-contradiction. Now, this has obviously been largely overlooked in the history of philosophy precisely as *history* and in a very deep sense queer theory and feminism did a terrifically deep excavation of the placeless: *khora* (and later on a khoral queer, or an ankhorite queer, as Caputo would put it) was revealed by Derrida and Irigaray largely as the womb welcoming contradiction, the one that gets excluded so that an *ur*-grund exclusion is made possible in order for non-contradiction to distribute spatio-temporally its tentacles over the history of ideas. The excluded was of course not the woman herself, but the very position of the other and, ontologically speaking, difference. The whole history of gay-lesbian studies so far, and to some degree of queer theory is, hence, somewhat reactive (rather than affirmative) in as much as it seeks to *date* with precision the existentials of its being-as-survival, and this almost always goes under the ghost of the exclusion. Following your own thinking, we can say that LGBT and queer studies have largely developed a tempophilia as against a predominant topophobia in order to, perhaps, ameliorate its own existence within - and here academism walks in - a simultaneity along the genealogical coordinates of the epistemological whirls from which the queer subject was excluded.

Does not this fundamental exclusion explain the *sans* you talk about? And could the *sans*, which is in fact a preposition epistemologically almost akin to the Other, be excluded even if the difference as the placeless place gets suspended? And a final question here: what is the meaning of the queer (self)ungrounding from your post-continental perspective - don't you find that even para-academism is reducible to a hidden *reproachment* of an exclusion we as queer hybrid writers would like *to forget in order to survive*? That is, is not it that from a non-correlationist view the leaky-roguish ontology of queer is its "hypothesis of repression," and is not the Derridian tinge of survival you interject complicit with a new history of forgetting and bracketing exclusion, which also partly explains the "anti-social turn?"

**M. O'R.:** I'm immediately struck by your choice of the word "curvature" to describe the topogeometries of the mutual enmeshment, or radically provisional being-with, of queer theory and post-continental philosophy. If we recall, Lee Edelman, whose name has become synecdochal with the "anti-social turn," declared in an essay in the mid 1990s (about ten years before the appearance of *No Future*) that queer "curved endlessly toward the realization that its realization remains impossible." (Edelman 1995, 346) This rather generous understanding of queer as asymptotic, aporetic, incalculable and a site of permanent (un)becoming seems quite far from the position staked out in *No Future* where Edelman is precisely *against* futurity, politics and relationality (this is why the anti-social turn also gets called the anti-relational turn; see Edelman 2004).<sup>3</sup>

In a very interesting recent essay called “Busy Dying,” the afterword to a collection called *Sex, Gender and Time in Fiction and Culture* (in which I have a little piece called “History’s Tears,” a title you can take either way), Valerie Rohy says that my argument for the “stubborn vitality” of queer theory in the face of its “death” and for its status as revenant, ghost, spectre, hauntological discourse, are “relics” of a past marked by a “radically anticipatory attitude” which actually “preceded” the “claims of queer theory’s decline.” (Rohy 2011) Rohy says this because my assertions about queer theory’s messianicity depend, in a 2005 article written on the fate of queer theory after (and without) Derrida, upon three quotations from David Halperin, Judith Butler and Lee Edelman (the Edelman quotation is mentioned above) which are dated between 1993 and 1997. (see O’Rourke 2005) I bring this up because I really do think her characterization of my work is a valid one since I have and continue to operate within this mode of radical anticipation. And I would go further and say that, for me, queerness is “inextinguishable.” (Sedgwick 1993, xii) It was Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who made this brave claim for queer theory - during this moment of palpable utopianism which I remain cautiously nostalgic for - and I would argue now that the revenantal effects I have been talking about must be understood in terms of what we might call *metaperformative temporalities*. I am riffing on, and simultaneously revising for my own ends, a classically Sedgwickian phrase in order to register how queerness is a radically anticipatory mode of letting come, of welcome, of hospitality, of openness.

But, I must admit that I have struggled a bit with the question of how to diagram or draw (as well as leaving open the possibility for rediagramming and redrawing in a visual or topological equivalent to Butler’s performativity, recitation and revisability) this *metaperformative* (and “metapolitical”) queer theory. When I spoke - via Skype - to a meeting of the Speculative Aesthetics Working Group at Duke University in March this year I began to sketch what my “queer diagrammatology” might look like and I gave the tentative examples of Negarestani’s ( ) hole complex and Levi R. Bryant’s utilization of Lacan’s graphs of sexuation for his flattened onticology. Afterwards, one of the participants asked me what a queer ontology might actually look like. And I left that question suspended. This subsequently reminded me that in *The Politics of Friendship* Derrida opens a parenthesis and remarks: “let’s leave this question suspended.” (Derrida 1997, 38) But, no matter how hard you look for it (and this does happen frequently in reading Derrida) he never ever closes that parenthesis. So, what Derrida leaves us with, what he leaves us hanging on, is an opened parenthetical mark with no closing one to match up with it. And that (“ reminds me now not so much of Reza’s ( ) hole complex which after all does have opening and closing parenthetical curves at the eastern and western ends. Rather, it reminded me of your use of the word “curvature” and of Edelman’s *unstatement* of what queer is, of what it desires. And if we think of this unclosed parenthesis in the broader terms of the so-called “deaths” or “ends” of queer theory and of my arguments for the *revenance* and *survivance* of queer theory, then the refusal to bracket things off, or to allow death to halt the asymptotic curvature of queer’s unrealizability, leaves us with an opening, a “(” whose “ending” could only ever be an unrestricted opening, an incalculable hospitality to the other, to the future, to that which comes. This is the only erotico-politics of the queer I can place my trust or my faith in because it deconstructs the oppositionalities between activity and passivity. Elsewhere, I have talked about how queer theory needs itself to be

queered if it is to survive and I have deployed the tropological figure of anal fisting to describe this gesture of lubricious opening. (O'Rourke 2007) When the hand and the *reactive* sphincter meet we can think about the conjunction between the perversely fluid and the institutionally static. If for Negarestani the Heideggerian topology of the Earth must give way to the leaky ontology of the ( ) hole complex then this neatly describes the way in which queer theory (without becoming a methodology) must re-fluidify, must open itself up, or be opened up. This encounter doesn't strike me as being simply reactive. Rather it is an affirmative opening up where queer theory is simultaneously entranced and entranced, becoming the space of wonder and surprise (in the sense of taking excessive hold over one) it really ought to be. The hand and sphincter are, in this encounter, capable of being drawn as two open parentheses "( ( " in a theoretico-erotic-political embrace which disrupts the logic of front/back, active/passive, and allows for the affirmative communication with the other precisely as other.

But, to get back to your question, the "*ur-grund*" exclusion that you talk about reminds me not of Derrida and Irigaray (although they are both very much in my thoughts when you are talking about the *khora* and difference and when I am thinking about the hand and the rectum) but of a less-recognized theorist of matrixiality who has been even excluded from much *academic* feminism and queer theory and certainly not taken up by the speculative realists: the artist, psychoanalyst and writer Bracha Ettinger. But before I say why I think Bracha's theoretical lexicon is remarkably useful for the questions you raise about the history of philosophy (or, in your rendering, the phallogocentric *history* of philosophy; in a brilliant formulation Levi R. Bryant calls this "phallosophy" and his feminist and queer ontology precisely works against the phallosophical enterprise), let me dwell a little on a phrase from very early in Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. I think it is even from the very first sentence and the phrase is "theoretical matrix." (Derrida 1974, lxxxix) The phrase, at the very opening, prefacing the work, seems crucial to me, because it sits well with the reasons why I see the queer through or as *khora*. On the one hand, readers of *Of Grammatology* (and of my queer diagrammatology) will expect him (and me) to draw or at least put forward a theoretical matrix. On the other hand, if Derrida (and me) are drawing or tracing a theoretical matrix, then we must acknowledge that such a matrix is *always already* in place, fully formed in the womb, as it were, of theoretical paradigms. And this is to say that queer maps time and that which is yet to-come. This is why I have referred to the messianic time of the queer as hauntological. It both comes from the past and from the future, so that our work with it, here and now, today, is always politically urgent and imminent (but at the same time promissory structured). As Derrida says in *Of Grammatology*, and this should bring to mind the matrix as inside and outside (like the Derridean outwork of *Dissemination*), as both forming and already formed: "reading should free itself, at least in its axis, from the classical categories of history... and perhaps above all, from the categories of the history of philosophy" (ibid.). Elsewhere, I have taken this to be indicative of a striking similarity between Jean-Luc Nancy's "finite history" and a de-essentialized or *khoral* queerness: "Finite history is the happening of the time of existence, or of existence as time, spacing time, spacing the presence and the present of time. It does not have its essence in itself, nor anywhere else (for there is no 'anywhere else'). It is then 'essentially' exposed, *infinitely exposed to its own finite happening as such.*" (Nancy 1993, 157) Queerness is *différential*, homographetic.

Now, for Bracha Ettinger matrixial bordertime is both a haunting from the past and from the future. Several of her concepts could prove useful for the discussion of “place” we have been having here. But, her idea of “jointness-in-differentiation” presses itself most acutely on me here since we are taking about short-lived and impersonal intimacies, *khora*, time, space, historicity, and queer theory as radically partial being-with. Contrary to the anti-relational turn Ettinger maintains that our subjectivity is in fact everywhere constituted by relationality, or what she calls “encounter-events.” In the space she calls the matrixial, a borderspace, “threads composed of shareable traces of joint encounter-events become transformational in and by new fragile proximity and reattunement in vulnerability.” (Ettinger 2007, 104) These are encounters with what Morton calls “strange strangers” and Tim Dean calls “unlimited intimacies” (Dean 2010) for in this matrixial space that Ettinger maps out each of us is marked by traces of encounter-events with others. For Ettinger “the non-I that is yet to come requires the living of the I” and “an *originary jointness-in-differentiating and besidedness*, rather than disappearance and death, becomes the kernel of the *feminine-maternal*.” (Ettinger 2007, 102) This jointness-in-separation and side-by-sideness, these syncopated relations and non-relations of proximity and non-proximity, make space for what Ettinger calls “co-response-ability”: “all those presubjective and sub-subjective supports are interconnected and cross-informing the I and the non-I, and revealed in and by extreme fragilization within new matrixial webs where co-response-ability, wit(h)nessing and com-passionate hospitality in jointness are re-created.” (ibid., 119) So, what Ettinger’s work tries to do, in response to your question, is re-make space for that which has been excluded (the queer, the feminine) but without “reproachment” or “forgetting.” And her post-Lacanian (or better *para*-Lacanian) formulations of matrixial borderspaces and matrixial bordertimes where Levinasian threads of connectivity can be made with others seems precisely calculated, I think, to avoid the topophobia we have been talking about.

A final word about the logic of the *sans*, of the x without x which follows, for Caputo, a “very strange syntax.” (Caputo 1997, 100) If the “anti-social turn” places the queer outside of politics and says “fuck you” to the future then this follows a certain apocalyptic logic. My understanding of the Blanchotian “x without x” takes its cues from Caputo where this weird syntax of the *sans* “is not a simple negation, nullification or destruction, but a certain reinscription of X, a certain reversal of the movement of X that still communicates with it.” (ibid.) That the reversal allows for the continued “communication with X” is pivotal and it explains the difference between the Edelman of asymptotic curving and the Edelman of *sinthomosexual* negativity. It is telling then that his own phrase, just prior to the line about endless curvature, is that queerness is “utopic in its negativity.” Caputo can best explain the divergent logics at work here: “hence the apocalypse without apocalypse, in the most precise cata-strophic sense of *sans*, is one in which a certain apocalyptic tone is struck up even as a certain tone is struck out, an apocalyptic tone *without* being caught up in the cataclysmic tones of the determinable apocalyptic revelations” (ibid.) The anti-social turn is a strong theory, an instance of what Sedgwick calls paranoid reading (Sedgwick 1997, 1-37). My queer theory as a metaperformative weak force (which comes partly from Gianni Vattimo’s *pensiero debole* as you notice in your next question, but more from Derrida and Caputo) is, however, an exercise in what Sedgwick terms reparative reading.



The difference between the anti-social turn in all its apocalyptic negativity (strong theory) and my “x without x” structuration (weak theory) is that my queerness is not one of abandonment (a striking out of the future and of politics) but one of *abandon*, of willingly, and affirmatively, gifting oneself to the other, to the future, to that which will come.

**S. P.:** Given that you say that “[i]f queer theory can ever disintricate itself from lesbian and gay studies and a focus on a problematic identitarianism it will become a place where vibrant, exciting and world-making (that is to say politically significant) thinking can happen,” (O’Rourke 2009) this seems to imply that queer as a *feld* in the socius should be reframed as a more articulate political space resisting the lure of its placing while becoming more firmly a place and distributing itself socially, through “hope.” What is at stake in your opinion when a potentially institutionalizable field moves towards the subject of spatiality but neither receives its place nor desires to?<sup>4</sup> Does that make queer a more *pure* and sincere form of (meta-)politics - on the streets, off the curb, in the nether of society while fighting to be exactly affirmatively social? Becoming a weaker force (an idea you mention which is already developed in a similar sense by Vattimo) and at the same time preparing itself to be even weaker than the primordial trans-historical jettisoning - is this the case? And if so, does that mean that the weaker the formalized social positioning of queer, the stronger its potentiality of becoming a place (lest not forget that it is precisely the potential of becoming that got subtracted from Platonic metaphysics onwards)?<sup>5</sup>

The political praxis of such a self-placing in the placeless seems quite problematic: In the context of the last more than 10 years of neoliberalizing education, even informal one gets more technocratized, and the social unrest in the Anglo-Saxon world against educational and social welfare reforms suggest that such a queer positioning is really counter-intuitive, even more so seen from the Eastern-European perspective where populations are largely reduced to a perverted game of consumerism-in-poverty and live their lives in the imaginary of a “happiness to-come” that is always postponed (and this is not a mere performative). As if we are preparing for a world worse than ever: as if we are readying to go underground and study not merely the social perversities, but devote ourselves to and embrace our own.

**M. O’R.:** You are right that I have said that queer theory needs to disintricate itself from gay and lesbian studies. And I would forcefully reiterate that point here. It has not made me very popular among queer theorists or those working in critical sexuality studies (needless to say it has made me very unpopular with those who work in lesbian and gay studies itself). But let me be clear, at the risk of further upsetting those people who I have already rubbed up the wrong way: Lesbian and Gay Studies is its own field, with its own history, and its own set of agendas (and it can get on with its own work without taking on the name of queer theory). None of those agendas seem to me to be widely applicable or capable of bringing about a world where vibrant, exciting, world-making, and politically important things can happen. If anything, lesbian and gay studies (in the academy) and lesbian and gay



activism (on the streets) has been acting in the service of neoliberal, capitalist realist (to use Mark Fisher’s term) and normativizing regimes. And, to go further, the inexorable desire to be “normal” (whatever that means) and the agendas for gay marriage and gays in the military, have already staked out what the differences are between the politically vacuous lesbian and gay studies and the politically radiant queer studies I am arguing for. Queer has, after all, from the outset, been all about chafing against all regimes of normativity and normalization. It is no wonder then that critics such as Lisa Duggan and Michael Warner have talked about “homonormativity” which is every bit as pernicious as heteronormativity. To put it succinctly, my hopeful queer theory is one which argues for the radical potential of *non-sexual* and *non-identitarian* aspects of queer thinking (which is not to absent entirely questions of gender and sexuality but simply to *de-center* them or recognize that they are but a part of a wider constellation of interests). So, within what gets called “queer politics” itself I worry about an increasingly normative swerve toward identity politics, and a narrow focus on state-sanctioned gay and lesbian marriage. Within academic work receiving the general label of “queer theory”, there is an anxiety-inducing trend to make sexuality the only proper object (in Judith Butler’s terms) of study, since such work quite often reduces understandings of sexuality to fixed identities or orientations. The institutionalization, domestication and one might even say banalization of queer theory has taken many forms both within and outside the academy, but most obvious have been preoccupations with same/sex marriage, the emergence of neoconservative agendas, and the return to an essentialist identitarianism, to a solidifiable subject. In the end, I have some serious concerns that the mainstreaming of the term queer, and the tendency to use it as a catch-all general term for the stringing together of identity categories (L, G, B, T, I, A...) may serve to make queer studies nothing more than a substitute for gay and lesbian studies. *Homos*, a “strong” early critique by Leo Bersani of queer theory, worried (but not as fervently as people believed) about the ways in which queer de-specified the properness of gay sexuality (however, *homoness* was something I always felt did not attach to the identitarian; it was a positionality anyone could take up) which leads me to wonder, some fifteen years later, about the ways in which queer theory now *de-specifies queerness*. (Bersani 1995)

I want to address your question now about the social field. In a brilliant recent article by Tomasz Sikora “To Come: Queer Desire and Social Flesh” we see this promise and danger explicitly played out. (Sikora 2011)<sup>6</sup> Sikora argues that traditional LGBT identities and politics should be understood in terms of what Deleuze and Guattari call “molarities.” They are also, he contends on the side of death, negativity, Oedipalization and institutionality. To counter this molar politics he mobilizes an understanding of queerness as molecularity, virtuality, as that which is horizontal and does not yet exist. In a sense, then, this piece is arguing for a deterritorialization of queerness which would allow it to flee or escape the molar and Oedipal structuration of both the social and the death drive (especially as that has come to grip queer politics in the wake of the so-called “anti-social” thesis). To counter the LGBT investment in the subject and the “will to institutionalization” (this term comes from Roderick Ferguson’s queer of color critique which Halberstam suggested had not translated into Euro-contexts) this dangerously contains, Sikora suggests we think of queerness in terms of the non- as opposed to the anti- social and the non-personal as opposed

to the person who dominates the current social and political terrain. An example of this multiplication he proffers is the ever-expanding acronym LGBTQIA. The shift from the person to the non-person carves open a space for an “ethics of communal sharing” and a “deprivatization of social tissue” (taken up from Guy Hocquenghem’s heavily Deleuzo-Guattarian influenced book *Homosexual Desire*). It is here that the “social flesh” of the title is introduced as he borrows Hardt and Negri’s idea of queer flesh from their *Multitude* to conceptualize a socio-politics which lies outwith social organization, institutionalization and Oedipalization. This is in many respects an admirable and persuasive essay and shares my sense that queerness is indeed something which “does not quite exist yet” and is horizontal, promissory. It does not have a delimitable political or social constituency for to suggest it does would be to molarize it and dull its political capacity to actualize its ownmost virtual capacities. I am also in complete agreement with Sikora that the recent turn in queer thinking to the death drive and anti-sociality is a dangerous one since they are potentially in service of a molar organization of the socio-political field. However, I am not convinced by the argument about the LGBT acronym as a proliferative contamination because each time a new term is added surely it does gain “ontological status.” If queer subjects “do not yet exist,” then how can this letter game help found a politics which evades institutionalization and molarization?

So, in my own work, I have turned to Jacques Rancière to look for a queerness which is yet to-come and a queer politics which is undelimitable. When I first encountered Rancière’s work some years ago I was instantly struck by the potential for staging an encounter with queer thinking. I had the expertise in queer theory but not in political theory so I wrote to Samuel Chambers who had written on both queer theory and on Rancière. He sent me several texts and I devoured almost everything of Rancière’s that was then available in English (the pace of translation of his work has now accelerated so much that it is nearly impossible to keep up) in a matter of weeks. While Sam and I both noticed that numerous queer theorists had cited Rancière we were surprised that none had taken up his ideas explicitly to develop a queer politics which would not place the sexual at the center of their inquiries. Incidentally, while Rancière has been supportive and encouraging (especially when we edited a special issue of *borderlands e-journal* on his work and queer theory (Chambers and O’Rourke 2009)) he has actively disdained the work of queer theory (and the take up of Foucault by the likes of Halperin and Hardt and Negri) for the ways that they have placed the sexual at the very heart of their thinking and their politics (and he does not see that as being the kernel of his own politics). What surprised me then, and still does, is that Rancière is a name rarely, if ever, invoked by queer theorists and this seems somewhat odd given Queer Theory’s genealogical roots in what is called (at least outside of Rancière’s France) French Theory, in queer activist and anarchic politics, and in a post-Althusserian landscape dominated by sophisticated challenges to identitarian regimes and normative police logics and apparatuses, which have largely gone under the name of heteronormativity or more properly, given their dispersive nature, heteronormativities. While as Todd May has recently claimed, Rancière is hardly a “household name” in the Anglo-American academy (May 2007, 20-36), Queer Theory has recently become more and more “at home” in the academy as the homonormative swerve I mentioned a moment ago has taken hold. The inherent danger in these

conservatizing and institutionalizing impulses within the field is that Queer Theory will become nothing more than a synonym for Lesbian and Gay Studies and Rancièrian political theory is, I think, one of the best terrains upon which to begin to try and agitate, shake up or revolutionize Queer Theory and its all-too-apparent complacencies.

The logic of the tort, of the wrong, has been at the core of Rancièrè’s politics from the very beginning (since *The Lesson of Althusser* which has just been translated into English, cf. Rancièrè 2011) and it seems apposite that the etymological roots of queer share this emphasis on torsion and that both are committed to anatomizing political subjectivation and possibilities for the emancipation of the subject. Both Rancièrè’s logic of the tort, of the wrongness and wrungness of the political order, and queerness have their roots in the latin verb *torquere* meaning twisted, distorted, the wrong way. Both are given over to the miscounted, the poor, the ones who have no part within the social hierarchy, coming from a space carved out between the police order and politics as it is currently conceived (and which does not equal radical democracy). This space, the “place” of Rancièrè’s politics, and of queer’s precarious politics, is one in which the abject subject can speak, and in which radical democracy, the emancipated subject can emerge (given that you mention education it is important to note that this emancipated subject is to be found in the perverse pedagogy of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, see Rancièrè 1991). In the partition or distribution of the sensible queers and other minoritarian subjects do not count, are mute, have no share. But, in Rancièrè’s political philosophy the paradoxical or paratactical subject, a subject falling *between* identities, is precisely from their non- or de-ontological (queer) position able to redress the wrong of so-called democratic politics. In Rancièrè’s post-politics of re-distribution of the sensible the political subject, the individual who has not been validated by the dominant order (women, queers, immigrant workers for example) polemically irrupts and has his or her speech validated. The impossible, de-substantialized subject attains their place in a regime where they have been invisible, silent, and unknowable. These queer subjects have a certain fidelity to what Rancièrè calls disagreement (Rancièrè 1999), conflicted speech situations in which certain subjects are seen and heard while others are not. Out of this conflict and incommensurability new forms of political community, new regimes of visibility and sayability, and new regimes of politics and aesthetics, surface. This radically democratic politics facilitates the eruption of valid political subjects, able to take up their share in the distribution of the sensible, however impossible their identity and speech may be, and these political subjects are created within a situation of tort, an ontological torsion, twisting, or wringing.

Andrew Parker, a queer Marxist critic who translated Rancièrè’s *The Philosopher and His Poor*, makes a similar point to my own about the homonormative turn in lesbian and gay studies and the route out of that “wrong” turn that Rancièrè affords us. Parker notes that, in *On the Shores of Politics*, Rancièrè denounces “commercial competition, sexual permissiveness, world music and cheap charter flights to the Antipodes” as reflecting “the banal themes of the pluralist society” that “naturally create individuals smitten with equality and tolerant of difference.” But, Parker asserts,

given such antipathy, it is rather ironic that one of the best approximations of what Rancière defines as “properly” political is the emergent Anglo-American model of queer politics: anti-identitarian, anti-statist, anti-normative in its emphatic swerving from the rhetoric of gay and lesbian civil rights. If “we’re here, we’re queer, get used to it” is something other than a claim on behalf of an identity, queer theorists might look indeed to Rancière’s work for its ways of posing rigorously the relation between voice and body and the impossible speech acts which bind and divide them. (Parker 2007, 75)

The most obvious place we might look for such a crossing over is in the work of Judith Butler which has consistently shared Rancière’s attention to the miscount, to equality, recognition, and to a radically democratic politics. Butler has, like Rancière, been vigilantly attentive to those whose lives (and voices, bodies) don’t count as liveable (women, queers, the transgendered, Jews, the intersexed, among others) and to fashioning a politics based not on ontologized subjects, but on those abjects lying outside (but as constitutively outside) the moral and social order. A serious engagement between Rancière and Queer Theory promises to open up new regimes of thought and the unthought and Levi R. Bryant has recently been arguing for such a “strange politics” in Rancièrian terms (which would also mine the promise of Rancièrian politics for Object-Oriented Ontology):

I argue that it follows that all politics is *queer* politics. Here I return to the original etymology of the term “queer,” extending its signification beyond the domain of the politics of sexual orientation and gender. Queer refers to the strange, the odd, that which twists, and is out of place. Insofar as politics *only* occurs in those sites where *parts* contest their status of elements, revealing the volcanic anarchy beneath every system of counting, disclosing the *contingency* of every object or system’s way of counting or producing elements, it follows that all politics is essentially queer. If queer theory initially stumbled upon questions of sexual orientation, gender, etc., then this is because these are mechanisms by which larger-scale objects govern parts and constitute elements for themselves (thereby erasing the bubbling chaos upon which they stand). It matters little whether the politics is what we ordinarily refer to as “queer politics,” whether it is Marxist insurrections of the proletariat as universal motor of history, whether it be women, people of color, or whether it be genuine eco-activists asserting the truth of spotted owls, in all cases the political moment is the moment where the queer or odd as in-apparent appears and challenges systems of constituting elements, governance, and the erasure of parts. (Bryant 2011c)

What Bryant is arguing here is that queer extends far beyond gendered and sexual politics (and the politics of identity) to include all those who have been miscounted. This redistribution of the sensible is one in which, for Bryant, queer becomes a far better name for radical democratic leftist politics than the “proletariat” because it includes rather than occludes other sites of struggle to do with class, religion, animality, ecology, and so on. So, on this account, queer politics occupies not just the site of gender and sexuality but numerous other sites of political struggle and “praxis.” Of course there is a danger, and we must take this chance, that queer theory and queer politics will fall back into place and that police orders and regimes of counting can reassert themselves. As Derrida warned in *Of Grammatology*, the future can only be anticipated in the form of an “absolute danger.” (Derrida 1974, 5) And this means that we must be prepared for whatever arrives, even if (for readers of Virilio particularly) that happens to

be the worst. But what Rancière teaches us is that the police orders which keep the “part of no part” in their place are contingent ones and the “people to-come,” if they do “embrace their own perversity,” can instantiate a “politics of literarity.” (Rancière 1994) By the politics of literarity, Rancière means that bodies (whether human, animal, objects, disciplines) which refuse to stay in their place have the “aesthetic capacity” (Rancière 2009, 8-15) to imagine new forms of life, to open up an interval (and politics for Rancière, as for Badiou, is always intermittent, rare) for promiscuous, incommensurable, excessive communications between *anyone and anything*.

**S. P.:** The insistence on democracy in your work provides a clear parallel between democratic openness and queer theory where queer is delinked from sexuality (as if anticipating a refutation of Irigaray’s “age of sexual difference”) and where democracy is more ontologically subverted by its repressed and de-intellectualized agents (thus whispering about a revolution of the “objects”). This is decidedly not the consensualist, UN, inter-governmental breed of democracy, but one that you call “voyoocracy or rogueocracy” which is “an anti-neoliberalist Resistance.” Significantly, your agalma of (Derridean) democracy as/and queer has the silhouette of a certain proletarianism. What significant difference do you foresee in the political strategies of the queer democratic, roguish proletarian? And in particular, what is the role of violence in a queer(ed) state of democracy, and precisely what sort of violence - not merely against the master signifier - you think can be legitimated from the perspective of the gradually queered, less and less homophobic Multitude?

**M. O’R.:** I do, as you quite rightly point out, draw certain parallels between queer theory and radical democracy (as the term is used by Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe, and Butler), so much so that, where Derrida used the phrase democracy to-come, I have often substituted the syntagm “queer to-come” (I have also talked about the universality to-come in Butler’s work, especially the dialogues with Žižek and Laclau). As Hélène Cixous says in an essay on Derrida and the time of the political, with the playful title “Jacques Derrida: Co-Responding Voix You:” “if one had to say ‘two words,’ as he would say, on the subject of the Politics of Deconstruction, of Deconstruction as Politics, it would of course be *à venir*, to come. This *à venir* to which he will have joined, in an unforgettable way, the word, the idea, the dream of democracy. From now on it will ne longer be possible to think Democracy otherwise than through this phrase: Democracy *to come*. And not democracy *coming*.” (Cixous 2009, 43) One could spend a long time with this essay, and I have given over most of the summer to reading Cixous’ and Derrida’s texts written for or about one another (I have called them love letters). But let me just pull out a few notable threads from the essay (while urging others, as Derrida so often did, to read every letter of Cixous’ fine text). The first thing to note would be that Derrida’s politics of deconstruction (which I consider to be the pervert twin of queer theory; there is no queer theory without deconstruction) allows for what you call the “revolution of objects” if we take objects in its most capacious (post-correlationist, non-anthropomorphic) sense. The second, and related point, would be that Derridean politics does not disavow sexual difference. In fact, as Cixous points out: “from the beginning, the deconstruction of the *properly human*, and thus of its empire, its rights, is in place. Jacques Derrida has always resisted the opposition



between the human and the animal, just as he does the opposition and thus the hierarchization between man and woman; this is the absolutely permanent, archioriginal trait of his political trajectory.” (ibid.)

I had forgotten, until you reminded me, that I have called queer theory in its more anti-neoliberalist strains a “vyoucracy.” Cixous puns on the word *voyou* which she insists on using rather than *rogue*. “I call him Voyou—but not just in French. Voyou as in Voix you, or Voie you or Vois you, Voyou, *as term with more than one tongue*.” (ibid., 47) The politically vyoucratic queer studies I have been talking about is keyed towards freeing the voices of those whose positions have been attributed and delimited. It is only by responding to the voice of the other that a radical hospitality can be arrived at. And “responsibility” as Cixous reminds us, “in its secret splendour, consists in going further than one’s own power.” (ibid., 43) This is the autoimmunitary and “this is to be lived, with difficulty, as he lived it, in the daily renewal of effort, fatigue, in a courageous insistence at the heart and core of discouragement.” (ibid.) Derrida spoke of the secret link between literature and democracy in ways which, for me, describe the amalgamation of queer theory and democracy you discern at the heart of my own engagements (just substitute queer theory where Derrida writes literature):

I am the inheritor, the depository of a very grave secret to which I do not have access ... This theme has also interested me from a political point of view. When a state does not respect the right to the secret, it becomes threatening: police violence, inquisition, totalitarianism. I take the right to the secret to be an ethical and political right. Now, literature opens this privileged place where one can say everything and avow everything without the secret having been betrayed... Literature has this political right to say everything... This right - to say everything without avowing anything - weaves a link between literature and democracy. (Cixous and Derrida 2008, 177)

This is why democracy and queerness remain *to come* and always beyond what is realizable. This is queer theory’s political “openness” as you describe it: “when something is foreseen, on the horizon, it is already over. Therefore it does not happen. This is also a political reflection: only what the available schemas fail to foresee happens.” (ibid., 175) The event, as Badiou says, is always linked to the undecidable.

I have argued that queer needs to be de-linked from sexuality (as *the only proper object*) but I would be a little wary of saying that this anticipates “a refutation of Irigaray’s ‘age of sexual difference.’” Because the queer studies we inherit in Derrida’s voice is one marked by a polyvocality which, as Cixous says, puts all the received ideas about sexual difference in question, but at the same time puts in question what is “monological in traditional philosophic discourse.” (Cixous 2009, 50) This seems to me to be at the heart of Irigaray’s work right from the early writings on the ethics of sexual difference up to the recent works on democracy between two, sharing the world with others, and *sexuate* difference. Instead of being defined, as in “monological” philo- or phallo-sophical discourse, in relation to the male, *sexuate* difference involves the cultivation of a co-responsibility and co-responsiveness between *sexuate* subjects (whether they are male or female). If *The Ethics of Sexual Difference* announced that sexual



difference was “one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age” (Irigaray 1993, 5) then *I Love to You* declares that sexuate difference is the major, if not the issue, of our contemporary moment: “to positively construct alterity between the sexes is a task for our time.” (Irigaray 1996, 62) And this new erotic-political ontology is to be discovered in Cixous, Derrida, Irigaray, and even Badiou on love, where the emphasis is on an ethical responsiveness to the other *as other*.

I had also forgotten that in the essay you refer to on the voyoucratic future of queer studies I made a plea for an ethically violent queer theory to-come. It can be quite violent to be confronted with your own words and not quite recognize them as your own. Here is what I said then:

If it seems that I go on to privilege a queer theory which is necessarily violent then it is because I believe this violence is ethically imperative if queer studies is to make any intervention into other disciplines or languages. Queer Theory is, I suggest, a lever in such alter-disciplinary and transversal moves... So, this is a call, a plea, if you will, for an ethically violent queer studies to-come. David Wills might call this a dorsal politics, a non-conciliatory dissidence, a turning away in order to challenge identitarian regimes and perspectives. A politics of dorsality (which seems a particularly apt formation for queer theory and politics) always turns violently away (or behind) in order to turn into the political. (O’Rourke 2006, 25)

I would probably still make most of these claims now. It is, after all, necessary to do violence to the other if co-responsibility, the ethical relationship, is to happen at all. Derrida himself says that violence is a contradictory concept, one which, in the logic of the autoimmunitary, is always shadowed by non-violence. So, there is a certain uncircumscribability to violence. It haunts the ethical relation, politics and even philosophy itself (I can’t help thinking of Žižek’s joke that the ultimate act of philosophical friendship would be stab Badiou in the back!). It is little wonder then that Deleuze and Derrida both frame *philosophy as politics* in terms of hostility, war, violence. Even the work of deconstruction, as we have seen, can be viewed as violent in its operations (Derrida dreamed of becoming a resistance fighter who would blow up train tracks. He also dreamed of becoming a footballer and I have always been more seduced by this image of deconstruction with its twists and turns and wrong-footings).

Similarly, paranoid reading practices, the violent hermeneutics of suspicion, always “silhouette” (to borrow your word) the more benign “reparative” modes of reading. We can never quite escape violence whether it be linguistic or physical. Even the language of queer theory as *weak* event is potentially violent in its registers. The event after all is often described as a rupture or a tearing. I talked earlier about the queer as surprise and David Mamet in *Oleanna* warned that a surprise can always be seen as a “form of aggression.” Derrida himself talked about the “irruptivity of the event” (Cixous and Derrida 2008, 176) which walks the fine tangential line between the possible and the impossible. I wonder then, if we might say that the event which is *foreseeable* depends upon a kind of mastering, an overpowering, if you like, of the event’s capacity to erupt or irrupt. But the queer event as *unforeseeable* is what I earlier called a metaperformative, a letting come which is, in Derrida’s words, *perverformative*. It perverts the

violent logics of being, time (putting it quite out of joint) and space. But, of course, as we have seen, even in the ethical relationship to the other, there will always be violence.

Derrida devoted a whole seminar series (as yet unpublished) to the performative utterance “I Love You” and the ways in which in declarations of love both the self and the other are “shattered” (this is Jean-Luc Nancy’s word). Žižek says there is always a violent aspect to this kind of love speech: “Say I am passionately attached, in love, or whatever, to another human being and I declare my love, my passion for him or her. There is always something shocking, violent in it. This may sound like a joke, but it isn’t - you cannot do the game of erotic seduction in politically correct terms. There is a moment of violence, when you say: ‘I love you, I want you.’ In no way can you bypass this violent aspect.” (Žižek, Reul and Deichman 2001) In his sideways look at violence in his short book with that title Žižek discusses three different types of violence: subjective violence is “enacted by social agents, evil individuals, disciplined repressive apparatuses, fanatical crowds”; objective violence is “the ‘symbolic’ violence embodied in language and its forms;” and systemic violence is the “often catastrophic consequences of the functioning of our economic and political systems.” (Žižek 2008) But the twist in the tail of the book is that *extreme violence*, a redemptive divine violence, is what will get us out of our current political situation: “If one means by violence a radical upheaval of the basic social relations, then, crazy and tasteless as it may sound, the problem with historical monsters who slaughtered millions was that they were not violent enough.” (ibid., 183) Sometimes, he says, those who lack a proper place, the “proletariat” for example, within a social structure may bring about violence in order to disrupt the poise of the system and the social relations it demands. But Žižek himself is just as ambivalent (he never fully endorses it but nor does he completely condemn it—recall that elsewhere he advocates smashing the neighbor’s face or pissing on the other as the ultimate acts of love) when it comes to this violence in the face of the increasingly controlled society we live in. His hero is Melville’s Bartleby who would “prefer not to” and in the end what Žižek advocates is that sitting and waiting, having the courage to do nothing, might well be the most violent thing to do. But, in the end, I can’t see this as being a useful strategy for queer studies because it would be to misunderstand the idea of the to-come as merely endless, passive waiting.

Just another few words about violence and why I continually worry about it. A good friend of mine recently told me that my work had a trademark “perversely abrasive” reading practice. I was fine with the perverse but the “abrasive” seemed to me to be too violent a word to describe the generous spirit I have always felt my writing to have. But, of course, queering as a practice does *abrade*, and there is no denying that. However, looking at the dictionary, a favorite past time of mine, I noticed an older, now obsolete word which better captures, I like to think, my reading practices: “abraided, abrade: to awake, or rouse - to start.” Braiding, awakening, rousing, starting over and beginning by startling: these are the things that my work tries to do (whether it is successful or not).

But, you asked what particular strategies the roguish, democratic proletariat might deploy and the book which immediately comes to mind is Ivor Southwood’s *Non-Stop Inertia* (Southwood 2011) which brilliantly describes our contemporary condition of just-in-time, precaritized and immaterial labor (as a postman I know this situation

all too well!). He too turns to Bartleby as a possible way out but more interestingly he revalorizes and repoliticizes camp as a strategy for resisting our economic, social and political condition. In the “queerly seditious” practices of camp (which he de-links, I think, from its associations with gay male culture) Southwood finds room to manoeuvre, breathing spaces which stall the seemingly inexorable logic of capitalist development:

there is a need to rescue camp from the respectable realm of individualized consumption and recover its collective spirit, its sense of communicating something unspeakable. Camp could then be used as an instrument to unearth those unconscious elements which would seem to today’s immersive, supposedly all-inclusive society like archaeological artifacts: conflict, outsidership, critical detachment. Such a discovery would yield a shocking insight: that even in the current postmodern era where supposedly anything goes and everyone is in on the joke, some people are still marginalized and some things are still taboo ... [Camp’s] use of exaggeration and stylization, and its affinity with lost causes and cultural marginalia ... might therefore be directed towards revealing the stage-managed naturalness of the aspirational script, and implying an alternative imaginative space outside its rigidly defined limits. (ibid., 85-6)

Short-circuiting the cycle of non-stop inertia is never easy of course. Tellingly, Timothy Morton, has conceded that even class is a species of what he calls “hyperobjects” and this explains, he says, why it is “so difficult to shift.” (Morton and Coffield 2011) More hopefully though, he asserts that this very unbudgability is what, if we got to understand it, might be the means to subverting or shortcircuiting class. Catherine Malabou calls this “plasticity,” the term which she has used to talk about our contemporary condition: “the systemic law of the deconstructed real, a mode of organization of the real that comes after metaphysics and that is appearing today in all the different domains of human activity.” (Malabou 2010, 57) She explains how this notion of plasticity proffers ways to escape the seemingly inescapable logic of capital: “I am quite convinced with Žižek that we’re living in some kind of closed organizational structure, and that society is the main closed structure. But at the same time the structure is plastic. So it means that inside of it, we have all kinds of possibilities to wiggle and escape from the rigidity of the structure... this closed structure is not contrary to freedom or any kind of personal achievements or resistance. So I think that in such a structure, all individuals have their part to play” (Malabou and Vahanian 2007). Steven Shaviro’s book *Post-Cinematic Affect* makes a similar argument about the way in which the contemporary world “is ruthlessly organized around an exceedingly rigid and monotonous logic” and how “all structures of feeling, and all forms of life, are drawn into the gravitational field, or captured by the strange attractor, of commodification and capital accumulation.” (Shaviro 2011, 131) While he does not endorse accelerationism (“the emptying out of capitalism through a process of exhaustion”) as a political option, he does see the promise of what we might call a *weak* version of accelerationism as a “useful, productive, and even necessary aesthetic strategy today.” (ibid., 137) While Shaviro is cautious about the possibilities for resistance in this accelerationist aesthetics, he does suggest that the post-cinematic media he discusses should be valued for their “intensity” effects.

Shaviro concludes his book by quoting Whitehead who, echoing Derrida, wrote that “it is the business of the future to be dangerous.” (ibid., 139) One of the dangers Shaviro notes is the potential non-translatability of aesthetics

into politics. But this risk is taken by Zach Blas and Christopher O’Leary who curated an exhibition entitled *SPECULATIVE* in Los Angeles this summer. Their manifesto, or curatorial statement, is worth citing at length:

Today, we see the world we live in as an inviable world, and yet a world poised for radical reconfiguration. From global economic crises to pandemic panics to burgeoning forms of hatred and control to the ravaging of our earth, new borders and quarantines haunt and terrorize the world at stochastic levels of the global, nation-state, informatics, and the biological. Indeed, our world presents to us the seemingly complete commodification of life, culture, the body, the planet. Yet, we find within these very inviabilities the kernels of potential to enact and push forward new ways, worlds, and lives. In fact, we see many up-risings emerging everywhere: from the calls to action of militant groups like The Invisible Committee to the UC student protests to the insurrections of the Middle East to the digital activism of WikiLeaks and Anonymous. These all point toward living and existing in the world another way. We see the *SPECULATIVE* as the uniting force in our artwork that conjures forth the potential of the world we want, in political, cultural, social, sexual, technological, biological, economic and ecological dimensions. (Blas and O’Leary 2011)

In his contribution to the catalogue for *SPECULATIVE* Jack Halberstam talks about “Gaga Feminism” as he thinks about new possibilities for living in this inviable world of ours and ways in which we might revolutionize our critical modes and tactics of reflection imaginatively and politically to generate a more “livable future.” Jack loves the little manifesto-text *The Coming Insurrection* by The Invisible Committee which urges us to “wild and massive experimentation with new arrangements and fidelities” and that we should “organize beyond and against work” (Halberstam 2011, 26). Jack also exhorts us to think in less disciplined, more an-archic ways, to think like “speculative and utopian intellectuals” in order to refashion our political landscapes: “on behalf of more anarchy, less state, cooperative social forms and brand new sex/gender systems, I offer up Gaga Feminism - a form of feminism that advocates going gaga, being gaga, running amok, physically and intellectually, and in the process finding new languages with which to imagine, craft and implement a different way of living, loving and making art.” (ibid., 28)

So, camp, plasticity, accelerationist aesthetics, speculative aesthetics, and anarchically going gaga all seem like potentially viable strategies for the “proletariat,” the queer multitude, the people to come, as they try to make some wiggle room, and to bring about another world, a new earth, a queer planet. And I’m sure there are many, many others.

**S. P.:** The emergence of object-oriented philosophy, speculative realism (regardless of the acceleration of splinters), and theories such as Bryant’s “democracy of objects” all seem to explicitly indicate an already (t)here queer-affective onto-political framework for the progress of thinking in fidelity to the Real. This seems to be a historical event, probably a result of the sum of the personae’s socio-political conceptions symbiotized with theory. I don’t think that such a theoretical friendship has ever existed: at least not intentionally. For much of the academic world an ontological pre-inscription in *whatever* world-outlook of an ontologically evasive essence without essence such as queer would be a striking, if not heretical, enterprise. Looking ahead of our time, what exactly is this friendship’s

character: do you think that there is a premeditated vested interest or that speculative realists are simply “naturally” prone to (theoretically laid out) inclusiveness of the margins? And will it democratize more the readers of theory? In this respect I guess you could tell us more about such a mutual sensitivity and share some of your central assumptions in the on-going work you do on queering speculative realism. Besides, your editorial work at Ashgate (you are leading the *Queer Interventions* series) gives you a fresh eye on the kind of “specialization” and “(d) evolution” queer theorists develop.

**M. O’R.:** I’m very much inclined to agree with you that the appearance of Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Philosophy do “explicitly indicate an already (t)here queer-affective onto-political framework for the progress of thinking in fidelity to the Real.” Levi R. Bryant has, of course, in his theorization of the “democracy of objects” in relation to Lacan’s graphs of sexuation, carefully laid out this connection between a queered OOO and the Lacanian Real. He is, as always, worth quoting at length:

The *real*, by contrast, is something entirely different in Lacan. The real, as Lacan repeats endlessly, is not *reality* (the correlational system and synthesis of the imaginary and the Symbolic), but rather is that which is both in excess of all reality and that which evades all reality. The real is that which is *without place* in reality. It is a strange sort of placelessness, for it simultaneously 1) is invisible from the standpoint of reality, yet nonetheless 2) the “system of reality” strives to gentrify and eradicate the real (in *Television* Lacan will cryptically pronounce that “reality is the grimace of the real”), and 3) the real, despite being invisible, nonetheless appears but in a way inimical to the vector body-object system of the Imaginary and the sorting-organizing system of the symbolic. The real is a placeless appearance. It is for this reason that Lacan will say, in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, that the real is a “missed encounter.” The imaginary-symbolic system that constitutes *reality* is a system of *anticipations* in our ongoing dealings with the world. A missed encounter is precisely a *contingent* encounter that is not predelineated in any way by this anticipatory system. It is an appearance of the *impossible* (Lacan will also say that the real is the impossible) within the field of the “possible.” Of course, the possible here is that system predelineated by the “reality-system” or the synthesis of the symbolic and the imaginary. The Real is the appearance of the inapparent, of the anarchic excess beneath the reality-system, of that which has no place. It is the real, not reality, that OOO aims at. When Harman argues that objects are radically withdrawn, he is proposing a gap between any and every manifestation of objects (what he calls “sensual objects”) and their existence proper. Every object is in excess of its being-for the reality system of entities. Put differently, all objects are irreducible to their appearing-for. There is always an excess, an inappearance, that evades the correlational system of reality. And it is for this reason that objects always harbor, to use Harman’s language, a volcanic potential to surprise or to constitute a “missed encounter” or encounter that evades all symbolic-imaginary systems of anticipation. OOO is a realism of the real, not reality. OOO realism aims at what Timothy Morton has called the “strange stranger” or that paradoxical inapparent appearing, that which cannot appear at all, at the heart of all entities. It is precisely this inapparent appearing that Harman underlines in his theory of metaphor that marks the paradox at the heart of all objects: their tension between their qualities or manifestations and their being. All objects are in excess of their appearingness. (Bryant 2011a)



I would also point out that my deconstructive queer theory of the event is also in fidelity to the real or to what Caputo calls hyper-realism, the love of the things themselves. Derrida himself, in a response to Christopher Norris, who called deconstruction a “transcendental realism” says that deconstruction “has - always come forward in the name of the real, of the irreducible reality of the real - not the real as an attribute of the thing (*res*), objective, present, sense-able or intelligible, but the real as coming or event of the other ... In this sense, nothing is more realist than deconstruction.” (Derrida 2005, 96) Caputo himself glosses this - in a lengthy critique of Martin Hägglund’s radical atheist reading of Derrida - as a poetics of hyper-realism:

Derrida is certainly dedicated to dealing with what is real, with what there is (*il y a*), but he is not satisfied to say that the real is the simply present, so he always has an eye on what is real beyond the real, on the real that is not yet real, on what is coming, on the *peut-être* and the *s’il y en a*. Derrida displaces the simple primacy of the sensible-real in two ways, first, by seeing to it that the sensible-real too is the effect of the trace, and secondly, by seeing to it that the real is always haunted by the specters of the *arrivants* and the *revenants*. That is why I have described deconstruction as a hyper-realism. (Caputo 2011)

In *The Weakness of God*, Caputo explains what he means by this hyper-realism:

I mean the excess of the promise, the call, of the endless provocation of an event that calls us beyond ourselves, down unplotted paths and into unexplored lands, calling us to go where we cannot go, extending us beyond our reach. Hyper-reality reaches beyond the real to the not-yet-real, what eye has not yet seen nor ear yet heard, in the open-endedness of an uncontainable, unconstrictable, undeconstructible event. (Caputo 2006, 11-12)

Caputo has been extremely critical of some strains of Speculative Realism, most especially the materialisms of Quentin Meillassoux and Ray Brassier, but I think we can see here the very obvious potentials for “theoretical friendship” between his hyper-reality of the event and OOO, especially with Bryant’s Lacanian non-phallosophy and Morton’s Levinasian “Strange Stranger.” Having said that, there are also exciting possibilities in staging an encounter between Meillassoux’s “virtual God,” a God who might exist in the future, and Caputo’s weak God, a God to-come (“the name of God is being’s aspiration, its inspiration, its aeration, for God is not being or a being but a ghostly quasi-being.” (Caputo 2006, 9))

The theoretical friendship between queer theory and speculative realism(s) is as you say “heretical” and really quite unthinkable in many respects. Indeed, it skirts away from the model of combative philosophical friendship we were talking about earlier. (In fact, it rather emblematises a mode of theoretico-philosophical bonding which is a movement of justice, of opening, welcoming, risking, extending. However, it is still a problem - and I will return to this later - that all the major names are men and this bonding is largely *fraternal*.) But you ask:



“do you think there is a premeditated vested interest or that speculative realists are simply ‘naturally’ prone to (theoretically laid out) inclusiveness of the margins?” I’m not sure if there is some vested interest but it is possible to trace some of the influences. Of the four main Speculative Realists (Harman, Meillassoux, Hamilton Grant, Brassier) it is fairly difficult to demonstrate any predisposition for queer theory. But it is important to note that Harman championed a marginal figure like Lingis and was already in the early 1990s outlining his “*carnal phenomenology*.” With the other three, there are some shared influences with queer theory: Meillassoux’s Badiou (for whom sexual difference is undeniably important) and Grant and Brassier’s Deleuze. However, it is much easier to discern the influence of queer theory on the main OOO theorists. Morton had already published on “queer ecology” before his much publicized conversion to OOO. Bryant had written about queer theory as a privileged site for speculative thinking on his *Larval Subjects* blog long before Christopher Vitale called for a wholesale “queering of Speculative Realism.” Harman had acknowledged the importance of feminism for his Object-Oriented Philosophy and it was he who famously said more girls were welcome in SR. Bogost has been instrumental in sensitively and intelligently bringing the emergent splinter group of Object-Oriented Feminisms to a wider audience. (see O’Rourke 2011, 275-312)

It is, as you say, very true that speculative thinking is drawn to, or even takes its position, as/at the margins (even as it continually crosses performative and disciplinary borders). It has frequently brought hitherto marginal or under-read figures back into currency: Harman’s Latour, Shaviro’s Whitehead, Bryant’s Luhmann, Brassier’s Laruelle. We could also add Fernando Zalamea and Nick Land (a figure who has been shunted to the margins of academic respectability) to this list. And there are many others. It is important to note too that SR and OOO set out to create work for others which is why it has so quickly and effectively migrated into and across such a wide range of disciplines. Equally crucially, given the question of marginality, it is questionable that - as some critical voices have claimed - the main protagonists are merely adopting speculative realism as a career move. Many of the key figures work from geographically or institutionally marginal locations: Bryant works at a small college in Texas, Harman is in Cairo, Brassier is in Beirut, Negarestani is an independent scholar in Malaysia. Also, much of the exciting and burgeoning work being done in speculative realism is by graduate and post-doctoral students: Ben Woodard, Taylor Adkins, Paul Ennis, Nick Srnicek, Anthony Paul Smith, Alex Williams among many others.

You go on to ask if Speculative Realism will “democratize” the “readers of theory” and I would have to say yes, for a number of reasons. Firstly, much of the reason for the astounding popularity of the “culture” or “movement” of SR is that much of this thinking and writing happens in the blogosphere. All four of the main OOO thinkers (or five if you add Shaviro) maintain prominent and widely read blogs. Many of their ideas are initially sketched out there and most of them are open to and respond to readers’ comments. Debates between the main figures and differences in position are staked out on their blogs almost daily. Links are shared, videos and texts are uploaded. Several of the graduate students associated with SR also have blogs where they develop ideas and receive feedback.

In the backlash against SR from Ray Brassier, who initially coined the term, he has excoriated this “on-line orgy of stupidity” which for him does not constitute valid or valuable philosophical debate. (Brassier and Rychter 2011) The use of the word “orgy” has the perhaps unwanted effect of bringing the promiscuous openness of the SR blogosphere to the fore. Indeed, Ian Bogost has an SR aggregator which helpfully archives SR-related posts each day; Morton has a side bar with introductory tutorials for those new to OOO; Bryant has a dictionary of “onticology”; there is also a Speculative Realism Pathfinder which defines terms, lists the various “schools” and offshoots, and provides links to texts which can be freely accessed (from my own position as a scavenger with no access to a library or institutional infrastructures this culture of openness, generosity and sharing has been invaluable). Brassier might be even more disturbed by the role Facebook (and Twitter, and now Google +) has played in the development and dissemination of ideas (many of the scholars involved with SR and OOO also freely and willingly share their work - at various stages of development - on academia.edu). Nigel Thrift, the geographer, has made similarly positive noises about the blog-based development of SR but I do share his concerns about the archivability of many of these materials which are in very great danger of becoming arche-fossils. (Thrift 2011)

Secondly, it is crucial to note the commitment on the part of SR thinkers to open access publishing and to experimental forms of publishing (many texts are available both as print texts and downloadable pdfs). There is the Open Humanities Press, re.press, Zer0 books, Punctum Books, Oliphant Books, In Media Res and other Media Commons projects, *Continent*, *Speculations*, *Thinking Nature*, *Helvete*, and the list could go on. The medieval cultural studies journal *postmedieval* has even been experimenting with forms of peer review which would be more open and less anonymous (the word they use for this experiment is “crowd” review). The most influential journal for many of us has been Robin Mackay’s *Collapse*. I first discovered Speculative Realism when my good friend and former student Diarmuid Hester gave me issue number III (on Deleuze) as a Christmas gift in 2007, and it was this issue which contained the proceedings of the first symposium with Grant, Harman, Meillassoux and Brassier. *Collapse* also introduced me (and many others, I’m sure) to Reza Negaestani’s writings. Thirdly, unlike most philosophical fields, SR has extended into a dazzling array of disciplines: performance and theatre studies, art history, music, geography, archaeology, anthropology, architecture, political theory, medieval studies, music, food studies, queer studies, gender and sexuality studies, theology, film and media studies, international relations and security studies, science studies, sociology, financial theory, geology, psychoanalysis, mathematics, literary theory, composition and rhetoric, ecology, and this list could go on and on. As speculative realism has reached out and into these disciplines, weaponizing them to use Reza Negaestani’s words, it has come to resemble something like China Miéville’s skulltopus.

Queer theory, of course, has been, for me, the most fertile ground for this mutual “sensitivity.” I am writing a little book for Punctum Books called *Queering Speculative Realism*. It will be the first book to explore and fully work through the as yet under-acknowledged points of connection between the disparate fields of Queer Theory,

Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology. The book will argue that it is their shared undefinability and provisionality which make SR and queer theory so compatible. It is my contention that it is the shared antipathy to correlationism and anthropocentrism which also unites the pair. While the earlier chapters will introduce both SR and OOO much of the book will focus on the potentials of the encounter between object-oriented ontology and queer theory. This is because of OOO’s focus on openness, democracy, affirmation and incipience. However, there will be a chapter on Negarestani’s dark vitalism and also some consideration of whether gender could be thought about in terms of Meillassoux’s “hyperchaos,” although I have not yet fully worked this out.

I think that the second half of the book will be of most interest to queer theorists and those working in critical sexuality studies and gender studies. One chapter will take a look at Object-Oriented Feminisms and I’ll be paying particular attention to the work of Elizabeth Grosz on animals and art and Karen Barad’s writing on quantum theory, agential realism and posthuman performativity (which has its own entanglements with Derridean notions of justice and hauntology). I have chosen three main queer theorists to focus on in the second part of the book. Leo Bersani’s writing on sexuality and aesthetics advances an erotic ethics which incorporates a non-violent relation to the external world that doesn’t seek to exterminate difference and even blithely ignores the intractable differences between the human and non/human. Bersani charts an impersonal aesthetic where the subject’s need to project himself on the world is not entirely necessary: “we correspond to the world in ways that don’t necessitate or imply the world’s suppression.” (Bersani 2009, 152) This “ontological passivity” or “ontological floating,” simply letting the world be, our ceaseless receptivity to the world means that ontologically the world cares for us, just as we care for the world. Judith Butler’s recent work has taken, in my opinion, a similarly ecological turn to Bersani’s. She has been extending her idea of precarious life in her attempts to formulate an ethics of global connectedness and mutual co-inhabitation of the world. I think this chapter will surprize those who have argued that Butler’s work is too enmired in the linguistic turn to have anything to say to or about objects or more vibrant materialisms. The third key figure for me is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick whose later writings were especially attuned to and fascinated by textiles, objects, breathing and the weather. I’ll be talking mostly about the as yet unpublished essay “The Weather in Proust” which concludes with these wonderful lines: “It is possible for the universe to be dead and worthless; but if it does not live, neither do the things in it, including oneself and one’s contents. So put it comparatively: the universe itself is *as* alive as anything it holds.” I’m hoping that the book will kickstart further conversations between speculative thinking and queer theories and, more importantly, that it will create work for others.

As you say, my position as the series editor for the *Queer Interventions* book series (which I co-founded with Noreen Giffney) at Ashgate Press gives me a certain perspective on evolutions in queer theory and on new turns in the field. We have published thirteen books so far and there are two more forthcoming soon. One is a collection of essays on queer futures, ethics and politics and will be the first sustained collection to come out *against* the “anti-social thesis.” It features essays by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Susan Stryker, Jack Halberstam, José Muñoz, and others.

The other is a book I am editing called *Reading Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: Gender, Sexuality, Embodiment*. As well as essays by many of her friends (including Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Lauren Berlant, Jane Gallop) it will also have exclusive full color photographs of Eve's art works which readers will never have seen before. I think, I hope, that the essays and the images will take people's breath away.

Quite a number of books have come out in the last year which have taken queer theory in new directions: Sara Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness*, Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds*, José Muñoz's *Crusing Utopia*, and, more recently, Jack Halberstam's new book on queer failure and a collection of Gayle Rubin's writings (see Ahmed 2010; Freeman 2010; Muñoz 2009; Halberstam 2011a; Rubin 2011). And there are a few books which I'm anticipating and which will, I'm sure, alter the state of queer studies: Sara Ahmed's forthcoming book on wilfulness, Jonathan Goldberg's collection of Sedgwick's unpublished writings, to name a few examples. The future of queer studies is something I worry about and for, but there is always work which enervates me and makes me tremble with excitement, sometimes orgasmically, always stupidly.

**S. P.:** The books you just mentioned are apparently already changing queer studies. I would say they do so by transforming queer form method to something which we might merely call "position:" of the proletariat, of the revolution, of the an-human. Amid the amok of control societies and all the projects of mummifying the present's horizon (and here gay-lesbian identitarianism has a solid share with its joyous homonormativization and assimilationist boot-licking), these authors not only provide but call for some hopefulness and futurity altogether: neither the neo-liberal jouissance, nor the anti-social passé, as if prying open the field to unimaginability bordering with self-effacement. We might be in a period where queer is giving away some (sexual) materiality (whence the numerous death-watches of the field) because more and more writers realize its welcoming of more and more subjectivities to speak from its positionality of unencumberedness with "phallosophy." This is a "position" which might simply be called "hospitality." Not the somewhat defensive one a la Harman's "Girls, welcome!!!" but one that does not account for itself and gains greater volume by even refusing to rely on its forgetfulness and perishability for a secured future: a hospitability which effaces its self-consciousness, that is, queer as a khoral position - perhaps even a void? - depends on some incoming transcendentalism and immateriality, subjectless sexlessness. How sexless could it get? For it is as if queer invites: "X, welcome!!!" In fact it is the welcoming itself that enhances and maybe even produces these subjectivities of, I would say, heterologosexual thinkers. As such, welcoming/hospitality is power. If hospitality is power, then is it the power-form of queer?

**M. O'R.:** This is a very rich closing question and leaves me with much to think about. You are undoubtedly correct to say that the books I have mentioned (and the ones which I am anticipating) have in some ways already affected the shape of the field of queer studies. I was recently asked to write something on the state of queer theory for a collection called *States of Theory*. It seemed inevitable that you would also ask me what I thought about the current state of the field. But as I think about what I might say for that essay it occurs to me to ask myself: Is queer theory in

a state? If so, what state is it in? A sorry one? Or one full of “hopefulness and futurity” as you say? Does it, to come back to your opening gambit, have to belong to a state or, more precisely, to the States (the United States)?

And, these are all questions which remind me, again, of that early piece by Berlant on Warner when they too are forced to think about the state of the field (back in 1995). Given that queer theory then could barely even be said to have fully crystallized they write that “We have been invited to pin the queer theory tail on the donkey. But here we cannot but stay and make a pause, and stand half amazed at this poor donkey’s present condition” (Berlant and Warner 1995, 343). There are a couple of things to ponder on in these short lines. Firstly, Berlant and Warner rightly advise us to exercise caution about metacommenting on that which can barely be “said yet to exist.” And I think that advice should extend to the ways we are now beginning to think about the rapidly accelerating virtual industries of Speculative Realism and Object-Oriented Ontology. Because, in many ways the directions these two new modes of thinking will take us in are radically anti-anticipatable. Secondly, I think it is noteworthy that, given the tendency to anthropomorphize queer theory (whether we are talking about its life or its death), Berlant and Warner refer to queer theory in its then “poor” condition as a “donkey.” Perhaps here we begin to see the blurry outlines of the shift you are seeing from queer form/method to position: the position of the proletariat (who are so often figured as work horses or donkeys) and of the non or “an-human.” However, I think that we might better describe this shift as being one from a phallic univocity to one of multiplicity. Levi R. Bryant’s work has consistently tried to take up feminized standpoints and his non-phallosophical approach is one which eschews totalizing phallic signifiers in favor of making a more fluidified kind of mess. And this is one reason why I’m taken with McKenzie Wark’s formulation of P(OO) (Praxis [Object-Oriented]) at the third OOO symposium in New York with all the mess that entails between the hind legs of the donkey.<sup>7</sup> But let me stand half amazed and pause over your use of the word “position” for a moment. I agree with Lee Edelman when he says that queerness can never ever describe a position but only ever disturb one. And queer theory ought not to become a position at the expense of its capacity to disturb, upend, and reframe. In a recent essay “Against Survival: Queerness in a Time That’s Out of Joint” Edelman, with characteristic brilliance, writes that:

To be queer, in fact, is not to be, except insofar as queerness serves as the name for the thing that is not, for the limit point of ontology, for the constitutive exclusion that registers the no, the not, the negation in being. Radically opposed to normativity and so to the order of identity, queerness confounds the notion of being as being at one with oneself. It attests to the impossibility of a concept’s or an entity’s survival in anything other than a state of exception to its nominal consistency. Opposing all normative logics, including those that would reify queerness as a positive and determinate identity, queerness is nonetheless central to every presentation of normativity. Metabolized and abjected as the remainder of any identity procedure, its unincorporability alone permits the consolidation of form. Thus queerness, as I have argued elsewhere, occupies the place of the zero, the nothing, that invariably structures the logic of being but remains at once intolerable to and inconceivable within it. (Edelman 2011)

And this gives us a taste of his forthcoming *Bad Education*, the sequel (as it were) to *No Future*, where queerness again is framed as a traumatically “radical encounter with the Real.” Despite being in total agreement with Edelman



that queerness confounds the notion of any entities' being at one with itself I cannot subscribe to his reading of Derrida's autoimmunitary process as "inseparable from the death drive." If Edelman is against survival, then my unconditional queer studies (remember that for Derrida the university without condition is one with the fundamental right to say *everything*) is all for it and all for the future, if there is such a thing. If Edelman is on the side of death (what I have, after Derrida, called his "Bin Laden effect" which can open on to *no future*) I am optimistically on the side of life. And, I know that I'm so paranoid that I think Edelman's essay is about me, but I cannot help thinking that everything here is responding to my readings of *No Future* which have vaunted the hopefulness of queer theory, the queer theory to-come, the *à venir*, over against the Bin Ladenism which can leave no trace. But this is not the place to go on about our respective differences.

However, I will say that this refusal of survival and of futurity is also precisely a refusal of unconditional hospitality and this is not *my* Derrida. However, this hospitality that we are talking about here is not one to be readily or too quickly associated with power. Rather, like the queer event, *hospitality is a weak force*. Caputo, who would be no theoretical friend to Edelman, since he thinks the child *as* the future, describes this kingdom of the queer:

In the world, one is always very flattered to be included on a guest list, to be part of the 'inside crowd' who have gotten an invitation, whereas on the un-principles applied in the kingdom, such an invitation might not be so flattering ... In the world, hospitality is constituted by a cozy circle of insiders, by the rules of the club, where all sorts of folks who are different need not apply. In the world, hospitality is a strong force - *hostis + potens*, having the power of the master of the house over the guest-in which one fortifies oneself against the unwelcome intrusion of the other. (Caputo 2006, 262)

I'll say a little bit in a moment about the cozy homosociality of SR and OOO in relation to this notion of hospitality and the kingdom. But, first, let me be clear why I would mobilize Caputo's hospitality against Edelman's inhospitality. To not welcome the other (the future) is precisely to not welcome that which comes (Levinas's alterity, Morton's strange stranger) which is also to stay within the circle of the *same*. In contrast, Caputo explains "when we call for the kingdom to come, therefore, we are being called upon to push against the limits, to strain against these conditions, to practice a mad and unconditional hospitality which is impossible" (ibid., 262-263). If for Edelman, queerness is an encounter with the Real, for Caputo it would be an encounter with the hyper-real, with a parliament of things themselves. When we risk our own sovereignty (and Kris Coffield at the *Fractured Politics* blog is doing fascinating work on sovereignty and objects, see Coffield 2011) in the aporetics of the event we short-circuit the phallosophical logic of conditional hospitality and community. For Caputo "the kingdom is a gathering of the un-gathered, who are gathered by the event, an assembly of the dispossessed who are possessed by the event." (Caputo 2006, 263) Edelman, of course, is like Žižek, against the plasticization of the human in Butlerian queer theory and the welcoming of, or compassion for, the other. For most readers, Butler is far too attached to the subject to have anything much to say about objects. And, as Anna



Kłosowska has pointed out to me, for many who misunderstand them, SR and OOO are inhuman and anti-human and are thought to conceive of subjects as objects. However, isn’t it really the other way around? That is to say that queer theory (à la Butler), SR and OOO conceive of *objects as subjects*. Butler’s ideas of precarity and solicitation (which Edelman so resolutely critiques) are connectable to a politics of SR and OOO insofar as we might try to think of a radical democracy attuned to objects. As Eileen Joy has argued, this would allow us to think about the “dignity” of objects. Furthermore, this democratization of objects would plasticize and extend Butler’s investigations into what counts as human, as a livable life and what counts as grievable or mournable. And this links up again to Rancière - whose politics Bryant finds most in line with his ontological framework (Bryant 2011) - and his understanding of democracy (and it is notable that he still sees efficacy today in terms like democracy and proletariat): “What I am trying to convey is that democracy, in the sense of the power of the people, the power of those who have no special entitlement to exercise power, is the very basis of what makes politics thinkable. If power is allotted to the wisest or the strongest or the richest, then it is no longer politics we are talking about.” (Rancière 2011a, 79) Rancière’s politics is provisional, occasional, rare, local and unprogrammable and this is also how I have described a queer theory without condition in “The Roguish Future of Queer Studies:”

Queer Theory, too, I am asserting needs to be anterior to its own construction and its plan, autoimmunitively “open to something other and more than itself... the space and time of a spectralizing messianicity beyond all messianism,” roguishly relational in its opening to its disciplinary neighbours in “an infinite series of possible encounters, one without limit and without totalization, a field without the stability of margins, open to the other, the future, death, freedom, the coming or the love of the other.” Hence, queer theory must, as Kenneth Reinhard says, “open in infinity, endlessly linking new elements in new subsets according to new decisions and fidelities.” (O’Rourke 2006, 35-6)

Such roguish openness - which has friendship, love, democracy, justice and hospitality, all the undeconstructables, as its watchwords - would entail a swerving away from institutionalization and discipline in favor of an undisciplined and ungovernable inclining toward the auto-co-immunity (Caputo’s poetics of the kingdom rather than the correlationist circle of the same) of a queer studies to-come which believes in the solicitation of the wholly other, the *tout autre* and places its faith in the democracy to-come and the justice to-come.

I mentioned that my friend Eileen Joy has talked about according dignity to objects, a project which would not just increase what counts as an object but also what counts as lovable. Geoffrey Bennington has recently added “dignity” to the long list of quasi-transcendentals in Derrida’s writing, seeing it as a watchword for the last fifteen years of Derrida’s work, in the context of valuing the dignity of what we do. (Bennington 2010) Just like the *demi-deuil* or half-mourning Derrida often spoke of, Bennington talks about a demi-dignity, or half-dignity, which would be unconditional, less than sovereign, an unconditional sovereign to-come. This unconditional dignity lines up with the out-of-jointness of time in the “Exordium” to Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* and is axiomatic for the very possibility,

the very chance or life of deconstruction. By exposing itself - like trace or *différance* - to something outside itself, dignity is an undeconstructable. It mirrors the structural endlessness of deconstruction itself in that it can never be achieved, nor is it ever finished. Dignity is, Bennington tells us, an infinite task and an ongoing responsibility. The queer studies without condition which I have been arguing for will certainly never be achieved either but we must affirm its possibility, and there is an urgency to this, here and now, at this moment of fragile institutionality.

As Edelman rightly points out *institutions* of knowledge, including literary studies, negate the radicality of queerness and its encounter with the Real. But there is a felicitous, if often unnoticed, etymological link between literature and speculation (in the Greek *theoros* from which the Latin *theoria* derives there is connoted viewing and speculation). As Julian Wolfreys explains:

It might be argued, though it cannot be exemplified, one general affirmation concerning literature can be made: that it is 'theoretical'. It is theoretical, literature is always already *in theory*, because it gives its readers the possibility to see that which, strictly speaking, is not there materially. It offers the possibility of speculation; it presents perceptions, perspectives and opens it to view, causing some other to appear. Literature, in theory, causes the other to come, to come back, and to return in singular, often unanticipatable ways that, regardless of the predictability or programmed nature of narrative cause and effect, makes possible an event. (Wolfreys 2010, xii)

Literature, *in theory* then, is both speculative and hospitable, as well as responsive and responsible. One literary theorist who describes this hospitality in similar terms to yours as a "void" (a key feature of Reza Negarestani's weird theory-fiction too) is J. Hillis Miller. In his work - which has proven so influential for Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick and queer theory more broadly - there are numerous figures for the void: black holes, the kiss, surds, zeros. However, I want to take up one key trope Hillis Miller deploys in order to link up your two questions about the void and hospitality. *Anastomosis* is this figure and it is one Miller adopts for both non-closure and for connection. It seems wholly appropriate to use this trope to describe the lattice of networks I am trying to make between queer theory, speculative realism and object-oriented ontology. He explains that "an anastomosis makes a new mouth or opening in what is already open, a vessel in the sense of a communicating tube between one container and another." It "may be thought of either as an external link between two vessels, or as entering into a vessel it opens, so that it becomes a version of the figure of the container and thing contained. Jacques Derrida has called this 'invagination.'" (Hillis Miller 1992, 155) As a figure of speech anastomosis means inserting a qualifying word between two parts of another word, an example Miller gives being Joyce's "underdarkneath" in *Ulysses*. Anastomosis then might be another word for the kind of grafting (elsewhere I have called it a Frankensteinian meme splice) between queer theory, speculative realisms and Object-Oriented philosophies, the ways in which these discourses flow in and out of other, connect and disconnect, form regimes of attraction for each other. Also, the multiple crossings and mutual perturbations between these fields also flags up questions to do with justice and hospitality since for both Derrida and Miller this rhetorical figure of anastomosis describes the non-saturability

and permeability of borders. Anastomosis is a figure for openness to that which is to-come (justice, the future, democracy) and the other or others who may arrive as part of that future (strange strangers).

One particularly trenchant criticism of SR and OOO has been that it is inhospitable to, even antagonistic towards, feminist and queer concerns. There have been robust criticisms of the homosociality of both fields given that their leading figures are all male (and this debate has resurfaced since the third OOO symposium in New York in September of this year). Facebook discussions have referred to OOO and SR as “masculinist circle jerks” and “sausage fests” and the pugilistic form of argumentation (mostly associated with Harman) have meant that many female philosophers and thinkers have felt uneasy with SR/OOO and have understandably withdrawn from this agonistic homosocial arena (where a bunch of “dude philosophers,” as Jane Bennett recently put it, wrestle over Heidegger, Husserl and other male figures (Cohen 2011)).

However, there has been much feminist and queer-friendly work done on OOO and SR and there are many names which we might associate with developments in both areas including Patricia Clough, Tiziana Terranova, Katerina Kolozova, Luciana Parisi, Elizabeth Grosz (this list could go on). To be fair, Levi R. Bryant’s blog often discusses Luhmann, Whitehead and Deleuze in the same breath as Karen Barad and Donna Haraway and, as I have shown in “Girls Welcome!!!” Morton, Bogost and Harman have all shown an active interest (and at times a refreshing self-relexivity) in the affinities between feminist/queer worldviews and their own. Indeed, Harman has recently said that the original four OOO theorists now consider Jane Bennett to be one of their number.

So, while I think that critique of SR/OOO and its gender politics is important and valuable (and Sara Ahmed and Nina Power have been key voices in this respect) I would like to suggest a move away from thinking of this realm as being a homosocial one towards a space that is more *anastomosocial*. Harman has recently referred to the space where most SR thinking happens as the *blogopolis*: “the philosophy blogosphere is not another version of books and articles. It is more like a city where you can live or hang out. It is blogopolis... and that’s what the philosophy blogosphere is all about. It’s a kind of loose philosophical bohemia that keeps things stirred up and is able to transmit new currents (such as speculative realism) quickly and enthusiastically.” (Harman 2011) I would argue that Harman’s blogopolis is a hospitable kingdom as opposed to the univer-*city* as locus of increasing discipline and control. The blogopolis is one privileged space of the queer studies without condition. And if you think Harman’s “Girls Welcome!!!” sounded “defensive” (I must confess that I did not) then how about his invitation to the SR blogopolis: “Who else wants in? You’re more than welcome.” So, in the blogopolis *everyone* and *everything* is welcome: X, welcome indeed!!!

You ask, finally, if hospitality is “the power-form of queer?” I have already said that hospitality is a weak force but I want to say a little bit more about hospitality and the new materialisms, especially Bennett’s “vibrant materiality” which refuses to discriminate between the human/nonhuman, living/dead, subjects/objects. But, most interestingly,

in the face of the ascription of agency only to humans, Bennett theorizes the agency which things themselves possess as “thing-power.” (Bennett 2010, 14). You talked earlier in our conversation about “whisperings” to do with the revolution of objects and I would pick this up again to say that Bennett’s deanthropocentrizations and attention to *all* our coexistents are attempts to turn an ear hospitably toward the susurrations of the world we coinhabit. Nigel Clark’s *Inhuman Nature: Sociable Life on A Dynamic Planet* draws on the speculative realists - including Meillassoux, Bryant, Brassier and Harman - to explore the commonality between human/nonhuman, animate/inanimate, organic/inorganic, real/imagined and how there is a fundamental asymmetry between the human and the nonhuman given the “thing power” of earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, fires, and irrepressible climate change. (Clark 2010) But Clark follows a tradition we would associate less with certain nihilistic versions of SR and more with the affirmativeness of Derrida and Levinas insofar as he argues, like Butler, for our constitutive vulnerability and precarity. In the face of this *shared* vulnerability Clark argues for a radically democratic ethico-politics of co-responsibility and hospitality which he calls “abyssal generosity.” (ibid., 136) While there might be a danger in overemphasizing the agency or thing-power of nonhuman actants Levi R. Bryant’s “wilderness ontology” has worked hard to “maintain a rich place for antirealist Marxist, feminist, queer, and semiotic, etc., critique, while simultaneously blunting its overwhelming tendency towards erasure of the *alterity* of the world and nonhumans” (Bryant 2011e) Abyssal, ankhoral generosity might then be the ground of justice and the platform for a risky co-responsibility to all others with whom we are entangled. Jane Bennett has urged us to think more about (as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen explains it):

*earthiness* (which she glossed as the sensuous specificity of everyday things) and *sympathy* (attractions and connections between similarities). Her avowedly “leftist, egalitarian” approach would attend to things as earthly forces, to *presencing* over reserve. She called this a new material sensibility, and concluded “What would it mean to start living differently, sensing differently, if we were to really believe in OOO?” (Cohen 2011)

Donna Haraway has described the challenge of Speculative Realism to feminists and queer theorists as a “dare.” And Bennett herself dares us to try to think an ethics and politics which would change our sense of the world and our relations with others. It is too early yet to say whether the sensuous encounter between speculative realisms, object-oriented ontologies and queer theories will have been an event, but dare I say it, I really believe it will have been.

## Notes:

1. Forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan in 2012 (O’Rourke 2012).
2. As an aside, I would assert that it is perhaps true that this asymmetrical situation (between US/Euro queer theories) at least partly mirrors the analytic/continental divide, which is why I have begun to refer in my recent writing to queer theory as “post-continental” a term I borrow from Paul Ennis and John Mullarkey (Ennis 2010, Mullarkey 2006).
3. As an aside, given how critical I have been of Edelman since *No Future* came out, let me say that his earlier book *Homographesis* is undoubtedly one of the best books ever written in queer theory. I return to it again and again for its theoretical sophistication, its bold claims, and its uncompromising difficulty. I will say more about his recent work later.
4. Many authors, including you more or less, have troubled the idea of transforming queer studies in an academic field, see for example Halperin 2003.
5. This is also suggested by you when you say “The queer theory to come... is an experience of aporetic impossibility” (O’Rourke 2011a).
6. Incidentally, Poland is a place where a uniquely non-US form of queer studies has taken hold with numerous symposia, collections of essays and a peer-reviewed journal *InterAlia* which is published in both Polish and English.
7. See Wark’s talk at Timothy Morton’s blog *Ecology without Nature*. <http://ecologywithoutnature.blogspot.com/2011/09/ooiii-video-archive-4.html> (accessed October, 1 2011).

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## **II Reviews**





Nikola  
Andonovski

### The Natural Exigency of Freedom

Towards

Cornelius Castoriadis,

*Postscript on Insignificance: Dialogues with Cornelius Castoriadis*,

translated by Gabriel Rockhill and John V. Garner,

London: Continuum, 2011.

In a wistful panegyric to Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997), published on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1997, *Le Monde* recalled his solemn political resolve: “Whatever happens, I will remain first and above all a revolutionary.” (Anon. 2004) Castoriadis, one of the most important thinkers and prolific writers on the French intellectual scene, must have been well aware of the irony surrounding his adamant self-identification. A philosopher of an astonishing scope and almost encyclopedic breadth of knowledge, he is widely remembered today as the “anti-Marxist revolutionary” who co-founded the journal and political group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (in 1948) and championed his “politics of autonomy” against both Soviet Marxism and critical Trotskyism. Yet, even a cursory glance at Castoriadis’ oeuvre reveals an astounding array of intellectual interests, ranging from classical philosophy and Freudian psychoanalysis to contemporary theoretical developments in economics, biology and mathematics. It is with this in mind that we can truly appreciate the “event” of the publication of *Postscript on Insignificance*, an English translation of a collection of Castoriadis’ dialogues with leading figures in these

various disciplines. Originally radio broadcasts, these interchanges include an interview of Castoriadis by Daniel Mermet (broadcasted in 1996), as well as discussions with Octavio Paz (poet), Jean-Luc Donnet (psychoanalyst), Alain Connes (mathematician), Francisco Varela (biologist) and Robert Legros (philosopher). These dialogues were all broadcasted in the period from March 1990 to July 1996 on “Rejoinders” (*France Culture*). A testimony to Castoriadis’ philosophical curiosity, *Postscript to Insignificance* introduces the English reader not only to his remarkable intellectual span, but also to the myriad possible ways in which these sundry ruminations can puzzle together into Castoriadis’ grand philosophical scheme: the project of autonomy.

A paradigm case of a systematic philosopher, Castoriadis placed ontology at the very center of his theoretical edifice. As he vividly put it in his late essay *Done and Be Done* (1989; cf. Castoriadis 1997, 361), his concern in ontology was not a consequence of his passion to “save the revolution,” but of his willingness to save his

coherency. The main pillar of this ontological castle keep was Castoriadis' understanding of Being as "creation."<sup>1</sup> In order to think the emergence of the "radically new," he eschewed both "physicalist" ontologies (reducing society and history to nature) and what he called "logicism" (accounting for social and historical forms as combinations of a finite number of discrete elements).<sup>2</sup> Truly grasping the emergence of the "new," Castoriadis opined, necessitated understanding creation as undetermined, uncaused and unmotivated. Creation, to use his famous *bon mot*, is *ex nihilo*; it is neither deducible nor producible from conditions of the anterior system. (Castoriadis 1997, 321) This wholesome rejection of the age-old philosophical maxim "ex nihilo nihil" was, for Castoriadis, tantamount to rejecting the exclusivity of what he idiosyncratically called "ensemblistic-identitary (ensidic) logic," the logic of set-theory. While "ensidic" logic corresponds to an organizable and determinate stratum of Being, this stratum, Castoriadis was obstinate, does not exhaust Being. The ontological remainder, charmingly dubbed "the magmatic" in his mathematical writings, is both that which transcends "ensidic" logic and which renders the creation of the "radically new" possible. "Magmas" are indeterminate and irreducible to the formalization of set-theory, an inchoate stratum of Being that prevents the deterministic closure of the physical world.<sup>3</sup>

But, Castoriadis' chief philosophical import was his discussion of the mode this universal creation takes in human Being: "the radical imagination." The imaginary, not merely a reproductive or a combinatory faculty, is a wellspring of incessant creation of figures and images, an "undetermined" production of social-historical and psychic forms. (Rockhill 2011, xiii) Man, endowed with

this creative capacity of the psyche, can be understood as a "universal creator," a manufacturer of imaginary conceptual and normative systems, of values, religions and identities. For Castoriadis however, this radical creation was always social in character; the unremitting production of historical forms could not be separated from the primordial socialization of the psyche. (ibid., xiv) The radical imaginary was, at bottom, a social imaginary. Society, Castoriadis wrote in his memorable *The Social Imaginary and the Institution*, "cannot be thought within any of the traditional schemata of coexistence... what is given in and through history is not the determined sequence of the determinate but the emergence of radical alterity, immanent creation, non-trivial novelty." (Castoriadis 1997, 214) This creative overflowing of the social is nothing but society's own "self-creation," the institution of the historical *ex nihilo*. Social-historical forms are not "determined" by natural and historical conditions, they are an expression of the boundless creativity of the "anonymous collective." (Rockhill 2011, xv) *Pace* Marx, there simply are no laws of history. Yet, this groundlessness of the *nomos* introduces a familiar anxiety in the heart of the political. With an absence of external justification of social institutions, societies are tempted to cover over this abyss of freedom. They attribute the creation of social norms to diverse external forces - gods, ancestors, nature etc. The distinct Sartrean flavor of this assertion is paired with a sweeping generalization of Castoriadis': almost every society that has existed has been "heteronomous" in this sense, failing to live up to the truth of society's self-creation.<sup>4</sup> It was only in the Greco-Western tradition that we have witnessed the establishment of the project of political autonomy. Solely within the confines of this tradition does *politics proper* appear, the taking of responsibility for the creation

of social and normative institutions. Political autonomy is not only the cornerstone of the democratic idea; it is a form of ethical self-consciousness.

It is precisely the compromise of this self-consciousness that motivates Castoriadis' exchanges with Daniel Mermet and Octavio Paz in *Postscript on Insignificance*. Broadcasted in the aftermath of Castoriadis' publication of *The Rising Tide of Insignificance* (1996), they are centered around his sweeping claim that modern Western societies are infested with a distinctly new form of heteronomy:

What characterizes the contemporary world is of course crises, contradictions, oppositions, fractures, etc., but what strikes me above all is precisely insignificance. (Castoriadis 2011, 5)

This omnipresent "insignificance" is nothing but the dramatic failure of citizens to challenge the dominant imaginary significations of contemporary liberal capitalism. What was particularly worrying to the discussants was the stifling of the creative capacity of the social sphere, giving rise to an unprecedented form of liberal conformism. The modern "complaisant nihilism," as Octavio Paz labels it, (ibid., 26) is conspicuous in the political passivity and disenchantment following the dissolution of the grand political ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the waning of the liberalist idea of material and spiritual progress. In Castoriadis' system, this political conformity is a consequence of the clash of two modern political projects: the project of autonomy and the project of rational mastery of nature. (ibid., 31) But, it is precisely the incompatibility of the two

that generates the precariousness of contemporary politics. The imposition of a single meta-value ("utility") and a single insurmountable pole of social imagination ("unlimited consumption") reduces all pluralities to an underlying homogenous base and hinders the process of self-determination so essential to politics. What is vital in order to jolt the contemporary citizen out of this heteronomic slumber, Castoriadis and Paz agree, is a novel type of social-historical creation, an emergence of a "radically new" political frontier. (ibid., 37) Particularly interesting in the context of this quest for autonomy is Paz's proposal for restoration of the concept of the human person in light of contemporary developments in evolutionary theory. (ibid., 38)

Castoriadis' conversation with the French psychoanalyst Jean-Luc Donnet reveals to the reader the systematic influences of Freudianism on the development of the concept of the "radical imaginary." In an iconoclastic interpretation of the psychoanalytic "cure," Castoriadis locates the primary role of the analytic encounter precisely in the liberation of the psychic imagination. (ibid., 47) The cure, always emerging *ex nihilo*, is a catalyst in the production of an autonomous subject, permitting the "ego" to subtract itself from the authority of the rigidified Super-ego. Autonomy, as Donnet hauntingly avers echoing Freud, is the "capacity to entirely de-sexualize the figure of destiny." (ibid., 52) The quest for novel social-historical significations must live up to the ultimate castration: the absence of pre-given meanings and norms. Yet, this absence in itself may be problematic for the universalist model propounded by Castoriadis. In a stimulating interchange with the Belgian philosopher Robert Legros, Castoriadis attempts to respond to what Legros

labels “the Romanticist objection” to the project of autonomy. (ibid., 96-97) Namely, if man is “nothing” by nature - if his social-historical existence is naturally undetermined - then does not the project of breaking the “social closure” (the heteronomic cage of social laws) simply precipitate a dehumanization, a pointless search for an abstract subject extirpated from social particularities? Castoriadis is at his brilliant best when maneuvering among these conceptual poles. Lambasting the Romanticist lack of understanding of the critical attitude (the act of radical questioning of the origins of value), he accepts the social “embeddedness” of the act of questioning, but refuses to render all conceptual traditions equal in value. (ibid., 98) In a distinctly Kantian move, he affirms the “tradition” of autonomy as an exigency to proliferate the questions of self-determination and freedom as (socially instilled) civilizational benefits. Man lives only by creating meaning and it is the understanding of this fact that is the sign of our intellectual maturity.

But, is it only man that has this incredible capacity to create meaning? Or can we envision machines that will eventually be our peers in the production of historical value? And, in that sense, what is this “radical imagination” if not a natural capacity of our psychic constitution? In a fascinating pair of dialogues with French mathematician Allain Connes and Chilean biologist Francisco Varela, Castoriadis castigates attempts by Artificial Intelligence enthusiasts to reduce human imagination to a system of cognitive mechanisms whose formalization we can, in a more or less successful manner, envision. And while in Connes, a vehement defender of a Platonist ontology of mathematics, Castoriadis finds a kindred mind, it is the intellectual encounter with Varela that most seriously

shakes Castoriadis’ system. Varela - a creator of the theory of biological autonomy that Castoriadis fervently endorses - presents what was (at that time) a radically new approach to the problematic of artificial life. Attempting to steer a middle way between classic biological reductionism and pure, undetermined “creation,” Varela lends from non-linear mathematics the notion of “emergence” - conceptualizing the creation of the “new” as a production of global phenomena of physical systems irreducible to their constituent elements. (ibid., 68) However, opposing Castoriadis’ insistence on the strict impossibility of “simulating” intelligence, Varela is quick to point out that the resources of the theory of non-linear dynamics allow an experimenter to formalize the conditions of the possibility of emergence. (ibid.) In essence, “artificial autonomy” can be brought forward in the laboratory, since one has the necessary resources to describe and set up the essential conditions for emergence. And, while Castoriadis’ objections concerning the specific corporeal and social existence of human beings do hold sway, it is precisely the embodied and socially embedded character of cognition that is best captured by Varela’s anti-representationalist turn.

Perhaps the most venerable facet of *Postscript on Insignificance* is the manner in which Castoriadis’ intellectual encounters themselves open up broad vistas for a critical engagement with his system. In that sense, it is one of Octavio Paz’s minute quips that best captures this researcher’s qualms about Castoriadis’ system. If creation is not combination, what is it then? (ibid., 38) The appeal to an undetermined “radical” creation resembles what Dan Dennett calls a “skyhook” - a magical, miraculous intervention that renders imagination possible.

(Dennett 1996, 74) But, even if one accepts this radical indeterminacy - the creative burst of the magmatic, if you will - it is not at all clear in what sense this would open up theoretical space for the institution of the creative imagination. As has been known since Hume, a simple rupture in the causal chain does not give us freedom and self-determination, but merely randomness. (cf. Churchland 2002, 232-233) And, while Castoriadis lambasts the positivists' misrecognition of the creative as aleatory, it is he that has to explain what precisely makes this mere indeterminacy a "creation." In an absence of a substantial explanation, Castoriadis' idiosyncratic employment of the notion has no ontological bearing and has to be clearly differentiated from the process of "subjective creation" essential to autonomy. However, Castoriadis' system can best be refurbished with another, ontologically distinct, interpretation of imagination. And, it is precisely this interpretation that fuels Castoriadis' most fertile engagements with the question of autonomy. There are two ways to make the distinction between the causal and the normative. The first would be to render this distinction itself a causal distinction. But, as we just saw, this leads us nowhere. On, the other hand, if - to borrow a trope overly familiar to German Idealism scholars - this distinction is itself made into a normative distinction, then the emergence of social creativity does not require causal indeterminacy. Normativity (and consequently self-determination) is instituted simply in the act of taking something "as" normative. Castoriadis is very close to such an approach with his insistence on the historical "emergence" of autonomy in Greco-Western culture, but the more general - and one must say "less ethnocentric" - method of naturalization would give the notion of autonomy a universal footing that is sometimes sorely missing in his account. What would be naturalized in this

project would not be the particular values and products of the norm-instituting creativity, but simply the formal attitudes of taking something as value-ridden and normative. Normativity will be created *ex nihilo* in a normative sense, but will be firmly grounded in the physical world.<sup>5</sup>

This project of naturalization, however, gives rise to important questions concerning the natural place of Castoriadis' "radical imagination." Namely, to what extent does *only* man live by creating meaning? In their passionate dialogue, Francisco Varela exposed only the crux of his ideas, but a decade and a half later, we have both the further development of those ideas and the benefit of hindsight in our favor. What in the mid-90s was a revolutionary research program in the cognitive sciences and the study of artificial life is today a well-established alternative to traditional (computer-inspired) representationalist views of the mind and cognition. And, based on what we now know<sup>6</sup> it would be, without a doubt, rackingly hasty to propound the exclusivity of human sense-making or to *a priori* reject the possibility of simulating "creative" intelligence. Castoriadis was adamant that only humans have the ability to "break the closure" of *autopoiesis*, (Castoriadis 2011, 60) but one of the main tenets of Varela's "dynamical systems theory" is precisely the idea that autopoietic closure does not necessarily contradict dynamic openness. Cognition is nothing but the structural, dynamical coupling of organism and environment, (cf. Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1992) and it is exactly the necessity of grappling with a particular environmental problem that jolts the imagination into a "creative" solution. All this, however, does not enervate the vitality of Castoriadis' project of autonomy. Fifteen years later, the question why our political coping with



the social problems of contemporary Western societies has not “jolted” our imagination into a creative, radical solution has grown into the defining riddle of our age. And, although on dark days this question does resemble an unsolvable enigma, it is worth keeping in mind the *natural* “exigency of freedom” that fuels this very act of questioning.

*Postscript on Insignificance* is a valuable addition to the steadily-growing library of English translations of one of the most versatile thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; but more importantly, it is a testament to the astonishing intellectual curiosity of the thinker, Cornelius Castoriadis, the revolutionary.

#### Notes:

1. For a detailed overview of Castoriadis’ system see John Garner’s entry in the *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. (Garner 2010).
2. Gabriel Rockhill’s comprehensive “editor’s introduction” to *Postscript on Insignificance* does a wonderful job of elucidating these ideas of Castoriadis’.
3. Cf. “The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy,” in Castoriadis 1997, 290-318.
4. Cf. “The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy” in Castoriadis 1997.
5. For this kind of an approach, see the *inferentialism* developed by Robert Brandom in *Making it Explicit*. (Brandom 1994)
6. An engaging overview of these developments can be found in Mark Rowlands’ “The New Science of the Mind.” (Rowlands 2010)

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Stanimir  
Panayotov

### Ask the Puppet

Towards

Thomas Ligotti,

*The Conspiracy against the Human Race,*

New York: Hippocampus Press, 2010.

If I was unborn  
I would have nothing to be grateful for  
I would have never seen love  
I would have never held cats  
I would have never buried my friends  
And prayed for their souls  
In reddening churches  
I would never have kissed  
And I would never have wept  
And I would never have seen  
Black Ships eat the sky  
And I would have been unborn  
And not have seen circuses  
Whilst watching the flowers  
Rise flags made of atoms  
Who will deliver me from myself?  
Who will deliver me from myself?

Current 93, *Black Ships Ate the Sky*

That we cannot give consideration to “nothing” is in itself not a tragedy too big to overcome. That nothing in the world is “inherently compelling” is also not a blunder too terrible to swallow. Yet the fact that we have not done yet with the massacre of life gains its significance from the non-realization of the nothingness that has to follow once

humanity becomes extinct under its “own will” to do so. And only a notion of the tragic could temporarily justify the affirmative spirit of the realization of that extinction. Of course, provided tragedy itself withers away along with all extinction. For, to preserve tragedy is to preserve a creeping life of partial extinction which does nothing to efface all the nothingness of this world - or, as Ligotti would say elsewhere, “this degenerate little town.”

The leitmotif of an affirmative “rant” such as Ligotti’s assumes its focus against the reign of unquestionable natalism from his own philosophical supposition that life is **MALIGNANTLY USELESS**. It might seem that Ligotti’s capitalization of this singular inference throughout the book insistently insults even the most attentive readers of this always already forsaken *opus post umus* of humanity. Although one needs to be a cynic in order to write horror (per Lovecraft), dare not be that cynical to the author: Ligotti is not interested in considering you emotional creatures. You are a puppet. Ask any human puppet.

Before coming to the outline of his own brand of philosophical pessimism which is based on the notion of *supernatural horror*, we should pay attention to the particular self-refuting rhetorical strategy of Ligotti who, while lambasting the posture that being (alive) is “all right,” invites us to *ask* this or that breathing impersonation of humanity about this or that saddening realization of our existence. Serving always as the rhetorical seal of a given passage, the futility of such an invitation to inquire another “authority” in non/existence only makes it more lucid to the reader that *to ask is to mean*. And what use of asking a question directed at some expert in in/humanity if life is MALIGNANTLY USELESS? What meaning can asking acquire if being alive is NOT all right? The affirmative spirit of negation is revealed just here: dare you ask, you are already there, facing the grinning face of joyless possibilities, meaningless nothingness, and malignant uselessness. Is this the same old story: that to affirm such an affirmation is the purest of negations? After all, this book provides only the “outlawed banalities” of worthless life. By asking, you only enact the worst myth ever - that of eternal return, while there is no sense in coming back. There is the repressed lurk of nothingness and its momentary natality of: and in this pure manure of being we will only be given a nanosecond of enjoying the obliteration of the One we become with the nothing only to disappear from the face of Earth. For Ligotti it goes without saying that this face will be smiling before all supernatural horror.

*The Conspiracy against the Human Race* pushes “philosophical pessimism” beyond its heroic versions (Unamuno, Camus, Sartre) and provides a methodological space and position for those not prone to buying into

compulsory suicidal rituals of self-effacement. Ligotti makes clear, once and for all, that the pessimist need not be morally burdened with suicide. That in the history of anti-natalist ideas few did not put an end to their tragic embodiments does not make them morally irresponsible. The (secular) anti-pessimistic moral infringement and its dictum require that should you happen not to like life, you better hurry up and die. But to announce the uselessness of life only means that the pessimist *has concluded* (p. 50) that the case is such. Nothing morally binding stems from the perfunctory ability to judge so. If anything, it takes an evocative and performative affirmation to announce this: against the dictum “If you cannot say something positive, or at least equivocal, keep it to yourself” (p. 172) stands the incorrigibly purposeless logic of the affirmative pessimist and his/her “yes” to death. “Without a ‘yes’ in our hearts, nothing could be done. And to be done with our existence en masse would be the most ambitious affirmation of all.” (p. 51) That affirmative spirit endorses that we should learn to live with what *should not be*. To overcome such a challenge, pessimists should positively affirm that what should *be* is the absence of life. (p. 47) It is from such heartfelt logical platitude that Ligotti evokes the screeching sounds of malignant uselessness from his signifying orchestra of “meaning.” What is more, pessimists do not choose to be forsaken since they never chose to be born in order to “apply for status in life affairs.” They are being *realists*, the everyday Buddha-advocates of non-existence. And without the Real of everyday life horror of living we cannot be done with. Thus, this sort of Buddhist anti-natalism requires that only by ceasing to procreate can one resolve the false dilemma of existence: suffering or transcendence. If “survival is for the pigs,” then may it be so for suicide. And if you are willing to even consider

that you are the joyless object of “puppet determinism” - Ligotti’s conceptual stock-in-trade, then being a pig will be much more joyful. With this the pessimist’s credo that “the non-existence never hurt anyone” gains its revelatory momentum: be no more and if you care for Nature, cease to exist. Even if Nature has a special plan for us, it is given to our consciousness to realize it: the conscious and controlled return to the primordial soup is impossible. Just as our *being-made human*. For, in Ligotti’s view, nature’s plan produced neither consciousness nor its plan to conquer it; and less so was the environment ever meant for us. Consciousness, even if we take the most vulgar and colonizing version of its anthropomorphization, was a system bug. Being conscious of this condition of ours thus invites us to kill ourselves. Ask Ligotti.

Both the title and the paradox of consciousness which produces the human tragedy of existence are deeply indebted to Norwegian philosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe and his essay “The Last Messiah,” (Zapffe 2004) as well as other occasional chunks of his translated into English which Ligotti disinters. The title’s “conspiracy” is more precisely one that involves silence when humans agree to not speak in their isolating themselves from meaninglessness. This is the primeval consensus of the human race against itself. Of course, that is true only if we take it for granted that falsification theory is the true grammar of living. Ligotti seems endeavored to prove how inherently wrong it is to entice yourself into the perseverance of a meaningless existing. He needs some categorical apparatus to reign over pro-lifers, and the project he should reinstate to do is roughly called anti-natalism, which seems to be the more generic term for both pessimism and nihilism (both of which went wrong

in life-affirmative directions, e.g. Camus and Nietzsche). It is only natural to conclude that this line of inhuman thinking, in the long run of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophical “turns,” went in the wrong direction in its being right and stayed outside the radar of philosophical trendsetters. At least it has been spared the attention of being recognized with masters of mystical materialismsuch as Nietzsche. In his indebtedness to Zapffe’s tragic and the Last Messiah, Schopenhauer’s moribund Will-to-live (“a virtuoso of life’s devaluation”) and Lovecraft’s supernatural horror, Ligotti walks through the bestiary of pessimism: Phillip Mainländer’s Will-to-die and deicide, Carlo Michaelstaedter’s puppet and suicide, Edgar Saltus, and other specimens of non-lifers reveals the chronology of Ligotti’s intellectual heirs in anti-natalism. The far-fetched end of this book is projected into the conclusion that not being is all right and we have nothing to lose but our right to die and just like God’s suicide or deicide we need to set ourselves free from life and ourselves (and the Last Messiah as the propagator of a post-divine era, is the quotidian Deus of the uselessness of life as its highest truth). After all, “Do we not deserve to die?” (p. 228) If Creation is for the pessimists the worst news ever, (p. 45) then our only natural and single right is the right to die. (p. 22) And, as we might suspect, it takes the abolishment of the very paradoxicality of life - consciousness - to do so quietly.

In his introduction and the first chapter, Ligotti merely makes it more luminescent why anti-natalists and pessimist are jettisoned in the outskirts of philosophy. Since the human condition is not one of being human, Ligotti takes quite literally the figure of the puppet. As if suggesting that we are already on the other side of life, as if

it was not enough that we only select what to want to see from the (in)human reflection that the puppets are, (p. 17) he asks: “How to take seriously a puppet master who has *gone over to the other side*?” Dare I say we should take that seriously if we are to ever proceed towards a more or less honorable quietus?

Since consciousness is a system error of Nature and divides (our) being, deprived of naturalistic reasoning, we inherit and reproduce the an-human paradox of consciousness which gradually leads us to believe that the puppet is the human. How so? Ligotti uses two possibilities to advocate puppet determinism (which naturally includes the questioning of free will and causality) by the quadruple explanatory formulas of Zapffe (isolation, anchoring, distraction, sublimation) and Tolstoy (ignorance, Epicureanism, strength and energy, and weakness). And while the latter cared to *choose* between these, the former, whose self-styled appointee Ligotti is, only cared to *explain* humanity’s strategies of survival in the vortex of consciousness:

“isolation” is the repression of grim facts by a code of silence; “anchoring,” the stabilizing attachment to specific ends; “distraction,” the continuous stream of divertive impressions; and “sublimation,” the conversion of anguish into uplifting pursuits, like literature and art. (Tangenes 2004)

Thus neither Zapffe nor Ligotti ever meant to take sides with survival: it is not a matter of choosing to die, it is a matter of the determination to *do* it.<sup>1</sup> With the evolution of consciousness, humanity developed finer techniques to deviate itself from disillusionment and the sad realization

of being here. Zapffe’s paradox of consciousness - that we cannot live with consciousness but cannot live without it - is the tragedy (itself able to serve as sublimation, see pp. 163-5). “This is the tragedy: Consciousness has forced us into the paradoxical position of striving to be unself-conscious of what we are - hunks of spoiling flesh on disintegrated bones.” (p. 28) Consciousness is “existential liability” (p. 51): and we *really* stop being what we think we are (and thus, Nietzsche-style, become what we are) when we are conscious enough of the identity paradox we live in and realize there is no way out if we believe we are somebody while being nobody. (p. 201) Everybody is nobody - as well as nobody’s puppet, for there is no self, too. It might turn out that the very externalization of the puppet (or whatever other mechanistic figure different from Ligotti’s) outside consciousness is the product of consciousness which is indiscernible as a self-model precisely because it serves both as image and reality.

I am pointing at Metzinger’s paradox from *Being No One* which Ligotti reads meticulously and defines it as: “You cannot know what you really are because then you would know there is nothing to know and nothing to know it.” (p. 105) Ligotti’s puppet determinism vs. causality postulates that we are able to reason about our determination, but we cannot feel it. (p. 97) Those who somehow manage to feel it go mad, for determinism = madness. It cannot be experienced first-hand, hence the socialized sublunary iatocratic power to temporarily undo someone’s “self” and “free will” in order to restore it and choose instead of that “self” who cannot relate to the notion of (causal) responsibility. To deny free will, as Ligotti does, is to involuntarily slip into the ranks of anti-natalists (one

such particular case is Popper's "elimination of suffering," see p. 73). The unacceptable and as of yet human compromise of cognitive psychology and analytic philosophy is that despite their oft met denial of the self, they only make more complex the questioning of existence. Thus, accepting/living in Metzinger's paradox is to mechanically go insane and sink into an "epidemic of madness." It is at this moment that the nightmare of our world finally becomes visible and real, and depression and meaninglessness unite into the four no's of Ligotti: "There is nothing to do and/ there is nowhere to go/ There is nothing to be and/ there is no-one to know." (Ligotti 2000)<sup>2</sup> And as in this stage we cannot feel anything being nobody, (p. 113-14) it only takes the mechanistic course of puppet determinism as the unconscious strategy of not surviving the millennia of our own survival. But there is something ultimately relativist about this determinism which renders it irrelevant for, as Ligotti himself admits, every nihilistic/anti-natalist position is abolishable. Were it not irrelevant, it might as well become a cause. And the question which Ligotti does not address is whether the self-extinction of humanity can do just fine without *itself*?

If we admit our being puppets, then we should abolish the paradox of consciousness which will be the abolishment of paradox altogether as yet another "real-life" paradox thrusting existence. And this arrested development is not news in itself. Earlier Malthus gave it economic determination if only to preserve a higher standard of living; in the 1990s, the Boston-based Church of Euthanasia was among the pioneers of a gleeful anti-natalist gay apocalypse through their weird house music. But these are minor examples of merely choosing to liberate oneself

from liberation. What is truly vertiginous here is that Ligotti asks for our liberation from ourselves. We do not deserve to exist: even less so as self-conscious and quasi-paradoxical puppets. The tragedy of evolution of consciousness is the "parent of all horrors." (p. 15) Kill yourself after Zapffe Socratic travesty "Know yourselves - *be infertile and let the earth be silent after ye,*" and you kill the whole family: the division of being, consciousness, tragedy, paradox, liberation and survival, puppets, death itself. There is no significant difference between suicide and thanatocide on this point. The uncanny fear of not being you (p. 88-9) which is worse than death is now alleviated once and for all.

In the rant against the line-up of the heroic "freaks of salvation," Ligotti manages to ravage such iconic nihilists such as Nietzsche, whose architecture of meaninglessness' ruins serves an entirely different Dionysian end that refashions fate into *freedom*. Transhumanists provide no more of it; they are attacked as a "secular retelling of the Christian rapture" (p. 127) whose ambition that we can remake ourselves is failed because determinism would teach us that we are not even part of the process of remaking ourselves in isolating suffering in the world. Day by day, we are not getting better: we are only "getting made" better and better. And the better we are made, the worse we will cross the finish. Christianity itself gets a scarce mention: a mere "savior on stick." The "egoistic compulsion to send emissaries into the future" (p. 178) does not end even in the spiritual counterpart of anti-natalism - Buddhism, which Ligotti considers to be the *religious* mirror of pessimism whose popularity as opposed to pessimism's state of affairs is based on: (1) the fact that operates through belief rather than truth claims and (2)



the tree-like Buddhist version of the Decalogue, based on the relief from suffering (*dukkha*). That Buddhism does embrace suffering from scratch still does not make it eligible as extinction's intellectual credibility, but at least it does consider the imaginary status of the self. In doing so, Buddhism manifests the paradox of desire and the self: if one wants to get relief from suffering, one assumes that he or she is one and has a self. "There is nothing more futile than to consciously look for something to save you," concludes Ligotti. And among those who best understood that ego-death is the condition to abandon that paradox are Krishnamurti and people who have not drawn themselves into the reparation of selves after Near Death Experience (such as author Suzanne Sagal). But then again, even ego-death is a compromise with being and creation itself; we have to be able to kill death and killing itself. And if we are puppets, we are doomed to do it. And perhaps imagining that "doing" for the human puppets is the only way to quit their very quietus.

It makes little sense to wonder or further ask where does this "only way" end. If the end is the end of the end of all ends, then puppet logic would require that even anti-natalists are not ones, for they will still retain self-identity which is non-sense. If anti-natalists assume that every system (and what else than a system [error] is the human species?) contains the conditions of its self-destruction, and if for humanity this condition is consciousness, and puppetry is self-destruction, then that system cannot and should not have a way to retain any possibilities for the abolishment of self-destruction and the preservation of the living "flesh" of the paradox. If this is the case, then to hell with "The moment of consummate disaster/ When puppets turn to face the puppetmaster." (Ligotti 2000) It seems

that for Ligotti self-destruction is just that: self-destruction with no identity, for how can it have one if there is no one to be and no one to know? This is when the human puppet grasps that "the true is a moment of the false" (Debord) and we have to abolish death itself in order to transcend being, go consciously through it and terminate it: other than that, there is no serious "confrontation with mortality." (p. 161) In short, it takes no self and no identity to destroy the (notion of) self; it only takes a puppet.

The mastering of such arguments which hardly can be further pushed to their edges has a specific purpose in Ligotti. We need to observe that he is a writer who, not yet dead, himself makes an examination of the kind of examined life not worth living. What spares us the whining and whimper of non-being in Ligotti? This is his privileging of philosophical horror fiction, more precisely, supernatural horror (Lovecraft).<sup>3</sup> It is the paradox in flesh (p. 16) and, to answer the futile "how so?": a character should "collapse in horror before this ontological perversion." If we are only able to accept being and living as "not all right," as horror (that it is supernatural is to me a tautological ornamentation of that ontological perversity), we will suffocate ourselves in peace with the non-existing denizens of selfhood. Since puppet determinism and supernatural horror are related, then it seems logical that their very deterministic relation should exclude the necessitation of all determination. This is why "No one can prove that our life in this world is a supernatural horror." (p.18) If a puppet could determine anything (say, about the ontological status of horror), then why bother writing about it in the first place? To exclude all determination from the idea of supernatural horror is not to further determine the puppet to shoot itself: we merely have to *play*



as if we decide on not determining it/us doing so, for the absolute adieu to consciousness is either a bullet or non-procreation. If what unites us is the Brotherhood of suffering (Zapffe), then those who live a conscious life about suffering should let go, because they do not “go on with things.” Since we are human puppets, and puppets are only relative to other *playthings* (p. 33, emphasis mine, S. P.) supporting the illusion of being real, “A utopia in which we no longer deny the realities we presently must repress cannot be realistically hoped for.” (p. 71) Thus, if the essential question was for Ligotti “Are we real?,” (p. 83) some 100 pages later the entire project of answering this question is subjected to the definition of supernatural horror as “Horror is more real than we are.” (Lovecraft p. 182)<sup>4</sup> The realization of such invariably mechanistic rationalization is the characterless plot of the supernatural horror fiction. (Again, little do we care to ask for the status of reason and “rationalization” if this is the case.) Existence of puppets as life-dream of “life” is that ontologically bittersweet concoction of subjective mind and objective monstrosity. Hence, every form of rationality and explaining horror “is irrelevant to our being afraid or not afraid of anything.” (p. 243, n. 7) Little do monsters care about horror, if they ever care and feel. Thus, the supernatural is the “metaphysical counterpart of a mind that has been driven mad,” (p. 211) that is, of absolute determinism in a causeless universe. Once consciousness appeared, we walked out of the natural. Ever since this system bug, everything is supernatural and we only figure in the galaxy’s cesspool. Our life is just the elusion out of this impossible and ravaging news.

*The Conspiracy against the Human Race* ends like an apophatic narration on how not to speak about death as

the supernatural, (see esp. pp. 224-26) since it is “like a visitation from a foreign and enigmatic sphere.” (p. 217) If there was no consciousness, it is natural that death would not exist and with this all narration ends here. But the supernatural horror of human puppetry *cannot be avoided* because we are both consciousness-bearers and puppets and as such orchestrate the endless rapture of life. If all is nature and we are not, then, simply put, “We are not from here.” (p. 221) “We” are the supernatural horror that creep us all along. We are the outlandish. We are the we that are nobody. We are those who should not be here. We run amok outside the puppet world we inhabit, decentering the supernatural Real in the outskirts of survival but, at the end, to no avail, for “We are those puppets, those *human* puppets.” (p. 222) Consciousness gave us an “appointment with nonexistence.” How do we part with it in not procreating? With an unnatural puppet smile.<sup>5</sup> And even then, as Ligotti says, what do we care? What do we care that some puppets are being swallowed by a terminal anti-eternality or that we are aware of all that follows from that millennial farce of being-all-right? There will come the time when we will not wake up on time, outside time, when time will be swallowed by itself and no God will be there to digest the feces and carcasses of those irrelevant non-beings, of those jittery puppets. After all, facing “The death of tragedy in the arms of non-existence” (p. 228) must bring about the end of all tragic ends; it *must mean* - in a final paroxysm of the paradox - that the puppets deserve to die.

Taken as individuals, we do not quite resemble horror. But seen as a whole, humanity is a zombie. And if only to unconsciously “surprise” itself with the horror that it is, yes, it does survive for the sake of survival. What else is

procreation if not human zombification? The conspiracy against the human race is made to be for the human race, and it ends with it:

Survival is a two-way street. Once we settle ourselves off-world, we can blow up this planet from outer space. It's the only way to be sure its stench will not follow us. ... [if] it can destroy what it has made ... then may it perish along with every other living thing it has introduced to pain. (p. 80)

Will life as such linger on with no-one to fake its realization? Will it whistle the planetary melodies of existence after survival's quietus? Undoubtedly, yes. Two documentaries (David de Vries' *Life after People* and National Geographic's *Aftermath: Population Zero*, both 2008) and a book, Alan Weisman's *The World without Us* (see Weisman 2007) announce the horrific news we never cared to face: without us, life itself continues undisturbed on Earth. Good news broadcasted on no TV channel: there is no one to pronounce the shibboleths of life and "life" itself. The bad news: our own disappearance or extinction does not free the world of our consciousness' remains with a sleight-of-hand. Puppets' puppets blight the smiling face of Earth some 300 years after. Stainless steel still shines away at the edge of non-existence. Dams and atomic plants still disintegrate. Non-existence and unconsciousness thrive. For the good of the unborn, for the smiles of "those who would never be forced to exist," for an ethic of the void, for a better galactic toilet, what else can we do but build a giant stainless puppet monument and CEASE TO EXIST? Who knows? Ask anybody's puppet.

Notes:

1. But as puppets, we are even not doing it: we are *made to do* it.
2. See also Ligotti's project with David Tibet: Current 93, *The Unholy City*, "Nobody is Anybody," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5fetSoZFyBw> (accessed October, 1 2011).
3. Throughout the years, Ligotti has raised the standard of a creeping and unimitable style of simplicity much less grandiose than that of Lovecraft's longitudinal necrostills but no less endeavored toward the description of being's hollows. I cannot think of better examples than his *Teatro Grottesco* and *In a Foreign Town, in a Foreign Land*.
4. See esp. pp. 191-2: "We know that everything we see is unreal, yet there is paradoxically heightened reality to it all. To awaken from such a dream is to lose your freedom from yourself and return to an onerous embodiment where consciousness is a tragedy and you cannot soar unscathed within an atmosphere of death. You can only die."
5. As Zapffe says, "All I have for facing death myself, is a foolish smile."

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