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Rok Benčin*

Introduction: The World According to Contemporary Philosophy

The emergence of modern philosophy coincides with the problematisation of the concept of world. In his famous study of the modern scientific and philosophical revolution that took place in 16th- and 17th-century European thought, Alexandre Koyré argued that this revolution “can be described roughly as bringing forth the destruction of the Cosmos, that is, the disappearance, from philosophically and scientifically valid concepts, of the conception of the world as a finite, closed, and hierarchically ordered whole.”¹ But what became of the philosophical concept of world when it could no longer be identified with a mythical, metaphysical, or cosmological totality? It could be claimed that the dissolution of the cosmos actually marks the emergence of the concept of world as a modern philosophical problem. This special issue of *Filozofski vestnik* presents a collection of essays dedicated to the persistence of this problem in contemporary philosophy.

In this short introduction to the issue, I propose a categorisation of three different ways in which contemporary philosophy has reacted to the modern destruction of the cosmos. Three strands of thought can be detected, each identifying a different “destiny” of the concept of world within modernity:

- (1) The first tendency generalises Koyré’s conclusion by rejecting the concept of world as an *obsolete* metaphysical category that is no longer viable in the modern age.
- (2) The second tendency claims that the modern dissolution of the cosmos also brought forth the *loss* of the world as a framework of commonly shared experience and reflects on the possibility of rebuilding it.

¹ Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957, p. 2.

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- (3) The third tendency argues that the dissolution of a cosmic totality resulted not in a loss, but instead in a *proliferation* of singular, divergent, yet coexisting worlds.

It should be noted that the distinction between these tendencies can only be made analytically, since they are actually deeply intertwined and often coexist within the work of one and the same philosopher. In what follows, I first briefly sketch these three tendencies and then proceed to describe the essays collected in this issue.

- (1) From the point of view of the first tendency, world should no longer be considered a valid philosophical concept. Inspired by Koyré, Jacques Lacan argued that science clearly shows that the nature of physical reality does not constitute what philosophers have called world: “If we leave behind philosophical discourse, nothing is less certain than the existence of a world.”² This claim has often been reiterated by Lacan-influenced philosophers, most notably Slavoj Žižek, who emphasise – from a materialist position – the ontological incompleteness of reality: “The only consistent materialist position is that the world does not exist – in the Kantian sense of the term, as a self-enclosed whole.”³ Even Alain Badiou, ten years before developing his own concept of world, claimed that “philosophy begins by destroying the very concept of the world; it knows, as does Lacan, that there only is a fantasy of the world, and that it is only in its defection, or its defeat, that one can subtractively think some real.”⁴ It is thus possible to claim, from a materialist or realist position, that “the world” does not exist. The new realist currents in philosophy either simply equate the notion of world with objectivity or reject it as the metaphysical totality to which nothing corresponds in reality. The latter position is endorsed by Markus Gabriel, according to whom the world as a totality is an illegitimate construction of the paradoxical domain of all domains.⁵ Roland Végső recently went a step further and showed how a strug-

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² Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX: Encore*, trans. B. Fink, New York, W. W. Norton, 1998, p. 30. (See also p. 33.)

³ Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2004, p. 97.

⁴ See the text “Logology Against Ontology” in Alain Badiou, *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, B. Bosteels (ed.), London, Verso, 2012, p. 317.

⁵ Markus Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist*, trans. G. Moss, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2015.

gle with worldlessness was even at the heart of those philosophies in the 20th century that nevertheless attempted to revive and reconfigure the concept of world.⁶ Végső proposes that such attempts should instead be abandoned in favour of an affirmative exploration of worldlessness.

- (2) The concept of world made a significant comeback as a category of phenomenological experience starting with Edmund Husserl's and then Martin Heidegger's theories of the surrounding world, the life world, the being-in-the-world, etc. In this tradition of thought, world is not simply a descriptive notion, but also constitutes an endangered ideal of the authentic existential experience, significantly threatened by modern ways of life and thought influenced by science and technology. For Heidegger, for instance, modernity brought about the "darkening of the world," in which humankind's world-building capacity is at stake.⁷ While, from the cosmological perspective, world is obsolete as a concept, from the phenomenological perspective, it is always on the verge of being lost as a form of experience. Inspired by this phenomenological perspective, Hannah Arendt presented a similar take on the loss of the world in social terms, identifying modernity with humankind's alienation from the world, which has occurred thanks not only to modern science but also the capitalist mode of production.⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy continued this trend by claiming that "there is no longer any world" in which "one might find a place, a dwelling, and the elements of an orientation."⁹ In his final seminar, Jacques Derrida similarly discussed the phenomenological concept of world by questioning the very possibility of shareable experience.¹⁰ In Gilles Deleuze, we find the idea that modernity testifies to the "broken link between man and world."¹¹ Finally, at a certain point, even Badiou claims that our historical situation, given the depoliticisation operat-

⁶ Roland Végső, *Worldlessness After Heidegger: Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. G. Fried and R. Polt, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014, p. 29.

⁸ See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958.

⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. J. S. Librett, Minneapolis and London, The University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 4.

¹⁰ See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign: Volume II*, trans. G. Bennington, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011.

¹¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 169.

ed by contemporary “capital-parlamentarism,” does not constitute a world.¹² For the most part, this trend seems to leave open the possibility of regaining the world, of re-establishing a genuine link to or belief therein. Yet, a more apocalyptic version is indeed also present. The climate crisis puts the loss of the world into an even more urgent perspective, while also compelling us to rethink the relation between earth and world.¹³

- (3) The third tendency claims that our contemporary experience of reality is marked by the coexistence of a multiplicity of worlds. Genealogically, this perspective entails a return to Leibniz, for whom worlds are different possible configurations of the same ontological multiplicity (the multiplicity of monads). Monads can be arranged in different ways so as to constitute an infinite number of possible worlds. While Leibniz confined the multiplicity of worlds to possibility (only one of all possible worlds was ultimately created), some contemporary philosophers have argued instead that our own reality is actually constituted as a multiplicity of divergent, yet overlapping, worlds. For Deleuze, the “impossibilities” that Leibniz distributed between different possible worlds erupt “onto the same stage,” constituting a “chaosmos” where “impossible worlds belong to the same universe.”¹⁴ Badiou, on the other hand, attempts to separate the logical order of worlds from the chaotic multiplicity found on the ontological level: “[H]ow can the essential unbinding of multiple-being give itself as a local binding and, in the end, as the stability of worlds? Why and how are there worlds rather than chaos?”¹⁵ Yet, this declared stability is nevertheless put into question when we consider the coexistence of a multiplicity of worlds: “Not only is there a

¹² See the text “The Caesura of Nihilism” in Badiou, *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, pp. 61–64.

¹³ See Kelly Oliver, *Earth and World: Philosophy after the Apollo Missions*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015; Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, trans. R. Nunes, Cambridge, Polity, 2017; M. S. C. Schuback and S. Lindberg (eds.), *The End of the World: Contemporary Philosophy and Art*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017; Pablo Servigne, Raphaël Stevens, and Gauthier Chapelle, *Another End of the World is Possible: Living the Collapse (and Not Merely Surviving It)*, trans. Geoffrey Samuel, Cambridge, Polity, 2021.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, T. Conley, London, The Athlone Press, 1993, pp. 81–82. See also Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 131.

¹⁵ Badiou, Alain, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event*, 2, trans. A. Toscano, London, Continuum, 2006, p. 101.

plurality of worlds, but the same multiple – the ‘same’ ontologically – in general co-belongs to different worlds.”¹⁶ Contrary to Leibniz, who subordinates the infinity of worlds to the best one, Badiou claims that human beings are capable of inhabiting a “virtually unlimited number of worlds.”¹⁷ Within the phenomenological tradition, Nancy has argued that the loss of the world as totality allows us to become attentive to the true sense of the world, in which its plurality is revealed: “The world is always the plurality of worlds.”¹⁸ The Leibnizian concept of possible worlds also had a significant impact in analytic philosophy through its usage in modal logics. The logical discussions also spawned a metaphysical debate on the actual existence of these other worlds. While David Lewis famously argued that other possible worlds, separate from our own, actually exist, Nelson Goodman claimed that *our own* world is always already constituted as a multiplicity of actual worlds.¹⁹

Obviously, this brief schematic overview leaves aside many important differences between the thinkers and concepts it puts together. What exactly “world” refers to in the work of different philosophers and philosophical traditions should of course be carefully analysed.²⁰ Yet, the more general tendencies revealed by this view from afar might nevertheless point us in the direction of some common questions and problems addressed by these different conceptualisations.

Further analysis would also have to show how these concepts respond to scientific, social, political, and artistic developments. We have opened this introduction with the major impact the emergence of modern science had on the philo-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Nancy, *Sense of the World*, p. 155.

¹⁹ See David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986; and Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1978.

²⁰ Despite the fact that there are a significant number of studies on the concept of world in individual authors and philosophical traditions, systematic examinations and comparative readings of different approaches in contemporary philosophy are relatively rare. Such studies include (apart from those I mention in other parts of the text) Paul Clavier, *Le concept du monde*, Paris, PUF, 2000; Christian Bernier, *Qu'est-ce qu'une conception du monde?*, Paris, Vrin, 2006; Jean-Clet Martin, *Plurivers: Essai sur la fin du monde*, Paris, PUF, 2010; Sean Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida*, London and New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2013; Julien Rabachou, *Qu'est-ce qu'un monde?*, Paris, Vrin, 2016; Franck Fischbach, *La privation de monde: Temps, espace et capital*, Paris, Vrin, 2019.

sophical concept of world. To this, we should add the rise of capitalism, which, as Karl Marx already noted, resulted in the world market. Capitalism recreates – but also immediately alienates – the world as a (socio-economic) totality. It is also the general framework within which the growing ideological polarisation, coupled with increasing socio-economic inequalities, today contributes to the deepening experience of living in different worlds. Philosophical readings of artworks should also be mentioned in this regard. Artworks have the capacity to open up new worlds by reframing the coordinates of sensible experience. Consider, for example, Deleuze’s assertion that artworks determine the conditions of *real* experience in contrast to the Kantian limits of *possible* experience.²¹ In turn, fictional structures, similar to those at work in art and literature, can also be detected, as Jacques Rancière – among others – has repeatedly shown, in the way the political experience of common worlds is constructed.²²

The first two texts in this issue themselves offer an extended introduction to world as a philosophical concept. Bruno Besana reflects on its “pre-history” through a detailed reading of Plato and Aristotle, offering an account of how the modern concept of world arises precisely from the incompleteness of the cosmos that ancient Greek philosophy constantly stumbled upon. The indeterminacy of the concept, its “essential equivocality,” is also – according to Besana – what has made it so productive throughout the history of philosophy. Peter Klepec further explores the many difficulties and contradictions related to this elusive concept in the context of contemporary philosophy, focusing specifically on the way the world is supposed to be changed (beyond philosophy, as in Marx) or recreated (with philosophy, as in Badiou).

A series of articles then addresses the knot of obsolescence and loss that surrounds the concept of world. Roland Végső proposes to understand contemporary cultural disorientation not as resulting from a lack but instead from a surplus of world. In an intriguing use of the Goethean categories of *Weltschmerz* and *Weltliteratur*, Végső’s article outlines an objective *Weltschmerz* through which the world becomes aware of its own inexistence while an abundance of

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²¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, London, Continuum, 1994, pp. 68–69.

²² See Jacques Rancière, *Modern Times: Essays on Temporality in Art and Politics*, Zagreb, Multimedialni institut, 2017.

apocalyptic *Weltliteratur* is being produced. Ruth Ronen discusses the contemporary loss of the world, but not in the strictly phenomenological sense of a disappearing framework of authentic existential experience, but as a failure of actualisation. At the same time, her analysis of modal terms – analysed through an encounter between Lacan and Hintikka – moves away from the problem of possibility and possible worlds to focus instead on contingency. The failure of the contingent actualisation of a world is what can help us understand the contemporary fragmentation of the world into its multiple versions and the general disorientation this results in. Loss of the world and its multiplication are therefore two sides of the same coin. Jan Völker tackles Heidegger’s reflections on the loss of the world in the light of the current debates on the Anthropocene. Heidegger, Völker argues, brings our attention to the necessity of framing these debates within the even more urgent need to rethink our relation to being as what is at stake in the loss of the world. Magdalena Germek approaches the concept of world through the metaphor of anatomy. In what way can we speak of the death of a world, or of its coming to life? Through these questions, Germek’s article provides a new perspective on Badiou’s logical definition of worlds and the truth procedures that invigorate or mortify them.

Badiou’s concept of world is further analysed by Nick Nesbitt, but in more political terms in connection to Marx. Nesbitt’s article brings our attention to Badiou’s curious neglect of capitalism as the dominant logic of the modern world. Yet, instead of stopping at Badiou’s shortcomings, Nesbitt claims that Badiou has, in fact, produced a formalisation of Marx’s logical procedure in *Capital*. Marina Gržinić offers another political reflection on the world as established by capitalism and especially colonialism. Through Mbembe and other contemporary critics, Gržinić’s text revolves around the task of decolonising the concept of world and the political realities it refers to.

The concluding series of texts focuses on the multiplicity of worlds and the status of world as a fictional category. My own contribution reflects on the contemporary actualisation of Leibnizian possible worlds, outlining a “hypercorrelationist” conception of a transcendental multiplicity of worlds. Emphasising the fictional structures at work in constructing such worlds, I re-examine Deleuze’s and Badiou’s subversion of Leibniz. I also analyse the political importance of such fictional structures in Kant’s definition of cosmopolitanism and Rancière’s definition of politics as a conflict of worlds. Jean-Jacques Lecercle responds to

my thoughts on the subject by testing my conceptions in a reading of Virginia Woolf's last novel. In *Between the Acts*, Lecercle retraces both the unification and the dispersal of worlds as transcendental frameworks. To the merely fictional construction of worlds, Lecercle contrasts their social construction through language, interpellation, and ideological apparatuses, while also reflecting on the specific role literature plays in these processes. Nika Grabar uses Rancière's conception of the distribution of the sensible to reflect on the world-building capacity of architecture. In what sense can the different regimes of architecture today build a different world – and for whom? Anna Longo's contribution confronts the hypothesis that we are living in a simulation comparable to the one presented in the *Matrix* films. Tracing the philosophical and social presuppositions and consequences of this hypothesis as formulated by David J. Chalmers, Longo proposes a Nietzschean critique that contrasts this calculating simulation to the proper artistic power of becoming. Noa Levin's text, finally, focuses on two contemporary readings of Leibniz that go against the grain of the established reception of Leibniz as an optimistic thinker of historical progress. Benjamin's and Deleuze's readings help us put into perspective Leibniz's notions of eternal return and the multiplicity of worlds.

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Bruno Besana*

The World: The Tormented History of an Inescapable Para-Concept

Part I: The Pre-History of the “World”

The universe and the world have a long history of conceptual proximity, if not of coincidence. Yet their relation is a complicated one. In fact, any attempt to set a distinction between the two seems doomed to leave a certain zone of confusion. This article will try to point out how the relevance of the idea of the world in contemporary philosophy can be elucidated by mapping its complicated relation to the idea of the universe. Broadly speaking it can be remarked that “universe” seems quite constantly to indicate the ordered totality of all that is, while “world” appears to refer to a more fluctuating object, one that is both superposed if not identical to the one of universe, and a part of the latter. World in fact can refer to the earth, to any planet (other worlds), to the totality of the universe (“wherever you are in the world, one and one equals two”), or finally, by extension, to a limited totality (“in the world of musicians, many are the deaf”). The world always seems to imply an environment, an *Umwelt*, certainly provided with a constituted order, that brings with it a certain self-evidence, a whole the regularities of which can be investigated, but that ultimately appears to have an unstable definition and uncertain borders.

The term universe targets as object of inquiry the whole of that which is; it therefore comes to stand, in different senses, for totality. In fact, despite a quite vast set of more or less metaphoric uses, these uses all still cling to an original referent, to one distinctly defined object (which certainly always remains an object of inquiry): the cosmos as a consistent and remainderless totality. By contrast, when it comes to the “world”, the point is not so much whether it stands for the universe or only for a part of it. Rather, it seems to signify something that is a whole, in the sense of an exhaustive set with a solid internal consistency (hence showing its near interchangeability with the noun “universe”), but whose margins we are never too sure about – a consistent totality, in relation to which something else can be thought. With the world, we encounter more difficulties in trying to relate its various uses to an original one. We find ourselves oscillating between an array of objects of reference, none of which seems to be pri-

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mary. “World” comes to signify a consistent totality, inasmuch as a constitutive uncertainty concerning its outside, its borders or the consistency of its elements casts a shadow on the solidity of said totality.

In this article I seek to underline how the concept of the world, as thought through this hypothesis, comes to play a central role in contemporary philosophy; that is, more specifically, how it comes to work as an operator that makes it possible to think beyond the critique of the notion of totality, that allows us to make sense (thus avoiding the fall into a sheer relativism) when no whole is available any longer to refer to. With its mutual irreducible meanings and with its zones of confusion, the world will appear as a sort of polymorphic formation that acts by identifying itself with totality, and therefore confusing the distinctive notion of the latter. Opaque and instable, it is as a sort of para-concept, that nonetheless firmly sits at the centre of philosophy, from which somehow it does not get expelled, as does happen with badly formed concepts. Confusedly identified with totality, it interrogates the validity of this notion; sitting at the centre of philosophy with its opaqueness and instability, it cripples the conceptual order that aims at grasping such totality, and plays a central role in the systematic organization of distinct notions, maintaining nonetheless intact its own confusion.

It will not be the aim of this article to give a diachronic, exhaustive account of the main turns that the notion of the world undertakes within the history of philosophy. It is not possible, however, to enter into our topic without first observing how the idea of the world has not been always present in philosophy. This first part of the article thus examines the conceptual space in which this term is absent, but in which a certain relation of tension between terms determines the very place in which the idea of the world will come to reside. In the second part, planned to be published in a later volume of this journal, I will investigate how in present times the concept of world underwent a sort of intensification, coming to play a particularly important role, exactly because of the operations that its confused nature allows for – a role in which are reflected, in a distorted manner, the elements that articulate the very place via which it first entered the space of philosophy.

Before the World

The beginning of philosophy seems to remain somewhat removed from the world. Not of course in the sense of it expressing some lofty lack of interest for worldly things as a certain *vulgata* cyclically comes to accuse philosophy of. The point is rather that the very notion of world seems not to be present during philosophy's initial period. The concept of world seems in fact to elude Greek thought. It would appear that the three nouns most likely to cover its conceptual field are easily translated by as many contemporary terms: *cosmos*¹ as universe; *gea* as earth (qua natural place as opposed to the sky); and to these two terms might be added *to pan*, or *ta panta*, to indicate in a distributive manner the whole of that which is. In what follows, the aim is to investigate the idea that the conceptual place for the world emerged from the relation between these terms of Greek philosophy and that the conceptual place that it comes thus to occupy will necessarily imply a certain equivocity. The world will come to appear as a certain superposition of the universe, the earth, and the whole of things. This, I argue, will give it a conceptual instability that, far from being a limitation, actually grants it a central, inescapable position in contemporary thought.

Concerning the three terms in whose place the world comes to appear, several things can be observed. First, *cosmos* comes to refer to the universe in as much as it is the extension of a well-articulated order. The term *cosmos* is used to describe an array of cases in which an order produces a harmony the effect of which is aesthetic beauty: if cosmetics, make-up, enhances beauty by hiding what are perceived as imperfections or underlying what are considered a face's proper proportions, similarly the beauty of the universe, its "cosmetic" harmony, is the reflection of the rational order that regulates it.² Since Thales, the term *cosmos* came to stand as a guarantee of finitude and unity ("the cosmos is one").³ Also, the Pythagorean obsession with an order that irradiates through mathematical relations into all natural things and the understanding of which (through the study of mathematics, astronomy or music) ultimately constitutes

¹ This article uses, for the Greek term κόσμος, the Romanization "cosmos", identical to the current term in English. Still all other terms stemming from the same root will maintain the use of "k".

² Cf. for instance Plato, *Republic*, II 373c, "gynaikeion kosmon."

³ DK A 13b. I refer to Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *I presocratici*, G. Reale (ed.), Milano, Bompiani, 2006, pp. 168–169.

a moral goal, is based on the conviction that “the set of all things is to be called a ‘cosmos’, because of the order that is in it.”⁴

The same underlying principle can be found in the two main systems of Greek classicism. Plato clearly stresses how the universe tightens a knot between aesthetic beauty and rational order – a knot that immediately implies moral consequences.⁵ *Cosmos* in Greek is used not only to indicate the right constitution (where something that is correctly built is “well constituted”) but also to indicate a rationally constituted political constitution: in this vein, in Plato’s *Republic* the adjective *kosmios* is employed to describe how, guided by a principle of measure that only the philosopher has firmly grasped, any given trait or character, any given “type of personality” can be held within its harmonic limits (can be set to do what it is suited to doing), thus well integrating with other type of individuals. So, for instance, asks Plato: “and doesn’t gentleness [...] once left to itself, become excessive softness, while on the contrary, when correctly trained, becomes order and civilization [*kosmios*, the adjective is here rendered with a noun]?”⁶ This passage crucially figures as part of Plato’s discussion of education through gymnastics and music, which he considers two fundamental tools for harmonizing a multiplicity of movements and sounds into a beautiful, finite, measured composition. With a stricter sense of “moral order”, “cosmos” resurfaces in Book IV, where it comes to indicate “order, dominion upon passions or desires,” not per se as the repression of such pleasures and desires, but rather, we are told, as a certain “sobriety” attained by their “balance” (by *kosmésanta*, i.e. “giving oneself balance”).⁷

Harmonizing each individual within the limits that their type imposes on them also makes it possible to establish harmonic relations between types of individ-

⁴ DK b21, in *ibid.*, pp. 236–237.

⁵ Such a knot will remain a major underlying theme that will remain intact from Greek to Roman civilization, as witnessed for instance by the double meaning of *decoro* in Latin, which indicates both the pleasant arrangement of a surface – whether a table, a cloth or someone’s skin – and the capacity to behave with decency in conformity with a moral order.

⁶ Plato, *Republic*, III, 410e. For the Greek text I refer to Platone, *La Repubblica*, Milano, Bompiani, 2009. The translations that I have consulted are those by Roberto Radice for the same edition and by Paul Shorey, Plato, *Republic*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes, vol. 5 and 6*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1978.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, 443d.

uals. It is upon a same measure or harmony that both the individual and the constitutional order regulating the relations between individuals are formed – and Books 3 and 4 of *Republic* exactly describe how the interconnection of such two orders is produced through education to measure, proportion and harmony. In a key passage depicting how the philosopher forms the link between the ideal supercelestial order that he contemplates and the city to which he transmits the principle of good governance, Plato observes that the philosopher achieves such a task by “looking at and contemplating [...] realities that do not commit or endure reciprocal injustice, and are all arranged according to order and to a given relation” (“*kosmoi de panta kai kata logon ekonta*”).⁸ This cosmos, here presented as a reiteration of *logos*, is, it can be argued, in no way per se anything else than the cosmic universe, as this latter is such – is a universe or cosmos – inasmuch as it is shaped by a superior logic of order and proportion, without which it would not be a cosmos, but an orderless material multiplicity, a *chora*.

This metaphysical extension of the *Republic* that is the *Timaeus*, as is well known, unfolds the details of such a logic: in the first, simpler explanation of the order of the universe, the reader is plunged straight into terminological turmoil, as Timaeus speaks about the necessity to investigate the “cause of the composition of the becoming and of *to pan*” (translated either as “universe” or as “all things”).⁹ The concept is reiterated immediately, this time as the need to find the “principle of the becoming and of the *cosmos*” (translated either as “universe” or as “world”).¹⁰ Between the two sentences, the construction is almost identical and, to add to the confusion, *ta panta* is used again a few lines further on clearly with the generic sense of “all things.”¹¹ The answer, of which the general characteristics are presented in this passage in the text, is that, analogously to what the philosopher will do at the microcosmical level of the city, the demiurge, wanting “all things” to be good, operates upon a tumultuous multiplicity, which swirls in a disordered becoming, and composes its movement as a moving image of the perfection of the principles of Unity and Identity. Thus ordered, fashioned, made beautiful, the whole of that which is (*to pan*) comes to

⁸ *Ibid.*, VI, 500c.

⁹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 29d–e. Giovanni Reale (Platone, *Timeo*, in Platone, *Tutti gli scritti*, Milano, Bompiani, 1991) translates “universo”, while R. G. Bury (Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 9, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1929) prefers “all things”.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30a. Reale translates “mondo”, while Bury prefers “universe”.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 50b and 50e.

form what we correctly call a “universe”, a totality in which the indeterminacy of becoming is, as far as possible, reduced to the unity of a principle regulating the relation of the parts: it is due to such order that the whole is not a merely “all things”, but a universe, a cosmos. This is in fact confirmed in the “palinode”, in Timaeus’s second and more accurate discourse, which invents a terminological dialectics that resolves the equivocity presented in the first discourse. In fact, after pointing out how the material multiplicity that constitutes all things is a sort of “amorphic kind, capable of receiving every determination,”¹² he defines the action of ordering that the demiurge imposes on it as *kosmeisthai to pan*: “to order the universe” is the translation in most editions, yet it would not be inexact to render it, as it were, as “to universalize the whole,” or even “to cosmetize all things.” The universe is such inasmuch as an action shapes or forces an infinity into a finite order, the mediation between the two being a well-ordered movement, such as that which the earthly observers see of rotational movement in the sky at night.¹³

As a recent study points out, Aristotle for his part has a certain allergy to cosmetics.¹⁴ Although the question of the general order of the universe plays a central role in his thought, he distances himself from previous classic cosmological accounts. In fact, if a causal perspective is central to Aristotle’s approach to nature, still the question of the general cause of the universe cannot be taken as an immediate step, as doing so cannot but lead to a diversity of problems, from superstition to logical contradictions.¹⁵ Aristotle tackles this problem from several angles. First is that each transformation, generation and corruption have to be relative to a support, to an *hypokeimenon*, the latter fundamentally being a rela-

¹² *Ibid.*, 51a.

¹³ A first presentation of the upper sky as the part of the cosmos that better translates into movement the ideal relation between the first principles is to be found in *ibid.*, from 38b on; the mode of translation from ideal relations to simple geometric shapes, and the description of how the universe is constituted upon a less and less (from the sky down to earth) ordered relation of these is to be found in *ibid.*, from 53b on.

¹⁴ Monte Ransome Johnson, “Aristotle on Kosmos and Kosmoi”, in P. S. Horkey (ed.), *Cosmos in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019, pp. 74–107.

¹⁵ For logical contradictions, see Aristotle, *Physics*, I, 6 and 7. For the *Physics* I have used mainly the translation by Luigi Ruggiu (Aristotele, *Fisica*, Milano, Rusconi, 1995), and the revised Oxford translation by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Revised Oxford Translation. One Volume Digital Edition*, J. Barnes (ed.), Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2014).

tion between matter and form that is regulated by principles.¹⁶ The question of physical becoming cannot therefore be posited without reference to one or another physical support, it cannot therefore go beyond *physis*. If an investigation into the causes of generation of one determinate natural thing does go beyond *said thing*, it nonetheless still refers to a further *hypokeimenon*. Ultimately, the investigation on nature starts *in media res*; it treats nature as eternal and refers to its logical principles, instead of focusing on the question of chronological beginning. In addition to this line of argument, Aristotle consistently states the idea that natural objects have the principle of their movement in themselves: although linked to one another by the interplay of the four causes, movement does not ultimately depend on an external principle, and this is inconsistent with any cosmogonic principle.¹⁷ As Monte Ransome sums it up: natural “things all have the causes of their motion in virtue of themselves, and not any other cause, and thus cannot have been caused to exist by anything else external like luck, spontaneity or intellect,” or, we might add, by any other cosmogonic principle on which the previous philosophers have insisted. “Hence cosmogony is impossible.”¹⁸ Finally a movement of generation would require a motor that would have to be itself in movement, which implies an infinite regression: to this extent, Aristotle’s critique of the “cosmetic” idea of a demiurge, or even an abstract principal force that would actively shape the universe into a determined set of ordered relations, relies on the fact that such a creator, or rather such a cosmetician, in order to move formless matter and impose order on it,

¹⁶ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Zeta 7. For the *Metaphysics*, I refer to the revised Oxford translation by W. D. Ross, edited by Jonathan Barnes (in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*), to the translation by Jean Tricot (Aristote, *Métaphysique*, Paris, Vrin, 1991), and to the translation by Giovanni Reale (Aristotele, *Metafisica*, Milano, Bompiani, 2000).

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Physics*, II, from 192b5 on.

¹⁸ Johnson, “Aristotle on Kosmos and Kosmoi”, p. 91. What needs of course to be further specified is twofold: first, the relation between movement and generation. To this extent, *Physics* II, 1, although not making this point explicit, does shift the discourse from “movement and rest” to “nature as form” and therefore to the problem of generation (see from 193a35 on). Second, one has to understand if the principle of the movement of a natural thing is internal inasmuch as the formal and final cause insists as a second substance in the first substance of the individual thing, or inasmuch as the material and efficient causes are themselves natural. Not only do both arguments preclude a cosmogenetic approach, they are probably ultimately also one and the same argument, if nature is said to be *hypokeimenon* and “form” is ultimately, qua form, a second specific substance that equally insists in one thing qua final and formal cause and in another (the parents) qua material and efficient.

would itself have to be in movement, and therefore demand a further cause of its own movement, a further motor.¹⁹

Rather than starting from a cosmogenic perspective, from the questioning of the causes of the order of the universe, Aristotle focuses thus on the order of nature at the global level of *to holon, to pan*, of the whole of the different substances of which the universe is made; and, more specifically, he points his attention on the functioning of *o ouranos*, the sky. Aristotle rejects the cosmogenic schema of an order imposed by a trans-celestial principle, up to the point that, as Ransome Johnson notes, “the concept of the cosmos appears in the *Physica*” mainly “in the context of the rejection of cosmogony.”²⁰ However, this does not mean that the swirling multiplicity of *physis* would not receive a principle of limitation. To the contrary, his critique of previous cosmological theories, it might be argued, aims at a better understanding of how a principle of finitude shapes the universe. Far from rejecting the necessity of finding a formal principle of order and finitude, Aristotle grasps the necessity of such a principle having to be logically immanent to the cosmos itself, logically derived by the physical observation of its laws.

In this sense, he observes that nature presents both aspects of actual finitude, of achieved stability of forms, and aspects of becoming, of indetermination; and a becoming is a power, the actualization of which is still possible, and therefore indeterminate. In other words, if in order to be, each thing has to be “one”, that is has to have achieved a certain formal stability without which it would not be one thing, at the same time there is no thing that does not endure some sort of movement, be it of spatial translation or a becoming of formation and dissolution. The fact is that the question of movement seems to double itself. On the one hand, movement as such in the universe has to be eternal (as the idea of a generation of the movement of all things leads us to an infinite regress).²¹ On the other, there has to be, as for each singular movement, a motor

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¹⁹ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Lambda 6, 1071b30–35. As regards why the prime unmoved mover is not a cosmogenic solution, see *infra*.

²⁰ Johnson, “Aristotle on Kosmos and Kosmoi”, p. 89.

²¹ Aristotle superposes the eternity of the universe and the eternity of movement. The argument of the necessity of the eternity of movement is elliptically implied in *Metaphysics* Lambda, but finds its full explanation in *Physics* VIII, 1, 251a20: movement cannot have been produced by a first state of stasis, as stasis is privation of movement, and therefore proceeds from movement. The bottom of the argument is that the universe qua totality of

also for the totality of movement as such. This principle of movement cannot be a becoming, because, if this were the case, it might also not actualize itself, while it is inconceivable for Aristotle that becoming, movement and time would stop. Becoming simply *is*, and its continuity requires “that a Principle is, the substance of which is act as such.”²² Such an act, qua pure act, cannot be, for the aforementioned reasons, the result of a potentiality, but is pure actuality, not actively acting upon something. It has therefore to be understood as a final cause of movement of all things, as that in relation to which all things move. The prime unmoved mover is therefore obtained as a logical consequence of the determination of nature as constant movement, as constant becoming; and the determination of nature as constant movement is in its turn established through the impossibility of generating movement from an extra-cosmic cause, without falling into logical fallacy.

The prime unmoved mover is therefore established as a motor that is not a generator, and all the determinations of which (the fact of being pure thought thinking itself, qualified as such in the moment in which it is the object of its own reflection; the fact of being an intelligence that becomes intelligible by the act of intellection) are the consequence of the necessity of determining and describing this pure act, the existence of which is required by the very nature of the movement that characterizes the *physis*. In this sense, it is worth noting that the prime unmoved mover is established as an internal necessity of movement of *physis*, and this is consistent with the definition according to which *physis* is characterized by the internality of the cause of movement. It might of course be argued that Aristotle identifies such a principle with god. However, seen from this perspective, Aristotle’s god stems from the necessity to get rid of any cosmogonic principle of the order of the world. Although transcending *physis*, the prime unmoved mover is a logical function necessary to explaining the latter. It could almost be said to be an internal necessity of *physis*. It is a cosmetic principle from which all cosmogenic traits (which are inseparable from the idea of a monotheistic God, into which the Aristotelian tradition will be integrated) are

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things in movement cannot be produced unless from a movement immanent to the universe itself (as an external, active principle of movement leads to paradoxes and infinite regression). Aristotle also constructs a similar argument about the possible end of movement (see Aristotle, *Physics* VIII, 1, 251b30).

²² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Lambda 6, 1071 b 20. For the treatment in the *Metaphysics* of the necessity of time, movement and becoming to eternally be, see *ibid.*, 1071b5.

removed. Logically inferred from the study of *physis*, this god will not be an infinite power (another “intuitive” feature of the monotheistic God to which the Aristotelian prime unmoved mover will be reduced) but rather a non-infinite actuality: while an “infinite mover,” “it does not have any dimension” and is therefore “neither finite nor infinite.”²³ The movements of natural things, and above all the processes of generation and corruption, imply both the actuality of a state, the actual condition of a form, and a potentiality inherent to their material condition: the state of movement and alteration in which all things are, implies both determination and indetermination, and the prime unmoved mover that those movements imply is like an extreme point at which all characteristics of indetermination proper to nature vanish. In apparent contradiction with Aristotle’s rejection of actual infinity – as we will see below – the prime mover is something like a completely determined infinity, an infinity from which all traits of indetermination and potentiality are subtracted, an infinity that is purely actual, pure determination and therefore identical to perfect finitude; a pure actuality that is nonetheless not acting (as this would imply a potentiality, which is proper to matter)²⁴ and that has an infinite role in shaping and determining the indeterminacy of natural things. Things are in movement (local movement, alteration, growth, formation and dissolution), and as such movement is an actual, determined state of their main natural character, which is to say, the fact of being movable, of having a certain potentiality inseparable from a state of indetermination. As such, movement is the act, the actual state, of that which essentially, qua material, is inseparable from a state of potentiality, of indetermination.²⁵ Movement, for material things, directly comes from the fact

²³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Lambda 7, 1073a5–10. More precisely, it has “neither a finite nor an infinite extension.”

²⁴ This seems consistent with *Lambda 9*, describing the prime mover as act of thought thinking itself qua pure act of thought. Such act is rather pure actuality, as it has no proper movement or *dunamis*. It therefore lacks nothing; at the same time, being perfectly finite, it also has no limitation (it even contains everything, as the principle contains what is derived), and is therefore, one can say, infinite. Such “infinity” is rather, one can say, an all-encompassing totality. A pure actuality that does not act, the prime unmoved mover is rather immobile than simply unmoved. Although described as “something that moves without being moved” (*ti o ou kinoumenon kinei, ibid., A7, 1072a25*), it is also said to be “a being existing necessarily” (*ex anankes ara estin on; ibid., 1072b10*): if the being that moves unmoved exists by necessity, it is not simply unmoved, but unmovable.

²⁵ See Aristotle, *Physics*, III, 1 and 2, *passim*. Movement, although clearly implying a potentiality, is described by Aristotle as an act. It is in fact the proper act of that which is caught in a state of potentiality: it is in fact “act of the movable”, and the material thing is that

that matter, although inseparably given with form, is per se a potentiality to be formed, a potentiality that is as such furthest from the most eminent sense of substance, which is essence qua form. The potentiality of matter, essentially united with form in the *synolon*, always determines that the actuality of form is gnawed at by potentiality (and ultimately also by this realm of formless potentiality that are accidents).²⁶ But at the same time movement is the actual state of the potentiality of matter.²⁷ It is that which tends towards the order of the form. The prime unmoved mover is the very point on which movement ultimately depends inasmuch it is an ordered transformation. It is that in relation to which we see that movement is not a mere manifestation of a potentiality understood as indeterminacy, but an ordered progress, whether towards form, natural place or, more generally, as that harmonic set of relations comprising the universe.

The fact is that such a principle will be less and less well received the further we go from the edges of the sky towards the centre: from one sky to the next, the multiplicity of that which is appears to be less receptive to the final and formal order provided by the logical function of the eternal substance. This continuity between a principle of order, which transcends nature but is logically implied by it, and the ways in which this principle is differently effective in nature, can be better grasped by looking at the different uses of the term *ouranos*, sky, which Aristotle is far keener to use than *cosmos* to refer to a certain idea of the totality of that which is. As Johnson remarks, Aristotle uses the term *ouranos* in three

which is, as such, in power, always caught in a becoming: movement is therefore “act of that which is in power” (*ibid.*, III, 1, 201a28). Stretching the text somewhat, it would not be inexact to claim that movement describes an actual formal trait of any material thing. But such a formal trait does not belong to the predication of the genus in the individual; it is not, as form is, a predication of the second substance in the first (see Aristotle, *Categories*, 5, 2b30), one that provides a form which insists in the individual thing as in “other thing” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Zeta 8, 1033b5). It is rather, one can argue, the proper actual form of natural, material thing qua material things. It is the act of their potentiality or the form of their matter. Movement is the form of matter qua matter; it is the actuality of the potentiality inherent to material things. Not the actuality as exhaustion of the potentiality, but the very actual state of being in potentiality that pertains to things which are moving. For *Categories*, I mainly refer to Jean Tricot’s French translation (Aristote, *Catégories*, in Aristote, *Organon*, Paris, Vrin, 1994), and for English the revised Oxford translation by J. L. Ackrill, edited by Jonathan Barnes (in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*).

²⁶ For the definition of matter qua substance “in potentiality”, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Eta 2, 1042b10.

²⁷ See note 25, specifically the reference to Aristotle, *Physics*, III, 1, 201a28.

different senses. First to refer to the sky, as that which contains everything, as the “place of the totality”, the limit of the container on which “the divine sits.” Then, to point to the celestial superlunary spheres characterized by constant circular movement and incorruptibility (the circular movement of the superlunary skies being the transcription of the finite in the infinite, the closest that the indetermination of the movements of matter can go to the stability of the eternal principle).²⁸ Lastly for the totality of that which is contained in the first, including the earth with all its accidental movements.²⁹ Set in continuity with such a physical “whole”, the prime unmoved mover is not an extra-cosmic entity actively regulating the movement of the universe, but a substance, a liminal substance of the latter, motionlessly “sitting” on the outer rim of the skies. The prime unmoved mover is in fact itself substantial; it is made of one of the three substances – the incorruptible one.

In its most general and immediate sense, substance is said of the cause of a thing, of that for which a thing is what it is. If, in its eminent sense, this is essence, ultimately meant as predication, qua form, of the genus in the individual,³⁰ at the same time substance is always such a form, that per se is completely independent of anything else, but considered inasmuch as it is bound in its union with matter: substance is also the *hypokeimenon*, the support of the thing, meant first and foremost as *synolon*, union of matter, or potentiality to be informed, and actual form.³¹ Two substances other than the divine enter into this definition: the eternal substance of the planets, which do not undergo any process of corruption, but only a process of spatial translation; and the sublunary,

²⁸ The idea that the circular movement of the skies is a sort of “transcription” of a transcendent order is already present in Plato’s *Timaeus*, where the transcendent order (the ideal relation between the identical and the different) is nonetheless perceived as an active principle, in its turn actively imposed on the world by the demiurge. See Plato, *Timaeus*, 38b–39c.

²⁹ Johnson, “Aristotle on Kosmos and Kosmoi”, p. 78.

³⁰ Essence is by definition that which something is in an eminent sense (essence hence refers to substance); but essence is that which a thing is *per se*, without reference to anything external (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Zeta 4, 1030a10). And that is the definition of the form qua predication of the second substance in the first, the second substance not referring to any external or accidental type of relation. Substance is in fact the cause of being of any given thing (*ibid.*, Eta 2, 1043a1), but the essence of a thing is that for which a thing is for itself. Only the form, qua pure actuality, is in itself the cause of what a thing is, with no reference to anything else. For the definitions of substance, see *ibid.*, Zeta 3 and 4, *passim*. For the definition of form as essential sense of the substance, see *ibid.*, Eta 2.

³¹ For a different sense of *hypokeimenon*, see *ibid.*, Zeta 3.

or corruptible, substance.³² The fact is that substance, as said, is also form, the pure act that is normally found qua informing the material one, with which it is united in *synolon*: divine substance is thus pure form, which, ultimately, being free from any matter qua potentiality to be informed, is nothing but pure act.³³ To this extent, the divine one, although meta-physical, corresponds completely to the logic of substance, i.e. to the internal requirements of the logics of physics. It is a substance, but as its existence is necessary (necessarily deduced from the very nature of movement), “it exists by necessity, and therefore it is a principle.” Surprisingly, adds Aristotle, its being necessary also determines it as a “good.”³⁴ As such, it “moves as that which is object of love.”³⁵ The refusal of the cosmogenic perspective, the will to start from the very turmoil of the movement of things in *physis*, still leads to substance being placed as a necessity, to be-

³² Cf. *ibid.*, Lambda 1, 1069a30.

³³ It is a complex question to determine if, in the individual subject to corruption, the form corresponds or not to the genus. If the idea of second substance in the *Categories* seems to point in this direction (see Aristotle, *Categories*, 5, 2b30), inasmuch as the genus is a necessary determination, that has nothing accidental about it, and that defines what the thing is for itself, on the other hand the *Metaphysics prima facie* excludes that the essence of an individual thing might lie in anything general, and even that the universal (meant as that which can be predicated of a multiplicity of things) can be a substance (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Zeta 13). Finally, the form is as “something other” than the potentiality of the matter that it informs, that which cannot be generated or corrupted (*ibid.*, Zeta 8 1033b5), and for which that which is, is what it is. To this extent the soul, defined in *De Anima* as “the form of a body that has life as potentiality” (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 412a30), is the essence of the human being; but, upon closer investigation, the form does not exist *per se* (except for God). Instead, it insists in the *synolon*, it is purely internally determined and has no proper individuality (the *De Anima* seems in fact to suggest that the rational soul is fundamentally transindividual – see *ibid.*, III, 5), all of its characteristics pertaining to the second substance, to the genus. The point is that Aristotle is ultimately locked in a double-bind: on the one hand, only of the singular is there essence and nothing general is essence of the singular; on the other, only of the substance is there science, so there is no science of the singular. If the metaphysics oscillates in accepting that the genus is substance it is probably because on the one hand, qua identifiable with the form, it is such in an eminent sense, but on the other it is not (and this is a fundamental point of explicit distantiation from most of the previous philosophers), inasmuch as it does not exist as such, but only, for material things, in connection to individual matter. Ultimately, a pure formal principle, a pure act, is needed for a thing to be more than a mere materiality, a pure potentiality on the shores of non-being. But it remains problematic if this principle is something other than a singular form that acts generically in a set of individuals.

³⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Lambda 7, 1072b10.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1072b1.

coming a logical principle, and to identifying it with moral superiority and, we might add, aesthetic perfection. Little wonder, then, that a few pages later we read that “mutation is always towards the worst.”³⁶ Aristotle’s cosmetic allergy is thus revealed as the need to immanentize the cosmic principle, to liberate it from any cosmogonic perspective, while keeping intact, and even articulating further, the idea of the cosmos as a principle of limitation acting in (and, in Aristotle’s case, from within, or rather from its borders) nature.

From the celestial order down to cosmetics and to the moral order a same rationality is thus deployed. But what is then this *to pan* to which the cosmetic action of ordering is applied? If the universe is finite, still it is such qua order, and not qua matter of which such order is said. As such, the matter is an indeterminate potentiality of determination and finitude. Still, it might be worth to recall that “*to pan*”, as seen, is defined in the *Timaeus* as harbouring, prior to its “cosmicization” a “capacity to receive determinations”: more precisely, Plato’s *chora* contains all determinations (at several passages *Timaeus* points out that it already contains the particles of each of the four elements³⁷) but disposed in an undetermined fashion, in a turmoil that infinitely shakes them out of balance. More than giving determinations, the cosmos appears to be that which stabilizes determinations out of the *a-peiron*, out of the indeterminate turmoil of their movements, rendering as finite as possible the relations between elements, by composing them in an ordered movement.

This capacity to be informed has to be read, despite the mythological language adopted here, as a quite strict anticipation of Aristotle’s definition of matter. Matter in Aristotle’s *Physics* is of course first and foremost a cause irreducible to any other, and the support of all things (as said, it is one of the irreducible senses of *hypokeimenon*, and therefore of *ousia*); but, at the same time, it is also described as something that cannot be known directly, but only inasmuch as it is formed, limited, shaped, made finite by an order of composition (informed by a form).³⁸ If this is the case, it is fundamentally because, as pointed out in *Metaphysics* Eta, it is power or potentiality, it is “substance existing in power.”³⁹

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³⁶ *Ibid.*, Lambda 9, 104b25.

³⁷ Cf. for instance Plato, *Timaeus*, 53a.

³⁸ Aristotle, *Physics*, I, 7, 190b5–190b15.

³⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Eta 2, 1042b10.

Matter, as affected by becoming, is as such potentiality, potentiality that has to be understood in relation to an act, the act of being informed by a form. As being is being one, and is thus determinate, and as matter as such is an indeterminate constant potentiality of new determinations, we can say that matter can always be known both as a potentiality realized in a form, and as a potentiality of transformation of said form. We know it as a past indetermination and as an indeterminate promise of alteration.

Furthermore, we know it as a sort of collapsing into each other of accidentality and essentiality: on the one hand, we know matter as a potentiality, one that as such is only known through a formal determination, and that therefore appears on the verge of non-being. If matter certainly is, if it does not have any substantial inexistence, still it is on the verge of non-being; it is even, explains Aristotle “non-being by accident.”⁴⁰ This expression indicates that it is in fact largely accidental which potentiality embedded into matter will pass into actuality and when this passage is liable to happen. But this ultimately means that the indetermination proper to matter is nothing else than the indetermination proper to accidental changes, to those accidents that, by definition, are furthest from essence – to those accidents that have as a cause nothing but matter.⁴¹ Nonetheless, on the other hand, *dunamis* is absolutely essential for Aristotle: it is one of the senses of being, and as such it stands on its own, unable to be reduced to any other. *Metaphysics* Delta 7 presents a list of senses of being (per se, according to categories, as true, as act and as potentiality),⁴² the equivocity of which, as Pierre Aubenque has pointed out, cannot be reduced to a single common sense.⁴³

⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Physics*, I, 9, 192a5.

⁴¹ “Matter is the cause of the accident.” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Eta 2, 1027a10). A strange idea indeed, because matter seems here to be not a material cause, which would mean essentially cause of a potentiality to be informed, but a cause of the actual “taking place” of the event, which, although not formally determined, indeed has an actuality. We find here something similar to the idea that matter implies an actuality of movement that is something like the proper actual form of the natural, material thing qua material thing, the form of matter qua matter, or the actuality of their potentiality qua potentiality, the very actual state of being in potentiality that pertains to things which are moving. An accident, which is clearly actual but as well clearly unrelated to any essential, formal principle of order, can be thought as the actual manifestation, or form, of such an actuality of potentiality. It is something like the terrible form of potentiality itself.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Delta 7, 1017a10 – 1017b10.

⁴³ Pierre Aubenque, *Le problème de l'être chez Aristote*, Paris, PUF, 1962; see part 1, Chapter 2, § 3 and § 4, and in particular pages 177, 186, 190, 198, 213.

Potentiality, qua capacity to receive determinations, is in itself a determination irreducible to all other determinations, and it is something irreducible to all order, i.e. to any and every order of the cosmos qua actuality. In the finitude of the cosmos, the determinate presence of the indeterminate seems inescapable.

More precisely, matter, qua essential potentiality, or indeterminacy, is treated in strict relation to the concept of infinity. Matter certainly receives a determinate name (*hyle*), but is conceptually treated as that to which the notion of indeterminate, or infinite, is applied.⁴⁴ The infinite is first of all affirmed by Aristotle to exist in principle (in a sort of anticipation of Anselm's ontological argument, he claims that the infinite has to be a principle, because if it could be deduced by a principle, this would limit it, which goes against its nature).⁴⁵ Secondly, it is empirically founded (through temporal continuity, through the possibility of infinite division, through the fact that "generation and corruption have no end," through the fact that everything finite is limited by something else, which must in turn be limited by something else, in an infinite regress, and, finally, through the intrinsic illimitation of the activity of thinking).⁴⁶ The infinite is principal and ever-present, and it is wherever there is mutation. Indubitably present, the infinite is nonetheless contradictory. In fact, whatever further determination one seeks to give the infinite, the infinite seems to reject: it is not a quality, as a quality has to be determinable; nor is it a substance, since substance is indivisible, and therefore finite.⁴⁷ Necessarily existing as a matter of principle, the infinite seems to be actually nothing. Unless, adds Aristotle, it is a potentiality. This potentiality is not, he specifies, the potentiality of something that will be then exhausted by an act (wood can become a chair, and this potentiality will come into actuality or not), but is rather one that remains throughout infinite actualizations. It is never exhausted by one of its parts becoming actualized. "Like a day or like a fight," it constantly passes into actuality, while remaining in potentiality: the day or the fight continue, moment by moment, even when it is another day, even when we have to fight for or against something new. As such a potentiality, concludes Aristotle, "the infinite exists with the same mode

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⁴⁴ "Infinite" and "indeterminate" are the two extremes of the area of sense proper to *apeiron*, i.e. the absence of *peras*, limit, a term indicating the boundaries that define the proper form and order of something or of some action.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Physics*, III 4, 203b5.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 203b 15–30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 204a, *passim*.

as matter.”⁴⁸ The infinite is therefore not that outside which nothing is, but that from out of which something new always comes to actually exist. It is an indeterminacy out of which determinations come. Surprisingly, infinity is, as it cannot be excluded. Still, it is not a whole or a totality: it is rather “a part”, exactly “like matter is part of the whole.”⁴⁹ It is an inescapable indetermination. Although presented here not as *to pan* but rather as a determinate *hyle*, matter appears once again as an essential, inescapable, anti-cosmic excess. The infinite is an immanent indetermination and a material excess that constantly ruins the idea of the cosmos as a closed totality, while at the same time being that out of which the order of the cosmos passes into actual realization.⁵⁰

It is of such a universe, as a well-structured totality that is finite in extension, and whose order is deployed down to the smallest detail, that the earth, *gea*, is the centre. If the irradiating point of the logic of the cosmos seems to transcend the cosmos itself (the prime unmoved mover for Aristotle, the relation of the Identical and the Different for Plato), nonetheless the point of equilibrium is undoubtedly the earth. A bizarre point of equilibrium indeed, as its central position at once constitutes the axis of equilibrium of the universe, and the very point at which its well-ordered structure seems to work the least smoothly, possibly as it is located furthest from its supercelestial principle.

The earth is the third of the terms within whose relation of tension the world will make its appearance at the centre of. It is the place at which the distributive multiplicity of all that is (*ta panta*) seems to respond more poorly to the cosmic order that animates it, thus showing that a negative principle, a lack of order, or, to put it with Aristotle, “an almost non-being” affects it, rendering accidental a large portion of the movements of its parts. For both Plato and Aristotle, the circularity of the movements of the skies leaves room on earth for the contingency

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 6, 206b15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 206a25.

⁵⁰ As seen, although Aristotle rejects the idea of an actual infinite, nonetheless the prime unmoved mover cannot be said not to be infinite. It has a perfect actuality, the finitude of which embeds certain characters of totality that we tend to attribute to infinity: it is a closed, self-contained actuality which comes to order the cosmos as a closed totality. It lacks nothing and nothing is really outside of it, as everything has it as final cause. Everything depends on it, except the indeterminacy of matter, the indeterminacy of the infinity of potentiality. Such a closed but all-encompassing totality is therefore logically opposed to the idea of the infinite qua immanent indetermination of that which is.

of relations and transformations, thus determining a constant imperfection in the actuality of forms. Plato considers that the surface of the earth is populated by beings of which we can only have “probable knowledge” (give a “likely account”).⁵¹ Bodies evolve within time, and within the inner limits of the outer skies. Both time and skies reflect with their circularity (the revolution of the skies, the alternation of day and night) the perfect immobility of the principle of Identity; they calibrate their becoming upon this principle. Although thus composed and moving with measure and harmony, still they are in motion, and motion always displays a certain degree of “deformity, the cause of which is lack of equality,”⁵² of measure and proportion. And as the skies are in their turn the principle of motion of the elementary figures upon which earthly things are composed, the consequence is that these latter, also because of their uneven composition (earthly things, as well as the humans populating earth, have been created by the demiurge through an imperfect calibration of the principle

⁵¹ See Plato, *Timaeus*, 29d and 59c. The text refers in both cases to “*eikota muthos*”, that which in this context is, as Reale underlines (see note to 29d), to be understood not as fable, but as a “likely narration,” a narration based on “probable knowledge,” i.e. the knowledge of sensible things, largely driven by imagination, or rather conjectural thinking, that Plato in his *Republic* names *eikasia* (the four degrees of knowledge – *noesis*, *dianoia*, *pistis* and *eikasia* are summed up in Plato, *Republic*, VI, 511d–e). Worth noting here is that *eikota* seems to indicate a clear link to *eikasia*. In fact, *eikota* means probable, and is an adjectival participle built on *eoika*, a verb bearing an array of meanings in the realm of “knowledge through senses” (to resemble, to look like, to believe or judge better); and the expression *eikasia* comes from the verb *eikazo*, of which *eoika* is the past tense, with use as present. Beside such considerations on the hierarchies of kinds of knowledge in Plato, it might also be worth noting that such “probable knowledge” is somehow echoed in Aristotle’s idea that we know matter only in an indirect fashion, as matter is a potentiality that we come to know only if and when realized through an act. The actual state of a thing will nonetheless bare the trace of the accidentality that characterizes the passage from power to act, and anyway the potentiality proper to the material *hypokeimenon* of the thing is never exhausted by any actual state, and thus neither are the accidents to which it might be exposed. A natural thing will always, to an extent, be in the realm of “probable knowledge.” Interestingly enough, Plato also describes the material substratum of things as determined by a certain power or potentiality (*dunamis*; see Plato, *Timaeus* 49b and 50b). This *dunamis* is meant certainly as the movement (local movement, movement in time, growth and corruption) that characterizes all things, but at the same time the material substratum is defined as a certain “formless” capacity – a capacity “to receive all things,” to receive determinations (*ibid.*, 51b), which, although not putting, as said, matter in the realm of pure passivity, still maintains its formative capacity in the realm of the possible, in a condition of less reality, or, to say it in Aristotelian terms, on the shores of non-being.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 58a.

of Difference upon the principle of Identity),⁵³ will suffer an even greater degree of deformity, their resulting movement being largely disharmonic, accidental.

For Aristotle, movements on earth are largely disordered, subject to shocks that constantly go against the tendency that each element which enters into the composition of a given thing has to rejoin its natural place (sky for airy components, the sea for the water component of things, etc.) and that each living thing has to correspond to the formal principle that characterizes the species that it belongs to.⁵⁴ These natural movements are constantly and incessantly at variance with casual encounters, with fundamentally accidental hits. Interestingly enough, the accident (as opposed to that which is necessary, but here quite perfectly applying also to movements through shock, independent from the natural, necessary movement by which each element tends to rejoin its natural place) is defined as that which “belongs to something and can be truly asserted, but neither necessarily nor constantly.”⁵⁵ Such are those characteristics of a given thing that are actual and real, but that have no relation to its essence.⁵⁶ There is no necessity for any such accident, any such paradoxical characteristic which “belongs to something in virtue of itself, but that does not enter in its substance.”⁵⁷ Rather, “there is a chance cause of it, i.e. an indeterminate one.”⁵⁸ On earth where violent shocks, accidents and disordered movements happen, something is attached to the substance of things, without having any necessity,

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 43c–e.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, IV, 310a15–311a15, and in a shorter form *Physics*, V, 208 b10–25. For *On the Heavens* I have used the revised Oxford translation by J. L. Stocks, edited by Jonathan Barnes (in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*).

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Delta 30, 1025a15.

⁵⁶ This bizarre idea of an “inessential reality” is rendered by a certain fluctuation in the translation of the verb *uparko*, which goes from “to be attached to” (Barnes) to “belong to” (Reale).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Delta 30, 1025a30. Here I follow Hugh Tredennick’s translation (Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Volume I*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1933), but I render the final *ousia* as “substance”, instead of “essence”, as suggested both by Barnes and Reale. In fact, saying that the accident does not belong to the essence is a sort of truism. The *ousia* in fact, as first category, is said to be sub-stance, determined as “sub-ject” of what is predicated via the other categories. Something of the order of the accident can be truly predicated of the substance, and hence in a way be attached or even belong to it. But it will never be part of its essential definition. Only those attributes that relate to the predication of the second substance in the first, of the genus and of the species in the individual, determine its essence.

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1025a25.

or even any essentiality. And in fact, continuing to book Epsilon of *Metaphysics*, we read that “the accident is almost simply a name,” that which makes of it something “obviously akin to non-being.”⁵⁹ Ultimately, it is the singular nature of material things that is characterized by such an ontological devaluation: “matter, which is capable of being for most part different than what it is, is the cause of the accident.”⁶⁰ Of course, each accident, being accidentally attached to something, can either not occur at all, or can happen, but without sticking to something’s essence; still, each thing on earth appears to be necessarily visited by contingencies, to stick essentially to accidents, which can only be shaken by finding another one glued to itself: a thing is always invested (“crashed into”, but also “dressed” and even “qualified”) by accidents, exactly like a substance is such qua supported by matter. Accidents stick like a necessity, but a somewhat negative necessity, at once appearing as a potentiality and as a lack of being. Accidents do not enter into the substance, but their mere contingency sticks to it (although the matter that is their cause is, qua potentiality, one of the senses of *hypokeimenon*, which is in turn one of the senses of essence).

It is the indeterminate potentiality of matter – the lack of complete determinate reason inherent to its movements (and, to a certain extent all movement, even the most regular, qua potentiality, suffers from a certain indetermination) – that determines the inescapable presence of accidents as sticking to things. These accidents at once determine things in their singularity, and make them constantly slide toward the edge of non-being. Material accidents stick to the things of this world through the accidentality of the movement that they impose on them: they stick to the substance as something that is part of it as a sort of deprivation of being, but a deprivation of being that is inherent to the movement of the things of this world, to that constant passage from potentiality to actuality without which they would not grow towards their natural form or in orderly fashion tend towards their natural place.

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What we find in this necessary presence of accidents as “sticking” to substance – accidents are at once external to the essence of substance but necessarily part of its actualization – is something similar to the idea that matter has a certain actuality of its own potentiality, or that there is a form of matter itself qua mat-

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Epsilon 2, 1026b20.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1027a10.

ter. In fact, that which is accidental is far from being pure potentiality or pure formless matter. An accident manifests itself as an accidental quality or trait of something, which is actual and which has a determinate form, but one that is devoid of all necessity. What accidents show is that matter is far more than a mere potentiality of being affected by a formal cause; accidents are actual traits that stick to the form of something, although in an inessential manner. Of these traits, matter is the cause, as it functions almost as a formal cause: matter is no longer the cause of the *potentiality* to be informed by the necessary order of the form and by the necessary laws of the cosmos, but is the cause of a *possible* formal trait (or rather, of one amongst a multitude of possible formal traits) that has no necessity.⁶¹ On earth the formal order of the cosmos always comes with matter, i.e. with a formal, but anticosmic, principle of indetermination.

If earthly beings are so affected by such accidental actual traits, the reason is as follows: embedded in matter, all movements and transformations are stretched between an ideal, ultimate and common final cause, the absence of movement of the prime unmoved mover, and the consequences of such finalistic movement: the immediate consequences, i.e. the circular motion of the skies, and the mediate consequences, i.e. the movement of each element towards its natural place, which is ultimately a place of rest, of absence of movement. The crossed movements towards such places determine a swirl of shocks, a cascade of indeterminations. Between the common tendency of all things to teleologically mimic the formal order, the perfection of the prime unmoved mover and the tendency of each element to rest in its natural place, comes the evolution of

⁶¹ On the one hand, it is important to remark that the traits that determine the intraspecific differences between individuals belonging to the same species are accidental, as the essence of something is determined by the predication in it of the second substance (see notes 25 and 30). On the other hand, it is also important to point out that Aristotle justifies as follows the strange idea that accidents are not mere potentiality, but something provided with a formal actuality, one that nonetheless has no necessity: if there were no accidents then “everything, without exception, would be necessary” (*ibid.*, Kappa 8, 1065a5) – a notion that Aristotle flat out rejects without any further explanation, as if it were *per se* evident that there is both the necessary and the possible. It seems therefore that for Aristotle it is necessary that the possible is, and that ultimately this works as a way to save freedom, not only in the realm of the potential, but qua actual freedom (differently than in the case of the contingent futures). Accidents seem somehow to be inevitable both to have some concept of the singular, individual thing (of which, for Aristotle, there is no science), and to pinpoint a certain ontological foundation of freedom within chance.

each living being towards its formal and final cause, as well as its decay. The entirety of the processes of generation and corruption, as well as the formal and final causes regulating them in the case of each particular being, have no external, ideal or metaphysical cause (which is consistent with an immanentist paradigm of movement in nature).⁶² They are rather the result of determinate, necessary movements (nature not only implies for each element the tendency to finally rest in its natural place, but also embeds each singular piece of matter with the potentiality to move towards the development of a form by intertwining the efficient, final and formal causes), but also of a decay of such necessity, the ultimate ground of which is the indetermination that the potentiality of matter brings with itself. In fact, if it is true that a living being comes to shape itself through having its specific form as a final cause, this form cannot be thought separately from the matter in which it determines a teleology of movement: it is almost as if the necessity of the form would stick to (or rather stick out of) the indeterminate, aleatory nature of matter, more than the accident would stick to a form. Or rather, the form of a thing seems to be immanently determined in the relation between a cosmic principle, a belonging to the universe, and a principle of indetermination that is specific to the material core of the thing.

The *apeiron* is thus farthest from the finite order of the cosmos. However, in no way can it be said to be an excess over and beyond the finitude of the sky as we can perceive it; the *apeiron* is, on the contrary, the indeterminacy of the earth – it is an infinite that constitutes the soft core of the universe. The *apeiron* is subtracted from the cosmos. It is the lack of determination that gnaws at its core. The very idea of finitude having such a soft core (an indeterminacy the potentiality of which both opens it to the infinite, and makes it almost slip into non-being), I would argue, comes to constitute the very idea of the world itself. With this, we come to the very core of the tension between the terms that I have presented in order to outline the site of the term world: instead of an all-encompassing, infinite cosmos, we have a tension between the universe qua principle of form and finitude, and an immanent principle of indetermination, which is far more than mere potentiality, but is a principle of infinitude carrying its own formal efficiency. The term world comes to existence as the concept of something whose order is always gnawed at by an indeterminacy, which at the same

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⁶² Aristotle, *Physics*, II 1, 192b10 and 192b30. This is explicitly affirmed as a principle, of which there is no further demonstration (*ibid.*, 193a1–10).

time opens it towards an infinite potentiality, and lets it crumble in a cascade of accidents, and hence veer toward the borders of non-being.⁶³

World as Collapse of Finitude

At the beginning, I claimed that the conceptual place of the world is determined within the three-way relation between a finite universe, the earth that resides at its centre and the well-ordered multiplicity of things that inhabit it. Now it appears, however, that the multiplicity of that which is, is well ordered according to a cosmological principle, but only inasmuch as the latter goes together with a negative principle, a sort of resistance that, as we see upon approaching the material core of the universe, determines an imbalance, an instability, a constant corrosion of order. It is in such dynamic subtraction from the order of the cosmos, from a cosmos that allegedly puts everything (*to pan*) in its place, with the earth at its centre, that the idea of the world makes its entrance on stage, as a sort of magnification of the lack of mutual harmony of these terms.

It is nonetheless true that the Latin term *mundus*, in which all iterations of “world” in Romance languages have their root, appears *prima facie* to mimic the Greek concept of cosmos. An interesting recent article suggests how we

⁶³ Such a relation between a finite and well-ordered cosmos and a centre in which this very logic seems to diminish, to be affected by a certain indeterminacy (*apeiron*), is of course opposed throughout classical thought by a “counter-narrative” in which the supporting logic is one of infinitude, while order is always a local result. This path clearly appears in the line going from Democritus to the Hellenistic schools, where the infinite stands as a principle that is intensive (infinity of atoms), extensive (synchronic or diachronic infinity of worlds), and subtractive (qua indeterminacy of the movement of the atoms in the void). The premises of such an approach can already be found in Anaximander. For Anaximander “the infinite contains entirely the cause of the generation of the universe and of its dissolution” and “from the infinite have come by separation all the worlds, which are infinite” (DK A10, in Diels and Kranz, *I presocratici*, pp. 182–183). But we might note that “universe” here translates *to pan*, and “worlds”, *kosmoi*. It is therefore from and infinitude of “things”, or elements, that an infinite number of finite combinations (*kosmoi*) comes (in a chronological succession). Each of these finite combinations or “worlds”, should not be confused with “earth” (*gea*), the latter being later in the fragment presented as a part of it. It would therefore rather make sense to translate this as “the infinite contains entirely the cause of the generation of all that is and of its dissolution” and as “from the infinite have come by separation all the universes, which are infinite”.

might understand this apparent contradiction. Simona Georgescu⁶⁴ notes how it is commonly accepted that the array of meanings attributed to *mundus* mimic that of the Greek term *cosmos*. For the Latin term, she lists the meanings of “clean”, “ornament” and “world”. If the ornament is at the source of the idea of moral and political order, albeit more in Greek than in Latin, here it is rather the sense of “clean” that appears to be central – the Latin *immunditia*, for instance, denotes both physical and moral dirtiness.⁶⁵ *Mundus* would therefore stem primarily from the sense of “clean” or “ornament”, its extension to the meaning of “world” having then emerged from out of the diversity of meanings carried by the Greek terms *cosmos*.

It might thus be argued that, if this analogy between the Greek and Latin terms is so perfect, then “the world”, contrary to what I have claimed so far, was already conceptually present in Greece. But on the one hand, as we have seen, contemporary translations from Greek also have to render as “world” several occurrences of the words *gea* and *to pan/ta panta*, which shows that the world sits uncomfortably in the triangulation of these terms with the term *cosmos*. On the other hand, the Latin word *mundus* seems to have had its cosmic analogy, its etymological solidity, blurred, if not gnawed away at, by a supplementary sense. *Mundus*, as Georgescu points out, in fact contains a supplementary sense, that of “pit”, or “path to the underworld”, “a gap leading to the underworld, and the underworld itself. Its shape is that of a receptacle, a pit, a yawning gap.”⁶⁶ As it is impossible to harmonize this last sense with the others (impossible to form a “cosmos” from all senses of the world, one might say), this last sense has been interpreted as a sheer homonymy. Georgescu, however, dismisses the idea of homonymy as a quick fix, pointing to some contrary textual evidence. Most notably, she remarks how this term not only can be reintegrated into the circulation of meanings that constitutes the term world, but can even be posited

⁶⁴ Simona Georgescu, “The World as a Yawning Gap. New Insights into the Etymology of Lat. *Mundus* ‘World’”, in N. Holmes, M. Ottink, J. Schrickx and M. Selig (eds.), *Lemmata Linguistica Latina: Vol. 1. Words and Sounds*, Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter, 2020, pp. 207–223. I am indebted to Luca di Blasi for having brought this text to my attention.

⁶⁵ In contemporary Italian, *immondizia* is one of the most used terms for “garbage”, while *immondo* is an adjective primarily used to denote someone who has a despicable moral attitude.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 214. Even more, she points how the *mundus* was identified with the *omphalos* of the city: the point that leads, like a belly button, to the visceral centre from where life and order stems, but that is in constant turmoil and transformation.

as the very foundation upon which all the others connect.⁶⁷ *Mundus* as “world” is accordingly a “hemispherical cavity”, the vault of which provides the basis for the idea of the celestial vault that encompasses the world. The world is thus seen here as a closed sphere that literally sits on another one, on a gap that the beautiful, closed totality of the world tries to cover, to hide, to “cosmeticize”, while exposing it with this very attempt. The term *mundus* accordingly refers originally to this gap (as shown by its phonetic alteration *fundus*, bottom), while the *mundus*/world is the cosmeticization of the fact that the well-ordered totality of that which is ultimately sits on a *fundus*, on a bottom that is rather first and foremost a hole.⁶⁸

Further still, the text continues, this infernal *mundus* sits at the bottom of another etymological line, the one going towards *mando* (to chew) and from here to the Anglo-Saxon mouth/*Mund*. The gap upon which the world sits – and that is mirrored as an etymological disturbance that ruins the nice harmony of the other meanings (cleanliness-order-world) which allegedly make sense of our universe – is not simply an absence, but a metabolic principle that transforms chaos into order only on the condition of creating turmoil and causing disorder in the harmony that stems from it.⁶⁹ The *mundus* is fundamentally a *cosmos* founded on chaos, chaos reversed into order, on condition of leaving it active, because its destructive power is inseparable from its metabolic, productive function. The *mundus* is the idea of an active indetermination, of a threatening

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 208–210, for previous authors attempting either to find a connection between the two etymological lines, or to establish the meaning of “underworld cavity” as original; see from p. 214 for the mechanics of the phonetic and semantic alterations suggesting how the lines going towards *fundus* and towards *mundus* qua clean/ornament evolve from a common point. This argument is also backed up with a chronological account of textual evidences.

⁶⁸ For the mimetic aspect between the world and the *fundus*, see *ibid.*, p. 213: “the essential aspect for understanding the significance of this mundus is exactly its shape. [...] [T]he shape of the subterranean mundus is similar to the sky vault, the upper sky.” And this meaning is said to be “the oldest, and thus the one that should be put in the first place.”

⁶⁹ The mouth here doubles the belly button: the belly button is that through which the formation of the human individual is made first possible, but it is also at the same time the thinnest part of surface separating us from the visceral movement, with all their disorder and “un-neatness”; the mouth is that from which articulated thought is given the opportunity to be expressed, but is also that which expresses a disordered instinct of hunger and material destruction, upon which the metabolic process sustaining the individual, and therefore their thoughts, is based.

potentiality, which is a power to form and a subtractive capacity to undo. It is literally the world that sits on the infinite of its potentiality, but a potentiality that is identified with chaos.⁷⁰ What we find synthetized in one word here is exactly the instable relation between the different terms (*cosmos, panta, gea*), a relation at whose place the world comes: that between a formal principle of order and finitude, and a counter-principle that is not only the infinite potentiality to be ordered, but that has a specific actuality, a specific turbulent productivity, a specific capacity to create novelties that do not fit into the nice order of the universe – i.e. to create unexpected singularities.

It should not therefore come as a surprise, insists Georgescu, that even in Greek the term chaos initially designated an array of senses inseparable from the general meaning of “world”, and that only through time was it cornered, and “reduced to [designate] the underworld.”⁷¹ Far from mimicking the connection of the senses of the word *cosmos*, the Latin “*mundus* might have followed the same trajectory” as chaos.⁷² Yet, where in Greek a clear separation appears between chaos and cosmos, in Latin there is no migration towards another word: the complexity of the different etymological lines remains intact, leaving chaos and cosmos, *fundus* and *mundus* intertwined. This is how the indeterminacy of the primordial senses of *mundus* continues to gnaw at the sense of order that the term comes to suggest.

I would argue that it is exactly this dynamic that is central in the unique role that the idea of “world” plays in the history of philosophy: how is it that a term

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* I have not included “chaos” among the terms in the place of which the world comes (a choice of terms that is of course not exhaustive, that which is consistent with the fundamental instability of this idea). Though inseparable from the world, in classic Greek chaos nonetheless designates the infernal underworld, and metaphorically refers to some sort of turmoil. Still, chaos originally stands for the undetermined vastness of the primordial formless matter (an idea very similar to the Platonic *hyle*). The term presents the idea of an indetermination radically contrary to the cosmic principle. It is not a term used to designate the world in its current state, but to designate the indetermination upon which a cosmic principle of determination acts. Georgescu interestingly points out how originally it comes to designate such a state of potentiality, and by extension the world as such. It is a term that has somehow been purged by the constellation of terms, in the relation of which the world comes to appear.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

that is so radically equivocal, opaque and vague, can come to occupy such a comfortable and even dominant position within philosophy? How over the centuries can it come to occupy in a more or less stable manner a place whose relevance blatantly conflicts with its unclarity and instability? If other terms have arisen from nothing or fallen into disgrace, if other terms have resisted dramatic changes that aim at reducing their equivocality and giving them a solid foundation, or at least a coherent place in this or that philosophical system, “world” seems to have escaped such typical philosophical operations. Its insistence, its central presence in the systems of the majority of authors, seems to rule out our thinking that its conceptual instability relies on the scarce relevance accorded to it; on the contrary, I would argue, its resistance to disappearance, to systematization and to deconstruction relies on what I would call its “essential equivocality”, on an opaqueness that has nothing to do with a poverty of meaning, but that on the contrary is the product of a rich, but structurally instable, relation of meanings.

Relevant in its instability, and shining in its opacity, while occupying a central place in philosophy, the world is an idea that suggests order and finitude on condition of gnawing away at any temptation to transform it into a stable and encompassing totality. What articulates it as a formidable conceptual tool, one that nonetheless always escapes a strict and consistent conceptual systematization, is its capacity to function as a point of incompleteness: it is as if every time a philosophical system tends to form a conceptual totality (the ultimate aim of which would be to produce a representation, a conceptual double of the world), the concept of the world presents itself, in said system, as a point of inescapable opacity. Not only does the world come to re-open the space of uncertainty that the idea of cosmos tries to resolve; it also works to “de-cosmeticize” philosophy itself, by casting itself like a wrong note that disturbs its harmonic attempts at systematization. It is like a note from which the very struggles of philosophical systems to do something conceptually new somehow seem to stem, as infinitely repeated, infinitely failing and yet extremely productive attempts to reduce its dissonance.

Based on this, the part two of the article will aim to explore how the idea of the world gains a firm footing in the history of modern philosophy, making it possible to grasp infinity not so much as an extensive concept, but rather as an immanent quality that gnaws away at any attempt to describe the whole of that which is as a closed totality. It will investigate how the idea of the world

established itself within philosophy as a point of immanent indetermination, of intensive infinity, one that unties philosophy from the temptation to frame that which is within the finitude of a cosmos, of a well-organized unity rendered by a limited set of clear and distinct concepts. After a short survey of some historical moments leading to the consolidation of this perspective in modern philosophy, the article will focus in particular on how several contemporary uses of the idea of the world as immanent infinity are conceptually related to the idea that any point of reality has a certain capacity to do something that exceeds its determinate qualities, its “cosmic” attributes. In an apparent torsion of the opposition universe-world with which we started, the universal will come to appear as the concept that names the capacity of each thing to subtract itself from the totality of the cosmos, to perform an active de-totalization. We will therefore try to unfold the hypothesis according to which the world is a conceptual tool that makes it possible to form a new idea of universe, of something that is “for all” and no longer has anything to do with totality. A conceptual tool that, far from abolishing the idea of universality, allows for its internal subversion: more specifically, it makes possible to describe universal traits, define universally valid rules and construct universal statements, but inasmuch as the elements of such universals identify with a whole only by eroding its compactness and completeness. The world will appear as a functioning, effective para-conceptual tool, producing within philosophy the separation between systematicity of approach and the necessity of a totalizing system – a separation obtained by a disentangling of the notion of universality and the idea of cosmos. This is a literally explosive approach that, as we will see, puts into turmoil our conception of the relationship between practice and theory, our idea of the subject, and that ultimately calls for us to leave open the dramaturgy of what it is that philosophy is supposed to do.

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Peter Klepec*

World? Which World? On Some Pitfalls of a Concept¹

The aim of this essay is not to provide a solution to a theoretical problem or a clear guide to political action, but merely to point out – in the least technical way possible – certain pitfalls that await us when we attempt to define the concept of world. The latter, in fact, is one of those concepts that seem simple, clear, and self-evident, but ultimately turn out to be very slippery, elusive, and tricky. The very mention of the word “world” constantly leads to ambiguity and paradox for several reasons. First, the word “world” constantly shifts between its cosmological, ontological, theological, chronological, anthropological, sociological, political, and existential meanings.² Second, the word “world” can have contradictory meanings even within a single meaning, especially with regard to its definition in terms of space, time, and ontology. The consequences of this affect its strict definition. Moreover, third, the world involves a peculiar paradox. It is with us from the beginning, it is always already there, but not really, or at least not yet completely – what appears to us as the world is either not the world at all, but an erroneous, inaccurate, or false conception of it, or the world itself is not yet at the level of its own concept. Yes, the world is there, but that does not mean it is simply identified with being (all that is) out there. This may seem strange, since “being there”, “presence”, “the outside”, “the real world”, and “the external reality” are often used as synonyms for “the world”. There are

¹ This article is a result of the research programme P6-0014 “Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy” and the research project J6-9392 “The Problem of Objectivity and Fiction in Contemporary Philosophy”, which are funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

² There is, of course, a great deal of philosophical discussion on this subject. Although we will not deal with the history of these discussions, here we have drawn on the following recent overviews of the subject: Paul Clavier, *Le concept du monde*, Paris, PUF, 2000; Christian Bernier, *Qu'est-ce qu'une conception du monde?*, Paris, Vrin, 2006; Sean Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida*, London and New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2013; Kelly Oliver, *Earth and World. Philosophy After the Apollo Missions*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015; Walter Biemel, *Le concept du monde chez Heidegger*, Paris, Vrin, 2015; Julien Rabachou, *Qu'est-ce qu'un monde?*, Paris, Vrin, 2016.

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already big and important differences between them, but perhaps more important for us here – and that is our fourth point – is that “the world” is not simply identical with external reality or with everything that exists. Nevertheless, and this is our fifth point, “the world” remains at the centre of the questions that relate it to truth: at the end there is always the question of whether it is *really true that the world exists*.³

One would have to enumerate many more points here, but from these arbitrarily chosen ones it is clear that “the world” as a concept necessarily presents many difficulties and contradictions. By definition, “the world” is in a quandary. While that may appear to somehow discredit, sully, or even refute the concept, it is, at least in our opinion, its main strength and driving force. For if “there is a world (out there)”, it is certainly full of problems, difficulties, contradictions, and antagonisms: that is exactly what the concept of the world should take into account. In other words, the concept of the world, the grasping of the world, must reflect the fact that the world, if there is one, is constantly in disorder, change, and flux. As a concept, it must even embody the end of the world, that is, the end and impossibility of its own object. In this sense, the end of the world is implicit in its concept; just as for Adorno the end of art is implicit in its concept. What we will attempt here follows in the form of an exercise, with somewhat logical reasons and arguments leading in the direction of a dynamic concept of the world. In the process, we will encounter a number of paradoxes. Perhaps the most fundamental thing is that we will constantly move in circles, always returning to the starting point to face the dilemma of the world, or rather, what to do with the world. What, which, and whose world are we talking about in the first place?

On the World

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Let us go back, then. “The world,” as we have said, is always already “there.” What is meant by this? Namely, “the world” is not there only in the sense of our physical surroundings from the micro to the macro level in the sense of the universe and the cosmos, but it is also there in the sense of man, people, nations, and the peoples who inhabit them. Alternatively, as Heidegger put it, we are always already in the world, in the sense of the German word *Mitsein*, being-with, togetherness, companionship. We are always already living in “the world” with

³ Bas C. van Fraassen, “‘World’ Is Not a Count Noun”, *Noûs*, 29 (2/1995), pp. 139–157.

the Other(s), and we can never really get out, we are always in some relation to it. “The world” shapes, conditions, and creates us in a sense, but it is also constantly changing itself and is never really the same. These changes are also our product, for our relationship to the world is never purely neutral and passive. Even when we do nothing or pretend to be only passive observers of “the world”, like Hegel’s figure of the “beautiful soul”, we are always active and creative: we create “the world”.⁴ On the other hand, perhaps we only create “our world” and each of us only creates our own private world? How many worlds are there? One world, “the world”, or an infinite number of worlds, a multiplicity of worlds? How do they relate to each other and to “the world”, if there is one at all? Are these worlds just views of “the world”, “worldviews”? Or perhaps we all live today, as Badiou puts it, in a worldless⁵ world, in a world that is not a world at all, and we have to fight for a new, better world, a world for all?

But where to begin? There where the world is, of course. For it is presumably “there”. Yes, “the world” might be there, but never, already for Heidegger, in the sense of an object, of something that we can literally hold in our hands, that we are facing *vis-à-vis*. *What* is it then – “the world”? In addition, what does it actually mean to “be in it”, to “be in it together”, to “share it”? If we can “be in it” – does that mean it is some kind of container? Or is it itself contained in something else? Can we locate it, is it perhaps a place – *where* is it? Clearly, “the world” is everywhere and yet nowhere in particular. However, this “being everywhere”⁶ still needs to be specified. Does it refer to a whole that has no bounda-

⁴ The motif of the “creation of the world” has been remarkably elaborated by one of the most lucid contemporary thinkers of the problem of the world, the recently deceased Jean-Luc Nancy. Although we do not explicitly follow his arguments here, we are deeply indebted to him and his adage: “*To create the world* means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World, or, Globalization*, trans. F. Raffoul and D. Pettigrew, Albany, SUNY Press, 2007, p. 54.

⁵ For these topics in recent contemporary philosophy, see the excellent: Roland Végső, *Worldlessness After Heidegger. Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

⁶ Here we must mention an old philosophical discussion that is practically never mentioned in discussions of the problem of the concept of “the world”, a discussion which has been going on since Anselm of Canterbury on the subject of the ontological proof of God, and which has undergone a kind of renaissance with modern philosophy up to Kant. (Cf. Dieter Henrich, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis, Sein Problem und seine Geschichte in der Neuzeit*, Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr, 1967.) Kant in a way ended this whole discussion not only, as is

ries, or to something that is itself limited and constrained? The real problem is where exactly to draw a line, demarcation, or boundary. For example, if by “the world” we mean the whole of “the outside world”, it is not quite clear where the outside begins and where it ends. Indeed, the inside is already outside in a certain sense, and the outside is already inside. Such an assertion may seem somewhat trivial, but a mathematical object like a Klein bottle shows that there can be no boundary between outside and inside. Lacan even coined the neologism “extimacy” to indicate this and in this precise sense the world would have to be simultaneously inside and outside. This complicates things, because normally we presume that the world is out there – so, it is both outside and inside of us. Of course, this does not mean that the world spreads everywhere, without limits. Another paradox is namely that the world is literally everywhere, yet at the same time many things or beings fall out of it. For “the world” is always about *who or what belongs to it*, it is about setting boundaries and excluding, about questions such as the following: Does it include *us* in the sense of human beings, or rather a collection of living things, humans, animals, plants, viruses, bacteria, etc., along with the non-living things, the earth, the air, the atmosphere, the stratosphere, the galaxy, the universe, space as such? In one way or another, “the world” is always bound up with the problem of demarcation between what is outside it and what is inside it. Heidegger, for example, in his seminar of 1929-1930 drew a line between human beings, animals, and stones – “the stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man [i.e. Dasein] is world-forming.”⁷ Nevertheless, this solution was clearly only provisional for him, for in a sense he never quite solved the problem of delimitation and demar-

often assumed, by repeating the old thesis that existence cannot be a predicate, but also by pointing out that ontological proof is a conceptual operation that connects two concepts, *ens necessarium* and *omnitudo realitatis*. This conceptual operation is, for Kant, found in all other proofs of the existence of God; however, for him it is impossible not only because it is purely conceptual, but also because the concept of *ens necessarium*, of being that is absolutely necessary, is self-contradictory and therefore impossible. Kant’s critique opened up new avenues of conceptual thought not only in philosophy, but also for modern physics and evolutionary theory. The second concept that remains from the above-mentioned conceptual operation, the concept of *omnitudo realitatis*, “all of reality”, reaches its apogee with Hegel (“Die Wahre is das Ganze”, “The true is the whole.”) and then remains central to the discussion of post-Hegelian philosophy as well as modern logic and mathematics to this day. The discussion of the “world” being “everywhere” and “all there is” is therefore part of this context, but we cannot go into it more deeply here.

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. W. Mc Neill and N. Walker, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001, p. 183.

cation. His infamous affair with Nazism, as well as his private anti-Semitism, bear witness to this fact, for instance.

This, by the way, is not just a problem of philosophy or of a particular philosopher, but also the problem of the political itself. What is at stake here is the ideological, political, racial, and cultural appropriation of the world in terms of domination and power over it. In Heidegger's case, of course, the question was whether this "our little world" was the German world, the Western world. Again, not only for him – as Rodolphe Gasché⁸ has pointed out, there is a long tradition of equating the concept of "the world" with the idea of Europe. Although we seem to live in a globalized world where we are increasingly becoming part of one big global village, there are still fences, borders, and boundaries. The segregation that Lacan predicted in the early 1970s is on the rise today. In this regard, Achille Mbembe, one of the most important contemporary critics of racial segregation, emphasizes the following: "As has long been the case, the contemporary world is deeply shaped and conditioned by the ancestral forms of religious, legal, and political life built around fences, enclosures, walls, camps, circles, and, above all, borders."⁹

Who belongs on the inside and who belongs on the outside is not only an abstract academic question, but also one of great political explosiveness – the question of borders is particularly important in the contemporary context of heated political debates about migration policy, refugees, "Fortress Europe", and the rise of populisms and illiberalisms.

However, borders and limits are not only spatial, they concern time, too. Everyone agrees today that the American world, the world that was created after the Second World War, is now in shambles and sinking, that relations between the world's geopolitical powers are changing rapidly, and that consequently the world is changing. Or, as current U.S. President Biden pointed out in one of his recent speeches, "The world is changing; it is not the same as it was twenty years ago." (June 14, 2021) Here, by the way, the reader might notice that we

⁸ For more on this, see Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task. A Study of a Philosophical Concept*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009.

⁹ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. L. Dubois, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2017, p. 24.

are suddenly moving quietly and without warning into a different terrain – the world we are now talking about is a geopolitical world, a world of geopolitical and power relations. This world was always about the division of the world into orders, races, and colonies. Today we are witnessing the emergence of new forms of colonialism, and yet, despite these brutal facts, we need to be aware, as Mbembe put it, that

in the end, there is only one world. It is composed of a totality of a thousand parts. Of everyone. Of all worlds. [...] There is therefore only one world, at least for now, and that world is all there is. What we all therefore have in common is the feeling or desire that each of us must be a full human being. The desire for the fullness of humanity is something we all share. And, more and more, we also all share the proximity of the distant. Whether we want to or not, the fact remains that we all share this world. It is all that there is, and all that we have.¹⁰

Mbembe knows very well that in the political sense “a common world for all” does not really exist. Not yet, or rather not in the strict sense of the word. Sometimes it is hard to distinguish between the utopian call for a single world that is deeply woven into our Western pop culture (take, for example, Lennon’s song “Imagine”, which ends with the conclusion, “And the world will live as one.”), humanitarianism (like the 1985 mega-pop charity Band-Aid, which installed a phenomenon Keith Tester called “commonsense humanitarianism”¹¹), and pure ideology.

The problem is that on an abstract level we cannot refrain from referring to the world – and in the last instance, to a single common world. This is precisely what, at least in our opinion, Mbembe’s remark quoted above points to. Even
50 more. Such hesitation, such doubt, such division cannot be eliminated – at least on an abstract level – when we talk and think about the world as such. We cannot help but refer to “the world” in one way or another, and yet we are never sure what that really means, what the world is, if it exists at all. The world seems to be something very solid and present, but as a rule, it always turns out to be the opposite, something very uncertain, floating, something endangered or even

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 180, 182.

¹¹ See Keith Tester, *Humanitarianism and Modern Culture*, University Park (PA), Penn State University Press, 2010.

threatened. This split between “always already” and “not yet” is constitutive of the very idea, representation, and concept of “the world”. On the one hand, in our desperate attempt to hold onto the world, we are constantly confronted with its fragility and uncertainty, its demise, its collapse, its crisis, or its dissolution. Or, as Novalis put it, we have lost the world and the world has lost us. However, one should be very precise here – we may have lost the world, but not completely, there always remains a remainder here that we cannot really get rid of. This can be especially troublesome and painful when we somehow decide to construct for ourselves the new, the true world.

The Two Worlds

There is a classical, typical, and predominant way of dealing with the world, which is found in religion, myths, and other ways of representing the world. The simplistic “two-world-theory” divides the world into two halves and in this way seemingly bypasses many problems with the world: one version of the world, more or less the bad one, makes everything impermanent, changeable, and uncontrollable, while the other, the alternative one, is the good, stable, clean, and pure one. The solution creates two worlds, two diagnoses of what and how the world is: the solution does not abolish the chaos, mess, and confusion of the real world; the latter is superposed by a purified and cleansed version of itself. To illustrate, let us quote a very recent passage from Bernard-Henri Lévy describing the problems with the world in the face of the crisis caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. On the one hand, Lévy says, there is *mundus*

as the real world. The one in which people strive, grieve, hope, and die. The one that fell into ruins twice in the twentieth century [...] But *mundus* also signifies what is neat and clean. Immaculate and without stain. Aseptic. Sanitized. Disinfected. In Greek, the word is *cosmos*. In French and English, *cosmetic*. [...] it is the name of a too beautiful world in which we are asked to hide the misery, the evil, the Medusas that we would prefer not to see.¹²

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It seems that the passage quoted very aptly illustrates the usual way of dealing with “the world” that splits the world into two parts and in this way “saves” its

¹² Bernard-Henri Lévy, *The Virus in the Age of Madness*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2020, pp. 90, 92.

coherence, consistency, and solidity. This procedure involves different levels, reasons, or causes, which according to Lévy are here political, personal-affective, structural, and aesthetic. However, from the passage quoted, it seems that Lévy somehow suggests that the world has always been just that, more or less split into two Manichean halves. It seems that he more or less deliberately presents things in such a way that readers will somehow conclude that any attempt to resolve the contradictions of the real world always leads to disaster, to totalitarianism. This would be the political side of the problem presented above, implying the moral that we should never try to solve the real world, because that would certainly end horribly.

Such a perfidious tactic loses some of its force, however, because the two extremes to be avoided are not really on the same level. You do not have to be Derrida to notice this – although it would be interesting to make a classic deconstructionist reading in this case, but there is no room for that here. The alternative to the real world is perhaps too simply a boring world, a purified and sanitized world that does not work well on the next level, which for Lévy is the level of desire and life. On the one hand, there is a world, Lévy says, “in which people strive, grieve, hope, and die.” This is a world of desire, a world of passions, affects, instincts and drives, a world of life, a world of procreation and corruption, reproduction, sex, sin, impurity, change, chaos, and misery. The problem here – and that Lévy knows very well – is that life as such is always accompanied by its negation, death, and that must be present already here and not only in the other world. Why does one need the purified world after all? The same is true of desire. Desire, in fact, is restless, never satisfied, never still and at rest; it is always split between hope and fear, as Hegel would put it, and it too, like life, is meaningless without its negation. In the above quotation, Lévy contrasts the world of desire, the chaotic world, with the world in which this very desire and life are purified and sterilized. Lévy’s simile falls short not only because negation is already an inherent and integral part of desire and life, but also because this very logic of negativity produces a surplus that is projected into the other half or the other world. In Lévy’s example, one does not really see the dialectical connection between the two halves. The world is now split, and so his diagnosis overlooks how the actual contradictions in the (real) world are related to its splitting. The splitting up of the world, the distinction and separation of its two sides, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, is obviously done here in a deliberately exaggerated way for pedagogical and moral reasons – again, perhaps to

avoid all extremes. Such a juxtaposition of the two worlds is too Aristotelian, too committed to “maintaining the Golden Mean”, whatever that may be.

At the fourth and last level, which we call structural, this becomes obvious. For if we divide the world into two parts, we get two halves, two sets of elements that appear as ordered and as disordered. Where does this very *order* come from? How does it come about, what determines it? This is precisely the question that the principle of avoiding extremes does not raise in any way. It is not only a question of how internal order and disorder are related, or who or what determines and governs them. It is also a question of visibility and representation, a question of how things appear and how the world itself appears, or, in Rancière’s sense of the French word *partage*, how it is divided and shared. By being divided, it not only avoids its contradictions and antagonism, but it also produces a certain order of the visible. There are two important consequences of that. They concern the highest and the lowest; the latter is simply that which remains invisible for that order. The former concerns that which shines as the paradigm of visibility itself (the other world as the world of ideas, for example, in Plato), which is projected out of the world onto the imaginary perfect world. In other words, what is missing in Lévy’s account of the two worlds is their dialectical connection. What drives the chaotic world, what desire strives for, is represented in the other world in a purified but neutered, castrated, or sterilized way.

Strictly speaking, we could also find in Lévy a relation between the two poles; for him, the reasons for the division of worlds lie in a general explanation similar to Freudian repression: we simply do not want to deal with the unpleasant and ugly side of the world, or, as he puts it, “we prefer not to see.” The other world, however, is much more fundamentally connected to the (real) world; it is really an escape and a remainder of its antinomies. The two worlds are much more interdependent; the chaotic world needs the pure world as its complement in order to remain what it is, that is, in order to maintain the intolerable, the unbearable, the repugnant, and the undesirable in it. This is nothing new, of course, but has already been hinted at in the history of philosophy. These are the very questions that Ludwig Feuerbach sought to clarify in his explanation of the origin of religion in his 1841 work on the essence of Christianity. Feuerbach’s argument is that

[r]eligion is the disuniting of man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself; God is not what man is – man is not what God is. God is the infinite, man the finite being; God is perfect, man imperfect; God eternal, man temporal; God almighty, man weak; God holy, man sinful. God and man are extremes: God is the absolutely positive, the sum of all realities; man the absolutely negative, comprehending all negations.¹³

At first glance, it seems that Feuerbach acts similarly as Lévy; here too we have two worlds, one imperfect and the other perfect. However, the relationship between the two is set differently – because one is imperfect and finite (man), one needs the perfect and the infinite (God) as his or her complement.

Nevertheless, even that explanation is too simple and a further step has to be taken, a step already taken by none other than Marx. As is well known, Marx criticized Feuerbach in his eleven *Theses on Feuerbach*, which were actually a sketch for the first chapter of the *German Ideology*, a work written with Engels but not later published and left to “the gnawing criticism of the mice.” The *Theses* also remained unpublished until after Marx’s death; Engels published them in 1888. In them, Marx essentially argued that Feuerbach’s materialism was too mechanistic, playing too much of a game of “black against white,” while the origin of the problem was to be found elsewhere, in praxis, which Marx himself later explained as the capitalist mode of commodity production. This is what determines the world and its contradictions, and in Marx’s view our task is to change it.

The Point Is to Change It

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Marx’s reading of Feuerbach’s view reaches its peak in the form of the infamous 11th thesis: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” Marx’s primary concern here is to abandon the position of idealist interpretation, which merely passively observes and interprets the world in various ways without first considering how much it is itself involved in it and without actually intervening in it. His aim is to initiate a materialist turn that brings materialism, *praxis*, to the fore. This *praxis* is

¹³ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. G. Eliot, Walnut, Mt. San Antonio College, 2008, p. 1.

not mechanistic materialism, but a materialism that draws heavily on German idealism. The story is, of course, much more complicated than that, but that is not our subject here. The issue here is primarily Marx's general observation that the world is not something we merely observe, perceive, and describe, but something that is actively produced and created. Not only by others, but also by us. Although Marx here foregrounds change as an alternative to reflection and interpretation, the real problem – also for him in the following decades – is how to explain the changing world, its self-transformation, and its dynamic character. Of course, there are a number of other problems with this point of Marx's as well – is it possible to juxtapose theory and practice in a rather crude naive way? Is theory incapable of thinking of change? How can the world be changed without rethinking it and reflecting about where and how to intervene in it, what to achieve?

These and similar questions have been vigorously debated throughout the history of Marxism. As Frank Ruda has masterfully shown, there are at least three traditions and readings of Marx's theses on Feuerbach.¹⁴ If you look closely, claims Ruda, you can immediately see that Feuerbach's themes are scattered not only throughout Marx's work, but also in every critical theory worthy of its name. That is, if we stay with the problem of the world that interests us here: How does capitalism relate to the question of the world, to the question of whether there is a world at all? If there is one – what options does it leave us and what does it force or coerce us into? Ruda in his text relies heavily on Alain Badiou, who claims

that, today, the world deprives the vast majority of human beings of their visibility. It is a protocol of exclusion of the visible, and not the transcendental distribution of a situation in the visible. The fundamental question of the world is in reality that of names. Who receives a name? It is not to begin with the question of wealth and its distribution. It is the question of knowing who is counted under its name, and who is not. The old world, which subsisted until the beginning of the 1980s, was in no way perfect, and it was even regularly sinister – but it was a world. [...] Today, we are in an intervallic period in which the great majority of people do not have a name. [...] We are the experimenters of the interval. We are

¹⁴ For an astute interpretation of Marx's 11th thesis, see Frank Ruda, *For Badiou. Idealism without Idealism*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2015, pp. 11–31.

between two worlds, one of which is falling little by little into oblivion, while the other is only fragmentary. What we have to do is pass through. We are passers.¹⁵

Badiou argues that in today's capitalist world there is no longer a common world,¹⁶ that we are perhaps passers in-between two worlds and that we must act and create a new world, new protocols of the visible and of visibility. We can see in this passage his entire philosophical and political programme in simple but very powerful and meaningful sentences. One can only agree with Badiou; however, perhaps an additional step is required. This is precisely what Ruda provides in his interpretation of Marx's 11th thesis. Ruda concludes the chapter on the 11th thesis with the following appeal:

To read the 11th thesis today from a Badiouian perspective implies thus initially an affirmation of the existence of a (common) world before addressing the question of how to change it. From a Badiouian perspective and under present conditions, one can rather read the 11th thesis in the following manner: *The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in variant ways; the point is to affirm it.* Or to give a longer version of this reformulation: *The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to affirm its existence.*¹⁷

This point is particularly relevant to our topic here, too. However, we will add yet another step to the steps presented by Badiou and Ruda. This step simply involves what we are doing here, namely, asking questions about “the world” and about the concept of the world. In other words, before we affirm the world, with the aim of changing it by bringing forth a new one, we may need to devote a little more attention to the question of how the world actually relates to its concept. To do that, we need to return to our question about the world.

¹⁵ Alain Badiou, *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, trans. B. Bosteels, London and New York, Verso, 2012, pp. 64–65.

¹⁶ Of course, Badiou is not alone in claiming that we live in a world that is not a world at all – the worldless world is precisely the subject of Végésó's excellent book mentioned earlier. Late Derrida was quite concerned with the end of the world, and for him nothing is less certain than the world itself; the absence of a common world even made him claim that perhaps “there is no world.” (Quoted from Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida*, p. 132.)

¹⁷ Ruda, *For Badiou*, p. 31.

Which World?

The details are crucial here. The very use of a definite or indefinite article in the case of “world” namely implies a choice that has rather radical consequences. In French, for example, it is not the same to speak of “le monde”, “the world”, or of “un monde”, “a world”. “The world” refers to something real in the sense of an open whole, whereas “a world” refers to a closed entity or to a particular section, plane, or area of a whole. Here we again encounter the problem of the doubling of the world that we mentioned above in Lévy and Feuerbach. If there the world was divided into two halves, one of which was perfect and the other not, here we find a different division, the division between the finite and the infinite world, known in history from antiquity to the early Renaissance, and then to Newton, Leibniz, and Kant. Alexandre Koyré brilliantly presented the historical and factual story of the process of the gradual abandonment of the ancient conception of the world that took place in the realm of ideas and science. Koyré described the history of the gradual transition from the ancient conception of the world as closed, to the new, modern conception of the universe as infinite from Nicholas of Cusa to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.¹⁸ That is why Nancy claims:

We no longer live in a *cosmos* in the Greek sense of the word – that is, we no longer perceive the totality of an ordered and thus beautiful world – a double signification to which the words “cosmonaut” and “cosmetics” bear witness. Today it’s no longer possible to speak of a beautiful, cosmic order because altogether the galaxies do not really present an order – physicists describe a finite world in an infinite expansion. It’s no longer possible to describe an order that would be comparable to that of the Ancients, who represented this order as spheres containing one another.¹⁹

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Nevertheless, even when we stop speaking of the world as *cosmos*, we still retain some sort of vague notion of “world” for everything that exists, much like *omnitudo realitatis*, which, as we already noted, belongs to a long metaphysical tradition. The claim that the world is all that exists has recently been challenged

¹⁸ See Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957.

¹⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Possibility of a World. Conversations with Pierre-Philippe Jandin*, trans. T. Holloway and F. Méchain, New York, Fordham University Press, 2017, p. 29.

by Marcus Gabriel's thesis that the world does not exist at all. His argument concerns the world in the sense of "everything", "everything that exists". If the world existed in this sense, Gabriel argues, it would be identified with the realm or domain in which not only all things and facts exist with and without us, but also the domain that encompasses everything – life, the universe, and everything else. Gabriel, for whom the world is larger and more encompassing than the universe itself, makes a strong distinction between the world and the universe:

One must differentiate the world from the universe. However, what is this actually, the world? What does the term "world" refer to? Nowadays we use it in everyday life, among other things, for the earth, for the planet on which we live. In English, it has become naturalized to denote more or less habitable planets, as well as those outside of our solar system, as "worlds." Moreover, there is also the use of "world" in the sense of the world of a novel, the world of the Aborigines, the world of the happy, or the world of the Romans. For starters, by nature, as it were, we tend to identify the world with the totality of all existing objects. However, in order for there to be such a totality, there must be a kind of rule or a law that holds this totality together.²⁰

If the world does not exist in the above sense of the domain of all domains, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of a world, or better still, of a plurality of worlds. Again, there are many meanings in which the latter may be understood. We humans tend to appear in many worlds, or, as Badiou puts it: "Man is this animal to whom it belongs to participate in numerous worlds, to appear in innumerable places."²¹ Although it is debatable whether or not we humans are animals, we can indeed appear in and participate in several worlds, which can be further defined and specified by adjectives or other particulars. These worlds are numerous and include domains, spheres, and realms. For example, my world, your world, our world, the world(s) of the senses, the transcendent world(s), the world(s) of fiction, the world(s) of certain fictional characters (such as the world of Don Quixote, the world of Emma Bovary, or the world of Hermi-

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²⁰ Marcus Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist*, trans. G. S. Moss, Cambridge, Polity, 2015, p. 32.

²¹ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event*, 2, trans. A. Toscano, London and New York, Continuum, 2010, p. 513.

one Granger), the world(s) of philosophy (like the Kantian world, the world of metaphysics), the world(s) of art, the world(s) of science, the world(s) of politics, and so on and so forth. Then there are past or present worlds and epochs of human history (such as the ancient world, the Roman world, the mediaeval world, the American world) or worlds in which a particular political-practical view prevails (such as the Anglo-Saxon world or the Western world, the Muslim world, the Christian world, and so on).

We could go on listing many more examples, variants, and references of the word “world”, but one thing at this point is now clear – the concept of world has a difficult task to perform. On the one hand, it must reflect and distinguish many different kinds of world(s); on the other hand, it must present a world as a single coherent entity. It must avoid the Scylla of many worlds and the Charybdis of one world without falling into the trap of the so-called worldview. It must offer a view of the world as a whole without presenting it merely as a limited or particular point of view. Moreover, it must be a view of the world itself and not a view from the outside. Another requirement is that it must be a dynamic and plastic concept, capable of reflecting and interpreting both the world and our place and position in it. Finally, it must really be a concept, that is, something that captures and holds the object with which it is concerned. Nevertheless, how and by what means is it possible to accomplish this difficult and rather paradoxical task?

One of the attempts to resolve this predicament can be to see it as a concept that shapes all other concepts, to understand the *world as a horizon*. Such a horizon determines the understanding of everything that happens in the world, here and now. More than that. Such a horizon also determines what (in such a world) is possible and what is not, and was described by Edmund Husserl as universal horizon:

Thus in whatever way we may be conscious of the world as universal horizon, as coherent universe of existing objects, we, each “I-the-man” and all of us together, belong to the world as living with one another in the world; and the world is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this “living together.” [...] The consciousness of the world, then, is in constant motion; we are conscious of the world always in terms of some object content or other, in the alteration of the different ways of being conscious (intuitive, nonintuitive, deter-

mined, undetermined, etc.) and also in the alteration of affection and action, in such a way that there is always a total sphere of affection and such that the affecting objects are now thematic, now unthematic [...]. Obviously this is true not only for me, the individual ego; rather we, in living together, have the world pre-given in this “together,” as the world valid as existing for us and to which we, together, belong, the world as world for all, pre-given with this ontic meaning. Constantly functioning in wakeful life, we also function together, in the manifold ways of considering, together, objects pre-given to us in common, thinking together, valuing, planning, acting together.²²

For Husserl, the horizon described forms a framework of meaning against which all things and actions appear as meaningful. This horizon is not static or unchanging; on the contrary, it is constantly changing, but exactly how this is, Husserl has somehow not really been able to explain successfully. He also conceptualized it as the lifeworld, i.e. as something that is always already there and forms a background for all our common and shared experiences. Yet, the concept of the lifeworld is ambiguous. On the one hand, it still represents something rather self-evident and anthropologically universal, while on the other hand it should be something practical, vivid, and concrete – lived. However, as such it is a unique, a singular world – which, by the way, Derrida dealt with exhaustively²³ – and it seems that Husserl never succeeded in overcoming the dilemma between universality (science, scientific worldview) and singularity.²⁴ The whole problem of how to understand the dynamic social and political nature of the lifeworld remained a task for Husserl’s successors, including Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Patočka.

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Although this could be discussed at length and widely, it is clear that Husserl tries to avoid certain problems that arise if one tries to have a static view of the world, or if one tries to neutralize – as we saw above with Lévy and Feuerbach – the negativity and contradiction that one encounters in the (real) world. A viewpoint on the world that attempts to repress or exclude the internal contradic-

²² Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology. An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. D. Carr, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970, pp. 108–109.

²³ For an informative overview, see Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida*, pp. 104–110.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 47–66.

tions of the world itself is ultimately nothing more than a pure fantasy – and that is why, by the way, for Lacan the world as such is but a fantasy: “the world is merely the fantasy through which thought sustains itself.”²⁵ However, thought sustains itself, if we may say so, in many ways to neutralize the negativity and contradictions in the world. These range from clinical paranoia and conspiracy theories, on the one hand, to “worldview”, on the other.

On the Worldview

There is virtually no philosopher who would not reject and strongly oppose what is called “worldview”. Why? Because the latter is a static and egocentric machine that neutralizes the disparities, contradictions, and antagonisms that one encounters “in the real world”. It is a unilateral view of the world, the frame of which in fact prevents us from seeing the world as it is. The word “worldview” became popular after the French Revolution, at the turn of the 18th century, when the old world of the *ancien régime*, “the old order”, was turned upside down and revolutionized. The term *Weltanschauung* was coined later, by the Romantics, as a sort of reaction to the Revolution; Schleiermacher introduced it in his 1813 speeches on religion as a totality of influences. Later with Dilthey, a worldview was equated with an overall view of our place in the world. In its most general terms, it seems that it seeks to fill in the gaps encountered in the real world – recall here Heine’s infamous description of the philosopher pictured with his nightcap filling in all the holes in the world. Heine’s target here is obviously Hegel as a patchworker, patching up the holes in the world; the trouble is that Hegel himself actually firmly rejected the very idea and concept of *Weltanschauung*.

What exactly is it, how is it to be defined? Why this world when we know that there are other similar terms in German such as *Weltsicht* and *Weltanschauung*? Freud points out the specific German sense of the word and its fundamental meaning. He points out that

“*Weltanschauung*” is, I am afraid, a specifically German concept, the translation of which into foreign languages might well raise difficulties. If I try to give you a

²⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Televisión. A Challenge to Psychoanalytic Establishment*, trans. D. Hollier, R. Krauss, A. Michelson, J. Mehlman, New York and London, W. W. Norton & Co., 1990, p. 6.

definition of it, it is bound to seem clumsy to you. In my opinion, then, a *Weltanschauung* is an intellectual construction which solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis, which, accordingly, leaves no question unanswered and in which everything that interests us finds its fixed place. It will easily be understood that the possession of a *Weltanschauung* of this kind is among the ideal wishes of human beings. Believing in it one can feel secure in life, one can know what to strive for, and how one can deal most expediently with one's emotions and interests.²⁶

Freud is not concerned in this lecture with a systematic elaboration of what a worldview is, but rather with an attempt to place psychoanalysis in the context of a rift between science and religion. Philosophy, which Freud incidentally also mentions here, does not play an important role for him. It namely operates with a technical language that only a few have mastered:

Philosophy is not opposed to science, it behaves like a science and works in part by the same methods; it departs from it, however, by clinging to the illusion of being able to present a picture of the universe which is without gaps and is coherent, though one which is bound to collapse with every fresh advance in our knowledge. It goes astray in its method by over-estimating the epistemological.²⁷

The point is that philosophy, for Freud, is dangerously close to a worldview – and here Freud refers to the above quotation from Heine (which was also very close to his heart, as he often quoted it²⁸), while psychoanalysis itself, in Freud's own opinion, "is incapable of creating a *Weltanschauung* of its own. It does not need one; it is a part of science and can adhere to the scientific *Weltanschauung*."²⁹

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And while Freud stands shoulder to shoulder defending modern science, Heidegger famously takes the opposite viewpoint – in modern science he sees the problem, the problem of domination over the world, because science "does not

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, trans. J. Strachey, in *The Standard Edition. The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. 22 (1932-1936)*, J. Strachey and A. Freud (eds.), London, Hogarth Press 1964, p. 158.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

²⁸ For more on that, see Mladen Dolar, *Oficirji, služkinje in dimnikarji*, Ljubljana, DTP, 2010, pp. 249–258.

²⁹ Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*, p. 181.

think.” Nevertheless, there is a line of argumentation with him that is close to Freud, except that Heidegger uses somewhat different terminology. He does not speak of *Weltanschauung*, but of *Weltbild*:

What is it – a “world picture”? Obviously, a picture of the world. But what is a world? What does “picture” mean here? “World” serves, here, as a name for beings in their entirety. The term is not confined to the cosmos, to nature. History, too, belongs to world. Nevertheless, even nature and history – interpenetrating in their suffusion and exceeding of each other – do not exhaust world. Under this then we also include the world-ground, no matter how its relation to world is thought.

Initially, the word “picture” makes one think of a copy of something. This would make the world picture, as it were, a painting of beings as a whole. But “world picture” means more than this. We mean by it the world itself; the totality of beings taken, as it is for us, as standard-giving and obligating. “Picture” means, here, not a mere imitation, but rather that which sounds in the colloquial expression to be “in the picture” about something. This means: the matter itself stands in the way it stands to us, before us. To “put oneself in the picture” about something means: to place the being itself before one just as things are with it, and, as so placed, to keep it permanently before one. But a decisive condition in the essence of the picture is still missing. That we are “in the picture” about something means not just that the being is placed before, represented by, us. It means, rather, that it stands before us together with what belongs to and stands together with it as a system. To be “in the picture” resonates with: being well informed, being equipped and prepared.³⁰

As already indicated, the problem for Heidegger lies in modern science as well as in modern philosophy, more specifically in Descartes, who introduced the figure of the modern subject: “That the world becomes picture is one and the same process whereby, in the midst of beings, man becomes subject.”³¹ In other words, as “soon as the world becomes picture the position of man is conceived as world view. [...] The fundamental event of modernity is the conquest of the

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, “The Age of World Picture” in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. J. Young and K. Haynes, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 67.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

world as picture. [...] Within this, man fights for the position in which he can be that being who gives to every being the measure and draws up the guidelines.”³² According to Heidegger, the key to the picture of the world is that everything is subordinated to man’s vision and his will to dominate the world. Moreover, the aspect of perspective is also crucial, i.e. a God’s eye or all-seeing view. This emphasis on the fact that what is most important in the worldview or *Weltbild* is precisely a particular perspective is, incidentally, something that others, such as Wittgenstein, have also emphasized: “The concept of surveyable representation is of fundamental significance for us. It characterizes the way we represent things, how we look at matter. (Is this a ‘*Weltanschauung*’?)”³³

The Point Is to Liquidate It, in Order to ...

In short, what thinkers as diverse as Freud, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein have in common is an understanding of a worldview as something constructed, but limited by one’s perspective and position. A worldview is actually an ideology, a framework that gives us meaning in the world, a framework that gives us direction in our daily lives. As an ideology, a worldview has the function of making sense of our place in the world, of structuring, stabilizing, evaluating, and directing our relationship to the world into a whole, a totality. A worldview gives support and meaning to life in the world, to structure and totality. One could say that the function of a worldview is to domesticate the world, to tame it in order to master it. By providing an overview of the entire world, it gives us a direction as to where we are in the world in the first place. The problem with this is that a worldview is something that is beholden to necessity, urgency, provision, and circumstance, not eternity, universality, or objectivity.³⁴ Those who want to orient themselves are more than ever lost, says Husserl, pointing to the connection between historicism, scepticism, and worldview. Although a worldview should be an infallible compass that orients us in the world, it is actually something that “locks us into” our private world – and as such it is something that leads nowhere. It is something that is too strong and concurrently too weak, precisely

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³² *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

³³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations/Philosophische Untersuchungen*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. Hacker, and J. Schulte, Malden and Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 55.

³⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* [1911], ed. Eduard Marbach, Hamburg, Felix Meiner Verlag, 2009, p. 61.

because it is an obstacle to a more objective view of the world. It is something that absolutely does not belong to philosophy, and because it is often confused with personal opinion, it is something that is directly diametrically opposed to philosophy. It is too arbitrary – everyone has his or her own worldview. Fichte was perhaps the first to associate philosophy with a certain personal character; according to him, we choose such a philosophy as we are ourselves. Hegel, as already mentioned, was opposed to the *Weltanschauung*, and it is no wonder that his successors were very critical of it. From a Marxist perspective, a worldview is inherent in ideology as practice, and it is no coincidence that Theodor Adorno, a contemporary of the three thinkers mentioned above, was a great opponent of worldview. In his lectures on philosophical terminology, Adorno emphasized that “a task of philosophy in my view is not to affirm but [...] to liquidate worldview:”³⁵ For Adorno, the liquidation of opinion is tantamount to the liquidation of worldview.³⁶

Our contemporary, Badiou, goes even a step further – it is not only necessary to liquidate worldview, in a sense the world itself must be liquidated. The world, or better, a particular conception of it, must be destroyed, as Badiou says: “philosophy begins by destroying the very concept of the world; it knows, as does Lacan, that there only is a fantasy of the world, and that it is only in its defection, or its defeat, that one can subtractively think some real.”³⁷ However, perhaps the world does not need to be destroyed or liquidated, since it is already destroying itself. This is exactly what Jean-Luc Nancy points out in his works. Nancy starts from the fact that the world is self-destructive; it is destroying itself. For him, this fact is not a matter of exaggeration, fear, anxiety, or catastrophism: “The fact that the world is destroying itself is not a hypothesis: it is, in a sense, the fact from which any thinking of the world follows.”³⁸ However, in order to do that, i.e. to think the world, one must, for Nancy, still free oneself “from the so-called worldview or *Weltanschauung*. Indeed, the representation of the world implies a vantage point, that is, a position outside the world from which the world can be seen and represented.” It is only when the world is no longer con-

³⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1973, p. 118.

³⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 123.

³⁷ Badiou, *Adventures of French Philosophy*, p. 317.

³⁸ Nancy, *The Creation of the World, or, Globalization*, p. 35.

ceived of as a (world) representation, (world) picture, or (world) view that “one reaches the most contemporary determination of the world.”³⁹

The diagnosis Nancy presents here is further elaborated in his many works. Here we can present only its basic coordinates. Why does he speak about the destruction of the world? For him, the real reason for the destruction of the world lies – and here he agrees with Marx’s assertions cited above – in the regime of general equivalence that produces global injustice and renders the world “unworldly”, *immonde*. For Nancy, the spread of general equivalence in the world is another name for globalization, and he believes that this process leads not only to gross inequalities but ultimately also to the destruction of the world itself. Here Nancy distinguishes between two French terms: *globalisation* (globalization) and *mondialisation* (world-creating or world-building). Globalization is, for him, not just another name for capitalism, but also for the domination of the world by the West, which has established a regime, a network of global capitalism spread through technology. This domination by the West has led not to unity but to disintegration, because the only unifying force is that of ruthless technological and economic exploitation. In this context of global expansion, the West is no longer the harbinger of universal reason. In addition, while globalization implies a form of totality, *mondialisation*, for Nancy, is associated with the potential for a liberatory process of creation. It is a process that extends to the entire human world. The world, in this sense, is undergoing a process of reinvention and exists in the form of the multiple relations between singularities that continually contribute to this reinvention. For Nancy, the creation of the world entails a practice that addresses the injustices of the contemporary world. Let us quote here, again, the task he presents:

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However, as I mentioned, this task is a struggle. In a sense, it is a struggle of the West against itself, of capital against itself. It is a struggle between two infinities, or between extortion and exposition. It is the struggle of thought, very precisely concrete and demanding, in which we are engaged by the disappearance of our representations of the abolishing or overcoming of capital. [...] But such thinking is not only theoretical: now as in the past, it is practically manifest and necessary – in the sense of the necessity and manifestedness of the world – that the struggle is straightaway and definitively a matter of concrete equality and actual

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

justice. In this sense, Marx's demand is not obsolete. The "thinking" of which we are speaking is necessarily involved both in the questioning of the "sense of the world" and in immediate, political, economic, and symbolic acts. [...] *To create the world* means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence. But this means to conduct this struggle precisely in the name of the fact that this *world* is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that it is precisely *what* forms the justice and the meaning of a world.⁴⁰

Therefore, here the real task of the concept of the world begins. After we have made a complete circle – or perhaps we might say that we have turned several times in a similar way – we have come back to our starting point. In the meantime, we may have succeeded in exposing some of the pitfalls that await us in our endeavour, but our task – as inhabitants of the world and as philosophers – remains. This task is set above by Nancy, but it is set in a similar way also by other contemporaries. Let us, at the end of our contribution, once again quote Badiou, who, as always, has clearly and succinctly formulated the only true and legitimate task of contemporary philosophy in this respect: "Philosophy has no other legitimate aim except to help find the new names that will bring into existence the unknown world that is only waiting for us because we are waiting for it."⁴¹

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⁴⁰ Nancy, *The Creation of the World, or, Globalization*, pp. 52, 54.

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Roland Végső*

On Acosmic Realism

As far as the idea of the “world” is concerned, the basic coordinates of our historical moment could be briefly outlined in reference to the following three points:

1. We are living in a historical era that is increasingly defined by a generalized sense of cultural disorientation. This experience is often described as the loss of a common or shared world.
2. However, it is no longer possible to tie the subjective experience of this loss to the simple objective loss of the world (which was the dominant paradigm of the 20th century). Rather, the current moment is defined by a peculiar tension: on the one hand, the subjective sense of loss corresponds to the uncontrollable objective proliferation of technologically enhanced mediated worlds (to everyone their own world); on the other hand, the looming specter of a global climate catastrophe threatens us with the total destruction of the human world. To use the artist Hito Steyerl’s diagnosis, we are suffering from having “too much world.”¹
3. A common response to this excess of worlds threatening us with a complete loss of the world today is a growing desire for re-orientation. Where will we find a stable foundation, something finally real or something absolute, which could give us back our lost sense of order? Should we create a new common world? Or should we dream up a workable confederation of many new worlds? Or should we simply let the inherent infinity of worlds guide us toward our shared destiny with the hope that, at the end of the day, it will have been worth it?

In the end, what the current situation might reveal to us, however, is that this common sense of loss is partially structured by an illusion – an illusion that we

¹ See Hito Steyerl, *Duty Free Art: Art in the Age of Planetary Civil War*, New York, Verso, 2019, p. 148.

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now have a chance to lose. We all know that the argument according to which we once had a shared common world that we have lost only yesterday is simply false: in our most recent histories, we would be hard put to identify a shared world that was not also at the same time a world of countless exclusions of various degrees of cruelty. The suspicion arises here that this shared, common world that we are already mourning today has never existed. If that is the case, however, it is not entirely clear why we would expect it to save us. In order to at least start imagining a history beyond this illusion, therefore, let us begin here by briefly examining some of the philosophical aspects of this unsettling situation.

Subjective *Weltschmerz*: Epistemological Delirium

While today hardly anyone needs a reminder that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe bequeathed to us the much cherished concept of *Weltliteratur*, it appears to be of significantly less academic interest these days that the optimism of this protean category has been immediately undermined by another popular 19th-century literary term that is often indirectly derived from Goethe's works as well: *Weltschmerz*.² Arguably, these two categories of Goethean descent could be treated as opposing twin paradigms of the 19th-century literary imagination of the "world". While *Weltliteratur* designates a hope for a nascent universality beyond the nation, *Weltschmerz* evokes the pain and suffering caused by not being able to find our proper place in this world. The tension between the two terms is quite palpable: while one of them celebrates the coming literary constitution of the world, the other already begins to mourn this world. What this juxtaposition reveals is that, in spite of the fundamentally pejorative connotations that the term *Weltschmerz* had accrued by the end of the 19th century, we

² While the first appearance of the term *Weltschmerz* is attributed to Jean Paul's posthumously published 1827 novel *Selina* ("Gott, um den *Weltschmerz* auszuhalten, muß die Zukunft sehen"), the general literary phenomenon that it now names is usually derived by historians of literature from Goethe's *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (1774). Although throughout its history the concept has accumulated various theological, political, social, psychological meanings, there appears to be a general critical consensus that it is a "genuinely modern phenomenon." See Burkhard Meyer-Sickendiek, "Weltschmerz", in C. Rohde, T. Valk, and M. Mayer (eds.), *Faust Handbuch: Konstellationen, Diskurse, Medien*, Stuttgart, J. B. Metzler Verlag, 2018, p. 254. For the specifically philosophical meaning of the term, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Weltschmerz: Pessimism in German Philosophy, 1860-1900*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016.

could treat it as a symptom of the impossibility of *Weltliteratur*. In this sense, it functions as a displaced recognition of the fact that “world” and “literature” cannot be linked together into a single concept without at least some pain and suffering. Going beyond the context of the 19th century, then, we could argue that something akin to the historical phenomenon of *Weltschmerz* emerges every time the ideological constitution of the world fails.

We seem to be living today in an age that once again is reactivating these 19th-century debates – albeit in ways that are now adjusted to a different historical situation. On the one hand, all the available empirical evidence seems to suggest that we are living in an era of “world literature”. The uncontrollable proliferation within the humanities of the debates about “world literature” are just one manifestation of this tendency of our times.³ In fact, we might be able to go further than this obvious diagnosis and speak of the ideological hegemony of a new kind of *Weltliteratur* that goes beyond the strictly speaking “literary” products and their academic interpretations so as to include all kinds of discourses about the “world” today – from officially endorsed theories of economic globalization, to scientific treatises on the Anthropocene, environmental protest movements, philosophical pamphlets, all the way to world-historical conspiracy theories, etc. On the other hand, all of these discussions have been conducted in an increasingly more ominous apocalyptic tone. The only thing that seems to be able to match the self-evidence of this fetishization of “world literature” is the certainty that the world as we know it is about to end. The religious variety of this kind of contemporary apocalypticism is the least surprising development of our times. Our “discontent” with our civilizations has apparently reached a new intensity that seems to have rendered obsolete the fundamental coordinates of collective knowledges. We no longer seem to be able to find our home in this world that this new world literature promised us.

³ After its initial formulation by Goethe in the early 19th century and its mid-20th-century reprisal by Eric Auerbach, the category of “world literature” took on new life in the 1990s. Based on the works of Djelal Kadir, Pascale Casanova, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, Gayatri Spivak, and countless others, the term has become the focus of endless debates. Since this critical literature is too expansive to review here in a meaningful way, I will merely refer to the following two titles both for the synthesis that they offer as well as for their polemical ambitions: Emily Apter, *Against World Literature*, New York, Verso, 2013; and Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016.

What are the most salient characteristics of our contemporary *Weltschmerz*? As Bruno Latour put it, “the abandonment of a common world leads to epistemological delirium.”⁴ This “epistemological disaster” that we have been living through over the last few decades might be understood as a generalization of this new *Weltschmerz*.⁵ While in the 19th century, arguably, the problem registered by this term was that the alienated European intellectual could no longer find his or her class basis in a rapidly transforming society and became homeless, today the phenomenon can no longer be localized so evidently. We could say that *Weltschmerz* has been “globalized” – both in the sense that it is no longer possible to tie it to one specific geographical location, and also in the sense that it can emerge from any segment of society. As such a mobile and generalized condition, it is now no longer the symptomatic exception, but increasingly the norm of dominant discourses. The carefully coordinated distance that kept the optimism of *Weltliteratur* and the pessimism of *Weltschmerz* apart from each other in the 19th century seems to have collapsed. Mourning the loss of a shared world is the only *Weltliteratur* we are left with today.

Thus, precisely when the world of the old *Weltliteratur* was about to be realized, a new kind of *Weltschmerz* emerged. This one, however, is not the lyrical melancholia of the failed petit bourgeois poet, nor the naïve enthusiasm of the adolescent mind, but something altogether different as it is based on confrontations with new types of universality – among which ecological disaster stands out as certainly one of the most threatening. This new *Weltschmerz* (although not without its own histories), then, assumes that our current historical moment is unprecedented. Yes, we can trace the histories of how we got to this point, teetering on the edge of the simultaneous realization of global humanity and the total destruction of our living environments. But the magnitude of the catastrophes that we are facing is without meaningful precedent. We are no longer or not yet in the field of historical repetition. The old Marxian maxim, according to which history repeats itself first as tragedy, then as farce, no longer seems to apply. The tragedy we are currently facing (which might reach the scale of the literal ending of the world) breaks down the logic of this repetition – we are deprived of the mental relief of the prospect of farcical futures. Should

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⁴ Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, trans. C. Porter, Cambridge, Polity, 2018, p. v.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

this understanding of history be correct, we would find ourselves in a strange situation: the present is outside repetition since it is unprecedented (it is not the repetition of the past) and, therefore, by ending this specific history, it will not be incorporated into a future history in which it could be repeated. The idea of a final ecological catastrophe itself implies that humanity as such will undergo it only once. The lesson of our times is, therefore, clear: the *Weltliteratur* of global humanity ends with the *Weltschmerz* of extinction.

One of the more remarkable recent documents of this new *Weltliteratur* is Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's *The Ends of the World* (first published in 2014 and revised in 2015). What makes this book so noteworthy is that Danowski and de Castro systematically map the basic coordinates of our contemporary *Weltschmerz*. In effect, they designed a combinatory machine that, based on structural principles, constitutes a system of eight available positions. The only two necessary elements of this matrix are the "world" and "us" (the inhabitants of this world), while everything else can be derived from the mutual irreducibility to each other of these two categories. In other words, the pain of our world is still born of the same old conflict that gave us *Weltschmerz* in the first place: there is no possible reconciliation between the self and the world. We can, then, proceed from here following the logic of subtraction. In other words, we can take away one of the elements of the self/world dyad and proceed as if the other did not exist. Next, these two options can be expanded upon by way of positing a temporal priority: we can imagine that one of the two elements existed "before" or will continue to exist "after" the other. These four basic options can be redoubled by attributing a fundamentally "positive" or "negative" value to this absence/priority. Accordingly, today, we can imagine a "world without us" (for example, speculative realism), an "us without a world" (Kantian transcendental idealism and accelerationism), a "world before us" (the religious discourse on Eden or the Romantic discourse on nature as wilderness), and a "world after us" (as in Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us*, or in the so-called Voluntary Extinction Movement). Depending on our own dispositions, each of these four positions can serve as a source of exhilarated jubilation or a cause for cosmic alarm.⁶

⁶ Déborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *The Ends of the World*, trans. R. Nunes, Cambridge, Polity, 2017, pp. 19–22.

Nevertheless, the way “speculative realism” appears in this apocalyptic fresco so skillfully painted by the authors remains quite instructive. Relying on the works of Quentin Meillassoux and Ray Brassier, Danowski and de Castro offer us two different (potentially conflicting) images of this philosophical position: in one of them, speculative realism is a radical affirmation of the world; in the other, it declares the world to be always already dead. On the one hand, speculative realism appears here as a representative of the “world without us” scenario due to its radical reassertion of “a world independent of all experience.”⁷ Rejecting the inherent worldlessness of all forms of philosophical idealism, speculative realism teaches us the “absolute pre-eminence of a world without people as the ultimate guarantee of any authentic materialism.”⁸ On the other hand, however, the authors also conclude that, for speculative realism, the end of the world is the very mode of existence of the world: “One could say that, for these thinkers, to speak of an ‘end of the world,’ far from a pragmatic contradiction [...], is, on the contrary, a sheer metaphysical tautology, a trivial ontological pleonasm: the end is the world’s mode of ‘existence.’”⁹ Speculative realism gives us a “a world, in fact, that is radically dead.”¹⁰ After all, it appears that the worldlessness of idealism (which holds that the transcendental subject can never access the world in itself) is countered here by the worldlessness of realism (which posits a radically dead world that only exists in the mode of its ending). Does this paradoxical absolute affirmation and absolute negation of the world make speculative realism itself a symptomatic site for our contemporary *Weltschmerz*?

Objective *Weltschmerz*: Too Much World

In order to be able to move beyond the confines of the map provided by Danowski and de Castro, it might be time to pick up one of the young Walter Benjamin’s suggestions from 1913: “We want the *Weltschmerz* at last to become objective.”¹¹

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹¹ See Walter Benjamin, “Romanticism: Reply of the ‘Unsanctified’”, in *Walter Benjamin: Early Writings 1910-1917*, trans. H. Eiland, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 132. In addition, for more discussions on this modern pain of the world, see also in the same volume the essay “The Happiness of Ancient Man”, p. 228.

Benjamin's goal was the rejection of the misguided Romanticism of his own generation. He calls for a Romanticism that is now "objective" rather than "subjective" in orientation – in the context of our current discussion, we could call it a realist rather than an idealist *Weltschmerz*. We can take Benjamin's strategy seriously: in order to fight the neo-Romantics of his time, he proposes a new kind of Romanticism that is finally devoid of Romantic subjectivism (he calls it a "sober Romanticism"). Similarly, we could counter the apocalypticism of our times by turning its *Weltschmerz* against itself. Although Benjamin himself does not make this connection explicitly, in his early works we can find a model for this objectivized *Weltschmerz* in the concluding sections of his essay "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" (1916) where he discusses the "deep sadness of nature": "It is a metaphysical truth that all nature would begin to lament if it were endowed with language. [...] Because she is mute, nature mourns."¹² Following this logic, then, our task could be to imagine a field of objectivity that already includes in its very constitution a certain principle of "mourning". Even before or independently of the advent of the subject, the world was already suffering – a radically dead world that nevertheless exists in the mode of its perpetual ending is a world that mourns itself.

So, what would this finally "objective" *Weltschmerz* look like today? Its presupposition would not be that the human subject cannot be reconciled to the world, but that the world cannot be reconciled to itself. In other words, suffering would no longer be located in the human subject as it would have to be inscribed objectively into the world. The world itself suffers from something – but this something cannot be conceived in transcendent terms. To put it differently, the call for objectivism here means that the world is not suffering from something other than itself (which prevents it from finally becoming a world) but simply suffers itself. "Suffering", as an objective process could be conceived as a technical term for a desubjectivized mode of existence that is haunted by an inexistence (the mourned object). The manner of existence of mind-independent reality is this suffering: undergoing or being subjected to being. The human "pain" that *Schmerz* refers to would be merely one possible modality of this objectivized suffering: the subjectivized human suffering. In fact, what we know

¹² See Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man", trans. E. Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Vol. 1, 1913-1926*, M. Bullock and M. W. Jennings (eds.), Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1996, pp. 72-73.

as the human subject might very well be nothing other than one specific way the world suffers this non-existence. The most extreme form of articulating this inexistence, however, would be to turn this mourning against itself: the world itself suffers from the suspicion that it does not exist.

But the difficulty of imagining a world that mourns and even mourns itself is quite evident. Before we even begin to imagine it, the project of this objectivation immediately runs into an obvious problem: the category of the “world” is (to say the least) overdetermined. To provide an objective definition of *Weltschmerz*, we might have to first produce a definition of the world itself – not a particularly easy or enjoyable task. To make things more complicated, it is quite obvious that the category of the “world” has been employed in cosmological, ontological, phenomenological, theological, political, aesthetic, etc., discourses in a number of different ways – often simultaneously in multiple registers. Already the Kantian “destruction of the cosmos” introduced the suspicion that the idea of the world will never meet its corresponding empirical object.¹³ A new kind of objective *Weltschmerz* emerges here: objectively speaking, it is not clear whether we can even speak about the world.

Thus, before venturing a proper definition, we might have to set ourselves a seemingly more modest (or even more “objective”) initial task: let us look around ourselves and count the number of worlds we find around us. In order to find some stable points of reference for this exercise, we could rely here on the classic metaphysical categories that we inherited from various ontological doctrines: monism, dualism, and pluralism. How many worlds are there? Here are some of the, no doubt, already familiar common answers:

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1. *There is one world:* Cosmologically speaking, among the ancients, we could refer to Aristotle as one of the most influential proponents of the fundamental unity of the world. Then, through the scholastic mediation of Aristotelian ideas, this position has also become a fundamental assumption of early modern science (for example, in Newton).

¹³ On this Kantian destruction of the cosmos, see Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, New York, Verso, 2000, pp. 59–66; Philipp Weber, *Kosmos und Subjektivität in der Frühromantik*, Leiden, Wilhelm Fink, 2017, pp. 27–56.

2. *There are two worlds:* We often blame Plato or, more precisely, Platonism for establishing the kind of “two-world” theories that have provided the fundamental framework for a significant part of Western thought. Even if Plato’s cosmos is on some fundamental level singular and One, this cosmos is nevertheless divided between the visible and invisible worlds. Hence the traditional separation of *mundus sensibilis* and *mundus intelligibilis* that has remained an operative force for so long (for example, Hannah Arendt classified any form of thought that distinguishes true Being from mere Appearance as such a “two-world theory”).¹⁴ Yet, the most familiar form of this duality in the West comes to us from Christianity (and, in its negative form, from Nietzsche’s critique of the *Hinterwelt*).
3. *There are many worlds:* Among the Ancients, Atomism and Stoicism provided two basic paradigms of the plurality of worlds (spatial and temporal plurality). Thereafter, the question whether (both ontologically and phenomenologically) we need to be able to speak about the plurality and even the infinity of worlds has been a recurrent problem for philosophy. In different forms, we can trace this question in the works of Descartes and Leibniz all the way to Alain Badiou.¹⁵

Of course, this hasty sketch remains insufficient for a number of different reasons. In reality, it is difficult to find pure cosmological systems in the Western philosophical tradition that do not end up mixing some of these categories. Nevertheless, this quick outline does allow us to reconstruct a recurrent logical sequence composed of three crucial steps: [1] even if we assume that there is a singular “world” that can be grasped somehow conceptually, [2] we find that this unity is often impossible to describe without reference to some kind of a fundamental internal division or antagonism (for example, the split between being and appearance) that reproduces the question of the unity of the given world in the form of an internal reduplication of this world, [3] which, finally, turns out to be an uncontrollable movement of the proliferation of internal divisions that can be escalated to such a degree that the initial conceptual unity of the world itself is undermined. As a result of this movement, the question of the unity of the world does not necessarily disappear from the problem of the

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, New York, Harcourt, 1981, pp. 23–26.

¹⁵ For a useful summary of these debates, see Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Worlds without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2014.

world, but is perpetually displaced in a series of repetitions and merely returns on different scales. Based on the model of a “hermeneutical circle”, we could call this sliding effect a “cosmological circle”: unity leads to division – which in turn leads us back to the question of unity.¹⁶

The mere act of counting worlds, therefore, seems to lead us into the drift of this circular argument with the force of an unavoidable fate. The one leads to the many – which leads us to infinity – which leads us back to the question of the one since even the infinity of infinities seems to contain some principle of structuration that forces us to identify minimal units of existence. A conclusion that could be drawn from this state of affairs is that worlds cannot be counted (in the sense that the act of “counting” already presupposes a pre-established unit of counting: the world). It appears that this difficulty itself is a sign of the objective nature of *Weltschmerz*. How can we get out of this circle, then? As a first step, in order to move beyond the reductive arithmetic of the three options listed above (one, two, infinity), we can immediately cite here two additional cosmological traditions whose calculations end up with quite different conclusions: Gnosticism and acosmism. What is potentially interesting about these two traditions in this context is that, at least temporarily, they shift our attention away from the endless dialectic of the one and infinity toward a calculus of smaller magnitudes: under their guidance, we enter the domain of the “less than one.”

Thus, in this context, we would underline the significance of the Gnostic heresy for the simple reason that it could allow us to talk about a “failed world”: a world that is not quite one without being nothing. Strictly speaking, of course, Gnostic worldlessness would still fall within the domain of Christian “two-world” theories: even if our human world is an incomplete project, the world of God, the world of salvation, is still posited as another real world. So, the fundamental dualisms of Gnosticism are still there but the world (our world) is now reduced to the status of a literal *demi-monde* (a *Halbwelt*): a partial world that exists without being a closed unity. This world that is not one anymore becomes the model of a recurrent pattern that is often evoked in discussions of Gnosticism but seems to point beyond this specific tradition. In a similar spirit,

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¹⁶ For example, in *Worlds without End*, Mary-Jane Rubenstein argues that in these cosmological systems singularity and infinity always end up mixing with each other. She calls these dynamics “multiplicity.” See *ibid.*, p. 26.

Peter Sloterdijk has recently argued that Gnosticism reduced the world to the status of mere “bad partial objects.”¹⁷ The Gnostic hostility toward the world was based on the Pauline “as if not” that established the necessary distance from the world that would eventually allow a wholesale negation of the world itself. But first, this world had to be dissembled before it could be negated. Nonetheless, as Sloterdijk’s paradoxical conclusion also shows, this is one of the essential limits of Gnosticism in this regard: “Even dark Gnosticism needs the scandalous world in order to flee from it.”¹⁸

Thus, in light of this contradiction, we have to consider the possibility that this “failed world” theory itself supposes too much about the world. At least this is the core message of that famous conversation between Max Brod and Franz Kafka that Brod reported in his 1921 essay “Der Dichter Franz Kafka” (the ur-text of all Kafka criticism):

I remember, Brod writes, a conversation with Kafka which began with present-day Europe and the decline of the human race.

“We are nihilistic thoughts, suicidal thoughts that come into God’s head,” Kafka said. This reminded me at first of the Gnostic view of life: God as the evil demiurge, the world as his Fall.

“Oh no,” said Kafka, “our world is only a bad mood of God, a bad day of his.”

“Then there is hope outside this manifestation of the world that we know.”

He smiled. “Oh, plenty of hope, an infinite amount of hope – but not for us.”¹⁹

¹⁷ “But, before the total object ‘world’ could be taken distance from and criticized, the whole had to be dissembled into parts that could be negated – or, in modern parlance, into bad partial objects – and represented as such. The development of a position of animosity to the world is in fact accomplished through such steps both at the level of the history of affects and at the mythological level; it goes the whole way, from one bad aspect of the world to the badness of the whole of the world.” See Peter Sloterdijk, *After God*, trans. I. A. Moore, Cambridge, Polity, 2020, p. 50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁹ Max Brod, “Der Dichter Franz Kafka” in *Neue Rundschau* (November 1921), p. 1213. The translation that I reproduced here is taken from the English translation of Walter Benjamin’s “Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death”, trans. H. Zohn, in *Selected Writings, Vol. 2, 1927-1934*, M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, and G. Smith (eds.), Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 798.

These are certainly well-known sentences. What might be worth highlighting here once again is that this conversation suggests that, for Kafka, even Gnosticism attributed too much consistency, too much substance, too much intentionality to our world. In order to understand our world, what we need is less than Gnosticism: not a fallen God but a suicidal one. We are presented here with the image of a God who is himself suffering from a kind of divine *Weltschmerz*. To be more precise, in God's suffering, the human world is merely a nihilistic thought, a mere suicidal ideation: a God that wants to kill himself incidentally produces this world as a passing bad mood. The world is this God's idea of the way he would kill himself. Yet, it appears that he does not do so in the end. In light of this God's pain, the insignificance of human suffering is further exacerbated by the reference to this whole episode merely constituting "a bad day" (an inverted Sabbath when God is not doing anything – however not because his work has been completed, but merely because he is too depressed to even move). All this suggests that God did not go through with the act: for the time being, at least, the idea was abandoned and the pain continues.²⁰

Can we retranslate this God's suffering here as a kind of objectivized *Weltschmerz*? The problem is that this "world" now is nothing other than the way God suffers himself. In fact, the world is the suffering itself as it is objectivized in our world (the world is an objectivized mood and human *Weltschmerz* is just the re-subjectivization of God's own suffering). Our own dissatisfaction with the world merely mirrors this God's suffering. However, one could argue that, in the Kafka example, this suicidal God still represents a force that is external to the world – so we are not yet talking about a truly "objectivized" *Weltschmerz* here. In the anecdote, human subjective suffering is merely displaced to another kind of subjectivity. While the world is now the objectivization of this higher, transcendent form of pain, the story still suggests that we could simply blame all our sufferings on God. Human subjective *Weltschmerz* is projected onto a divine subjectivity. A step in the right direction, but how would this scenario look different if we simply removed God from this equation? Would the world mourn this God if, in the end, he really did commit suicide?

²⁰ To put it differently, one of the ultimate metaphysical surprises of Kafka's world would not be simply that we human beings do not have hope, but that even God experienced its being as Joseph K. did his own.

We should not forget, however, that we do know from the history of philosophy a possible name for this “worldview” that offers us even less than a failed world: acosmism. The assertion of the absence or non-existence of the world. How many worlds are there? None. Unfortunately, we seem to know even less about acosmism as a philosophical tradition than about Gnosticism. In fact, it is a frequent complaint that, currently, no systematic treatment of philosophical acosmism in the literature seems to exist. As a result, it is a telling detail of the secondary literature that one of the most often cited starting points for discussions of acosmism remains Hans-Walter Schütte’s entry on “*Akosmismus*” in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* – a meagre paragraph that briefly evokes Hegel’s critique of Spinoza (in the context of the atheism debate) following a reference to Fichte’s quip that he would rather be called an “acosmist” than an “atheist”. While these words might suggest that acosmism is nothing more than a properly groomed version of atheism, Schütte’s summary judgment is quite telling: acosmism is a “doctrine of worldlessness” that “has not developed its own philosophical theory.”²¹ Caught somewhere between Spinozist monism and Fichtean subjective idealism, acosmism appears to lack its own philosophical substance – it appears as a mere specter that haunts other philosophies.²² It is as if there were something not properly philosophical about the idea that the world does not exist and only a non-philosophy could devote proper attention to it.

Absolute Weltschmerz: Speculative Realism

Is “acosmism”, then, the neglected philosophical tradition that could at least lead us one step closer to accomplishing the task of producing a finally objective *Weltschmerz*? The contemporary relevance of this question is certainly confirmed by the fact that some strands of acosmic thought did resurface recently in philosophical texts that also declare their allegiance to philosophical “realism”.²³ So, what are the chances of a contemporary acosmic realism that would

²¹ Hans-Walter Schütte, “Akosmismus”, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Vol. 1, J. Ritter, K. Gründer, and G. Gabriel (eds.), Basel, Schwabe, 1971, col. 128.

²² For a recent attempt to locate Romantic acosmism precisely in this tension between Spinoza’s and Fichte’s philosophies, see Philipp Weber, “Romantic Acosmism: On Friedrich Schlegel’s Theory of an Unfinished World”, *The Germanic Review*, 96 (1/2021), pp. 23–40.

²³ One of the best-known versions of this “new realism” can be found in Markus Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist*, trans. G. Moss, Cambridge, Polity, 2017.

finally render *Weltschmerz* truly objective? If we see speculative realism as an expression of our contemporary *Weltschmerz*, the question that we need to pose here concerns the degree to which this philosophy can successfully objectivize the non-existence of the world. Countering Schütte's diagnosis, we might hope that the doctrine of worldlessness is finally about to receive its own philosophical theory.

What happens to the world when the project of (idealist) "critique" is replaced by that of (realist) "speculation"? Before rushing to an answer, we should consider here briefly Sloterdijk's attack on what he calls the *Weltschmerz* of Critical Theory in his early text *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Reflecting on the lachrymose melancholia of the Frankfurt School, Sloterdijk writes: "Critical Theory was based on the presupposition that we know this world *a priori*, through *Weltschmerz*. What we perceive of the world can be ordered in psychosomatic coordinates of pain and pleasure. Critique is possible inasmuch as pain tells us what is 'true' and what is 'false'."²⁴ As we can see, the core of this argument is that Critical Theory was essentially an attempt to turn subjective *Weltschmerz* into the guiding principle of an allegedly objective social analysis of a world that is no longer accessible to traditional epistemological critique. To put it differently, *Weltschmerz* functioned as the *a priori* condition of possibility for any properly modern critique as it accomplished two things at the same time: on the one hand, by virtue of being an "*a priori* pain," it established the necessary critical distance from the world by founding a specific standpoint from which the world can be judged; on the other hand, by virtue of being an "*a priori* pain," it also provided a concrete program with clear content for this critique: rejecting the false pleasures of the world.²⁵ What was registered in the works of Walter Benjamin, for example, was the pain of the times (*Zeitschmerz*): critique has become impossible due to the suffocating closeness of things precisely at a time when it was most necessary. This paradox gave rise to this "melancholy science" that Sloterdijk refers to as a "Sensitive Theory" that was often coded in terms of an elitist "aesthetic" critique of the world. But, and this is a crucial point here, in Sloterdijk's hands, this evaluation of Critical Theory as a utopian weaponization of *Weltschmerz* turns into a critique of "critique" in general. To

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²⁴ Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. M. Eldred, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. xxxiii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

put it differently, the entire program of critique is grounded in this *Weltschmerz* whose time is finally up. Sloterdijk, on the other hand, wanted to “cheer us up” from the “melancholy stagnation” of this moody suffering.²⁶

Regardless of how happy we might be with such a conclusion, we are now certainly a step closer to accomplishing the task set out by Benjamin. For the least we can say here is that this *a priori Weltschmerz* already moves the discussion to a transcendental level. Taken in this sense, *Weltschmerz* is still subjective, but it no longer falls into the domain of empirical psychology. Rather, it now designates an inherent possibility of transcendental subjectivity: it emerges as an effect of the ability to create a distance from exclusively empirical experiences. It appears to be something like the affective (bodily) means of producing the transcendental/empirical difference itself – and, as such, if it is not necessarily the condition of possibility of any “critique”, it is at least an important prelude to it. To the degree that the field of objectivity is constituted by this transcendental subject, then, this *Weltschmerz* now has a potential role in this constitution. In fact, what Sloterdijk’s analysis suggests is that the transcendental subject of critique is by definition in a painful relation to the world that it itself co-constitutes. This suffering is the price the subject pays for having escaped the domain of pure empiricism. Thus, critique means suffering, since the transcendental subject that constitutes the world will never be fully part of this world.

Would it be possible to repeat Sloterdijk’s gesture here (his identification of “critique” with *a priori* pain) in relation to realism and ask whether “speculation” itself is a form of suffering? As we have seen, Danowski and de Castro have already introduced the idea that speculative realism is the simultaneous absolute affirmation and absolute negation of the world. Is it possible to maintain this perplexing position without the mediation of some kind of suffering? Let us start by noting that, in the broader discourse around speculative realism, a similar duality has been produced with regard to the question of “subjectivity”. In a sense, there is a crucial rift in speculative realism that becomes visible in the tension between asubjectivism and panpsychism. The same way that the idea of the world leads to a self-negating acosmism, the question of subjectivity leads to tension between a totalizing asubjectivism (the whole of the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xxxvii.

real is asubjective) and a totalizing subjectivism (the real is relational). The first position asserts that the absolute is asubjective: the only way to have (subjective) access to reality in itself is to conceive of it as completely devoid of subjectivity. The object-oriented splinter group, however, has moved in the direction of panpsychism: in this view, the very difference between the object and the subject is undermined by the hypothesis of fundamentally “sentient” objects. Of course, both trends assert the existence of a mind-independent reality that remains untotizable – but as far as the nature of this incomplete reality is concerned, they certainly disagree.

In this context, Quentin Meillassoux’s “strange” materialism confronts us with a new set of questions, for the issue will no longer be whether science can think but whether science can suffer. Scandalously bypassing the Heideggerian problematic, Meillassoux suggests that science is capable of thinking the absolute.²⁷ But this thinking is predicated upon a complete negation of suffering. Philosophy begins where sufferings stops. Of course, the question is not whether individual philosophers or scientists can suffer – the same way the Heideggerian question did not concern specific individuals who happened to be scientists. But when the thinking of the absolute becomes identical with the thought of radical contingency, philosophy is called upon to bear witness to a certain kind of “death”: on the one hand, the substance of the world is dead matter; on the other hand, the world as we know it can cease to exist at any moment without any reason whatsoever. While some might object that the idea that anything can happen anytime without reason is a positive prescription for a permanent state of anxiety, Meillassoux certainly does not attach an *a priori* affect to the thought of radical contingency. In this regard, his attitude is quite different from that of a Heideggerian anxiety (which, in *Being and Time*, is precisely produced by exposure to the worldliness of the world). On this count, Meillassoux is deliberately and consistently silent. There is no explicitly formulated *Grundstimmung* for speculative materialism – not even in the face of death.

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²⁷ For a discussion of the proposition that “science thinks”, see Frank Ruda, “The Speculative Family, or: The Critique of the Critical Critique of Critique”, *Filozofski vestnik*, 33 (2/2012), p. 58.

This silence is understandable since Meillassoux is clearly just as allergic to subjectivism as to all forms of anthropomorphism when it comes to thinking the absolute. In its substance, then, the world is pure and simple death:

If there is a true critique of the subject, it must also be a critique of the subjective, and of its hypostasis: such a critique thus cannot *but* be materialist, since only the materialist absolutizes the pure non-subjective – the pure and simple *death*, with neither consciousness nor life, without any subjectivity whatsoever, that is represented by the state of inorganic matter – that is to say, matter anterior to and independent of every subject and all life.²⁸

But what is the price that we have to pay for the discovery of the world of pure matter? The stakes of this enterprise first become visible in the distinction Meillassoux makes between speculative materialism and science. Speculation requires a certain anesthetic ascetism (as Meillassoux puts it: “*we prohibit ourselves from speaking of what is* – that is to say of what is *actual* – and speak only of that which *could really be*”). But the description of reality by science assumes the form of an absolutely necessary empiricism, an unavoidable aesthetic encounter with a “regime of experience” (Meillassoux defends “the exclusive right of experience to describe the inexhaustible intricacies of the real that make up our world”).²⁹ While there is no *a priori* suffering tied to speculation, science is after all a form of empirical suffering. The speculative philosopher gives up the world of experience and retreats into a dead world – in order to justify the scientist’s encounters with the living world. Standing on the sidelines, the materialist philosopher cheers on the scientist with the following chant: keep going, you have an absolute right to your suffering! Thereby, we now also have a categorical justification of an empirical *Weltschmerz* that proposes an unbridgeable abyss between the absolute (accessible only to speculative materialism) and the empirical sciences (whose role is now restricted to a description of the world as it is).

²⁸ Quentin Meillassoux, “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Sign Devoid of Meaning”, trans. R. Mackay and M. Gansen, in S. Malik and A. Avanesian (eds.), *Genealogies of Speculation: Materialism and Subjectivity since Structuralism*, London, Bloomsbury, 2016 p. 141.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

Hence the fundamentally mournful tone of these discussions. For we should keep in mind that death appears in at least two different forms in Meillassoux's arguments. First, individual death plays a crucial role in establishing the argument against correlationism. In essence, contrary to all correlationist objections, death becomes the first instance of an absolute that is thinkable. The absolute (that is, contingency) first becomes thinkable in the form of death (since death is a form of "the capacity-to-be-other" required by contingency).³⁰ Second, this death is then transposed into the absolute. Therefore, there is after all an anthropomorphic hypostasis at work here: not the hypostasis of human subjectivity but that of the death of the subject. When the generalized ontological capacity-to-be-other is coded as "death" rather than some other form of lifelessness, a minimal degree of anthropomorphism is reintroduced into the absolute. For the absolute is just as much deathless as it is lifeless. To speak of death before the miraculous emergence of life would imply that this emergence was not *ex nihilo* (as Meillassoux would want it to be) but somehow preordained by the very structure of lifeless matter.³¹ The absolute is where the subject goes to die – a graveyard of human suffering. As a result, we now *know* for sure that there is a rift between the subject and the real.

At the other extreme of this spectrum we find Graham Harman explicitly calling for a "speculative psychology" of objects ("a still nonexistent field" that would provide "speculations on the different levels of psyche at different levels of objects").³² Of course, the point here is not to project human psychology onto objects but the exact opposite: to redefine human psychology itself as merely one instantiation of a larger cosmic pattern. Thus, this psychology is not intended to be a direct projection of 19th-century *Weltschmerz* onto the cosmos: it "has nothing to do with a romantic conception of sensitive plants and weeping minerals."³³ Rather, following the logic of this reversal, the goal is to understand human *Weltschmerz* itself as a specific manifestation of a larger problem.

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³⁰ Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. R. Brassier, London, Continuum, 2008, pp. 55–57.

³¹ For a discussion of the *ex nihilo* emergence of life out of lifeless matter, and consciousness out of life, see Quentin Meillassoux, "Excerpts from *L'Inexistence divine*", trans. G. Harman, in Graham Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: A Philosophy in the Making*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2011, p. 175.

³² Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, Winchester, Zero Books, 2011, p. 120.

³³ *Ibid.*

Let us recall that, according to Harman, “the basic rift in the cosmos lies between objects and relations.”³⁴ In other words, the classic form of *Weltschmerz* was correct to the degree that it posited an unbridgeable *rift* between the self and the world. But it was mistaken when it tried to universalize this abyss as a specifically *human* attribute because it assumed that “the human-world relation is the basis for all others, or at least for knowing about the others.”³⁵ In other words, one of the goals of this speculative psychology would be to finally identify the objective conditions of human *Weltschmerz*. And the answer is clear. Relationality itself is the author of this universal tragicomedy: the real ontological break is “between [objects’] autonomous reality outside all relation, and their caricatured form in the sensual life of other objects.”³⁶ The mere form of the relation of *Weltschmerz* is retained here in a purely objective manner: the entire dynamics take place in the relations between the inner essence and the sensual life of objects.

Yet, this “panpsychism” has to be articulated within a decidedly acosmic framework. To put it differently, in this infinite proliferation of objects, we do encounter an ultimate limit: “The cosmos has no bottom, but does have a surface. There may be an infinite regress, but no infinite progress: no final, encompassing object that could be called a universe.”³⁷ The world (in the sense of a single totality of all objects) cannot be objectivized since the logic of infinity undermines any objective totality. If every object is composed of other objects, we do have an infinite regress toward ever smaller objects; but there is no super-object that could contain this infinite regress. This is one of the reasons why the “pan” of “panpsychism” is by definition a hyperbole that has to be tamed by a kind of “polypsychism”. If there is no “all” that could be fully psychologized, we are left with the assumption that psychism does not apply to every object all of the time. It is possible to conceive of objects that are (at least temporarily) outside of all relationality.

But how does this definition of the partially psychologized infinite world relate to Harman’s understanding of objectivity in its most extreme (most pure

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119–120.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

and most objective) form? Careful to distinguish this domain of pure objectivity from mere death, Harman compares it to sleep: “dormant objects are the purest kind of objects we can study. They are not altogether lonely, since they do have pieces; they are simply not pieces of anything else, and therefore they do not perceive.”³⁸ What is striking about this definition of the dormant object is that it fully inverts Harman’s definition of the untotalizable world: after all, there are world-like ultimate objects in the cosmos. If a dormant object no longer participates in any higher relation (and does not itself perceive anything anymore), it does take on the function of the kind of super-object that a universe is supposed to be: it effectively totalizes an infinity of relations. It is a lonely object to the degree that it is completely withdrawn from any other “higher” relation; but it is not completely lonely to the degree that it contains multitudes. While the cosmos cannot be reduced to a single universe, it does contain potentially infinite universes in itself: these are the sleeping objects that contain an infinite number of other objects in themselves without being in a relation to anything outside themselves. Yet, the psychology of these lonely objects remains an inherent limit to the future discourse of speculative psychology. Since they fully reproduce the solipsistic rift of classic *Weltschmerz*, they condemn this psychology to an interminable suffering caused by its alienation from its own objective foundations: the withdrawal from the world.

Thus, caught between the desubjectivization of the absolute and the partial non-human psychologization of objectivity, we can detect the emergence of a certain pattern. If realism today is by definition acosmic, it is based on an inverted *Weltschmerz*. The agony of this science comes from a double relation to the world. On the one hand, we have to suffer from the consistent application of the idea that the world does not exist because it never existed. This is certainly not an easy task and it meets plenty of resistance along the way. On the other hand, we cannot deny the reality of the “idea” of the world. As an idea, the world still needs to be repeatedly accounted for. This is our new *Weltschmerz*, which surfaces in many discourses today but is quite palpable in the discourse of philosophical realism: although we know that the world does not exist, time after time we keep behaving as if it really did exist.

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³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

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Ruth Ronen*

The Actuality of a World: What Ceases Not to Be Written

Modalities and the Loss of World

In his seminar from 1973-1974,¹ Lacan mentions the work of the logician Jaakko Hintikka. This is a kind of hapax, but as with many philosophers Lacan mentions in passing,² what may seem like a semi-enigmatic reference, stores important insights. Lacan mentions Hintikka in the context of Aristotle's logic, which had regularly occupied Lacan in his teaching since 1961, and he alludes to Hintikka's name because someone has brought to his attention a book Hintikka had published a year earlier on Aristotelian modal logic. Modalities had already occupied Lacan in the seminar of the previous year (in Seminar XX on feminine sexuality). So why Hintikka, a well-known logician of the analytic tradition with an interest in epistemic reasoning for logic and with no interest in the psychoanalytic unconscious?

In this paper, Lacan's brief reference to Hintikka will be deciphered and expanded in order to address the question of how Aristotelian modalities and their use by Lacan can shed light on the question of *what the actuality of a world is, or what it takes to validate a possibility (either p or not p) as an actual state of affairs.*

The question of what makes a world actual has an obvious political and philosophical import in our times, where whatever is considered "our world" appears to have segmented itself into multiple versions, equally weighing possibilities, with little to ground the privileging of the one over the other. Are corporations

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¹ Jacques Lacan, *Séminaire XXI. Les non-dupes errant, 1973-1974*, unpublished, trans. C. Gallagher, <http://www.lacanireland.com/web/translations/seminars/>, accessed 8 December 2021. (The original transcript is available at: <http://gaogoa.free.fr/SeminaireS.htm>, accessed 8 December 2021.)

² This is different from philosophers such as Descartes, Hegel, or Pascal, whom Lacan discusses extensively and repeatedly. See Ruth Ronen, *Lacan with the Philosophers*, Toronto and London, Toronto University Press, 2018.

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benevolent organizations striving to advance the welfare of humanity or destructive profit-hunting machines leading to the collapse of the economy? Is science an infinite resource of progress and solutions to every human predicament, or is science a force-manipulating knowledge in order to camouflage its political commitments and interests? Is mass vaccination the only sure way that humanity can overcome viral pandemics, or is such vaccination part of a politics of surveillance, a current version of the panopticon? Doubt infiltrates our picture of world (and the versions thereof) and undermines our ability to discern among the possibilities. Thus, while a sense of actuality is obviously part of what being in a world entails, it seems particularly hard, nowadays, to substantiate one possibility as actually being the case.

“World” and “actuality” are also a part of modal thinking, and in the context of modal logic and possible worlds semantics, the *actuality* of a world converges with the question of the limits of possibility; actuality differentiates mere possibility from what can become an instantiated *fact*. Although we may agree that Socrates could have been Socrates without being a philosopher, the range of valid possibilities for these other alternatives requires further assessment.³ Actuality not only touches the *difference* between an instantiated possibility (Socrates was a philosopher) and one that is not (Socrates was a Greek carpenter), but also the difference between possibility and impossibility. While people would agree that things might have differed from the way they actually are, those different possibilities can either be taken to constitute equally actualized worlds,⁴ or alternative constructions only built on actually existing objects of our world, or “distant planets” remotely relevant to what we call “our world”.⁵ Actuality as a modal notion assumes a *relation among possibilities* leading to our differentiating whatever is the case, i.e., the *being-such* of the world, from possibilities that do not materialize. This relation of the actual to the possible has been open to various understandings in the context of possible worlds semantics and logic, as modal logicians argue over whether all possibilities are

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³ A question answered, for instance, by Saul Kripke, by the moment of baptizing or naming as a symbolic moment determining the range of possibilities for a given entity in *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1972, pp. 96 ff.

⁴ A thesis propagated by David Lewis. See David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986.

⁵ Michael J. Loux, “Introduction”, in M. J. Loux (ed.), *The Possible and the Actual: Readings in the Metaphysics of Modality*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1979, p. 46 ff.

equally actual, or that everything possible *can become* actual, or actuality is dismissed as unanalyzable, an empty ascription adding neither a property nor any absolute ontological status to possible worlds.

While the modal polemic is not my concern here, it does indicate that whatever qualifies a possibility with the attribute of “actual” is not a trivial matter from the perspective of modal semantics and logic. The notion of a world suggests an Archimedean point, in relation to which possibilities of indeterminate status are differentiated: some are mere possibilities while others relate to the being-such of a world. Although “possible worlds” and the modal systems on which they rely carry metaphysical, logical, and epistemic consequences, one finds in any of their interpretations a measure or an organization relative to which possibilities are weighed. Whether “actual” is taken as a privileged notion (e.g., as in the Leibnizian idea of the best of all possible worlds) or as an indifferent assignment (every possible world can become actual), actuality is part of a system of possibilities, all or some of which (those that are not impossible) constitute a universe.

What determines the being-such of a world relative to other “possible worlds” also touches the core of current concerns as to whether “world” is still a valid organization of life forms. For us, inhabitants of whatever we name “our universe”, “there is no longer any world: no longer a mundus, a cosmos, a composed and complete order (from) within which one might find a place, a dwelling, and the elements of an orientation,” to quote Jean-Luc Nancy.⁶ How does this absence of world relate to possible worlds terms? Can modal terms shed light on the meaning of this loss of world and on the sense of its actuality? This loss to which Nancy refers can be the loss of what orients contingent and possible states;⁷ without a world as what provides composition and order, we are unequipped to determine the capacity of being of possible states. Without a world, possibilities, which cannot be assessed, are easily manipulated or hover atomistically with nothing to place them in relation to each other. It can be argued, in other words, that the absence of world is tantamount to equivalent possibilities lacking the option of actualization, that we have lost the sense in which a world

⁶ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. J. S. Librett, Minneapolis and London, The University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 4.

⁷ Possibility and contingency are usually distinguished by the former being opposed to impossibility and the latter to necessity. As we will see below, Aristotle shifts their relative standing, as does Lacan.

differentiates its fake states from its factual ones. The question of what makes a world actual, and of whether the actual can indeed be articulated in the absence of a world as support, is hence a question of pressing urgency (and actuality).

While modal notions introduce relativity into our understanding of how a world comes to be such and such (as there are multiple actualizable possibilities), the modal framework also supplies the grounds for differentiating the possible from the necessary or from the impossible. There are considerations, not merely logical, but also semantic and ontological, which determine how a given state of affairs qualifies for a modal category. Modal notions, however, do not address the question of what a world *is*, but of “world” as a modally nuanced organization. The modal structure of worlds is based on *a relationship* established between the actual and the possible, between the world’s being-such and its other possible and impossible states. In order to clarify this point of modal differentiation as determining the way a world is conceived, let us consider an example, distant from the world as described by Nancy, the world of ancient Greek tragedy:

Paedagogus: “Orestes is dead; that is the sum. [...] Hitherto the ill-fated Orestes had passed safely through every round, steadfast in his steadfast car; at last, slackening his left rein while the horse was running, unawares he struck the edge of the pillar; he broke the axle-box in twain; he was thrown over the chariot-rail; he was caught in the shapely reins; and, as he fell on the ground, his colts were scattered into the middle of the course.”⁸

These lines portraying Orestes’ death in vivid colors and dramatic detail to the devastated Electra and the rejoicing Clytemnestra describe a possible course of events that *did not take place*. Orestes is actually alive and planning to return to his city and avenge his father’s (Agamemnon’s) murder by his mother. Up until now, the question of whether Orestes is dead or alive had been undecidable for the characters acting in the scene. Now that the news regarding Orestes is presented, who could tell that the course of events – so described that it convinces us of it actually being the case – is false? That the news brought by Paedagogus is fake? There is nothing in the way this possible course of events is articulated as actual that marks its true status (as false).

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⁸ Sophocles, *Electra*, lines 675-756, trans. R. C. Jebb, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Tragedies_of_Sophocles_\(Jebb_1917\)/Electra](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Tragedies_of_Sophocles_(Jebb_1917)/Electra), accessed 8 December 2021.

In the Greek world of tragedy, however, the falsity of this course of events is destined to be exposed (as part of the logic of dramatic action), and a reversal of fortunes (*peripeteia*) will be enacted to reveal the actual state of Orestes. From among the possible routes of destiny, the actual will force its way through the course of events and will eventually be revealed. Even if the world is not fixed and can be given to change over time, its possibilities are determined by destiny, eternal truth, and human faults, so that what is actualized in the world of tragedy is rigidly determined, oriented by what has been predestined. Oedipus will have to act upon his sin, even if the extent of his fault or the possibility of cleansing it can be argued; Orestes' homecoming will be unavoidably marked by the bloodshed of revenge (as dictated by prophecy and the will of the gods), even if in some versions of the play the justification for killing his mother is not univocally endorsed. When Clytemnestra, eager to hear of Orestes' death, him being a direct threat to her life and well-being, is willing to believe the possible state of affairs described by the messenger, the course of events to be actualized in the world of the tragedy persists (in the replies of the chorus, for instance), positing an irreducible alternative to what the messenger tells the queen. What will come out as actually being the case, the being-such of the world of tragedy, is unchangeable and unavoidable due to there being a core of actuality in the world, in relation to which fake possibilities, such as the one portrayed by the messenger, are bound to be refuted.

What is it that has been lost when, as Nancy puts it, there is no longer a sense of a world? What can the status of the actual be when alternative worlds introduce themselves with ever-renewed appeal while establishing no relationship with one another? Have we lost the sense of the actual when losing the sense of the world? A world introduces a relation; it means *being-to* or *being-toward*; "it means rapport, relation, address, sending, donation, presentation *to* – if only of entities or existents *to* each other."⁹ When there is no longer a sense of a world, then *p* and not *p* can no longer be modally differentiated. Even if one believes that there is only one possibility that is the actual one, the absence-of-world imposes a state of dispersed possibilities, of equal weight. Without a world we face an undifferentiated plurality of alternatives.

⁹ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 40.

The state of non-rapport, in the absence-of-world, is described by Nancy as a “philosophy of confines”: where there is no possession or mastery of a universe or cosmos, “we are at the confines of the multidirectional, plurilocal, reticulated, spacious space in which we take place [...] we touch our limits on all sides.”¹⁰ In other words, this thing we call “world” is what determines a relation *among* possibilities, as the world enables us to weigh and differentiate what appear as equally valid states of affairs. Without a world, one is confined to *a* possibility, and what is actual appears to be merely possible; what is contingently true seems to be necessarily the case. Without a world, modal differences (outside their logical applicability) seem irrelevant, inapplicable distinctions.

It is at this juncture that the Aristotelian approach to the relation among modal notions and the psychoanalytic use that Lacan makes of this conceptual system of modalities come in, suggesting a way to re-think the notion of world and its “suchness”, that is, the relation of world to the actualization of possibilities.

Lacan with Hintikka and Aristotelian Ambiguity

What Hintikka’s studies on Aristotle’s modal theory (the book from 1973 that Lacan mentions¹¹) attest to is that the application of modalities to states of the world is not univalent. Hintikka focuses on the *ambiguity* of terms such as possibility, contingency, and necessity in Aristotle, revealed whenever these modal terms are applied to different cases or uses. Hintikka analyzes the depth of ambiguity in Aristotle’s logic by demonstrating ways by which the application of necessity or possibility diverts from their definition: hence, while possibility is defined as what is *not* necessary, in its application the possible can turn out to include necessity. It is in the way Hintikka pinpoints the source of ambiguity in Aristotle, *through the application of definitions to things*, that his importance for Lacan’s use of modalities can be clarified. In this section, Hintikka’s commentary on Aristotle will be presented in a way that already anticipates Lacan’s use of modalities. In this paper, I claim that Lacan suggests a different outlook on what differentiates modalities, using the difference between possibility and contingency in order to indicate the latter as a mode of breaching the confines

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¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Jaakko Hintikka, *Time and Necessity: Studies in Aristotle’s Theory of Modality*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1973.

of mere possibility. This outlook will be considered in the last section of this paper, as a way of restituting a sense of actuality in the state of being “without a world”.

Hintikka starts off from the notion of *ambiguity itself as an ambiguous term* in Aristotle. Aristotle addresses ambiguity with the term *homonymy*, which indicates that two things sharing a name can part in their definitions. But when looking into cases of homonymy, Hintikka shows that it is sometimes used to further indicate a multiplicity of applications or uses rather than different definitions, and in such cases, homonymy shows broader applicability than homonymy in the proper sense. The ambiguity regarding what makes an ambiguity (a difference in terms, in definitions, and in application) reveals the gist of where the causes of ambiguity lie. Once a distinction is made and qualified (for instance, a continuum can be infinite in two ways, with respect to division or with respect to extremities), Aristotle will put the term in question to use disregarding the duality in application. What such instances, analyzed meticulously by Hintikka, reveal is that ambiguity is not resolved by definitions, but is further activated in the way the different terms are put to use. The ambiguity of terms such as “possibility”, “continuum”, or “substance” in Aristotle is not resolved by definitions, as definitions do not lead to a uniformity of usage: “We may note that in many of these cases Aristotle goes on using one and the same term although he has pointed out that it is used in different ways.”¹²

To anticipate Lacan, Aristotle can be paraphrased as saying that words are what founds the thing (*la chose*); but the thing is founded not on the words actually describing or defining its qualities, but rather on the condition that the words cease, and the thing is what *remains* of them. Lacan will accordingly define *possibility*, for instance, *as that which stops being written*.¹³ The idea is that the thing we define as possible or necessary is the effect of a language operation (and is not given as such or so). Hence, in ceasing to say or write it, or in ceasing from not writing it, something is actualized, is made to be. To grasp the consequences of this Lacanian understanding of modalities, we first need to survey why, for Aristotle, it is impossible to exhaust the meaning of a term through its definitions.

¹² See Hintikka, *Time and Necessity*, pp. 25–26.

¹³ Lacan, *Séminaire XXI*, lecture on 8 January 1974.

Specifically, according to Hintikka, possibility is a homonymous category in Aristotle: it is either opposed to necessity (something is possible when it is *not* necessary), or to impossibility (something is possible only if it is not impossible). “‘I use the terms ‘possibly’ and ‘the possible’ of that which is not necessary but, being assumed, results in nothing impossible’ [writes Aristotle in the *Prior Analytics*]. This is clearly the notion I have called contingency.”¹⁴ While possibility is defined as what is not necessary, when put to use, possibility applies to all cases that are not impossible, including the necessary. Hence, the possible and the contingent converge and, as Hintikka goes on to argue, the necessary cannot be distinguished from the possible: “to say of the necessary that it is possible is to use the term ‘possible’ homonymously [...], which is what I called possibility proper.”¹⁵

Hintikka shows that possibility in Aristotle, when opposed to impossibility, has a broader range of application comprising also what is necessary,¹⁶ whereas when possibility is equated with contingency it is opposed to necessity. This is an ambiguity related to a *duality of application, a duality revealed beyond the two definitions of possibility*. We will see below that the ambiguity of these terms (possibility, contingency, and necessity in Aristotle), that is, the fact that they cease to apply when put to use, is in fact what grants these terms the capacity to produce possible or necessary things. Lacan will use the Aristotelian modalities to indicate what *remains* when the words/definitions cease to apply.

To demonstrate possibility “in use,” Hintikka sketches the following diagrams to illustrate the ramifications of defining possibility in a dual manner, demonstrating thereby that possibility, when put to use, cannot be distinguished from other modalities.¹⁷

¹⁴ Hintikka, *Time and Necessity*, p. 30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

not exclude the option of “not-everything succeeds”, as long as failure is not impossible (“ p is necessary” overlaps with “it is not impossible that p ”).²⁰ This is due to the conflation of necessity with possibility. In other words, “ p fails” is not impossible even if “ p never fails” applies. Contingency, in other words, is what “is not impossible” and remains in the domain of necessity.

What emerges by way of this demonstration (in the two diagrams) can also explain why Lacan would argue that it is not the true that is at stake for Aristotle (i.e., if it was, p and not p could not equally apply): Aristotle, Lacan claims, does not really care if all swans are truly white when “all swans are white” is asserted (some are obviously grey). When possibility is *opposed* to the necessary, it appears indifferent to whether p or not p apply. This case highlights the fact that possibility is just a saying (*un dit*), whose consequences are determined by what it is opposed to. Lacan will define *possibility as that which ceases to be written*; something else is needed: to discern from among mere possibilities what is not impossible.

What Aristotle wishes to guarantee is the link between swans and a predicate necessarily attributed thereto: “the important thing is that something should be articulated,” says Lacan,²¹ but when articulated (for instance, when swans are universally assigned whiteness), things turn out to be other than what was expected, as swans are only *generally* white. Hence, in writing “all swans are white” as a necessity, this will “introduce the Real as such,”²² viz: it will introduce what is not impossible, and is actually the case: that swans can be grey. In writing p as necessary, what remains unsaid is a real (rather than indifferent) thing that is not impossible. This short analysis of the color of swans reflects the way Lacan extracts male and female sexuality from the necessary application of the phallic function. It is in the putting to use of the universality of phallic jouissance that what is not impossible, and is other than phallic jouissance, emerges. It is in the relations between the saying, and what remains unaccounted for by the saying, that the Real is revealed.

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²⁰ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, p. 58.

²¹ Lacan, *Séminaire XXI*, lecture on 12 February 1974.

²² The relation of writing to the Real is fundamental to Lacan’s understanding of the Real as what cannot be signified nor assimilated by signs, words, or letters. It is, however, through signifying operations that the remainder of these operations comes to be.

To summarize this section, it was shown that Hintikka's diagrams clarify the source of the indifference between p and not p (when possibility is opposed to necessity), and also the conditions for the emergence of a possibility (rather than any possibility) from whatever is said to be necessary, when necessity is opposed to impossibility.

The Writing of Modal Possibilities

Lacan treats modal notions as *writing operations*, with each mode of writing establishing a different relation to what is being written or unwritten: *necessity* is a mode related to “what does not cease to be written”; *possibility* is a mode related to what “ceases to be written”, and *impossibility* is related to “what does not cease not to be written”. Lacan adds a fourth category: the *contingent*, as “what ceases not to be written”.²³ The operations of writing demonstrate that something remains from being written. From each mode of writing (or of ceasing to write or of not writing) another mode or *capacity of being* remains (e.g., what remains from not ceasing not to be written – from the necessary – is what cannot be written). In other words, the writing operations reveal what is real in modal differences. Lacan grants Aristotle a cardinal role also in this context. Being the first to use inscription for creating a logic, Aristotle's modal notions paved the access road to the Real, his logic being a “science of the Real.”²⁴

A science of the Real produces knowledge of the Real, and this knowledge has the structure of a Borromean knot, linking two terms and another term that establishes their relationship (which is also the basic structure of logic, syllogism, combining three terms into an implication). Lacan's reference to Hintikka reinforces the Lacanian idea that Aristotle is arguing in a Borromean structure, in the sense that his logic exposes a third element that determines the distance between a term and its use, and which Hintikka describes at the same time as a source of ambiguity and a part of the modal structure. This third element is what remains unwritten, unarticulated – a hole. Lacan will claim that it is precisely

²³ *Ibid.*, lecture on 19 February 1974.

²⁴ Lacan refers to Aristotle as *le frayeur*, i.e., the one who cleared the path for our understanding the kind of knowledge logic is committed to: knowledge of the Real, rather than of truth or of semantic understanding.

this hole, i.e., what appears not to be written, that constitutes a *real possibility*, the possibility of what ceases not being written.

“If a necessary event has been asserted to occur usually, clearly the speaker has denied an attribute to be universal which is universal and so has made a mistake.”²⁵ Putting the *modal notion of necessity* to use reveals that it is either incompatible with its general applicability (it is only generally the case that *p*, but it also happens that not *p*) or that the necessary is comprised within the domain of possibilities (as both possibility and necessity are not impossible) and its distinct modality is lost. In putting a proposition to use (a proposition being described by Lacan as the effacement of the sense of words), its true meaning is revealed in *the impossibility of the relationship*, that is, in the relationship between “swans are white” or “it never fails” and “it is not impossible that a swan is grey” or “it is not impossible that it fails”: it is this dimension of the knot that remains unarticulated and is the key to understanding the impact of modal distinctions.

Logic, Lacan claims, has been founded on sayings (*des dits*), and yet Aristotle manipulates them by “emptying this said of its meaning,” thus giving us an idea of the Real.²⁶ It is through writing that the paths of logic can be traced to reveal a different dimension to logical reasoning, different from the level of the said. This is precisely what Hintikka’s study of Aristotle reveals, despite Hintikka, so to speak, as Hintikka himself aims to formalize the ambiguities in order to resolve them. It is through the writing of logical structures that the depth of Aristotelian ambiguity is encountered, and this ambiguity is a sign of the force of logic in revealing through writing what cannot stop not being written.

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What Lacan has to say after his elusive and brief reference to Hintikka is that he has long been anticipated by Hintikka (“*le Hintikka en question [...] m’avait devancé depuis longtemps*”²⁷) in the sense that Lacan had long been occupied with Aristotle and his logical tenets and here Hintikka has succeeded in actually articulating in a useful way these exact tenets, enabling us to draw the consequences from logic as a science of the Real. This Lacanian perspective on Hintik-

²⁵ Aristotle quoted in Hintikka, *Time and Necessity*, p. 28.

²⁶ Lacan, *Séminaire XXI*, lecture on 12 February 1974.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

ka's study as "particularly demonstrative," spotlights the presence of ambiguity in Aristotle as anticipating the Lacanian idea of "there is no sexual relationship" as a relationship between the necessary and the contingent. Lacan's formulas of sexualisation, representing the sexual difference between woman and man as the difference between two logical structures, are in this sense an instance of how to put Aristotelian logic to use. We have thus come all the way to clarifying how this peculiar triad (Aristotle, Hintikka, Lacan) can advance the question of what makes a state of affairs actually the case (a swan is either white or not-white, a state of affairs is either necessary or is impossible) despite the impossibility of articulating the relationship between them.

From Necessity to the Contingency of the Phallic Function

In Seminar XX, Lacan uses the modal notions of necessity, contingency, and impossibility in the context of the sexual relationship between woman and man. The idea of formalizing sexual difference with the formulas of sexualisation has been much discussed in the literature. What concerns us here, however, is not sexual difference but the way in which Lacan uses modal notions in order to introduce the different positions of woman and man as partly overlapping (for both, phallic jouissance is necessary) and partly incompatible (although phallic jouissance is necessary, there is also another jouissance that is not impossible), despite the sexual relationship itself being impossible, that is, bound to fail (*ça rate*).²⁸

As already mentioned, *necessity* appeared in Hintikka's diagrams as opposed to impossibility, which allowed unwritten possibilities to be implicated by what is declared necessary. Necessity, as that which does not stop being written, is linked (*conjugué*) to impossibility, to that which does not stop not being written by way of the contingent, by what stops not being written. The necessary in this context is the phallus, as what never fails (or should never fail), as the ubiquitous mark of a satisfying sexual relationship, and this necessity takes the form of universal sayings of the kind "there must be phallic jouissance", or "phallic jouissance never fails". This is obviously just a saying (as marked in the conditional form through which Lacan plays with the ambiguity of the verbs *faillir* and *falloir*: *c'est la jouissance qu'il ne faudrait pas*), but as a saying it affects what remains from what does not cease being written and is not impossible: another

²⁸ Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 58.

jouissance. This other jouissance is what causes the sexual relationship to fail, as phallic jouissance is not whole. It may appear as if necessity covers the whole range of relevant possibilities, but it in fact hides the presence of the conditional, there being things that do not comply with this alleged necessity.

Necessity not only includes unarticulated possibilities; it also imposes whatever makes possibilities real, which is the fact that they are not impossible. To clarify how necessity operates: in a totally enigmatic world, “one tries to bring in this something which is supposed to be modelled on logic, and on which there is supposed to be grounded that in the species described as human *one is either man or woman*. This is very specially what experience rises against.”²⁹ Necessity modelled on logic rules that one is either man or woman. This is the necessity that is resisted in use/experience, as there are many for whom being man or woman is undecidable. Necessity is bound to come across a body that does not strictly resemble the body of a man or a woman, or to overhear a chat with a taxi driver who cannot tell if he/she is man or woman (an example used by Lacan). Whatever started as necessity, encounters the impossibility of writing the difference between woman and man. “There is no such thing as a sexual relationship” marks this substantial aspect of the phallic function: it does not acknowledge/write the difference even if it necessitates one.³⁰ Necessity is hence complemented by impossibility, by what resists the universal saying and does not stop not being written. Furthermore, what remains unacknowledged (that there is more than phallic jouissance) not only supports whatever is written as universally necessary, but also produces sexual difference as real.

“Were there another jouissance than phallic jouissance, it should not be/could never fail to be that one.”³¹ In inscribing the phallic function as necessary, the other, not-impossible possibility, that supports it is disclosed as real. This not-impossible possibility is what cannot be known or articulated and yet makes love come into existence. The event of love, in other words, is an event brought about by what stops not being written, by the contingent. It is what remains (as the unknown connection) from the necessity of phallic jouissance and what is not impossible: the other jouissance because of which the sexual

²⁹ Lacan, *Séminaire XXI*, lecture on 19 February 1974.

³⁰ Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality*, p. 59.

³¹ *Ibid.*

(phallic) relationship – fails. By interpreting contingency as what ceases not to be written, Lacan indicates that the contingent emerges as the real possibility unaccounted for by the universal saying. The contingent emerges from the impossible, but as what stops the impossible from not being written. In order for something of sexual difference to be written, the phallic function must allow the contingency of sexual difference to be registered: “the apparent necessity of the phallic function turns out to be mere contingency. It is as a mode of the contingent that the phallic function stops not being written. [...] The regime of the encounter is tantamount to contingency. It is only as contingency that, thanks to psychoanalysis, the phallus, has stopped not being written.”³² The impossibility of the sexual relationship that complements the universal status of the phallic function is the condition for something to stop not being written, Lacan concludes in Seminar XX. Psychoanalysis is required for writing the contingent, and it is only in analysis that what is always the case comes across what cannot be written, thus assigning a place to what can here cease not to be written: an event of love. Contingency is what allows the universal to appear as conditioned on another jouissance, another jouissance that cannot be but such: “were there another jouissance than phallic jouissance, it should not be/could never fail to be that one.”³³

The real weight of modal terms for psychoanalysis lies here: since there is no sexual relationship (a relationship is impossible as long as what does not stop being written is phallic jouissance, a universal function that fails to account for sexual difference), we face a hole in knowledge. When this hole, this *troumatisme* (*trou* = hole) is exposed, the contingent can emerge, can take place. The contingent involves an invention of knowledge as it establishes a relation with a thing other than the one covered by the universal saying.³⁴ It is in this way that the universal saying is disclosed as being conditioned on something other than what it enumerates and this something is revealed as what does not stop being repeated.

The contingent emerges from impossibility, but how precisely does the contingent inscribe sexual difference? The contingent is invented knowledge by which the relation of necessity to the impossible comes to be written, or rather,

³² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

³³ See note 31.

³⁴ Lacan, *Séminaire XXI*, lecture on 9 April 1974.

ceases not to be written. Without the contingent, the scansion, the arrest, the ceasing (of not being written) cannot occur. To mention Nancy on this matter, the relationship between world and sense requires “that there should be non-sense or, rather, beyond-sense in order for there to be sense.”³⁵ Likewise, to have access to the world, one has to be on the threshold of access, in nonaccess, in impenetrability.

I cannot say all [women] because what is proper to the denumerable [there is no way to get to the end of them except by enumerating them one by one], is precisely that one never gets to the end of it. [...] The true saying is what comes to grief, is what comes to grief on this: that in an untenable *either-or* which would be that everything that is not man is woman, and inversely, what decides, what clears the way, is nothing other than this saying, this saying which is engulfed in what is involved in the hole by which there is lacking to the Real what could be inscribed about the sexual relationship.³⁶

Women are not given to generalization, and are enumerated one by one. Enumerating one individual after another in order to form a group “does not involve any kind of identity of nature among them [...] it is like that that people imagine some universality or other.”³⁷ In forming a group by adding up individuals, we may be misled into thinking the differentiating identity of the group has been inscribed. While epistemic logic would start from saying: one is either man or woman, logic, as a science of the Real, would make it evident that universal sayings fail to capture this difference. The logic of the Real recognizes necessity as “conjugated” by impossibility, thereby partially rectifying this failure of differentiating woman from man. In putting the necessary to use, one faces the fact that while one is either woman or man, it is not impossible that one is neither precisely, or both. Thanks to psychoanalysis, sexual difference can emerge as contingent: it emerges from the impossibility of grouping women under one universal, and from the failure of the phallic function to account for this or that case. This failure leaves as a remainder something that diverges from phallic

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³⁵ Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, p. 60.

³⁶ “Le dire vrai c’est ce qui achoppe, achoppe sur ceci : que pour, dans un *ou-ou* intenable qui serait que tout ce qui n’est pas homme est femme et inversement, e qui décide, ce qui fraye n’est rien d’autre que ce dire [...] qui pourrait s’inscrire du rapport sexuel.” Lacan, *Séminaire XXI*, lecture on 19 February 1974.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

jouissance and is yet not impossible. The contingent constitutes the grounds for an actual love relation to take place; it is the basis on which the actuality of the relationship comes to be as an actuality based on difference.

Hence Lacan's logic of sexualization inscribes difference in terms of what is impossible to be known (i.e., the relationship between man and woman), and from this impossibility there emerges two sexual positions: the one exhausted by phallic jouissance *and* another jouissance, and they emerge as actual possibilities.

The Actuality of a World: Being-Such as What Ceases Not to Be Written

These thoughts around the ternary encounter of Lacan with Aristotle and Hintikka suggest an *understanding of actuality in terms of the advent of contingency*, as what emerges from the proximity between the necessary and the impossible (a proximity revealed through the Aristotelian ambiguity in the use of modal terms). For the *contingent* to take place, the hole in universal knowledge should be recognized. Coming against the interference of what eludes articulation (i.e., what does not cease from not being written) in the domain of necessity, reveals what is actually the case. The contingent is what comes to take place in response to the inherent limitation of the universal: it does not know of the actuality of being-such. Hence, the actual enjoyment in a love event emerges from "there is no sexual relationship," as a saying that already acknowledges the failure of universal love. Unlike the saying: "sexual love always succeeds," the Lacanian universal already recognizes what is impossible in this love, and is encountered whenever a sexual relationship is experienced.

When phallic jouissance alone is acknowledged, its effect is that of confinement to just this universal possibility, which camouflages or disables all other possibilities. While the universality of phallic jouissance fails to acknowledge the difference between woman and man, or between their modes of sexual enjoyment, when the sexual relationship is *conjugated* with impossibility, we grasp something of actual love, of the contingent mode of being involved in love. Alternative to this arrival of the contingent from the impossible, when all possibilities of enjoyment are taken on a par, jouissance fails to be written (hence the possible is what ceases to be written, that is, it is indifferent difference).

This Lacanian understanding of the relations between the modal notions after Aristotle and Hintikka illuminate the idea that the absence of world can be understood as the absence of a sense of the actual. The difficulty in discerning the actual from the merely possible or fake does not lie in the failure of defining modal categories, but in these categories losing their grasp on the Real. What hinders our path to actuality is one's bewitchment with universal sayings that commensurate (or eradicate) all possibilities and fail to acknowledge the impossibility of knowing and the actuality of difference.

We will now examine the implications that can be drawn from the Lacanian modalities in order to arrive at a relevant understanding of the problem of actualization in our contemporary world (as opposed to the Greek one). In Sophocles' play (as in the other dramatic versions of the story of the house of Atreus), the apparition of Orestes as definitely and actually alive is preceded by endless doubts, misgivings, and regrets on the part of the characters regarding the possible scenarios that can be actualized. These eventually lead to the disclosure of the actual situation: Orestes is alive and is bound to avenge the murder of his father. While destiny is deterministic, and the individual's leeway for influencing the decree of the gods is limited, the relation of human life to its destiny remains an ongoing riddle. That is, despite the force of destiny, there is a space of undecidability in which individual action comes to take place. In fact, the individual would not be able to act if the universal edict did not both impose its dictates and yet leave as unarticulated what will come to be written – the contingent – by individual action. The necessity of destiny does not subsume all possibilities, and yet, for the contingent to emerge, an enactment of what is not a mere possibility is required.

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While in Greek tragedy the contingent, the course of events actually taken, must acknowledge what cannot be definitely known in the face of universal truths, a contemporary example of which binds human life to the global destiny, divulges a different modal structure – I refer here to the case of *global warming* as a case in point. In the face of a warming planet whose causes (the burning of fossil fuels) and consequences for humanity (environmental destruction) are known, a recent history of the politics of science unfolds the case of how the productive force of necessity as portrayed by scientists can be reduced by the powerful in-

strument of doubt.³⁸ The story is that global warming was already anticipated by oil companies back in the early 1980s, and the implicated companies reacted by spreading *doubt* regarding the anticipated scenario. The destructive outcome of global warming has been put on a par with other possible outlines (that the human genius will find solutions to climate change in due time, that global warming could be due to cosmic cycles that human beings cannot influence, etc.). At the same time, the unshaken belief in humanity's progress was opposed to the possible compromising of this progress in case fossil fuels are no longer burnt. The insertion of doubt into the equation had an inevitable effect. The inevitable scenario of global warming was reduced to a mere possibility (which can best be met by inaction in the direction of reducing emissions). Doubt has also affected the balance between human progress and the perilous changes in its course humanity can take, thus privileging the former. In other words, all modal options apart from the dependence of human progress and sustenance on fossil fuels were reduced to mere possibilities, thus devaluing or even erasing the possible weighing of alternatives.

A "Greek" attitude toward the universal belief that "humanity cannot fail" or that "humanity always progresses" would imply a different modal understanding. This universal belief, as much as its dictates are powerful, implies a hole in knowledge (progress is just the known part of human history and it is not impossible that the idea of progress is ill-conceived) regarding what remains unacknowledged.

But when the proximity of necessity to impossibility (that is, what the necessary allows as not impossible alternative actions) is camouflaged, the contingent fails to arrive and no action is seriously undertaken. The sense of what is real is lost as the individual is confined to only one possibility presented as the exclusive/necessary one. While in tragedy the individual had to fight through possibilities in order to decide what his or her actualized action with regard to the dictates of destiny and the gods will be, the doubt spread in the present case prevents the contingent from taking place. With no serious alternatives to what is taken to be

³⁸ See Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Climate Change*, London, Bloomsbury, 2011; Benjamin Franta, "Early Oil Industry Disinformation on Global Warming", *Environmental Politics*, 30 (4/2021), pp. 663–668.

the necessary state of affairs, all other possibilities acquire equal weight or are completely suppressed. In such a case, actuality eludes one's grasp.

This short example can illustrate the consequences of reconsidering modal notions from a Lacanian perspective, as suggested in this paper. It allows us to conclude that whenever a state of the world is presented as necessary, so that any scansion, arrest, or ceasing (either by *weighing* the alternatives, or by *conditioning* the necessary as not being the whole case) is avoided, there is a failure of actualization. When what are declared necessary truths constantly replace each other, and when possibilities introduce themselves with equal appeal and conviction, it is the modality of the contingent – i.e., the advent of a real possibility (as a limit on what appears as necessary) – that can restore our sense of the actuality of a world.

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The End of Life Is Not the Worst: On Heidegger's Notion of the World

Beyond the End of the World

For Heidegger, the eradication of all life on planet earth is not the most horrible thing that could happen. It is the impossibility of thinking the world that exposes us to something worse: the loss of our link with being. If human beings want to avoid the eradication of life, it is imperative to not simply stop the most dangerous technologies from unfolding their explosive threats, but to think the world. Today, we see that we cannot think the world as something we have at our disposal, something we can handle, something we can master. We see that a world which we can master is only the futile image of a will to mastery which has directed itself into an impasse. What was once thought to be mastered, reigned over, has come to unfold its own powers, and returns as the threat of the uncontrollable. This threat, and the potential consequence of the eradication of life, is increasingly discussed under the keyword “the Anthropocene”: the un-circumventable traces of the human species inscribed into the geological body of the earth threaten to make life gradually impossible. But the Anthropocene not only raises the image of a possibly uncontrollable planet, it also opens up a rift in thought. Thinking as such is challenged by the Anthropocene, for it brings about the increasing dissipation of the formal distinction between thought and thing – human and earth. Within the Anthropocene, the thought of the human as well as its actions reflect back from the former object “earth” or “nature”. The former objects of thought turn into acting objects themselves, and the human turns out to be an objective geological factor.

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Once we see that the world is not at our disposal (although we knew that perhaps already before), the way we think the world has to change. The relation of the human and the world is infected by the imponderabilities of the meta-language, and the Anthropocene is not only the result of our reckless behaviour; it is also a symptom of the impossibility of thinking of ourselves as a part of the planet. How can we think of ourselves not as distant from but as moments of

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that which we think? This rift, the rift of modern rationality, threatens us with the uncontrollable. Thus, if it is still possible to think the world at all, then this thought has to take the uncontrollable, the unaccountable into account. This is a loss, a crack. We cannot think the world as the totality of all beings on earth, neither can we attempt to think the world as a completed form. Consequently, to think the world may have become impossible today.¹ This impossibility, however, is not a plain technical impossibility. It implies that the thought of the world has been a pillar, a linchpin of the fatal mastery over the earth that led to the critical age of the Anthropocene. To think the world as a rational entity was nothing more than an imaginary delusion that has been working until now: now (a “now” which is itself expanded in time) we can no longer ignore the consequences of this blindness.

From this, two questions arise: First, is it possible to think the world in such a way that it does not fall prey to the will to mastery? And second, if the world can be thought such that the impossible is a moment of this thought, how is this thought to be related to the earth or the planet, which it seeks to think?

In the following, we will attempt to follow one single consideration: we will propose to reconsider the late Heidegger’s examination of the concept of the world, and we will argue, in line with Heidegger, that to think the world is not only necessary to prevent the extinction of life on earth, but that the loss of thinking the world lies at the beginning of the crisis we are living through. Or, in other words, what we discuss under the heading of the Anthropocene is a symptom of our lost world. A concept of the world is not simply a sign of human hypocrisy; a true concept of the world is rather an essential moment of being on earth.

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And indeed, this is the late Heidegger’s concern: the loss of the world must abandon the earth to the crisis. And he presents the thought of the world precisely as an answer, an acceptance of the impossibility of thinking the world as a totality. But instead of resigning, we are called upon to think the world in a different manner. For Heidegger, the need to think the world is not an attempt to master it, but rather to accept it as something uncontrollable and to act upon this ac-

¹ This is considered a consequence of the Anthropocene by Timothy Morton, among others. See Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2013, especially pp. 99–133.

ceptance. We have to think the world, because otherwise we are not capable of confronting what Heidegger calls “the horrible”. And here we have to begin: with the horrible. The late Heidegger, critical of the unfolding of (especially modern) technology, was very clear in his stance regarding the dangers resulting from the – back then – most dangerous technologies. Technological developments such as the atomic bomb or the hydrogen bomb, with all their destructive power, are for Heidegger nothing but superficial markers of a far greater and further-reaching danger. In his *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* from 1949 he emphasizes this conviction very strongly. In his introduction, Heidegger writes:

The human is transfixed by what could come about with the explosion of the atomic bomb. The human does not see what for a long time now *has* already arrived and even *is* occurring, and for which the atomic bomb and its explosion are merely the latest emission, not to speak of the hydrogen bomb, whose detonation, thought in its broadest possibility, could be enough to wipe out all life on earth. What is this clueless anxiety waiting for, if the horrible [*das Entsetzliche*] *has* already occurred?²

Not only is the potential destruction of the earth a rather superficial occurrence – even more importantly, it conceals that the “horrible *has* already occurred.” The entire unfolding of his thought around the question of technology – with the seminal text “On the Question Concerning Technology” from 1954 – thus situates the human in the presence of what Heidegger calls the horrible. The horrible appears to be a moment of the uncanny, as Freud had defined it: strange in the midst of the familiar, it has occurred, it is there, it is here. It is what is, this seems to say, distinct from what it seems to be. We humans have already been living in the presence of the horrible, and we are living in its presence without realising it. And this horrible, we have to conclude, must be deemed more horrible than the end of all life. For if the eradication of all life is only the “latest emission,” and the “horrible *has* already occurred,” then the eradication is an end, the end of the horrible. The horrible must be worse, because it is the ground from which that end and its many, diverse possibilities come forth. Thus, the destruction of all life on earth – that is: of the entire earth – is only a consequence of something

² Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, trans. A. J. Mitchell, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2012, p. 4.

worse. But is it some-*thing* worse? It is not clear at all whether this “something worse” is really some-*thing*, and not perhaps a pure loss, a no-thing. That much we can say: the end of the earth is not the worst. And we can further say: what is worse than the extinction of all life is that it has already begun. These claims, in all their radicality, cannot but leave us with astonishment and irritation; they are a challenge to thought. Is there something that is worse than the end of all life on earth? What is it, how can it be? Heidegger leads us beyond death, beyond the end of the earth, maybe beyond being. The horrible has to be found somewhere beyond life and death in the midst of all the beings on earth.

It is very well known that Heidegger, in his 1966 interview with the German weekly *Der Spiegel*, stated “Only a God can save us.”³ Recalling this slogan, one might be tempted to associate apocalyptic undertones with the notion of the horrible, and subsequently to take the slogan too literally as a call for a God. But if we do not assume this God to be the Christian God, a God whose existence could be – or would have to be – proven, then “God” remains as an old name for something that we are unable to determine and which is irretrievably lost. If only a God can save us from the horrible, it cannot be an old God, as if a God had been missing for some time and we would have to hope for His return. To hope for the return of a God would imply thinking the world as the world of a God, even in the absence of a God. But a God, as Jean-Luc Nancy remarked, is not simply missing, we do not live in a world with a missing God:

[T]here is no God because there is world, and because the world is neither the work nor an operation but the space of the “there is”, its configuration without a face. There is no God because God does not belong to the “there is”: his name names precisely the category of that which would be subtracted from the “there is”. [...] The “world” is henceforth the name of that which neither operates nor is operated: the sense of the “there is”.⁴

If there is world, and if the “there is” of a world marks the inexistence of a God, then a God cannot return to the world. Rather, the world presents the challenge

³ Martin Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us: The *Spiegel* Interview (1966)”, in T. Sheehan (ed.), *Heidegger, The Man and the Thinker*, Chicago, Precedent Publishing, 1981, pp. 45–72.

⁴ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. J. S. Librett, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 156.

of living without a God on earth. In the *Spiegel* interview, Heidegger explains: "Only a god can save us. The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in [our] decline, insofar as in view of the absent god we are in a state of decline."⁵ And a little later, on the absence of a God: "Even the experience of this absence is not nothing, but a liberation of man from what in *Being and Time* I call "fallenness" upon beings. Making [ourselves] ready for the aforementioned readiness involves reflecting on what in our own day ... is."⁶

That only a God might save us should rather be read inversely: only a God can save us, but once a God saves us, we have lost the world, and we have lost all "there is". Instead, we should rather take on the task of thinking the world, so that no God will have to save us by taking away everything "there is". The answer to the horrible cannot be "a God". We will have to look somewhere else, and it is the horrible that will lead us there. In the final paragraph of the already quoted introduction, Heidegger specifies the horrible: "The horrifying is what transposes [*heraussetzt*] all that is out of its previous essence. What is so horrifying? It reveals and conceals itself in the way that everything presences, namely that despite all overcoming of distance, the nearness of that which is remains outstanding."⁷

The nearness of everything dissolves, and the horrible grows in, and as, the loss of nearness. The "beyond" is then the sphere that arises in the distance of the thing; "beyond" death and "beyond" the end of the earth – this is a sphere right within the earth, for it is within the thing. It is this dissolution of nearness that must be understood as worse than the eradication of the earth. We do not know, though, what Heidegger points us to when linking the horrible to the loss of nearness. At this point, "the horrible" is given to us in the state of the uncanny: something is wrong in the sphere of our intimate surroundings, in the sphere of the thing. What seems physically near to us is not near any longer.

But still, Heidegger's rigorousness remains surprising, and this moment of surprise needs to be read as well. The harshness with which he dismisses the erad-

⁵ Heidegger, "Only a God Can Save Us", p. 57.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷ Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, p. 4.

ication of life as a secondary phenomenon remains noticeable in comparison to the rest of the lectures, which unfold the question of technology, the outstanding nearness of the *thing*, the reign of the *Ge-Stell*, as well as the *turn* of thought as a turn within the *danger* of technology. While the general tone is severe and serious – Heideggerian so to speak – at certain moments the disdain for a given ontic technological phenomenality breaks through, and it rises to remarks that seem to dissolve all differences under the heading of a destructive industry, or rather an industry of destruction: “Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of countries, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs.”⁸

Although “in essence the same” does not say “literally the same” – the simplicity of this statement is not very Heideggerian. It has to be taken as a symptom, as the conflictual expression of a different conflict that remains unsolved. The contempt uttered here refers back to the essentially horrible – namely the loss of nearness within the thing. The loss of nearness is essentially the loss of the thing itself: “The exclusion of nearness despite all abolition of distances has brought the distanceless to dominance. In the exclusion of nearness, the thing as thing in the stated sense remains annihilated.”⁹ What is horrible, then, is that every thing withdraws (or has already withdrawn). The destruction of life is a reality, a technological reality, but as such it disguises the essential withdrawal of every thing in itself. Later, in the lecture on *the turn*, Heidegger opposes catastrophic scenarios: “All attempts to reckon up the presiding actuality, whether morphologically, psychologically in terms of decay and loss, in terms of disaster and catastrophe, of downfall, are all only instances of a technological behavior.”¹⁰ No calculation of the horrible is possible; every calculating, comparing, weighing terminology remains as a moment within the calculated catastrophe.

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The withdrawal cannot be calculated. But, and this is the crux of the matter, calculation, technology in the broadest sense, is an expression of the essence of being itself: “Positionality [*das Gestell*] is the essence of modern technology. The essence of positionality is the being of beings itself, not in general and not

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

from time immemorial, but rather now, here where the forgetting of the essence of being completes itself.”¹¹ Within being, we find the withdrawal of being, and this is the horrible. The horrible forgetting of being cannot be calculated, it cannot be accounted for in technical terms, and it is not a technological difficulty or challenge. But, at the same time, the horrible finds its expression in the reign of technology, which is a mode of being in the state of its withdrawal. The horrible is expressed within technology, but it conceals the loss of nearness, the loss of the thing, and finally the withdrawal of being within itself.

“Technology” as such a symptom cannot be understood as a specified technology – it is neither this nor that technology, and it cannot be a certain technology here, in some country, continent or region, nor a certain technology there, in another country, continent, or region. Thus, we are dealing with a technology that has a planetary dimension, as Heidegger emphasizes in his *Spiegel* interview.¹² Technology, as Heidegger conceives it, endangers the earth as a planet, and is therefore understood in a planetary dimension. And within this dimension, calculation regarding the aspect of energy is the common denominator of modern technology, which allows Heidegger at certain points to wipe out all differences: loss of nearness, on the one hand, calculating energy by means of technology, on the other. Modern technology is that which erases its own differences.

This is not to say that technology reigns at every place in the same manner; rather, technology unfolds itself in a planetary dimension – everywhere where it evolves it unfolds a planetary relevance.¹³ The planetary dimension is an

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49, translation modified by J. V.

¹² Heidegger, “Only a God Can Save Us”, p. 60 ff.

¹³ This becomes clear when Heidegger criticizes the development of thought alongside the development of technology. “Thinking ‘as such’ – this is our Western thinking, defined from the λόγος and calibrated to this. On no account does this mean that the world of ancient India, China, and Japan would remain thought-less. Much more, the reference to the λόγος-character of Western thinking contains for us the behest that before touching upon these foreign worlds, should we risk it, we first ask ourselves whether we at all have the ear to hear what is thought there. This question becomes all the more burning as European thinking also threatens to become planetary, in that the contemporary Indians, Chinese, and Japanese in many cases report their experiences to us only in our European way of thinking.” Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, pp. 136–137. Thus the planetary dimension does not imply an omnipresence, but a will to and a tendency towards omnipresence.

overarching dimension of a specific Western technology, and thus it is a very specific technology, which stems from the West, and is not in itself universal, but unfolds a universal approach. And it is here that the political dimension of this discussion is left untouched by Heidegger, and the outbreaks of contempt that align all different technologies under the theme of destruction mirror this unresolved political problem. By ignoring the different forms of technology's presence in different areas of the earth, Heidegger ignores the political aspect inscribed into any notion of "the planetary". However, this planetary dimension brings us back to the possible wiping out of "all life on earth" – technology, in its destructive appearance, concerns the earth as a planet.

The World and its Earth

What then is the meaning of the world, and how can it be related to the notion of the earth and to the notion of the planet? How can the notion of the world be related to the threat of the end of all life? How is the notion of the world related to the loss of nearness, the withdrawal of being within being? To understand the weight that Heidegger puts on the notion of the world, we have to go back to "The Origin of the Work of Art", written in 1935-1936 and published in 1950. As the title indicates, the question in this article is the essence of the work of art and its origin. Heidegger understands this origin as a work in which a thing unfolds its truth. But in order to examine this origin as embodying the ground from which it stems, Heidegger, as he mostly does, starts from the plain appearance of a thing: a thing can be defined as something that has properties or as something that appears to the senses, but a thing also needs to be distinguished from pure utility. In his attempt to define a thing, Heidegger then famously turns to a painting of Van Gogh in which a pair of shoes is shown. A pair of shoes is a typical thing that is utile: that is to say, Heidegger turns to a work of art in which a typical utile thing is displayed to further investigate the specificity of a thing. And it is here, in the description of the painting, where he first mentions the distinction between earth and world:

The shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth, its silent gift of the ripening grain, its unexplained self-refusal in the wintry field. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining worry as to the certainty of bread, wordless joy at having once more withstood want, trembling before the impending birth, and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs *to the earth* and finds pro-

tection in the *world* of the peasant woman. From out of this protected belonging the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself.¹⁴

What Heidegger calls the equipment (*das Zeug*) reveals its truth in the work of art, and this truth is its “reliability.”¹⁵ But all this can only be seen within the work of art, it cannot be registered within the everyday use of the equipment. What, then, is the truth?

In the work of art, the truth of the being has set itself to work. “Set” means here: to bring to stand. In the work, a being, a pair of peasant shoes, comes to stand in the light of its being. The being of the being comes into the constancy of its shining.

The essential nature of art would then be this: the setting-itself-to-work of the truth of beings.¹⁶

The truth is what the thing, as equipment, is in its being. And Heidegger then goes on to unfold the question of truth as one between the notion of earth and world. Already in the quoted passage we saw that the world is understood to protect the equipment, and that the equipment belongs to the world. In German, Heidegger uses the word “*behütet*” (translated as “finds protection”),¹⁷ which might also be translated as “taken care of” or “looked after”: in the context of the rural scenery of the painting, *behütet* points to the “taking care” / “looking after” of animals (as in *shepherding*). This *behüten* determines the “belonging”, insofar as the equipment belongs to the world precisely to the degree that it is looked after. In reverse, something that is not taken care of cannot belong to the world. And we might even ask whether there is a world if there is nothing that is looked after. The construction of the world is much more interesting than the delineation of the earth, which here seems to refer to the circular up and down, give and take, in a more or less classical understanding of nature as the circulation of powers. But this impression has to be revised: something that is not taken care of is left to decay. So it is not only the world that is opened by taking

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. J. Young and K. Haynes, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 14.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks”, in *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1950, p. 19.

care of equipment, but also equipment in its belonging to the earth is taken care of, which means: within the world, the earth is taken care of; without a world, the earth will disintegrate.

We find this same constellation, in which the earth appears as something to be taken care of, in Heidegger's later essay on "The Question Concerning Technology". Here, he opens up a distinction between modern technology as a "challenging" (*Herausfordern*) of nature, on the one hand, and a different form of "revealing" that was characteristic of technology before modernity, on the other:

The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order [*bestellte*] appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In the sowing of the grain it places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase.¹⁸

In German, Heidegger uses "*hegen und pflegen*" ("take care of and maintain") and then again "*hütet*" ("watches over").¹⁹ *Hüten* ("taking care") leads us directly to the figure of the human being, as it is the peasant who is said to be watching over the earth. And it is the figure of the human being on which Heidegger focuses his argument in the following: after unfolding the essence of technology as "*Gestell*" ("enframing"), in which the real is understood in its specific way to reveal its being as a matter of "*Bestand*" ("standing-reserve"),²⁰ and in which the human being finds itself also posited, Heidegger contrasts "*Gestell*" with "*Geschick*" ("destining"):²¹ destining marks the potential freedom for the human being, for it is not simply posited within the *Gestell*, but the human being is also enabled to become "one who listens and hears."²² Enframing, *Gestell*, is the essence of technology: everything is calculated, aligned, and economized. Stand-

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¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt, New York and London, Garland Publishing, 1977, pp. 14–15.

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik", in *Gesamtausgabe, I. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910-1976, Bd. 7, Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 2000, pp. 15–16.

²⁰ Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik", p. 22.

²¹ Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 24; Heidegger, "Die Frage nach der Technik", p. 25.

²² Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology", p. 25.

ing-reserve or *Bestand* means that modern technology is geared to the storage of energy and to the allocation of everything for further use. The human being is a moment of the *Bestand*, but the human being is also marked by the *Geschick*, which is the point at which history becomes possible. Within the *Bestand*, the human being is the open positioning of the *Geschick*.

The essence of modern technology starts man upon the way of that revealing through which the real everywhere, more or less distinctly, becomes standing-reserve. "To start upon a way" means "to send" in our ordinary language. We shall call that sending-that-gathers [*versammelndes Schicken*] which first starts man upon a way of revealing, *destining* [*Geschick*]. It is from out of this destining that the essence of all history [*Geschichte*] is determined. History is neither simply the object of written chronicle nor simply the fulfillment of human activity.²³

Geschick is the reverse of *Gestell*: for the *Gestell* of modern technology enforces the revealing and challenging of nature, and the *Geschick* is the human being enacting this revealing and challenging. Thus, history is neither simply human activity – as it is sent on its way – nor is it simply a matter of what is happening, for what is happening expresses in essence something else. Technology is happening, but history is a case of listening to the *Gestell* expressed within it. By listening, the human being can set itself "truly free."²⁴ So we see, revealing is entangled with concealing; the human being is able to listen to the revealing within the concealing. In his famous reference to Hölderlin, Heidegger then characterizes destining as the "extreme danger" in which at the same time "the saving power is said to grow":

Every destining of revealing comes to pass from out of a granting and as such a granting. For it is granting that first conveys to man that share in revealing which the coming-to-pass of revealing needs. As the one so needed and used, man is given to belong to the coming-to-pass of truth. The granting that sends in one way or another into revealing is as such the saving power. For the saving power lets man see and enter into the highest dignity of his essence. This dignity lies in keeping

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

watch over the unconcealment – and with it, from the first, the concealment – of all coming to presence on earth.²⁵

As the translator remarks in a footnote, “coming-to-pass” is the translation of “Ereignis”, event.²⁶ The human being is “given to belong” to the event of truth – in German, Heidegger writes “*vereignet*”,²⁷ which refers back to *Ereignis*, and is also linked to the verb *eignen*, which then again refers to one’s own, one’s belongings or property. The event of truth does not simply happen as something distant from the human being, something to be watched, to be recognized, and to be accepted. The event is something to which the human being is given to belong; we might also say that the human being is assigned to the event of truth. Destining sends the human being on the way by which it is assigned or even ascribed to the event of truth. On the one hand, the human being is a moment of the *Gestell*, of the enframing or positioning of every thing, while on the other hand, the human being is capable of listening, and thus of realising the revealing within the concealed. And if destining, *Geschick*, entails an opening in which history dwells, then we get a more detailed understanding of what the event might be: the understanding, the acceptance, of being a part of the *Gestell*. Heidegger emphasizes that this does not imply some sort of fatalism, but neither is it the position of the master in which the human being will find itself. It is important to see that the dignity ascribed to the human being is situated, in classical terms, on the threshold between passivity and activity: the human being is not the one to master the event or to initiate it, the human being only has the capacity to “keep watch” – and here it is again “*hüten*”.²⁸ And what is it that the human being is able to watch over? “The unconcealment – and within it, from the first, the concealment – of all coming to presence on earth.” This last sentence of the quote gives a further hint as to how to understand the “keeping watch”, in which Heidegger finds the highest dignity of the human being. We may notice in passing that the “highest” dignity contrasts with the lower ground of the earth, such that in this link we already find an anticipation of the later quadruple of heaven and earth and mortals and immortals, as that by means of which Heidegger will unfold the notion of the world. We will return to this in a moment.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, “Die Frage nach der Technik”, p. 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

What needs to be taken care of is not so much the unconcealment – for technology is a brute force of unconcealment itself – but more the concealment. We have to refer to the German again: concealment as well as unconcealment concern the “coming to presence on earth”, which in German is “*alles Wesens auf dieser Erde*”.²⁹ *Wesen* is often translated as essence, although Heidegger is careful to distinguish *Wesen* from *essence*, and he uses the noun – as he often does – as a verb, too. The earth is the site from which and to which everything moves in its essence, as unconcealment and concealment. This we can learn from another passage from “On the Origin of the Work of Art”:

Early on, the Greeks called this coming forth and rising up in itself and in all things φῶς. At the same time φῶς lights up that on which man bases his dwelling. We call this the *earth*. What this word means here is far removed from the idea of a mass of matter and from the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that in which the arising of everything that arises is brought back – as, indeed, the very thing that it is – and sheltered. In the things that arise the earth presences as the protecting one.³⁰

And once more, we have to turn to the German. The German of the last sentence of our quote reads: “*Im Aufgehenden west die Erde als das Bergende.*”³¹ The earth unfolds its essence in that which arises, and it does so by salvaging that which rises up. The earth, as we saw Heidegger clearly stating, is neither a mass of matter nor the name of a planet; it is rather a lighting up, an opening that assembles.

Let us recall where we started this discussion: it is Heidegger’s aim to distinguish the thing in what makes it a thing from descriptions that reduce it to some properties (Where to start? Where to end?) or to its sensual appearance. This brings us to the question as to the essence of the thing, and Heidegger turns to the shoes displayed on a painting by Van Gogh. The thing, as a useful thing, as equipment, belongs to the earth, and is taken care of in the world. In the work of art it unfolds its truth. If we can see the truth in the work of art, then this is not to be understood as if we could see something that essentially belongs to the shoes

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, p. 21.

³¹ Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks”, p. 28.

as they are outside of the painting. The truth of the equipment essentially is within the painting, it unfolds its essence here. Truth is not the correspondence of a thought with a thing; truth is a thing being in its essence.

This tells us something about the earth to which these shoes, as Heidegger said, belong. We can see now that the earth is not simply the fertile ground from which things – first the living and then the non-living – would stem. The earth is not “mother earth”, in which things are sheltered and from which things originate. The earth is not the origin. Rather it is the work (understood as a work of art, as something that is brought about) in which the essence of the useful thing, the equipment, can unfold its truth. And the earth can only unfold as the opening up once it is watched over by the human being – watched over not as that which is revealed, but on the contrary, watched over as revealing and concealing.

The Truth of the World

It is from the point of truth that Heidegger conceives of the world.

The work, then again, in which the equipment reveals its truth, is linked to the world.

World is not a mere collection of the things – countable and uncountable, known and unknown – that are present at hand. Neither is world a merely imaginary framework added by our representation to the sum of things that are present. World worlds, and is more fully in being than all those tangible and perceptible things in the midst of which we take ourselves to be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be looked at. World is that always-nonobjectual to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse, keep us transported into being.³²

World, as we have seen before, is the sphere of taking care of the things of the earth.

By the opening of a world, all things gain their lingering and hastening, their distance and proximity, their breadth and their limits. In worlding there gathers

³² Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art”, p. 23.

that spaciousness from out of which the protective grace of the gods is gifted or is refused. Even the doom of the absence of the god is a way in which world worlds.³³

There are different worlds, worlds in which a God prevails, and worlds in which a God does not exist. As we said before: “world” in the sense of the “there is” cannot be a world without a God, but it is a world in which there is no God. Heidegger seems hesitant to accept that the modern world, the world of modern technology, is a world in which no God exists. But does he not precisely describe this world in which there is no God? It is the interplay of distance and proximity (as well as that of lingering and hastening, breadth and limits) that allows the essence of things to be. By opening a world, things are enabled to unfold their essence: and this does not simply mean that they are allowed to present themselves, they shine forth and exist essentially. World and work are closely related: “To be a work means: to set up a world.”³⁴ And it is the ambiguity – the form of a threshold – which justifies this link. In his article “Origin of the Work of Art”, Heidegger emphasizes the aspect of the shining that marks the work of art and is traditionally addressed as beautiful. “The shining”, he writes, “that is set into the work is the beautiful. *Beauty is one way in which truth as unconcealment comes to presence.*”³⁵ Just like the character of the work of art is ambivalent – as it comes to be essentially once it is not what it is – so is the relation between the earth and the world not an instance of harmonious salvation:

The opposition of world and earth is strife. We would, to be sure, all too easily falsify the essence of the strife were we to conflate that essence with discord and dispute, and to know it, therefore, only as disruption and destruction. In essential strife, however, the opponents raise each other into the self-assertion [*Selbstbehauptung*] of their essences.³⁶

In this world, there is no God, for there is no harmonious *one*. Strife is the sense of the world, strife as the setting of a world to work, of setting up a world as a work. The strife is what essentially the work is: it is essentially there where it is not simply what it is. Opening up a world does not simply mean to bring something to its essence, as if the thing would find its fulfilment within a work.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

It is not as we often claim: “This is what a thing truly is!”, as if we would have stripped off the thing to its essence. It is the other way round: the essence dwells where the thing is brought to its ambivalence. The work brings forth the essence, but it does so by allowing for concealing and unconcealing to take place at the same time. Thus, against the unconcealing force of technology, the opening up of a world reinforces the ambiguity of the thing.

In terms of the relation between earth and world, we have to turn things over. Heidegger does not design a relation in which things that essentially belong to the earth are watched over within a world: in such a relation, earth might be taken as mother earth and the world as paternalistic care. The situation is more complex:

That into which the work sets itself back, and thereby allows to come forth, is what we called “the earth.” Earth is the coming-forth-concealing [*Hevorkom-mend-Bergende*]. Earth is that which cannot be forced, that which is effortless and untiring. On and in the earth, historical man finds his dwelling in the world. In setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth. “Setting forth [*Herstellen*]” is to be thought, here, in the strict sense of the word. The work moves the earth into the open of a world and holds it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth.*³⁷

To “let be” is the essential indication here. Within a world, the earth is allowed to be an earth. The world neither forms nor orients, neither guides nor brings about the earth, but the world lets the earth be an earth. Without a world, that is to say, the earth cannot be an earth.

But the world brings us back to the question of the thing and its nearness. In his talk on *The Thing*, Heidegger unfolds the thingness of the thing: What is it that makes a thing a thing? He rejects the position of knowledge, of science: it is unable to grasp the thing in its essence. But why? Because for Heidegger the essential moment of the thing is a void. The famous example in this talk is a jug, and Heidegger meticulously describes the void of the jug and the pouring out of a beverage, from this jug, which embraces a void. He relates “the gift of the pour”³⁸ to the mortals drinking it and to the immortals, for whom it is

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁸ Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, p. 11.

an oblation. Mortals and immortals, earth and heaven – these four form what Heidegger calls the “*Geviert*” (“fourfold”).³⁹ The fourfold “gathers”,⁴⁰ and this is the difficult and substantial relevance of the thought of the fourfold: it forms a gathering without referring to a preceding form. Rather, the gathering gathers in the form of the jug that is formed by this very gathering. Neither gathering nor form precede. They are of equal precedence, together in strife. This fourfold finally gives a definition of a world: “We name the appropriating mirror-play of the single fold of the earth and sky, divinities and mortals, the world. The world essences in that it worlds.”⁴¹

And directly afterwards, Heidegger further explains the “worlding” of the world:

This says: The worlding of world is neither explicable by nor grounded upon anything other than itself. This impossibility is not a matter of our human thinking being incapable of such explaining and grounding. The inexplicability and ungroundability of the worlding of the world lies much more in the fact that things like causes and grounds remain unsuitable for the worlding of the world.⁴²

We might be dissatisfied with the impossibility of explaining the worlding of world in explanatory terms. But Heidegger argues against any calculating or causal understanding of worlding. Worlding, for Heidegger, refers rather to thought. We have to think the thing to grasp its essence:

When we let the thing in its thinging essence from out of the worlding world, then we commemorate the thing as thing. Thoughtfully remembering in this way, we allow the worlding essence of the thing to concernfully approach us. Thinking in this way we are met by the thing as thing. We are, in the strict sense of the word, conditioned [*Be-Dingen*]. We have left the arrogance of everything unconditional behind us.⁴³

³⁹ *Ibid.*; Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe, III. Abteilung: Unveröffentlichte Abhandlungen, Bd. 79, Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, p. 12.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

The process of accepting to be conditioned is what Heidegger understands as thinking: conditioned, that is, by the thing which is more than that what it plainly and simply appears to be. Can we really argue that a thing is more than what it appears to be? Heidegger's argument is exemplified by Van Gogh's shoes. We cannot say that a thing is not what it seems to be, we have difficulty telling what it is. To say what it is, we have to follow the thing throughout different spheres of its appearances, and in the painting we find the truth of its being. It is only within a world that a thing can unfold its truth, that it can be in its essence. And it is, as in the fourfold, neither a thing nor its truth that comes first; a thing unfolds its truth in its "thinging essence", its being within a world. But a world is strife – it is not a rational, scientific entity, it is neither some purity of the earth, nor some higher order of the world; it is the strife, not only between different essences, but of the essence within itself. A world is a work for it lets the thing be what it is, and the human being is only capable of being conditioned by the thing once it lets the thing be within a world. Thinking, then, does not mean to understand or to describe, it rather means to let oneself be approached: "When and how do the things come as things? They do not come through the machinations of humans. But they also do not come without the vigilance of mortals. The first step to such vigilance is the step back from merely representational, i.e., explanatory, thinking into commemorative thinking."⁴⁴

A world is work in which the thing can be what it essentially is, and it is the task of the human being to build this work, but this world is built not by accounting or counting, but by letting the thing be. Thinking is worlding, and it is the human being that thinks. But thinking is not an attempt at mastery; it is precisely the contrary. The human being is not the master of the world, but rather the rift of thought within the world, which allows the thing to be in its character as essentially unfolding its truth. Unfolding its truth, the thing is not only what it is, but also what it seems to be. It is what it is, but also what it is not. But the point of thought, thinking the thing, which the human being inscribes into the earth, is not only the possibility of letting the thing be, it is also a moment of the being of the thing: the thing is a thing when it is thought; it is a thing within and by the human being. To think the thing is not only to let it be, but also to let the thought be a thing.

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⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

“The horrible” was Heidegger’s title of a non-world in which the thing has lost its nearness. The loss of nearness appears amidst every thing, a moment of the uncanny within the thing. But the horrible is not uncanny because the thing has lost its clear outline; the horrible marks the loss of being within the thing. The true thing then is not the thing clearly outlined, but the thing that is let be in its being, as well as in its shining. The world is the space in which truth is thus: “The world is the truth of the essence of being.”⁴⁵

Our current attempts to think the crisis of the Anthropocene come along with the problem of understanding human beings as part of a changing geological structure. Maybe the danger implied in this endeavour is to lose the capacity to think a world and thus to lose the point of weakness at which a thing can be a thing, and at which the thought that allows a thing to be is a thing, too. If this is the case, the thought of the Anthropocene would have to remain an “instance [...] of technological behaviour.”⁴⁶

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Magdalena Germek*

The Anatomy of the World

The World of Anatomy

In this text, a philosophical concept of the world will be introduced through a somewhat unusual phrase “the anatomy of the world”. The anatomy of the world seems like a convenient term, since it accurately describes the attempt to construct a philosophical concept of the world, taking into account its constitution, architecture, and structure – its *anatomy*. In order to do so, we must also apply the method of *philosophical anatomy*. A general image of anatomy as a scientific discipline and a surgically precise practice, allowing a *clean cut*¹ in seeing and understanding, can be helpful here. Anatomy studies internal organs, making visible what is otherwise invisible and not pleasing to the eye, uncovering what is covered by the skin. This is exactly what we are aiming at with the philosophical anatomy of the world. We want this anatomy to show what the world is hiding under its skin, what the world’s inner constitution looks like, to reveal the internal organs of the world, to make them worldly – in short, to expose the world to the world. But it is precisely at this point where an unexpected issue arises. For an anatomy of the world to be carried out, we need a corpse of the world. And to have the world’s corpse, the world needs to die first. Just how can the world die? Does the process of dying require a subject of dying? Can the world be murdered? It is exactly these kinds of questions that reveal the difficulty of our topic: it is difficult to obtain the corpse of the world. In his renowned book *Logics of Worlds*, Alain Badiou suggests a materialistic concept of the world, where the world is the place of taking-place where objects appear. As we intend to show, this is a specific phenomenological-topological concept of the world that ignores death. But in order to obtain the corpse and perform a dissection of the world, we need a specific theory of the world, where the world

¹ The very etymology of anatomy can be useful here: from the Ancient Greek, ἀνατομία (anatomía) – ἀνατομή (anatomé, “dissection”): from ἀνά (aná, “up”) + τέμνω (témnō, “I cut, incise”) – literally means “cut up”.

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is able to live and die. Here, we can nevertheless turn to Badiou again. From the perspective of his doctrine of truths, the world reveals itself not only as an objective scene where objects appear, but also as a subjective category susceptible to the processes of living and dying. But before getting to Badiou's theory of the world, we will first take a detour. We will make a stop in the world of anatomy to check if there is any other connection between the world of anatomy and the anatomy of the world, besides the word game. Perhaps, the world of anatomy itself can provide the corpse of the world.

But let us proceed in an orderly fashion and in meaningful steps. We need to learn the basic rules and principles of anatomy. A short lesson in anatomy is needed and we must return to the lecture room, perhaps the very same lecture room immortalised in the painting *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (1632) by the Dutch painter Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. Our professor of anatomy will be the respected Dr. Claes Pieterszn, better known to history by his name Dr. Nicolaes Tulp, the author of the renowned work *Observationes Medicae*. The book was written in Latin, because the author "did not want the public to read it and treat their own illnesses,"² which is by all means an interesting concern also from today's perspective. *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* is a group portrait of seven participants observing Dr. Tulp and the corpse of the man who is the immediate object of the anatomy lesson. They are all dressed in ceremonial, black, formal suits, with a broad black hat adorning the lecturer's head. The latter is a small detail that Rembrandt used to emphasise the privileged position of the holder and master of knowledge. The least clothes can be found on the naked corpse of the dead man, with only a tiny cloth covering his groin.

Public anatomy demonstrations had been held in Amsterdam since the middle of the 16th century and a supervisory office, the Praelector, was founded to this end. In 1555, Philip II, King of Spain and Holland, granted the Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons a privilege, thereby allowing them to dissect human bodies in order to teach anatomy.³ The bodies of executed criminals were used and the activities were practised once a year in the winter, when the temperatures were

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² Sam A. Mellick, "Dr Nicolaes Tulp of Amsterdam, 1593-1674: Anatomist and Doctor of Medicine", *ANZ J. Surg.*, 77 (2007), p. 1102.

³ Cf. Frank F. A. Ijpma, Robert C. van de Graaf, Marcel F. Meek, Jean-Philippe A. Nicolai, and Thomas M. van Gulik, "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp Painted by Rembrandt in 1632", *ANZ J. Surg.*, 78 (2008), p. 1059; Eelco de Bree, J. Tsiaoussis, and G. Schoretsanitis,

low enough to preserve the organs from rapid decomposition. These were social events attended by physicians, surgeons, and other noble citizens. There were dedicated anatomy theatres for such occasions that could accommodate up to 300 people. These events were also immortalised in group portraits painted by the most famous portrait painters of that period. The painters in Holland, mostly neglected by the Church and its funding at that time, were supported by civil groups and rich guilds. The portrayed people had to pay for their spot in the painting, and so one can easily imagine Dr. Tulp paying a little extra to have a more prominent position than the other seven participants.

It is not exactly clear how the then 26-year-old and relatively unknown Rembrandt managed to gain the commission for such a portrait; in any case, this painting made him famous. Unlike other portrait painters before Rembrandt, who had painted group portraits of anatomy practise without the human object of the anatomy lesson, Rembrandt has given the central position to the corpse itself. The meticulously painted male body still fascinates both art and medical experts today. Equipped with special technology,⁴ they examine and discuss the anatomical accuracy of Rembrandt's depiction of the forearm muscle. It is also obvious that the painting is not a realistic representation of the actual event. It shows only the left arm dissected, which is uncommon in the autopsy procedures of the 17th century. In order to avoid the rapid decomposition of the internal organs, the standard anatomy procedure usually began with a dissection of the organs in the abdomen and thorax, while the extremities would be dissected last. In Rembrandt's painting, however, the left forearm is opened, while the rest of the body parts are untouched. Another unorthodox element is Dr. Tulp himself, painted as he performs the procedure, which is also a scenario deviating from the usual practice, where such procedures were performed by other, less important participants, allowing a lecturer of Tulp's significance to proceed with the lecture unhindered.

"Anatomy Lessons by the Amsterdam Guild of Surgeons. Medical Education and Art", *Hel-
lenic Journal of Surgery*, 90 (5/2018), p. 260.

⁴ During its restoration from 1996 to 1998, "the painting was minutely examined using a stereomicroscope, ultraviolet light, infrared photography, reflectography and roentgen photography." Cf. Ijpm, *et al.*, "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp Painted by Rembrandt in 1632", p. 1060.

Although Rembrandt's painting is more of a symbolic than a realistic interpretation of the classic anatomy lesson, it represents the world of anatomy well. The seven observers are located behind the head of the deceased, leaving the place of honour to the anatomist. All together, the doctor, the participants, and the corpse form a triangle with interesting relations between them that Rembrandt created by differentiating and distributing their gazes. There are different interpretations as to where exactly the gazes of the men are directed. We believe the constellation is the following: three of the seven participants are intensively observing Tulp's left arm, the man in the back of the group is gazing at the head of the esteemed doctor, and the remaining three observers are staring straight "into the camera". Nothing in the painting is inviting us to a spectacle of wild imagination. There is nothing intended to shock. The death is not presented as haunting; instead, it is accepted as such and dissected. It seems that no one present is looking at the deceased. The gaze of Dr. Tulp is also directed at his students and not at the procedure he is performing or at the object he is analysing. The entire scene maintains the scientific character of the given situation, which by no means diminishes the vivid curiosity of the students. In contrast to them, Tulp appears to be dignifiedly indifferent and professional, as someone in his position of knowledge should be. He is not affected by the life and death of human organs. He is on a mission to research, analyse, and demonstrate the subtle flows of life on the background of death itself. The most indifferent head is that of the corpse, of course. Its involvement in the world of anatomy is minimum. Although it may be the central object of that world, it is not subjectively connected thereto. We can draw the conclusion that every participant is, in his own way and in connection with the other participants present, involved in the world of anatomy, which is exactly a world of transferring knowledge, learning, observing, demonstrating, and teaching. There is another object in the painting that emphasises the fact that this is indeed a world involving the historic production and transfer of anatomical knowledge. By the feet of the deceased there is a wide open hardcover book. It is assumed that this book is *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543), a classic anatomy work by the famous Dutch anatomist Andreas Vesalius.

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Andreas Vesalius was a medical reformer from the 16th century who greatly contributed to the formation of the study of human anatomy as a modern science. A spectacular drawing (*Frontispiece*, 1543) on the cover of the book depicts Vesalius's surgical procedure on the abdomen of a female corpse. The anatomist's

right hand is in physical contact with the open body.⁵ The direct contact of the surgeon's hand with the wide open abdomen of the corpse can be understood as a symbol of the surgical occupation – “the surgeon's hands act as an instrument of mediating knowledge gained from studying the body.”⁶ Vesalius's right hand may be pointing to the crowd of observers or above it, to the heavens, which gives him the transcendent assertion of a mediator, a representative and instrument of God's creation. It is also possible that the painting depicts medicine becoming independent of God's will. The anatomist's hand, the hand of medicine, will be in the service of science from now on. The hand is also emphasised by another portrait of Vesalius, a woodcut by Steven van Calcar, where the anatomist is performing a dissection of the *flexores digitorum* muscles on the forearms of a corpse. There is no place for God's intervention between the anatomist's hand and the hand of the deceased. The entire arrangement indicates the superior position of the anatomist, the scientist, as the master of the human object. He has the greatest treasure of God's creation in his possession. While God brings life to humans, the anatomist is the one researching this life when people die. Such mastery arises from the scientific production of knowledge: the human corpse is transformed by science into a scientific object of study.

A scientific analysis, a medical dissection, the hand of the subject of science, the hand of the object of science, the demonstration and transfer of knowledge – all this belongs to the world of anatomy, of which we have learned in the lecture of Dr. Tulp. The human body is no longer covered by the veil of the sacred, the mystical, and the unknown. Despite it being ripped, dirty, and smelly, with its no longer hidden mucus and fluids, the body does not belong to the anatomy of disgust, but to anatomy as such. In the world of anatomy, taboo will gain its worldliness through science; it will be exposed to the light, presented to the public, and illuminated by human instruments. It will undergo demystification and profanation and thus become worldly. Something had to die to become a part of this world. In the world of anatomy, death does not represent a loss of world, it is not a departure from the world, but an entry into the world through

⁵ Below, we refer to the analysis of Adéla Janíčková, “Surgeon's hands in Vesalius's portraits and Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp*”, *Hektoen International*, 2016, <https://hekint.org/2017/01/19/surgeons-hands-in-vesaliuss-portraits-and-rembrandts-the-anatomy-lesson-of-dr-tulp/>, accessed 30 November 2021.

⁶ *Ibid.*

scientific knowledge. Death is no longer a transcendence; it has become nothing more than scientific formalisation instead.

But how has philosophy perceived this world? For Hegel, such an anatomical formalisation of death, life, body, and organs, presents something more dead than death itself. Hegel sees in anatomy a modus of thinking that imposes a problematic concept of (pseudo)science. Anatomy is not based on the true concept of science as an organic totality and self-moving unity. On the contrary, its basic practice is dissection. Furthermore, its theoretical approach breaks conceptual connections, cutting the organic essence into fragments, deriving therefrom an empty generality:

Furthermore, that kind of an aggregation of little bits and pieces of information has no real right to be called science, and a conversation about its purpose and other such generalities would be in no way distinct from the ordinary historical and uncomprehending way in which the content, or these nerves and muscles, and so forth, is itself discussed. In the case of philosophy, on the other hand, this would give rise to the following incongruity, namely, that if philosophy were indeed to make use of such a method, then it would have shown itself to be incapable of grasping the truth.⁷

The method of anatomy is a method of pseudo-science and as such inappropriate for philosophy. At this point, we can make a detour from Hegel with a present-day example that explicitly demonstrates Hegel's fears. The example concerns a series of portraits of Jacques Derrida by Monique Stobienia and Thierry Briault.⁸ The portraits show a sequence of the same head in multiple variations: the head in warm colours and sharp edges; the head in cold colours and sharp edges; the head with a reflection in a broken mirror; the head as a broken mirror; the head in a geometric maze; the head shining; the head with one eye replaced by a wire installation; the head creating an electromagnetic field; the head entangled in a baroque line; the head entangled in wiring; the head mired in colour; the head disappearing; the head arising; the head as just a small expression; the head

⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 10.

⁸ I made an analysis of these portraits from another perspective in my article "V ozadju filozofije", *Filozofski vestnik*, 33 (1/2012), pp. 191–211.

made to appear haunting; the head made to look disgusting; the head as the head of a monster; and the head as the head of a philosopher. Looking at these portraits, we can hardly resist the impression that these portraits are an attempt at performing a kind of *artistic anatomy*. This anatomy is specific, because it does not show the interior of a human skull, but nevertheless keeps us in the spectrum of a metaphoric interior, which is connected to the philosophy of the dissected philosopher. It is not the skull that is dissected, but a philosophic thought. The artistic anatomy is a deconstruction *in actu* and thereby also an artistic construction of Derrida's philosophy. With this series of portraits, Derrida might have arrived at a unique and the simplest representation of his philosophy. Just by looking at his portraits one can directly see what the philosopher's thought looks like, here being presented not through an artistic representation, but precisely through an anatomical procedure. The head is broken, the anatomy of his thoughts is displayed. Thierry Briault and Monique Stobienia have not created an artistic interpretation, but have performed an artistic-surgical intervention.

This is exactly what Hegel would never dare to do in his concept of philosophy. Philosophy is not an immediate display of one's concepts, but rather a dialectic becoming, a deriving of concepts. On the other hand, anatomy is a paradigm of what philosophy must not become. The object of anatomy is a corpse, its practise is cutting, its theoretical method is an analysis, destroying the very concept of science as such. A true science should insist on life and organic unity, while anatomy is nothing but a mortifying aggregate of knowledge. And if anatomy is a new model of science, then the world as an object of such a science will suffer too. It will become a corpse subjected to its analytical, dissecting method. Our initial question of how to obtain a corpse of the world thus gains an answer: we get a corpse of the world when we subdue the world to science. The letter of science murders the world; it formalises it, separates it from the world's own internal organic parts; it rips out all of its life force. "Mortification, applied literally in anatomy, can perhaps be posed as a metaphor for scientific practice in general: the inaugural gesture of 'modern age science' was perhaps mainly in mortifying its object, no longer perceiving it as a harmonic and living unit, as an '*organische Einheit*' and '*das Leben des Ganzen*'; it reduced the cosmically open book of God's disposition to a 'dead letter'."⁹

⁹ Mladen Dolar, *Heglova fenomenologija duha*, Ljubljana, DTP Analecta, 2017, pp. 26–27. An illustrative example is given in the philosophy of David Hume, who posits in his *Enquiry*

Now, let us turn to a modern example of the concept of the world from the philosophy of Alain Badiou. Badiou takes the concept of the world – subdued to the letter of scientific formalisation – to the extreme. The world itself can be reduced to the formalisms of mathematical logic. This, however, does not lead to the conclusion that the world is a corpse or a hollow shell. As we will see, the world is a phenomenological-topological category representing a specific logic of place; as a representative of the logic of place, the world is a place of objectivity that registers death only to a certain degree. What is called death is merely an objective degree of appearance that makes no difference concerning the world. But in order to detect, in this framework, the processes of mortification and the death drive, we need the world to be subjectivized, i.e. subjective processes need to appear in the world. In this manner, Badiou transposes the entire question of life and death in the doctrine of truths and subjectivity. The world suffers from mortifying impulses, as the reactive and obscure forms of subjectivity actively work against the realisation of truths in the world. We will discuss this in detail below.

A Topology of the World

We have already mentioned the portrait series of the philosopher Jacques Derrida by Thierry Briault and Monique Stobienia. But the latter is also interesting for her cooperation with another philosopher – Alain Badiou. Based on private sketches drawn by Badiou himself, she created a series of painting variations under the common name *Landscapes*. *Landscape No. 5* can be found on the cover of the French and English editions of Badiou's book *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*.¹⁰ The cover is painted with rich, geometrically-shaped patches of colour,

Concerning Human Understanding the difference between the behaviours of an anatomist and a painter, aiming to illustrate two possible approaches to moral philosophy or the science of human nature. On one hand, there are philosophers, who “paint virtue in the most charming colours, getting help from poetry and eloquence,” thus actively shaping the behaviour of their readers by vividly illustrating a life of virtue or a life of sin (“They make us *feel* the difference between vice and virtue.”); on the other hand, there are philosophers who understand human nature as an object of theoretic, rigorous, and precise research. Hume addresses the first approach as philosophical painting and the other as philosophical anatomy. Philosophical anatomy is supposed to be a rigorous and precise science about experience. Cf. David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Indianapolis, Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1993, EPUB, Section 1, n. p.

¹⁰ In the following section, a part of the material that I published in the article entitled “Vozadju filozofije” will be used.

crossed all over by straight lines and sharp edges, without the geometrical logic hindering the vivid tonality of colours in any way. It is not completely clear what we are looking at: sea, sky, dream, an abstraction awaiting its meaning. In any case, instead of the philosopher's head, we are faced with a kind of landscape. One might find such an absence of dynamism slightly unusual for a portrait of a militant philosophy such as Badiou's. One impression is overwhelming, however. As we look at the cover of the *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, there seem to be no obstacles hindering our view. We get an impression of boundless expansion. There is no central point to the net of geometrical coordinates, no guidelines dictating the direction our gaze is supposed to take. This effect is not achieved with a parallelism, but with the lines intersecting under different angles. Our sight is not entangled in a chaos of threads, but rather freed by its colourful and geometric consistency, arrangement, symmetry, and certainty that only order can provide. We are presented with a cosmos. An orderliness that spreads; the boundlessness of the universe. Cold and warm nuances. Our sight is calmed by concrete colours. All in all, it is a scheme of a general concept of the world. An image of the universe. The main motif of the *Landscape* is a motif of worldliness. The topology of the world it presents gives us an excellent starting point to further contemplate the anatomy of the world.

Stobienia's painting reveals several key features of Badiou's concept of the world. The first obvious feature of the world is that it is depicted without a source, without a creator responsible for its constitution; there is no point from which everything can be deduced, neither is there a point to which everything can be reduced. Another significant feature of the world is that it is an orderliness, emphasised by the geometrical net "where the lines' structured force merges with an original conception of colour."¹¹ The landscape is painted in colours with a prevailing geometric-architectural style, which is an excellent choice to present another important feature of Badiou's concept of the world, namely that it is logical. The world is a site of a unique objective transcendental logic, which is independent of the constitution of any transcendental subject. This logic arises from a few basic transcendental operations that are able to describe an infinite number of different worlds, given that there is also an infinite number of different logics of worlds. For Badiou, the world is an objective (non-subjective) cat-

¹¹ Alain Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. L. Burchill, Cambridge and Malden, Polity Press, 2011, p. vi.

egory *par excellence*, studied by an objective (non-subjective) phenomenology. In his *Logics of Worlds*, Badiou proposes an unorthodox concept of phenomenology that refuses the categories of subjective consciousness, perception, and experience and is derived from the concepts of the transcendental, object, and relation, which are all deemed to be strictly independent of the category of the (transcendental) subject.

For Badiou, the world is “the place in which objects appear”¹² or “the place of taking-place.”¹³ This means that the world is a phenomenological category that must also be considered topologically – through the logic of place. Whereas Badiou is mostly noted for his ontological project, we must note that Badiou’s consideration of the logic of place (providing him a path to phenomenology) reaches all the way back to the works from his youth. In his text “The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism” from 1967, Badiou critically addresses Althusser’s theory of structural causality, namely by means of the thesis that Althusser’s partition to numerous practices and instances requires a general and formal theory of multiplicity: “There must exist a *previous* formal discipline, which I would be tempted to call the *theory of historical sets*, which contains *at least* the protocols of ‘donation’ of the pure multiples onto which the structures are progressively constructed.”¹⁴ In Badiou’s proposal, one can recognise the first signs of referring to mathematical set theory, which will take centre stage in his ontological project at the end of the 1980s. However, it is important to note an additional aspect here. Badiou goes on to say that his proposal refers to a discipline “which is closely tied in its complete development to the mathematics of set theory,” but nevertheless exceeds “the simple donation of a procedure of *belonging*.”¹⁵ The new formal discipline of historical sets would exceed mathematical set theory (where all basic operations on sets are reducible to the primary relation of belonging) by following the rules of spatiality: “the conjuncture had to be thought as a definite system of ‘places’ in which the instances come

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¹² Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event*, 2, trans. A. Toscano, London, Continuum, 2009, p. 598.

¹³ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham, London, Bloomsbury Revelations, 2013, p. 26.

¹⁴ Alain Badiou, “The (Re)commencement of Dialectical Materialism”, in *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, B. Bosteels (ed. and trans.), London and New York, Verso, 2012, p. 163.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

to articulate themselves onto one another.”¹⁶ The concept of determination will include both of these elements: on the one hand, it will have at its disposal the *P* set as a set of places, and on the other hand, the *F* set as a set of functions and practices receiving their value from *P*. The mathematical theory that here serves Badiou as a paradigm to think the “system of places” is the mathematical *theory of categories*, of which he says the following:

The theory of categories is perhaps the most significant epistemological event of these last years, due to the radical effort of abstraction to which it bears witness. Mathematical structures are not properly speaking constructed in it according to operational links between elements of a pure multiplicity (set); but they rather appear as “summits” of a network of trajectories in which the structural correspondences (the morphisms) are primary. In the Universe (such is the concept used) that is thus drawn, Structure of structures, multiplicity is not one structure among others: one will speak of the Category of sets as well as of the Category of groups, etc.¹⁷

In a series of seminars published in 1982 under the title *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou reintroduced the idea of a general concept of place (*P*), which he developed through the abstract and formal differentiation between pure being and the being-there. He introduced this difference using the Hegelian pair of “something” (*Etwas*) and “something else” (*Anderes*): there is an *A* (*Etwas*), a pure being, and another, duplicated *A* (*Anderes*), which is *A taking place*, the *placed being*, *Ap*. In the first case, we are dealing with a “pure identity”;¹⁸ in the second case, with a “placed identity”.¹⁹ This placed identity marks the pure identity of all possible ways of an *A* belonging to a *P*, which is abstractly perceived as a generality of the place and represents the “being-placed” as such. The significance of *P* is merely that it represents a reference in the relationship to which we note the placed identity *Ap*. In a way, *A* does not even exist as a pure being, since by saying something about it, we already place *A* in a certain identity, i.e. *Ap1*, *Ap2* ..., which means that *A* is always presented as *Ap*. If *A* is pure being, then, ontologically speaking, *A* is nothing; but if *A exists*, an indexed identity will be

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, note 166.

¹⁸ Alain Badiou, *Theory of the Subject*, trans. B. Bosteels, London, Continuum, 2009, p. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

assigned to it, dividing it from the inside. A is never equal to A , except when it is simply *not*; rather, it is inevitably its own duality of a pure and placed identity. A can thus be comprehended through “a constitutive scission: $A = (AAp)$.”²⁰ The contradiction between a pure being and structure drives the dialectic, which is not a dialectic of the idealistic synthesis (thesis and antithesis), but a materialistic dialectic of the scission “based upon the contradiction between A and P , between the existent and its place.”²¹ A pure identity is thus never pure; instead, the pure being and a structural place, a certain P , to which it belongs, is inscribed in it.²²

Although Badiou had seriously unfolded his theory of place for the first time in his book *Theory of the Subject*, the mathematical theory of categories gained its central philosophical significance with the *Logics of Worlds*, where it is made equal to the *phenomenology* of the world in the same manner as the mathematical theory of sets is made equal to the *ontology* of the pure being in his *Being and Event*. The trajectory of the tense relation between the pure and placed being in Badiou’s philosophy therefore advances as follows: in *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou sets out the contradictory relationship between the pure being and the general structure of place P ; in *Being and Event*, however, he is focused on the pure being as a being that is presented in the ontological form of a pure multiple; and in *Logics of Worlds*, the focus is again on the logic of place and the localised identity. Hence, it seems that there is a continuity between *Logics of Worlds* and *Theory of the Subject*, briefly interrupted by *Being and Event*. We must add, however, that there is nonetheless a moment in *Being and Event* where Badiou hints at the logic of place. Ontology refers to the structurability of a structure, whereby something of this structure is being structured as presented and consistent. Badiou named the process of structuration as the count-as-one, leading us to the presented multiple or situation. Any presented multiple is a situation where this situation is “the place of taking-place” that is indifferent to the elements of the set.²³ At this point, Badiou introduces two ways of comprehending situ-

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²² How this logic also remains crucially pertinent to the analysis of contemporary capitalism has been most recently highlighted by Uroš Kranjc. Cf. Uroš Kranjc, “On the Notions of Police/State (of Situation): An Economic Perspective in Light of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*”, *Critical Horizons*, 22 (3/2021), pp. 312–315.

²³ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 26.

ations: situations as *consistent presented multiples* and situations as *worlds*, as *the domain of models*.²⁴ What we are interested in is the situation comprehended as a world that is “the place of taking-place.”²⁵

According to set theory, belonging to a pure multiple is a formal way of saying that something is at all.²⁶ But to belong to a set simultaneously bears witness to the fact that something of the being is *placed in* the given set, that something of the being is situated and localised in relation to this set. In ontology, the elements of a pure set are also pure sets themselves and therefore one can build complex structures based on the pure form of a multiple. However, ontology does not question the form of a multiple, which is measured in relation to localisation. Hence, ontology is focused on the composition that can be formed with the elements of a set, but it tells nothing about their relation to this set. In this regard, it is possible to introduce a distinction between the proposition that a certain *x* is, that it *belongs* to situation *S*, and the proposition that *x* *exists*, that it belongs to *situation S*, “in so far as it exists, *x* is situated, it exists in a situation (or in several).”²⁷ In relation to the latter proposition, Badiou says, “the belonging of *x* to the situation is called its *appearance*.”²⁸

As opposed to the ontological form of the pure multiple, the phenomenological form points to the being placed in a situation; it points to how *x* “happens at some place”, how *x* appears. We must emphasise, however, that it is always the same being that is at stake: the being that is intrinsically thought as *the being qua being*, and the same pure being, thought as a being that is localised, *that is there*. The difference arises from the modus of thinking and the formal operations used by mathematics. In the first instance, the being is thought ontologically and this ontological thinking uses set theory to present the being axiomatically. In the second instance, the being is thought topologically, which

²⁴ Burhanuddin Baki, *Badiou's Being and Event and the Mathematics of Set Theory*, London, Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 71.

²⁵ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 26.

²⁶ For an interesting recent analysis of this see Rok Benčin “Rethinking Representation in Ontology and Aesthetics via Badiou and Rancière”, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 36 (5/2019), pp. 95–112.

²⁷ Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, trans. R. Brassier and A. Toscano, London and New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 181.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

is the kind of thinking that is at work in the mathematical theory of categories that uses the “topos” operator. According to Badiou, topological thinking is phenomenological, because it is the same to consider the appearing of the being and to consider the being as being-there. Hence the world is thought in relation to the placed, situated being, which is there. Taking place as such, the world is not limited to the coordinates of the physical space and time. Badiou also vigorously rejects Aristotle’s paradigm of the “natural place” to which the unmoved mover forces all natural things. “We will posit that there is no natural place.”²⁹ “Place” is a concern of logic and it is established by Russell’s paradox. Russell had demonstrated that the concept of universe, perceived as the Whole or a totality, is a contradictory concept. If we reject the Whole as inconsistent, we get the concept of the world. The world is necessarily localised. If there is no whole, there are multiple worlds. The logic of place is therefore not a logic of the “natural” distribution of places within a certain universal place, but rather an inevitable consequence of the fact that there is no general Place. The latter is an inconsistency, while the former is a consistency *in actu*. Appearing is logical precisely because logic is violent in a way that is logical only for logic: logic breaks inconsistency, forbids chaos, sanctions paradoxes, and forces inconsistency into consistency and order. And order is related to violence; *cosmos* is not given, but gained. The violence of logic is not conditioned or caused by anything; it is violence for no cause. This means that being does not appear through a deduction, but through the violence of contingency.

The world is a logical consistency and a consequence of the totality being inconsistent. As a consequence of logic, it does not need the work of a subject to be constituted. For its existence, it only needs a topological push, which happens as a pure contingency: “The fact that a multiple is in some way localized, such that the multiple-indifference of its being is assigned to a world, goes beyond the resource of this multiple-being as thought by mathematics. A sort of impetus, topological in essence, prevents the multiple from being merely what it is since, as what appears, it is *there* that it has to be what it is.”³⁰ Nothing in being qua being requires it to localise, as being is indifferent to its appearance. The topological push does not cause the multiple to appear, but rather causes the multiple’s *discontent* with *being what it is*. The indifferent form of the multiple

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²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, p. 30.

disregards its disinterest and its indifference: this indifference to indifference causes being to become interested and to move from indifference to difference. The first difference of being is that being is *there*. The first difference is therefore a topological, i.e. phenomenological, one.

In such a formalised concept of the world, there is no pathos towards the processes of death and dying. The world exists by way of its transcendental operations and these operations also constitute existence in the coordinates of the world. The existence of a multiple is measured in relation to a certain world and marks the degree of identity by which this identity appears identical to itself in this world. This degree can be minimum (in this case, we are dealing with “the inexistent”), maximum, or some intermediate degree between the minimum and the maximum of appearing. Death is not a category of being as such, but is rather something that happens to the existent, “an affection of appearing,”³¹ a transition from the positive degree of appearing of the existent to its minimum degree of appearing in relation to the world given. Death happens to the existent as something external, a consequence of a contingent cause. Here, Badiou does not consent to the idea that death is an intrinsic characteristic of the existent, that we are inevitably mortal beings; instead, he understands death as a logical correlation that contingently enforces itself upon the function of appearing: “At most we can accept that death is possible for it, in the sense that an abrupt change in the function of appearing may befall it and that this change may amount to a minimization of its identity, and thus of its degree of existence.”³²

At the same time, the central part of Badiou’s philosophy belongs to the doctrine of truths that offer the essential link between the world and subjective processes. According to this doctrine, truths are procedures that appear on the basis of the emerging of events and the subjective realisation of traces of these events. Truths are happening in the world, but are also exceptions in relation to the logics of these worlds, something that introduces a new arrangement of the given transcendental setting of the world. For our topic, however, the most important thing is that the whole attitude of the world towards death and life can be measured exclusively in relation to the eternal truths and their immortal subjective representatives. Paradoxically, it is only in the context of eterni-

³¹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 269.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 270.

ty and immortality that one can understand the concept of death. Within the framework of his theory of truths and subjects, Badiou offers concepts that enable us to think the anatomy of the world, such as resurrection, the body, and the organs of the body.

The Anatomy of the World

We demonstrated the concept of the world based on its topology, where we perceived the world more as a kind of unique topological network. By introducing the concept of subject and truth, we can add to the world a dimension of life, enriched by the concepts of body, organs, life, new birth, resurrection, death, mortifying drives, corpse, and dying. Thus, we are getting to the field of the anatomy of the world. The place for anatomy is exactly where the creation of truth and subjective invention are. As Badiou mentions in *Logics of Worlds*, Galois's mathematical discoveries in the field of algebra and Bourbaki's monumental mathematical treatise are inventions which are "more akin to an anatomy of the mathematical body than to a dynamics of its creation."³³ At the same time, Badiou does not persist with the word "anatomy", but instead subsumes the entire theory of bodies under the signifier of physics.

Badiou makes a systematic classification by which mathematics is ontology (a general theory of being), mathematical logic is phenomenology (a general theory of being-there) and physics covers the doctrine of truths and the general theory of change.³⁴ In a narrower sense, physics is a theory of the body that retroactively makes sense of the metaphysics Badiou introduces at the start of *Logics of Worlds* – the formal theory of the subject-without-object (without a body). In his "physics", Badiou points to the processes of the incorporation of subjective formalisms in the way that a body "is this very singular type of object suited to serve as a support for a subjective formalism, and therefore to constitute, in a world, the agent of a possible truth."³⁵ We must add, however, that by using the word physics, Badiou intends to simultaneously distance himself from biology. Even though Badiou speaks of the body as an organicity and devotes the last

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³³ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

³⁴ Badiou, Alain, *The Subject of Change: Lessons from the European Graduate School 2012*, D. Rousselle (ed.), New York and Dresden, Atropos Press, 2013, pp. 45–46.

³⁵ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 451.

chapter of his *Logics* to an analysis of the category of life, he nonetheless avoids defining biology as the main signifier of his theory of the body. At first sight, biology might seem to be more appropriate than physics, especially if one considers that modern biological discourse, in particular the branch of molecular biology of Jacques Monod and François Jacob, is explicitly critical of all forms of vitalism and animism, which are part of “the anthropocentric illusion”³⁶ of the science of life, thus compromising the scientific development of biology. The new science of life strives to set itself free from all the theological assumptions, the categories of the creationist force, and the *elan vital*. It perceives life as a *logic* that develops through random mutations and offers an anti-humanistic idea of life that would probably adhere well to Foucault’s paradigm of the “death of man” and Badiou’s radically anti-vitalistic idea of “in-humanism” from *The Century*.³⁷ Yet, Badiou chooses physics and not biology, because biology is a discourse strongly exposed to ideologisation.³⁸ Badiou discusses this in the preface to *Logics*, wherein he denotes democratic materialism as a *bio-materialism* or a *materialism of life*. The equation “existence = individual = body”³⁹ applies in bio-materialism, assuming a “natural belief” in the human “bare nature”, in the “natural law”, or some kind of a “biologised legality” as the carrier of rights. Badiou’s view of the ideology of “bare human nature” is strikingly illustrated by the following citation from his *Ethics*:

Considered in terms of its mere nature alone, the human animal must be lumped in the same category as its biological companions. This systematic killer pursues, in the giant ant hills he constructs, interests of survival and satisfaction neither more nor less estimable than those of moles or tiger beetles. He has shown himself to be the most wily of animals, the most patient, the most obstinately dedicated to the cruel desires of his own power. Above all, he has succeeded in harness-

³⁶ Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity. An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, trans. A. Wainhouse, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1971, p. 41.

³⁷ Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. A. Toscano, Cambridge, Polity, 2007, p. 178.

³⁸ This ideologisation can take place within the discourse of biologists itself, as Althusser directly demonstrated with the example of the discourse of the mentioned molecular biologist Jacques Monod. Cf. Louis Althusser, “Appendix: On Jacques Monod”, in L. Althusser, *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*, London and New York, Verso, 1990, pp. 145–166.

³⁹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 2.

ing to the service of his mortal life his own peculiar ability – his ability to take up a position along the course of truths such that he acquires an Immortal aspect.⁴⁰

The last sentence of the cited paragraph clearly expresses Badiou's position regarding the relation of life and death. Life is not so much opposed to the category of death as it is to the category of survival. A true life strives for truths, while survival is an ideological axiom of modern times, which is concerned only with the existence of body and languages, excluding any idea about the existence of eternal and universal truths. When Badiou, in the conclusion of his *Logics*, asks what it means to live a true life, he is asking about the kind of life that a human can live as a subject "participating in Immortality" and not as a human animal. Already in *Being and Event*, Badiou sets the thesis that nature as such does not exist (only natural situations exist), which also means that there is no human nature. The ruling ideology of bio-materialism, on the contrary, insists on the fragility of our nature, making of mortality a principal value and of life the central category of bio-ethics. "The conjunction of 'ethics' and 'bio' is *in itself* threatening"⁴¹ and leads to the proliferation of different "bio-discourses" that duplicate the category of life into the *bio(s)*-life. This fascination with controlling the mortality of life is nothing but a death wish or the death drive itself, resulting in different forms of mortifying survival.⁴² The alternative is to insist on the category of life that is not put under the signifier of *bios*, but rather under the signifier of *eidōs*, the idea: "Against this abolition of life-thought, philosophy declares that to live is to act so that there is no longer any distinction between life and Idea."⁴³ It means that we subjectify ourselves under the idea of the existence of truths through the form of a faithful subject that eliminates mortifying impulses and pursues truths.

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Whether the world is alive or dead depends on the forms of subjectivity, which are the bearers of the realisation and materialisation of truths in the world. The life and death of the world refer to the ability of the subject to act as a support of a certain process of truth. There are three forms of subjectivity (or three subject "formulas") that Badiou defines as the *faithful*, the *reactive*, and the *obscure*.

⁴⁰ Badiou, Alain, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. P. Hallward, London and New York, Verso, 2012, EPUB, Chapter 5, n. p.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 3, n. p.

⁴² Cf. Badiou, "Conclusion: What is it to Live?", in Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, pp. 507–514.

⁴³ Badiou, *Second Manifesto for Philosophy*, p. 14.

Regardless of its form of subjectivity, the subject always has an active relation to truth, even when it is determined to act against it. We will say, therefore, that the subject is an active form of the production or rejection of truth. Only the faithful subject works in the direction of the active production and realisation of truth. The reactive and obscure subjects work against life lived in the name of a truth. The problem is that when the faithful subject is constituted as bringing a world to life, the reactive and obscure subjects already act towards the mortification of this world. This brings us to Badiou's main point, namely: "we should note that the contemporaneousness of a figure of the reactive or obscure type depends on the minimal production of a present by a faithful figure. From a subjective point of view, it is not because there is reaction that there is revolution, it is because there is revolution that there is reaction."⁴⁴ Reaction is always a re-action to the revolution: "the denial of the present supposes its production, and its occultation supposes a formula of denial."⁴⁵ A political revolution, for example, is not simply a re-action against social oppression, but is first of all the production of a new political form, generating an uprising of the reactive and obscure spirits. Science provides good examples of how emerging new scientific theories can provoke extremely oppressing reactions, and long-term struggle is sometimes needed to establish new scientific perspectives and matrices.

It is the same with the concept of the world. The world is neither alive nor dead, if there is no subjectivity to think it, perceive it, feel it. When reflecting on the 20th century, Badiou identifies the subjectivity of the century exactly with the way the century understood and thought itself. How it was thought is revealed by examples from science, politics, and art, which are the four "truth procedures" according to Badiou's philosophy. Therefore, we have to be within the domain of a truth procedure in action to peek into the anatomy of the world – in this case, to be able to register that the letter of science murdered the world. But contrary to what might be expected, this truth procedure is not necessarily (only) science; we have also found an example of this in Rembrandt's masterpiece.

Returning to the Rembrandt's canvas, we can see the implicit reaction of the artist's subjectivity to the world of science. By skilfully using the *chiaroscuro* painting technique (the use of strong contrasts between light and shade), Rem-

⁴⁴ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 62.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

brandt created a special light that radiates from the dead man's body. The medical observers are presented in dark clothing, blending in with the shadow of the background, while the corpse has a spiritual light.⁴⁶ Here, we can observe how Rembrandt resolves the so-called "Rembrandt's dilemma". Rembrandt was a religious man, yet he portrayed a dissection of a dead man's arm. The Catholic church had condemned autopsy practices, since the resurrection principle required the burial of intact bodies. For this reason, Leonardo da Vinci was forced to dissect human bodies in secret. On the other hand, dissection was not only a common practice, but a public spectacle in Protestant Holland. The resolution of "Rembrandt's dilemma" is that Rembrandt had decided to paint the medical staff in dark nuances and the corpse in a shiny light. According to the tradition of painting in Holland, dark symbolised spiritual blindness and white symbolised purity. It is, therefore, telling that Rembrandt assigned light and holy purity to the corpse, while covering the representatives of science with darkness and spiritual blindness.⁴⁷ The corpse was that of Aris Kindt (an alias for Adriaan Adriaanszoon), who had spent his life as a criminal and also ended like one – he was executed for robbery. The X-ray analysis of Rembrandt's painting reveals that the right arm of the corpse was partially amputated at first. Legal practice in the 17th century sometimes demanded the amputation of limbs prior to execution, which may be the reason why Rembrandt painted the arm as amputated.⁴⁸ However, in the final version of the painting, the entire arm is painted, pointing us again to the possible interpretation that the artist was struck by the fate of the executed. Adriaan Adriaanszoon is presented in the light of and with the affection of the artist. He is a representative of those members of society that are usually attributed a hidden, minimised role of appearing and visibility, such as outcasts, tramps, criminals, and underprivileged individuals. It seems that Adriaan Adriaanszoon is not simply an object of anatomy, but a subject, a carrier of a symbolic connection very well known in Christianity: the connection (made visible only in death) between Jesus and the criminals executed alongside him on Golgotha.

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⁴⁶ Below, we refer again to the analysis of Adéla Janíčková, "Surgeon's hands in Vesalius's portraits and Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp*".

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Ijpm, *et al.*, "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp Painted by Rembrandt in 1632", p. 1060.

Let us dwell for a few more moments in the 17th century and look for another example in art. *The world has died* is a shocking thought announced by the poem suggestively entitled *The First Anniversary: An Anatomy of the World* (1611) by the English poet John Donne. Written for Donne's patron Sir Robert Drury, the poem talks about the death of Drury's fourteen-year-old daughter Elizabeth. What the poem shows is not simply the death of a young person, but the death of the world itself. The world dies with Elizabeth. The world collapses. Without her, the soul of the world, the world falls apart. The rest of the residents of the world act indifferently, as if nothing happened. But something did happen. And if there is no one to notice it, the world will be the one to grieve.⁴⁹ The world will become a subject of love that is grieving, collapsing, and dying.

But this world is also the old world, which is now changing religiously, metaphysically, and politically. New scientific and philosophical concepts are arising and bringing radically new perspectives of the universe itself. According to Alexandre Koyré, the 17th century brought about new concepts of the world; the idea of the world as a closed and harmonically organised totality was replaced by the modern idea of openness and the infinitisation of the universe. The new astronomy gradually replaced the geocentric concepts with heliocentric ones, a new scientific matrix was being born, arising from the geometrisation of space, the uniformity of the world, and the mathematisation of nature. These processes were not concurrent. The mixing of the old and new concept of the world had sparked different ambivalences and imaginaries. It is this tension that Donne's poem speaks of in the art medium. The poet feels that the old world is changing and slowly dying, and something new is coming. Protestantism is coming to England; the old dogmas in science are collapsing, new philosophies and concepts of the world are emerging. The poet is overwhelmed by ambivalent feelings, by curiosity and hope, by confusion, fear, and doubt about what is

⁴⁹ "This world, in that great earthquake languished; / For in a common bath of tears it bled, / Which drew the strongest vital spirits out; / But succour'd then with a perplexed doubt, / Whether the world did lose, or gain in this / (Because, since now no other way there is / But goodness, to see her, whom all would see, / All must endeavour to be good as she). / This great consumption to a fever turned, / And so the world had fits: it joyed, it mourned; / And as men think that agues physic are, / And th'ague being spent, give over care, / So thou, sick World, mistak'st thyself to be / Well, when alas, thou'rt in a lethargy." John Donne, "The First Anniversary: An Anatomy of the World", in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, R. Robbins (ed.), London and New York, Routledge, 2013, EPUB, n. p.

coming. All forms of subjectivity are present: Should we greet something new, even if we have no knowledge about what it will bring, or preserve at any price what is already known to us, and fight the novelty or even to deny it? The new philosophies (of Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler) bring something more than just interesting ideas. They are the beginning of something that will develop in a dominant paradigm of the world with Newton – an entirely different picture of the world from an integral, holistic, and teleological paradigm. Donne's *An Anatomy of the World* is perhaps a reaction to the coming analytical, rationalist, dissectional, anatomically-scientific view of the world, which was also a subject of Hegel's critique.

Both artistic examples, Donne's poem and Rembrandt's painting, point to two views of the world: the objective and the subjective. On one side, there is the cold, calculative, objective world of science; on the other, there is the artistic, religious, existentialist, and subjective experience of death, world, life. From the perspective of the artistic truth procedure, scientific discoveries may not be recognised as creating genuine and subjective productions, but are rather felt as invasive, objective mechanisms of the approaching inevitability that disregards the living and dying to which a work of art can react emotionally and melancholically. From this perspective, science is perceived to be on the side of the cold, external world, and art as the carrier and representative of internal, subjective, existential values. Science creates a dead world, while art is concerned with life.

However, looking at this through the prism of Badiou's philosophy, we can reject this dualism as superficial. We saw that due to its phenomenological-topological constitution, the world is simply an objective place that disregards death and perceives it as an existential value. Instead of one world, it would be correct to talk about an infinite number of worlds. These worlds can be understood in terms of cold, deadening objectivity. They are indeed objective as long as there are no events, no truths, and consequently no subjects appearing in them. But when an event happens, which can be an event of love, politics, science, or art (which Badiou considers to be truth procedures), the site of the given world transforms into an eventual site, into a place where something radical can happen. Whether something revolutionary will actually happen (which can only be revealed retroactively) depends on the forms of subjectivity that will either faithfully address and affirm the event in the production of a new form of a concrete truth, or deny and prevent the processes of truth from realising it. If the reac-

tive and obscure subject forms win, we get a mortifying world – a corpse of the world. On the contrary, with the active production of the event-emerging truth, a new world of a given truth procedure will emerge and arise. This means that the life and death of the world can only be followed in relation to the appearing of the concrete truth procedure.

In this text we have discussed the concept of the world – by aid of examples from Rembrandt and Donne – in the context of the artistic truth procedure, which brought us to the scientific world of anatomy. Without here going into the complex relation among individual truth procedures,⁵⁰ we can draw the conclusion that in the case of Rembrandt and Donne, what is at stake are not two distinct worlds of two separate truth procedures – the scientific and artistic – understood along the opposition of dead and alive, but rather that of one world of art, subjectively realised in a dynamic range of artistic critique, uncertainty, enthusiasm, resistance, curiosity, and compassion. From the perspective of art (and Hegel's philosophy), the world according to the model of (anatomical) science can be understood as a corpse; but we must note that from the perspective of science this is not an inevitable conclusion. According to Badiou's doctrine of truths, an event is always localised and refers to a specific truth procedure; meaning that what is an event in one truth procedure is not necessarily an event in another. If we were to delve deeper into the concrete procedure of scientific production, we might be able to follow the birth of new scientific theories that the faithful subjects of scientific truth advocate and thereby realise the birth of new scientific worlds. In this respect, what becomes a dead letter of science is not necessarily a corpse, a product of the mortifying production of reactive or obscure subjects, but something that comes alive exactly through the letter of science.

⁵⁰ We can thus note that one must look at truth procedures through the autonomy of their own subjective production. Every true procedure is autonomous in its field, which means that, for example, science cannot annihilate the possibility of the production of truth in the field of art or vice versa. Further analysis would definitely require us to develop this point more precisely and to concretely check the possibility that the production of the new and universal of certain truth procedures can provoke reactive and obscure subjectivities of other truth procedures.

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Nick Nesbitt*

Capital, Logic of the World

Alain Badiou's oeuvre sits uneasily astride a bewildering paradox. Badiou repeatedly asserts that the single most imposing impediment to our subjective access to truths, to our finite, yet substantial and materialist participation in the infinite, is the tyrannical domination of global social relations and subjectivity by the economic rationality of capitalism. In *Number and Numbers*, he writes: "Number governs the economy; and there, without a doubt, we find [...] the 'determination in the last instance' of its supremacy."¹ Similarly, in one of his most recent books, *Happiness*, he tells us that the good and real life, "*la vraie vie absente*" as Rimbaud writes in *Une saison en enfer*, is systematically reduced in the world of global capitalism to freedom to the specious freedom of consumerist choice: "Freedom is coded or precoded in the infinite shimmer of commodity production and in what monetary abstraction institutes on that basis."² In the face of this overdetermined and seemingly universal untruth, the name Badiou has steadfastly maintained to indicate the political dimension of the true life, is, of course, the "Idea of Communism".

And yet, for all that, one could assert with little exaggeration that Badiou's engagement with Marx's critique of political economy is a veritable empty set. Badiou's repeated, sustained, admiring and attentive engagement with this great thinker is, in other words, addressed almost univocally to the *political* Marx, the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto* and *The Civil War in France*. But if capitalism constitutes the dominant logic of our untrue world, and not merely a passing epiphenomenon, how can a reader hope to formalize the logic of the true life, life subtracted from the reign of commodity fetishism, without a systematic, formal construction of the categories and logic of the world of capitalism?

¹ Alain Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, trans. R. Mackay, Cambridge, Polity, 2008, p. 3.

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² Alain Badiou, *Happiness*, trans. A. J. Bartlett and J. Clemens, London, Bloomsbury, 2019, p. 43.

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Like Adorno's superficial comments in *Negative Dialectics* on capitalism as universal fungibility, Badiou's explicit pronouncements on capitalism are not false, but remain manifestly inadequate to the real complexity of their object, betraying only the vaguest sense of the complexity of the logic governing the valorisation of value, the many laws of the tendencies determining production, circulation, exchange, and accumulation that Marx painstakingly develops. We know as much as Badiou tells us about the logic of capitalism from even the first sentence of *Capital* volume one: that the form of appearance of social relations in which the capitalist form of production predominates is that of universal commodification and exchange.³

Now, this disinterest is of course odd coming from Badiou, who devotes meticulous care precisely to the formalization of his primary objects of inquiry in systematic, philosophical and mathematical-logical terms. But while this is the case, for example in *Logics of Worlds*, it is nonetheless striking that the worlds in question there, along with the events that break free from them remain either entirely generic, worlds as such, events as such, or else, constitute decidedly minor, even "baroque" subsets of what Marx called the general social forms (*gesellschaftliche Formen*) that govern social existence in any specific historical domain and period:

a country landscape in autumn, Paul Dukas's opera *Ariadne and Bluebeard*, a mass demonstration at Place de la République, Hubert Robert's painting *The Bathing Pool*, the history of Quebec, the structure of a galaxy [...] Rousseau's novel *The New Heloise* [...] Sartre's theatre, Julien Gracq's novel *The Opposing Shore* and the architectural form of Brasilia [or] a poem of Valéry.⁴

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To take two other examples of events named in *Logics of Worlds*, it is certainly the case that Toussaint Louverture and Schoenberg name world-historical events in the political and musical domains respectively. But in both these cases, there is no substantial demonstration of the structures either from which these events break free nor the worlds into which they subsequently open. Only the brief-

³ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. B. Fowkes, London, Penguin, 1976, p. 125.

⁴ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event, 2*, trans. A. Toscano, London, Continuum, 2009, p. 95.

est presentation of the Haitian Revolution, and nothing of the essence of slavery and capitalism in the Caribbean, arguably the logics governing these two worlds, before and after Toussaint Louverture. Similarly, in Badiou's "Scholium" to Book I of *Logics*, one finds no substantial demonstration of the logic of traditional western harmony and the various points and sites where Schoenberg ruptures this logic to implement two entirely novel operational procedures, free atonalism and dodecaphonic composition.

Now, no one can know everything, and it may be fine to leave the details to others, given the suggestive nature of Badiou's propositions. But my point is rather that while *Logics of Worlds* casts its remit explicitly as the apodictic exposition of the "logic of appearance" (*la logique de l'apparaître*) governing any world (and thus the plural of its title), none of the examples in *Logics of Worlds* in fact addresses the general logic and laws governing the forms of appearance of any specific object in *capitalism*. Perhaps Badiou simply is not interested in developing in his own terms the structural categories and logic of capital that Marx initiated. Indeed, Badiou often appears more interested in the novelty of events than the mundane regularity of dominant logic of the world: "Philosophy is asked to be capable of welcoming or thinking the event itself, not so much the structure of the world, the principle of its laws or the principle of its closure, but how the event, surprise, requisition, and precariousness can be thinkable in a still-rational configuration."⁵

I wish here to argue that Badiou has, in the three monumental volumes of *Being and Event*, in fact produced the materials for precisely such a logic, but in the form of an arsenal of concepts that remain to be precisely measured against Marx's critical and formal reproduction of capitalism, confronted with what Marx called his *Gedankenkonkretum*, a materialist, scientific "thought-concrete", the systematic exposition of which consumes the three volumes of *Capital*. In what follows, I will proceed in two moments, the first critical, the second comparative. While Badiou's disinterest in the logic of capitalism and Marx's *Capital* specifically constitutes a silence that traverses his entire oeuvre, this absence takes on a strongly symptomatic, spectral presence in the 1994–1995 seminar

⁵ Badiou, *Happiness*, p. 63.

recently translated to English as *Lacan: Anti-philosophy 3*.⁶ Secondly, and while I have elsewhere indicated certain general aspects in which Badiou's ontology reproduces certain fundamental gestures of Marx's materialist critique,⁷ here I wish to push this claim further and more strongly: while it is true that *Logics of Worlds* never discusses the logic of appearance that governs all *capitalist* things (i.e., commodities), we should nonetheless read *Logics* in a quite specific sense as the (objective, likely unintentional) abstract translation and formalization of Marx's *Capital*. In this view, *Capital* should quite simply be read as the systematic demonstration of the logic of what Marx calls the *capitalist social form*, which is to say in Badiou's jargon, as the logic of the appearance of things in the *capitalist world*. This will then entail two subsidiary claims: 1) that the notion of a materialist logic bears the same meaning for Marx and Badiou, and 2) that the domain Badiou calls a "world" encompasses what Marx calls *social form*. In a sense, then, this means nothing more, though nothing less, than subjecting *Logics of Worlds* to a Marxian torsion: what Badiou has neglected, Marx has in fact already accomplished (with his own specific formal, conceptual, and discursive means): the systematic, synthetic demonstration of the necessary forms of appearance of commodities in the capitalist social form.

Badiou's Lacan, Badiou's (Marx)

While Badiou fully grasps the essential nature of formal demonstration for Lacan, his 1994–1995 seminars circle around, and yet nonetheless betray a symptomatic repression or blindness regarding Marx's critique of political economy. In these lectures, Badiou explicitly names Marx alongside Lacan as occupying a very particular status in the pantheon of antiphilosophy, insofar as both Marx and Lacan mount a critique of philosophy and truth in the name of *science*, rather than Nietzsche's poetic utterances or Wittgenstein's language games. Despite this crucial insight, Badiou nonetheless remains symptomatically deaf in these lectures, as elsewhere, to Marx's scientific discourse – to *Capital*, that is to say.

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⁶ Alain Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-philosophy 3*, trans. K. Reinhard and S. Spitzer, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013.

⁷ Nick Nesbitt, "The Concept of the Commodity: Badiou and Marx, 1968/1989", in J. N. Berankova, M. Hauser, and N. Nesbitt (eds.), *Revolutions for the Future: May 68 and the Prague Spring*, Lyon, Suture, 2020, pp. 122–139.

This repression results in a highly problematic *suturing* in Badiou's discourse, a suturing of the ideological imaginary to a politics of the real. In suppressing any consideration of scientific discourse – whether of Marx's *Capital* or even Lacan's systematic demonstration in the 1950s of the structure of the unconscious, a demonstration that Badiou suggestively names a “hyperstructural axiomatic”⁸ – Badiou enacts a short-circuiting of analytical critique. The result of this suture as theoretical short-circuit is that politics in Badiou's *Lacan* seminar lacks any consequential formalization of the categorial structure of capitalism understood as social form, as the *value-forms of abstract labor*, that is to say. In its absence, politics can take the form not of a true act, but only and ever the mere acting-out of ideological fantasy.

This becomes eminently clear in what is for me the key passage in the entire seminar. Here is Badiou, citing Lacan's *Radiophonie*:

What Marxism has shown by its actual revolution: that there's no progress to be expected from truth, nor any well-being, but only the shift from imaginary impotence to the impossible, which proves to be the real by being grounded only in logic: in other words, where I claim the unconscious is located, but not so as to say that the logic of this shift shouldn't hasten the act.⁹

Badiou's commentary of this passage is revealing, both in what it says and does not say:

In short, in Lacan's view, Marx showed that, instead of philosophical fantasies about the good state or the good society, it was the logic of Capital that had to be identified at the point of the real. Marx's actual revolution is a liquidation of philosophy. *Should we say that Marx substituted a science or knowledge for the*

⁸ Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-philosophy* 3, p. 203.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, “Radiophonie”, cited at Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-philosophy* 3, p. 155. Note the tortuous, ambivalent grammar and tense structure of Lacan's original phrasing: “Ce que le marxisme a démontré par sa révolution effective: qu'il n'y a nul progrès à attendre de la vérité ni de bien-être, mais seulement le virage de l'impuissance imaginaire à l'impossible qui s'avère d'être le réel à ne se fonder qu'en logique: soit là où j'avertis que l'inconscient siège, mais pas pour dire que la logique de ce virage n'ait pas à se hâter de l'acte.” (Lacan cited at Alain Badiou, *Le Séminaire. Lacan: L'antiphilosophie* 3, 1994-1995, Paris, Fayard, 2013, p. 155.)

*philosophical imaginary? No, says Lacan, because we must maintain that the “logic of this shift” must “hasten the act.”*¹⁰

The first point to note in Lacan’s original statement is his indication of Marx’s refusal of “truth” and “well-being”. This formulation reiterates Lacan’s post-May ‘68 rejection of traditional, Leninist Marxism, as both a moralism of the proletariat as the universal class, and Bolshevism as a mere programmatic redistributionism of wealth. It is Lacan’s rejection of the Leninist misreading of Marx’s critique, the reduction of the critique of political economy to an ideological moralism of the working class in the form of a politicized redistribution of the wealth of production, in short, Left Ricardianism.¹¹ Leninist Left Ricardianism ignores Marx’s systematic demonstration of the laws of the tendencies of capitalism as a structure and social form, while the mere superficial forms of appearance of modes of market exchange become the target of political redistributionism.

It is clear from his many disparaging comments on the proletariat and proletarian politics after May ‘68, a number of which Badiou cites in the course of the seminar, that Lacan discounted all mythification of the proletariat as ideological, as what he calls here the “impotent imaginary.” Virtually no attention, including Badiou’s presentation, has been devoted to a number of brief but incisive comments Lacan makes on the formal logical structure of Marx’s analysis in *Capital* in the seminars from the 1950s, precisely the period when Lacan was elaborating his own systematic formalization of the symbolic structure of the unconscious. That said, Badiou rightly reads Lacan as here, in the wake of May ‘68, affirming in place of all utopian “philosophical reveries on the good state and good society” the systematic analysis of the structure of capitalism. The point though is that this work, both Lacan reading *Capital* and Lacan articulating his own structural demonstration of the nature of the unconscious, had occurred long before, in the 1950s seminars, a period of his thought Badiou studiously ignores in these seminars.

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¹⁰ Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-philosophy* 3, p. 132. My emphasis.

¹¹ This program is encapsulated by the famous Leninist slogan “Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country”, the redistribution, that is to say, of the wealth of production under the directives of the dictatorship of the proletariat, while leaving untouched, and even expanding as a general productivist imperative, the general social form that to this day demands the endless valorisation of value.

In this passage, Badiou reads in Lacan's assertion a rejection of philosophy ("no clamor of being or nothingness"), revealingly identifying Marx as an antiphilosopher of the same stripe as Lacan himself. In this vein, in order to analyze Lacan's assertion that philosophy merely plugs the hole of politics, Badiou had reminded his listeners of Marx's famous taking leave of philosophy in the eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it." While this disparagement of philosophy and truth casts both Lacan and Marx as antiphilosophers, they are, as Badiou points out regarding Lacan, different from all others in that for both, the rejection of philosophies of truth is enacted in the name of the rigor of scientific, apodictic demonstration; for Lacan, the demonstration of the structure of the unconscious, for Marx, the demonstration of the structure of capitalism.¹²

Badiou cites Lacan in a further development of what I would call Lacan's scientific antiphilosophy: "Thus the real differs from reality. This is not to say that it's unknowable, but that there's no question of knowing about it, only of demonstrating it."¹³ Here, and although his name is never mentioned in the whole of Badiou's seminar, we are resolutely on the terrain of Spinoza. Not the Nietzschean misreading of Spinoza as an invocation of the mere affect of beatitude as a joyful wisdom or Gay Science, but the precise categories of adequate knowledge that Spinoza terms the general and the intuitive (the imaginary remaining

¹² In articulating his critique of Freudian Ego-psychology, Lacan had striven to give a materialist turn to the notion of the symbolic, one that draws it into more direct proximity to Marx's Spinozist, materialist dialectic. In his 1954 Seminar II, Lacan displaced the process of signification from the intentionality of a subject, to argue instead that the figures of machine language (cybernetics) offered a perfect illustration of the function of the Symbolic. Lacan there reduces meaning (*le sens*) to the logical assemblage and concatenation of signs, the purely formal relation of logical marks, such that Lacan can assert that "the symbolic world is the world of the machine." Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, trans. S. Tomaselli, New York, Norton, 1991, p. 47. The symbolic, as Lacan formulated it at this point, is understood to constitute an asubjective system of codes that are supported, in Lacan's example, by the materiality of computing (rather than the intentionality of an ego). In this view, the Lacanian symbolic would constitute the asubjective system of meaning into which we are thrown, to be interpellated as subjects of Capital.

¹³ Jacques Lacan, "Radiophonie", cited at Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-philosophy 3*, p. 151. "Ainsi le réel se distingue de la réalité. Ce, pas pour dire qu'il soit inconnaissable, mais qu'il n'y a pas question de s'y connaître, mais de le démontrer." (Lacan cited at Badiou, *Lacan: L'antiphilosophie*, p. 178.)

a necessary, but wholly inadequate form of knowledge, as we first learn in the famous Appendix to Book I and more fully in Book II of the *Ethics*). If Lacan is an antiphilosopher, Spinoza nonetheless remained the crucial formative philosophical reference for Lacan, prior to Hegel and Kojève, most explicitly in the 1932 dissertation, where the entire presentation is framed by citations and analyses of key propositions from the *Ethics*. No less is Spinoza the crucial reference to grasp Marx's epistemology of the substantial unity of the real and the synthetic production of analytic thought, as Althusser and Macherey famously argued in their analysis of the 1857 Introduction in *Reading Capital*.

It was Spinoza whose demonstrations already put Hegelian negative dialectics in its proper place: things (such as the unconscious or capital) adequately grasped in their singular essences, know no contradiction or negation. Here is Badiou:

The real is the remainder of the disjunction between the knowable and the unknowable. Here we take the measure of the anti-dialectical dimension of every anti-philosophy: the point of the access to the real cannot be reached negatively. As compared with knowable reality, no negation procedure provides any access to the real.¹⁴

Contradiction adequately understood is a figure of experience, of the forms of appearance of things. While this has been well-understood of the unconscious since Freud's *Traumdeutung*, in Marx's case, we witness across the development of the critique in the wake of the dialectical Hegelianism of the *Grundrisse* a series of theoretical revolutions in the notes and manuscripts of the 1860s and 70s, in which what Jacques Bidet has called various Hegelian theoretical impediments (the identity and non-identity of production and consumption, for example, or the merely apparent contradiction between the exchange of equivalents and the realization of surplus value) are removed and in their place Marx develops, or tends increasingly to develop in his unfinished masterpiece, the full relational complexity of the laws of the tendencies and counter-tendencies as they determine the increase in the organic composition of capital. Not the mere falsity, but the absolute necessity governing the phenomenal, fetishistic forms of appearance of capital (profit, rent, finance, for example).

¹⁴ Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-philosophy* 3, p. 152.

Adequate knowledge, knowledge of both the general laws governing the unconscious as well as of the essence of any singular case, governs Lacan's understanding of analysis. While in the *Écrits* and seminars Lacan develops a systematic exposition of the structure of the unconscious, it is no accident that we are left, as Badiou laments toward the end of the seminar, without a theory of the act. For the analytic act occurs on the register of Spinoza's third, intuitive mode of knowledge, as the knowledge of the singular essence of any given case. We cannot know what to do in the case of a given, real analysis, no matter how adequate our knowledge of the laws governing the structure of the unconscious may be. We can only approach the real of a given subject via an adequate understanding of the singular essence of that case, a process which indeed requires, along with the scientific mastery of general laws, an improvisational genius attendant to Spinoza's third genre of knowledge.¹⁵

Badiou's commentary is revealing: "Although the real, as distinct from reality, is exempted from the knowable, which is the essence of reality, the real nevertheless does not end up being the absolute unknowable but is instead exposed to being demonstrated."¹⁶ "Demonstration" is arguably the key epistemological concept in the French tradition from Cavailles and Koyré to Althusser and Badiou himself. Beyond the knowable and the unknowable, lies not the will to power, or language games, but the adequate, asubjective, apodictic demonstration of the essential necessity governing an object of knowledge such as the unconscious.

All this is, I think, a fully adequate reading of these two typically enigmatic Lacanian pronouncements that Badiou cites. The problem, however, arises in

¹⁵ In the third section of "L'Unique tradition matérialiste", Althusser – in the course of a broad reflection on the centrality of Spinoza to his thinking – turns to Spinoza's invention of an adequate materialist ("nominalist") knowledge, a knowledge Althusser argues encompasses Spinoza's discovery of "generic constants or invariants [...] which arise in the existence of singular 'cases'." Such constants are to be distinguished from the universal generality of "laws", (which would fall under Spinoza's second genre of knowledge); equally, it is their genericity as constants of any singular case that allows for what Althusser revealingly calls in clinical terms their "treatment", as distinct from any empirical or experimental verification. See Louis Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza", in W. Montag and T. Stolze (eds.), *The New Spinoza*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, pp. 3–20.

¹⁶ Badiou, *Lacan: Anti-philosophy* 3, p. 151.

Badiou's final gesture: "Should we say," Badiou concludes, "that Marx substituted a science or knowledge for the philosophical imaginary? No, says Lacan, because we must maintain that the 'logic of this shift' must 'hasten the act'."¹⁷ Where in the original text Lacan loads his typically baroque pronouncement with ambiguous negatives and subjunctive conditionals ("Be there where I announce that the unconscious reigns, but not to say that the logic of this turn may not hasten to the act") Badiou declares an unambiguous imperative to proceed directly to the political act itself. This "*devoir*" ("we *must* [on doit] maintain that the logic of this shift *must* [doit] hasten the act"), this obligation Badiou imposes on Lacan's ambiguity betrays a problematic disinterest – in fact an extraordinary indifference given the systematic, logicist nature of Badiou's philosophy – in scientific knowledge of the object. It is at this point that Badiou's interpretation becomes not merely problematic, but wholly symptomatic, symptomatic of a general oblivion and lack of engagement not only with Lacan's scientific discourse on the structure of the unconscious from the 1950s, but above all with Marx's *Capital* specifically.

Even more surprising, it is Badiou himself who makes precisely this point, presented in terms of traditional Marxism's lack of engagement with Marx's categorical demonstration, when he summarizes Lacan's critique of the political Marx in the following terms: "Politics is glued to meaning, and, insofar as it's glued to meaning, it makes an imaginary, or if you will, religious, hole in the real of Capital."¹⁸

In the absence of any substantial engagement with Marx's scientific demonstration on Badiou's part and the rush to pronounce the imperative of the political act, Marx himself is reduced to a mere (hysterical) political activist, and revolutionary desire remains "stuck" to mere ideological meaning, overdetermined by the empty, even "religious" hope of moving beyond capitalism to something called communism.

Strictly speaking, there is no discourse of politics. And it's because there isn't any that, in fact, politics always makes a hole in the discourses. And more precisely in

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

what, in these discourses, is based on imaginary consistency, or, in other words, is based on semblance.¹⁹

The complexity of social form, of capitalism as the social logic of compulsory valorisation, is reduced to mere imaginary ideological semblance, both in traditional Marxism (as Lacan and Badiou both note), as well as in Badiou's own suturing of politics to the Idea of Communism. In the face of the immense theoretical complexity and simultaneous abstraction of Badiou's logic of worlds and events, how is one to know where the weak points and sites lie in the capitalist system, what constitutes its weakest links and limits? How to organize and articulate political militancy without an adequate understanding of the social form that is its object? The result of such reflexive politics invites the very conclusion Lacan never tired of bestowing on the pseudo-events of May '68: the mere acting out of imaginary desires sutured immediately to the inflammatory act and the messianic hope that the system would magically crumble: "Sous les pavés, la plage."

This brings us directly and imperatively to the limits of any formalization of the world of capital, to the very problem Badiou terms the "*recherche du réel perdu*", the search for the capitalist real. There is, in other words, a capitalist Real, in the strong, Lacanian sense of the term. In *À la recherche du réel perdu*, Badiou draws on Lacan to argue that the capitalist "real" is no mere empirical, ready-at-hand substance or experience of the everyday; instead, the capitalist real consists of the very impasse or impossible limit of capital understood as a process of formalization.²⁰ I would argue, though, that a more appropriate proper name for this real is not equality, as Badiou suggests. Equality is certainly a necessary subcategory of the capitalist real – for example in capitalism's dependence upon abstract labor as the substance of value. The essential conclusion of *Reading Capital* still holds: we do not yet truly live as more than the subjects (*Träger*) of what Marx named the "automatic subject": subjects of the general social structure of compulsion that he formalized as the system of *Capital*. To live, then, beyond mere fleeting intimations of life in evental moments such as 1789 and 1804, the Paris Commune and May '68, requires the deployment of a politics adequate to the demands of such events as a general possibility, the transformation of the transcendental categories of social structuration and subjectivity themselves,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 118, translation modified by N. N.

²⁰ Alain Badiou, *À la recherche du réel perdu*, Paris, Fayard, 2015.

toward the construction of a post-capitalist transnationalism, one that surpasses the mortal crisis of valorization that is the actuality of posthuman capitalism and its real and attendant threat of anthropocenic catastrophe.

Badiou himself eloquently describes such an orientation as our finite participation in the infinity of Number, real and true life, that is, beyond the tyranny of mere numericality:

To think Number [...] restores us, either through mathematics, which is the history of eternity, or through some faithful and restrained scrutiny of *what is happening*, to a supernumerary hazard from which a truth originates, always heterogeneous to Capital and therefore to the slavery of the numerical. It is a question, at once, of delivering Number from the tyranny of numbers, and of releasing some truths from it. [...] It proceeds, effectively and theoretically, to the downfall of numbers, which are the law of the order of our situation.²¹

“Qu'en est-il de la logique?”: Reading Logics of Worlds After Capital

Let me restate in the most deliberate terms the paradox that determines the limits of Badiou's philosophical and political critique: on the one hand, Badiou clearly and repeatedly states the obvious, that the overarching and predominant form of contemporary global social relations is, quite simply, capitalism. Most recently, for example, Badiou has repeated this in the form of an axiomatic truism: “Allow me to begin [...] from a perfectly banal conviction: the dominant socio-economic structure, which is today in place at a global scale, is capitalism. Everyone, or nearly so, agrees.”²² Who could disagree? On the other hand, while I have argued above that the corresponding absence of any concrete *analysis* of the capitalist social form on Badiou's part occasionally, as in the Lacan seminars, reaches symptomatic proportions, the one moment where one would most expect such an engagement with “the dominant socio-economic structure” that governs the contemporary world is precisely in Badiou's second magnum opus, *Logics of Worlds*. Instead, in the vast complexity of its 638 pages comprising sev-

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²¹ Badiou, *Number and Numbers*, p. 214.

²² Alain Badiou, “Comment vivre et penser en un temps d'absolu désorientation?”, talk given at La Commune Aubervilliers, October 4, 2021. Transcription available at http://www.entretemps.asso.fr/Badiou/21-22.html?fbclid=IwAR1oOVauXtOuGfACRHijSXrDLmBzDgRf87r pEQxokTe__gzC-5PakoiHack, accessed 21 November 2021. My translation.

en books and dozens of chapters, alongside the analyses of worlds from painting to poetry, mathematics to music, love and revolutions past and present, the word *capitalism* appears exactly once, in a banal and utterly indeterminate aside, when Badiou early on castigates the *nouveaux philosophes* of the 1970s for their ideological role in the unleashing of “an unbridled capitalism.”²³

Stated as such, this stunning absence from a book proposing to analyze with abundant examples the logic governing the forms of appearance of things in any world would amount to no more than a final *pièce de conviction* in an absurd and illegitimate condemnation of the author of some 200 books for not having talked about a topic of particular interest to this reader; were it not that *Logics of Worlds*, without ever explicitly mentioning capitalism, in fact provides the means precisely and adequately to understand the philosophical status of Marx’s critique of the political economy of capitalism as a *materialist logic*. To reread *Capital* after *Logics of Worlds*, to read its three volumes as a *logic* of capital, is to account for its status as an utterly contemporary presentation of a materialist logic of the dominant structure of the world. In this vein, Badiou recasts and precisely delimits logic, after Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel, after the linguistic turn of analytic philosophy, as what he calls the “science of the forms of appearance” (*la science de l’apparaître*) of objects in any world. In the case of capitalism, following Marx, this will mean quite simply to grasp the precise ontological status of the critique of political economy, understood as the science of the necessary forms of appearance of value in the capitalist social form, as, in other words, Marx’s *monetary labor theory of value*.

“*Qu’en est-il de la logique?*”, “What then of logic?” Badiou asks in his theoretical prolegomenon to *Logics of Worlds*, the 1998 *Court traité d’ontologie transitoire*.²⁴ To answer this question will require that Badiou reconceive the ontological status of logic – this is the project of the *Short Treatise* – which will then allow him to deploy this new, *categorical* logic of the forms of appearance of things in any given world in *Logics of Worlds*. Badiou is forced to turn to the problematic status of logic in the wake of *Being and Event* because, he argues, that book

²³ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 55.

²⁴ Translated as Alain Badiou, *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*, trans. N. Madarasz, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2006, p. 153, translation modified by N. N.

left unaddressed a crucial aspect of any ontology: the being-there, existence, and forms of appearance of beings that manifest themselves in any determinate situation:

My goal [in *Logics of Worlds*] is to define what existence is [...] and to introduce the fundamental philosophical difference between being [the subject of *Being and Event*] and existence. [...] *Logics of Worlds* is the logic of existence. It establishes the possibility of the logic of existence; that is, the possibility of different forms of singularity, of different forms of relationship between a multiplicity and a world in which this multiplicity is localized.”²⁵

To “establish the possibility of the logic of existence,” Badiou first steps back in the *Short Treatise* to condense the problem of logic in the form of an axiomatic decision between “Plato or Aristotle.”²⁶ Either logic remains integrally linked to the Idea of mathematical truths, as it does for Plato, he argues, or, in the case of Aristotle, “thought is the [mere] construction of an adequate descriptive framework,” the weaving together, in the form of demonstrations that construct a “purely ideal” set of admissible consecutions, an aesthetic “art of calculation.”²⁷ In Badiou’s reading, Aristotle’s logic remains ontologically determined (“For Aristotle, ontology prescribes logic”) in a manner analogous to that of Frege, whom Badiou had critiqued in the crucial Meditation 3 of *Being and Event*.²⁸

Badiou’s initial presentation would seem to relegate Aristotelean logic to the dustbin of the history of philosophy, but in fact, surprisingly (and crucially in the case of Marx, for whom Aristotle, not Plato, stands as “the greatest thinker of Antiquity”²⁹), this refoundation of logic as a categorial science of appearances will ultimately refashion Aristotle for a contemporary logic of worlds. To do so, Badiou must address the immediate object of his critique, the linguistic turn of logic since Bolzano and Frege. Badiou formulates this critique as a second contrast, one that forces an axiomatic philosophical orientation: logic will either be understood as the syntax of a linguistic semantics or, as Badiou will propose, as a *categorial* logic, in which among plural “universes” (a term he will subse-

²⁵ Alain Badiou, *Sometimes, We Are Eternal*, Lyon, Suture, 2019, pp. 103, 105.

²⁶ Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, p. 105.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 102, translation modified by N. N.

²⁸ See Nesbitt, “The Concept of the Commodity”.

²⁹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 532.

quently replace with “worlds” in *Logics*) each necessarily bears its own singular logic as an immanent, “internal dimension.”³⁰

Key to this categorial reconceptualization of logic is the notion of the plurality of worlds and their attendant logics (as the title *Logics of Worlds* will forcefully proclaim). Given that, as Russell’s Paradox first determined, there exists no set of all sets, no totality of worlds (what Badiou will call in *Logics* the “universe” of worlds), there can correspondingly exist no single logic that would govern the existence of all beings. Instead, logics in their plurality must be conceived of as necessarily *local*:

It is an essential property of the existent qua existent [*de l’étant en tant qu’étant*] that there can exist no totality of beings, in so far as they are thought uniquely from their beingness [*étantité*]. A crucial consequence of this property is that every ontological investigation is irremediably *local*. In fact, there can exist no demonstration or intuition bearing upon Being as the totality of beings, or even as the general site in which beings are disposed.³¹

This plurality of logics that Badiou will formalize in *Logics of Worlds* is not only a necessary characteristic of any adequate materialist logic since Cantor, but, I would add, indicates the relevance of a *categorial* logic to Marx’s critique of political economy. Any world and its attendant logic of the existence of beings must, Badiou argues, necessarily be local and contingent; there exists, Marx argues analogously, no overarching ontology or anthropology of production, labor, or commodities and their value as such, understood transhistorically. Each of these and other categories of political economy always necessarily exist within a historically and conceptually distinct “social form” (*gesellschaftlich Form*) (feudalism, capitalism, communism, etc.).³²

³⁰ Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, p. 113.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161, translation modified by N. N.

³² This is among the key points Moishe Postone first developed in his influential critique of traditional, Left Ricardian Marxism, to substitute instead a reading of Marx as what he calls a “categorial” critique: “I use ‘categorial’ to refer to Marx’s attempt to grasp the forms of modern social life by means of the categories of his mature critique. [...] A categorial reinterpretation, therefore, must focus on Marx’s distinction between value and material wealth; it must show that value is not essentially a market category in his analysis, and that the ‘law of value’ is not simply one of general economic equilibrium.” Moishe

The principal consequence of Badiou's categorial reformulation of logic as a plurality of situated logics is therefore that to the description of any given world there correlates a specific structure of logic: "The descriptive characterization of a thinkable ontological state induces certain logical properties, which are themselves presented in the space of Being, or the universe, that thought describes."³³ This categorial reformulation allows Badiou to escape the formalist dead-end of the linguistic turn of modern logic³⁴ and to construct a novel "contemporary theory of logic." When logic is no longer understood as a normative syntax, but instead as an "immanent characteristic" of possible worlds, it escapes its reduction to the status of a formal science of adequate discourse, to regain instead the ontological dimension it had born from Aristotle to Hegel, but now relegated to its limited and proper domain, as the science of possible worlds according to the "cohesion" or necessary forms of appearance therein.

The final consequence of this reformulation is thus that the remit of logic becomes necessarily limited to the ontological domain of existence, with logic understood specifically as the science of the necessary *forms of appearance* of any existing object in a given world.³⁵ Since a necessary aspect of Being is that it must take on forms of appearance,³⁶ and since in this view "the essence of appearance is relation," categorial logic can thus demonstrate how any given

Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 17, 123.

³³ Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, p. 113, translation modified by N. N.

³⁴ "For a long time I had believed this superseding of Platonism involved a destitution of formal logic as the royal path by which we have access to rational languages. Accordingly, and so deeply French in this respect, I rallied to the suspicion that, in the minds of Poincaré and Brunschvicg, was cast upon what they called 'logistics.'" *Ibid.*, pp. 159–160.

³⁵ Badiou defines appearance as follows: "what links a being to the constraint of a local or situated exposure of its manifold-being we will call the 'appearing' of this being [*l'apparaître de cet étant*]." *Ibid.*, p. 162, translation modified by N. N.

³⁶ Badiou restates this Hegelian point categorically and without demonstration, but, against both Kant and Hegel, in the form of an asubjective phenomenology: "It is the being of the existent to appear [*Il est de l'être de l'étant d'apparaître*], insofar as the totality of Being does not exist. [...] Appearing in no way depends on space or time, or more generally on any transcendental field whatsoever. It does not depend on a subject whose constitution would be presupposed. The manifold of beings [*L'étant-multiple*] does not appear for a subject. Instead, it is rather the essence of a being to appear as soon as, unlocalizable within the whole, it must assert the value of its being-multiple [*fasse valoir son être-multiple*] from the point of view of a non-whole." *Ibid.*, translation modified by N. N.

world can both be in its pure, inconsistent multiplicity (as *Being and Event* had described), as well as intrinsically determined as the existence of beings and their attendant and necessary forms of appearance. This affirmation of the strict equivalence of logic and appearance then becomes a shibboleth in *Logics of Worlds* (“‘Logic’ and ‘appearance’ are one and the same thing”) such that for Badiou the compass of any given logic, as it governs the existence of things in any singular world as such (rather than a particular world or social form such as capitalism), remains strictly limited to the laws that determine the “cohesion of appearing.”³⁷

Logics of (Capitalist) Worlds

Following his refoundation of contemporary logic as the science of appearing (“science de l’apparaître”) in the *Short Treatise*, *Logics of Worlds* sets itself the consequent task of grasping “the requirements of a contemporary materialism” in the form of a systematic “materialist logic.”³⁸ To do so, Badiou sets forth in the crucial second book of *Logics* what he calls a “Greater Logic” (*Grande logique*), which he defines as “a materialist theory of the coherence of what appears.”³⁹ This Greater Logic takes the form of an exposition and demonstration of the concepts required for the apprehension of the existence, or “being-there” (*être-là*) (Badiou uses the terms interchangeably) of any multiplicity whatsoever. If *Being and Event* had articulated Badiou’s understanding of ontology as such, *Logics* turns to the subordinate problem of the “worldly” existence of any being, apprehended not as pure multiplicity, but according to the laws governing its appearance or “localization” in the form of a general theory of objects and relations:

The mathematical theory of the pure multiple doubtless exhausts the question of the being of a being, except for the fact that its appearing – logically localized by

³⁷ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, pp. 100–101. “We are speaking here of any appearing whatsoever in any world whatsoever. In other words, our operational phenomenology identifies the condition of possibility for the worldliness of a world, or the logic of the localization for the being-there of any being whatever.” *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94. This “Greater Logic” Badiou distinguishes from “ordinary logic, [i.e.] the formal calculation of propositions and predicates” which he considers a mere subset of Greater Logic as such. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

its relations to other beings – is not ontologically deducible. We therefore need a special logical machinery to account for the intra-worldly cohesion of appearing.⁴⁰

It is thus the task of *Logics*' Greater Logic to set forth this "logical machinery" in the form of a novel series of concepts or "logical operators", the functions that provide any world with its singular coherent forms of appearance, the most important of which for this task is what Badiou names, after Kant, the "transcendental".⁴¹

Reasserting in the wake of Russell's paradox the inexistence of totality as a necessary and governing condition of any contemporary materialist logic, *Logics* analyzes both worlds and their attendant logics in their plurality.⁴² One of the few significant differences between the refoundation of logic in the *Short Treatise* and its systematic exposition in *Logics* is a terminological one. Where the *Short Treatise* spoke ambiguously of multiple "universes," in *Logics* Badiou reserves this term to indicate not a world but only the inexistence of the Whole figured as an empty set or void (*le vide*).⁴³ In its place, he substitutes the more precise term of "world", and crucially indicates by this not a material, extensive space to be filled with beings, but instead only the governing *logic* of that world.⁴⁴ This is to formalize the concept of world in the order of thought, to grasp the real struc-

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 121–122.

⁴¹ In explicit contrast to the Kantian transcendental subject, Badiou's materialist logic is radically pre-subjective, and necessarily so, since Badiou's conception of the subject – which Book I of *Logics* further articulates in the wake of the formal simplicity of the concept in *Being and Event* – appears in subtraction from the governing logic of any world as the bearer, faithful or otherwise, of an Event: "The transcendental that is at stake in this book is altogether anterior to every subjective constitution, for it is an immanent given of any situation whatever. [...] It is what imposes upon every situated multiplicity the constraint of a logic, which is also the law of its appearing, or the rule in accordance with which the 'there' of being-there allows the multiple to come forth as essentially bound." *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁴² Russell's 1902 Paradox, Badiou summarizes, "means that it is not true that to a well-defined concept there necessarily corresponds the set of the objects which fall under this concept. This acts as a (real) obstacle to the sovereignty of language: to a well-defined predicate, which consists within language, there may only correspond a real inconsistency (a deficit of multiple-being)." *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴³ "We will call universe the (empty) concept of a being of the Whole." *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴⁴ "A world is not an empty place – akin to Newton's space – which multiple beings would come to inhabit. For a world is nothing but a logic of being-there, and it is identified with the singularity of this logic". *Ibid.*

turation that allows for the manifestation of objects as they appear in sensuous lived experience.

The concept of the transcendental enables Badiou to pass, logically, from the inconsistency of any set in its abstract, “neutral” multiplicity, to account for the consistency in the existence of any object in a given world. Badiou develops this process in four steps, steps that correspond, in the abstract, to Marx’s initial and familiar demonstration of the basic categories of the commodity form in the first three chapters of *Capital*: use-value, exchange-value, value as such and its substance (abstract labor), along with the necessary form of appearance of any commodity, the price-form. These steps, given their high degree of abstraction in *Logics of Worlds*, can be rapidly summarized.

Badiou’s demonstration sets off from the ontological standpoint of *Being and Event*, and its description of the abstract multiplicity of the elements of any set in its bare neutrality.⁴⁵ To this corresponds Marx’s concept of the commodity’s use-value: every commodity possesses, and must possess if it is to be sold, its singular identity. The set of all commodities in the capitalist social form consists of an infinite variety of things, each of which – at this general level of abstraction of use-values as such – exists in its singularity, unique unto itself, in its abstract nature as use-value devoid of any systematic relation to other commodities, each existing in sheer externality to all others within this set. “The commodity is, first of all,” Marx writes, “an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind.”⁴⁶ The set of commodities taken solely as use-values refers each use-value to its singular possession of any given quality whatsoever, the only requirement being the most abstract one, that a commodity in fact have some use-value of whatever kind (lest it be unsellable, and thus, in the capitalist social form, worthless). Were we to reproduce capitalism analytically in this fashion as a structured totality of the Symbolic, a Badiouian rearticulation of the opening sentence of *Capital* might thus read: “The wealth of a society subject to the logic of the world of capitalism appears as a consistent multiplicity of commodities.” To posit being as the abstract mul-

⁴⁵ To initiate his Greater Logic, Badiou explicitly invokes this starting point: “Previously, I identified [in *Being and Event*] situations (worlds) with their strict multiple-neutrality. I now [in *Logics of Worlds*] also envisage them as the site of the being-there of beings.” *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴⁶ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 125.

tiplicity of the objects in any world entails for *Logics of Worlds* no more than a passing reference to *Being and Event* (“A multiple is only identical to itself, and it is a law of being-qua-being”).⁴⁷ Marx similarly spends a mere three paragraphs analyzing the use-value of commodities.

Exchange value, in turn, is the crucial category that in Marx’s demonstration initially explains how commodities can enter into relation with one another: the commodity form *requires* that materially distinct commodities, commodities *differing* in their nature as use-values, possess *identical* exchange values (in their relative amounts) in order to be exchangeable one for the other. Crucially, and even in Marx’s initial, abstract examples of simple exchange logically prior to the price form (“a quarter of wheat for example, is exchanged for x boot-polish, y silk or z gold”), each exchange requires a definite, numerical quantity through which it relates to all others.⁴⁸ While it is only with the price form that this quantity will *appear* as identical – if in the barter example “x boot-polish, y silk or z gold,” the variables x, y, and z all constitute different amounts, the dollar value of two exchangeable commodities must be identical – the key point to note here is simply the necessity of this numerical count.

Badiou analogously characterizes a necessary quantification as the degree of difference between any two things that appear in a world. “The logic of appearing,” he writes, “necessarily regulates degrees of difference, of a being with respect to itself and of the same with respect to others. These degrees bear witness to the marking of a multiple-being by its coming-into-situation in a world.”⁴⁹ Badiou argues that every object that exists in a world bears a certain degree of strength of its appearance in relation to all other existing things in that world. It

⁴⁷ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 155.

⁴⁸ Heinrich analyzes in extraordinary detail the various levels of abstraction in Marx’s presentation across the initial chapters of *Capital*, pointing out for example that in Chapter One (which I am discussing here), “Marx is analyzing a capitalistically produced commodity, which is normally exchanged for money, but he is doing so initially not only in abstraction from capital but also in abstraction from money [as well as from the human subjects that exchange commodities]. For that reason, Marx does not yet mention prices. The relation between the money price that we are familiar with in everyday life and exchange-value still has to be explained. [...] The object of inquiry, the ‘commodity,’ is not simply drawn from experience. Instead, it is constructed, by means of abstraction.” Michael Heinrich, *How to Read Marx’s Capital*, trans. A. Locascio, New York, Monthly Review Press, 2021, p. 53.

⁴⁹ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 118.

is this relational logic of a world that “regulates” the local manifestation of an object, “affecting a being with a variable degree of identity (and consequently of difference) to the other beings of the same world.”⁵⁰ While Badiou argues that this logic of the transcendental holds for any world whatsoever, his examples often remain obscure (what do we learn from an analysis of the relative strengths of appearance of the objects – leaves, a wall, a shadow – in a painting?), in the case of capitalism, it is luminously clear that every commodity, to be exchangeable, must bear a numerary exchange value that precisely determines its “strength of appearance” in the world of commodities and their exchange, in other words, its numerical price or exchange value. “There must exist values of identity which indicate, for a given world, to what extent a multiple-being is identical to itself or to some other being of the same world.”⁵¹

Marx asked for the first time why under capitalism labour must appear as what he called its “value-form” (*Wertform*), manifest as the price of labor power, and, furthermore, demonstrated how the formal equality of commodity exchange is nonetheless able to create surplus value. Money, in the form of exchange value (manifest as the price form), in this view, is no mere convention, but the key relational intermediary that governs and regulates social interaction under capitalism, crucially enabling the socialization of all private labor. Marx for the first time distinguished transhistorical, material-physiological processes of commodity production (concrete labor) from their specific social forms in a commodity-based society (as abstract labor, the “substance” of value). In this fashion, he demonstrated why in a society governed by commodity exchange, labor must take the historically distinct form of a monetary exchange value that Marx termed labor power. To count as a value in the capitalist social form, a concrete object or service must necessarily, by definition, have an exchange value, a value that can and must be manifested in the form of a price. A commodity without a price is simply not a commodity, regardless of whether we treasure or despise it.

The price form of a commodity, Marx crucially shows in the first three sections of *Capital*, is no mere nominal contrivance or clever invention to facilitate exchange, but is essential and absolutely necessary to the nature of the commod-

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

ity.⁵² Since the capitalist social form is axiomatically defined, in Marx's view, by the predominance of commodities and commodity relations, a thing without an exchange value simply cannot appear as a thing of value within that social form.⁵³ There is nothing mystical in Marx's mundane observation: that commodities require a price form is simply another of the necessary consequences of Marx's initial premise in the first sentence of *Capital*.⁵⁴ A thing on the store-shelf without a price, for example, simply cannot be exchanged for money, it remains a tangible thing, perhaps even a privately useful thing, but, under capitalist social relations, it cannot take the *social* form of an exchangeable *commodity*.

Marx is not content to describe the dual nature of the commodity as use- and exchange-value; he asks, furthermore, what is it that a numerical exchange-value actually measures? What in other words, constitutes the *substance of value* of a commodity? Marx's famous answer, *abstract labor*,⁵⁵ indicates a further point of congruence of Badiou's abstract logic of worlds with Marx's systematic demon-

⁵² See Patrick Murray, *The Mismeasure of Wealth: Essays on Marx and Social Form*, Chicago, Haymarket, 2017, p. 273. "For classical labour theory," Murray writes, "labour of whatever social sort was the source of value, and money was an afterthought, a 'ceremonial form,' as Ricardo called it; the answer to a merely technical problem." *Ibid.*, p. 278. Marx vehemently rejected and critiqued such monetary nominalism of Proudhon and his followers such as Darrimon in the first section of the *Grundrisse*.

⁵³ "All other commodities relate to [the general equivalent] as their expression of value. It's only this act of 'relating' within the world of commodities that makes a certain commodity into the general equivalent, thus endowing it with the ability to buy everything. Importantly, this 'relating' is not at all accidental or arbitrary; it is necessary, for only by relating to a general equivalent can commodities relate to each other as values." Heinrich, *How to Read Marx's Capital*, p. 143.

⁵⁴ "The busiest streets of London," Marx observed matter of factly in the 1859 "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", "are crowded with shops whose show cases display all the riches of the world, Indian shawls, American revolvers, Chinese porcelain, Paisian corsets, furs from Russia and spices from the tropics, but all of these worldly things bear odious, white paper labels with Arabic numerals and then laconic symbols £ s. d. This is how commodities are presented in circulation." Cited at Murray, *The Mismeasure of Wealth*, p. 471. See Heinrich, *How to Read Marx's Capital*, pp. 92–143, for an extraordinarily meticulous, word-by-word analysis of Marx's demonstration of the logical and materialist necessity governing Marx's monetary labor theory of value.

⁵⁵ "How, then, is the magnitude of this value to be measured? By means of the quantity of the 'value-forming substance', the labour, contained in the article [...] The labour that forms the substance of value is equal human labour, the expenditure of identical human labour-power." Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 129.

stration of the singular logic of the capitalist social form, as what Badiou calls the scale (*échelle*) of evaluation of the strength of appearance of any object. An object's indexification to a transcendental, what Badiou calls its "function of appearance", must, he argues, offer a numerical measure of something. What, in other words, does the degree of a transcendental measure? Badiou's answer is perfectly agnostic, given the abstract level of his analysis, and yet its relevance to Marx's analysis of the substance of value in the capitalist social form is uncanny:

But what are the values of the function of appearing? What measures the degree of identity between two appearances of multiplicities? Here too there is no general or totalizing answer. The scale of evaluation of appearing, and thus the logic of a world, depends on the singularity of that world itself. What we can say is that in every world such a scale exists, and it is this scale that we call the transcendental.⁵⁶

Translating Badiou's jargon to Marx's analysis, we can say that the quantitative degree of strength of an object, what Marx calls a commodity's exchange value, is the monetary form of appearance of the substance of value of that commodity, what Badiou terms the scale of values inhering in any world. In capitalism, this scale is simply the price or exchange-value of any commodity.

Capitalist society, Marx argues, is that specific historical epoch in which every thing and relation that counts as a value must bear a monetary price. "In this form," Marx concludes, "when they are all counted as comparable with the [general equivalent, money], all commodities appear not only as qualitatively equal, as values in general, but also as *values of quantitatively comparable magnitude*." Any commodity, under the general, monetary form of value, can thus *relate* to any other through its *equation* with the universal equivalent: X (quantity) of (any given commodity) $a = \$1$. This, the general capitalist form of appearance of value, is quite simply the price form: in Marx's example, "20 yards of linen = 2£".⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 156.

⁵⁷ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp. 159, 163. Emphasis added by N. N.

Here we should note that Badiou furthermore argues, again analogously to Marx, that the existence of the things composing any world forms a *relational system*; no single thing can exist on its own. Rather, the logic of the necessary forms of appearance of things in a world necessitates a relational order: “What is measured or evaluated by the transcendental organization of a world is in fact the degree of intensity of the difference of appearance of two beings in this world, and not an intensity of appearance considered [ontologically] ‘in itself’.”⁵⁸ Badiou’s transcendental logic of appearance of any world demands that each thing that appears in that world do so in relation to all other things; the intensity of appearance of one thing must be relational, “measured by the intensity of appearance of one of them.”⁵⁹ This “conjunction,” Badiou states, is “carried” by one of the two things in relation. The parallelism with Marx’s analysis is here as well uncanny: in Marx’s derivation of the necessity of the price form of appearance of any commodity in the capitalist social form, he famously begins by defining exchange-value as a necessarily relational determination.

While Badiou’s abstract point can be briefly stated as such, Marx’s more complex analysis of the relational nature of the commodity can be summarized in four crucial steps of his argument. In the famous opening sentence of *Capital*, Marx chooses to begin his demonstration with an axiomatic declaration of the nature of the capitalist social form: “The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities’; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of the commodity.”⁶⁰ Marx thus asks his reader to accept, initially and without prior logical derivation, that in capitalism – the immediate form of appearance of which is the massive accumulation of commodities – the predominant form of *existence* as well as the *relations among existing things* are those laws that govern the exchange of commodities. This is to say that the capitalist social form is, minimally but essentially, distinguished from other social forms by the predominance of both commodities and commodified social relations. His analysis, his initial statement informs the reader, will take as its object this specific social form, and furthermore will investigate not specific individual commodities, as did classical economics, but

⁵⁸ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 123.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁶⁰ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 125.

the total mass of commodities, an undifferentiated, “immense heap” (*ungeheure Warensammlung*), in relation to which Marx will analyze individual commodities as identical subdivisions or “aliquot parts.”⁶¹ Marx initiates in this manner not a semantics of capital nor a representation of the structure of capitalism, but instead undertakes a logical demonstration of the essential nature of the real (commodified) social forms of relation in capitalism, to *construct*, under the aspect of thought (rather than sensuous material extension), as the logic of this world or social form, actual capitalist social relations.⁶²

One could imagine other axiomatic definitions of capitalism. Marx chooses an initial, readily acceptable proposition (that capitalism appears as the accumulation and generalization of commodities and commodified relations) and from it, the many implications he will demonstrate in his critique follow necessarily. More specifically, if the reader accepts that the predominant form of appearance of capitalism is the accumulation of commodities, this already implies, as Marx will demonstrate, that only commodified things bearing a monetary price form can appear as values under the capitalist social form. Non-commodified things and relations certainly continue to exist (though tend to be monetarized whenever possible), but they do not and cannot *count* as commodified values when the capitalist social form predominates: they can have no value in capitalism since they have no value-form and thus cannot be objects of commodity exchange.

If, as Marx proposes, the substance of value is social (as abstract labour in general, rather than any specific concrete form of labour), this must mean that value

⁶¹ See Fred Moseley’s penetrating analysis of this point in *Money and Totality: A Macro-Monetary Interpretation of Marx’s Logic in “Capital” and the End of the “Transformation Problem”*, Chicago, Haymarket, 2017.

⁶² As Marx affirms in his “Notes on Adolph Wagner”: “I do not start out from ‘concepts’, hence I do not start out from ‘the concept of value’. [...] What I start out from is the simplest *social form* in which the labour-product is presented in contemporary society, and this is the ‘commodity’. I analyse it, and right from the beginning, *in the form in which it appears*. Here I find that it is, on the one hand, in its natural form, a useful thing, alias a ‘use-value’, on the other hand, it is a bearer of exchange-value, and from this viewpoint, it is itself ‘exchange-value’. Further analysis of the latter shows me that exchange-value is only a ‘form of appearance’, the autonomous mode of presentation of the value contained in the commodity.” Karl Marx, *Later Political Writings*, T. Carver (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 241–242. Emphasis added by N. N.

“can only appear [as exchange value] in the social relation between commodity and commodity.” Marx argues that it is only when two (or more) commodities actually confront each other in the exchange process that they take on the social form specific to capitalism, a commonplace value-form of which “everyone knows [:] the money-form”.⁶³ To do so, he demonstrates that the value of labour must be expressed not simply as an isolated exchange value, but must take the specific form of appearance of the universal equivalent, money. To do so, Marx systematically develops his analysis of the social nature of commodity relations:

1) One commodity (sugar, cotton, indigo) taken in isolation cannot have an exchange value expressed by itself, since this would be to “exchange” one thing for the same. The exchange value of a commodity can only be expressed *relatively*, in a relative form, in some other, second commodity.⁶⁴

2) This “relative form” of the expression of value, which Marx analyzes in great detail,⁶⁵ simply describes how one commodity can come to have its value expressed in another commodity. There must, by this reasoning, exist a minimal relation between (at least) two commodities for the substance of value (abstract labour) to find expression (as an exchange value). Only then does the commodity take a form (in its equivalent) that is distinct from its material, natural form as a use value, a dual form that Marx has already shown any thing must possess to count as an exchangeable commodity. The social nature of this binary relation lies not merely in the comparison of these two things (as exchange values). The social aspect of the commodity form finds its first (logical) mode of expression in this simple relative form of relation in so far as the substance of that value (which Marx has argued is abstract, rather than any specific concrete labour), what exchange value is actually measuring or expressing, is given real concrete form in the social act of equating these materially distinct concrete practices when two use values (linen, coats) are equated (X coats = Y yards of linen).

3) This simple relative form of value, however, is “insufficient,” Marx notes, and “must undergo a series of metamorphoses before it can ripen into the price-

⁶³ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 139.

⁶⁴ “I cannot,” Marx observes, “express the value of linen in linen,” for this would simply express a concrete quantity of this item “as an object of utility”. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 139–154.

form,” the form of appearance adequate to the capitalist social form. A society in which only two commodities are exchanged simply is “insufficient” to determine the capitalist social form as Marx has axiomatically defined it from the first sentence of *Capital*. In what Marx calls the “expanded relative form of value,” a commodity expresses its value not just in a single opposing commodity, but in each and every other commodity; there thus arises an infinite sequence of relative values. The social relation of any given commodity now becomes all-encompassing, and all commodities stand “in a relation [...] with the whole world of commodities [as] an endless sequence.”⁶⁶

4) Commodities consequently must find their adequate form of expression in one single commodity, a general equivalent that is socially specified to stand apart and to serve as the measure or expression of value (traditionally, gold). It is finally in this general form of value that commodities achieve their full social form of expression, in so far as only this universal equivalent “permit[s] them to *appear* to each other as exchange values.”⁶⁷ This general, social form of relation to all other commodities is therefore *necessary* given the axiomatic assumption that the capitalist social form is characterized by the general predominance of commodities and commodification.

Badiou’s abstract summary of the relational nature of any system of the transcendental valuations governing the strength of appearance of the objects in a world constitutes, therefore, a precise reformulation of Marx’s analysis of the systematic logic governing the forms of appearance of commodities in the capitalist social form. “The transcendental values,” Badiou concludes,

do not directly measure intensities of appearance ‘in themselves’, but rather differences (or identities). When we speak of the value of appearance of a being, we are really designating a sort of synthetic summary of the values of transcendental identity between this being, in this world, and all the other beings appearing in the same world.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁶⁸ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 127.

The logic of the forms of appearance of existence in any world, Badiou argues, can be succinctly summarized at this high level of abstraction with only three basic operations: 1) the determination of a minimum value for any thing to appear in that world (in capitalism, that a commodity bear a numerical price); 2) that there exist the possibility of conjoining the degrees of value of any two objects (in capitalism, the determination of what Marx calls a *relative* exchange value between two commodities); and 3) the possibility of a “global synthesis” of these values among a specific number of multiples (in capitalism, the necessity of the monetary price form to allow for the universal exchangeability of any and all commodities one for another). The degree of congruence between Badiou’s abstract analysis of the logics of worlds and Marx’s analysis of the necessity governing the forms of appearance of commodities in the capitalist social form is uncanny, all the more so as judging at least by his writings, Badiou seems never to have closely studied Marx’s synthetic demonstration of this logic in the third chapter of *Capital*.

Reading *Capital* as the Logic of a World

Marx’s demonstration of the nature of value in the capitalist social form, of its forms of appearance (above all as money), and of the essence of surplus value, are not derived from obscure metaphysical elucubrations (as Marx’s academic and empiricist critics have often asserted), nor from the theoretical reversals of a negative-dialectical (Hegelian) logic.⁶⁹ Marx’s theory is at heart a materialist logic of the real process of the circuit of capital as it passes, without logical negation, through its various forms. Marx was not improvising when he methodically, revision after revision, constructed the various drafts of *Capital* from 1861 to 1883, but instead sought the most adequate (logical) form of demonstration to present the conceptual order of the capitalist social form. Though he certainly continued to develop and fine tune the diverse categories of his analysis till his last days, he had already conducted his fundamental “inquiry” into the structure of the capitalist social form to arrive at his central notion of the monetary labour theory of value in the final pages of the *Grundrisse* notebooks. Among the greatest accomplishments of *Capital*, in this view, is to have constructed for

⁶⁹ On the putative Hegelian, negative-dialectical structure of *Capital*, see for example Chris Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx’s Capital*, Leiden, Brill, 2002, and F. Moseley and T. Smith (eds.), *Marx’s Capital and Hegel’s Logic: A Reexamination*, Leiden, Brill, 2014.

readers the real, dynamic logic of the capitalist social form, the immanent logic of a social form, to reveal, as Marx proudly proclaims in his first Preface from 1867, “the natural laws of capitalist production, [...] these tendencies winning their way through and working themselves out with iron necessity.”⁷⁰

If capitalism appears as the general accumulation of commodities, and *if* its predominant form of social relations is that of the exchange of commodities, *then*, Marx argues, a series of necessary consequences immediately follow.⁷¹ What Marx will argue, in the limpid terms of a synthetic logical demonstration, is that given this predominance, abstract labour, the substance of value, *must* take a monetary form of appearance. To do so, he takes his reader step by step to discover the essential nature of the commodity form. From the dual nature of the commodity as both use- and exchange-value to the substance of value (abstract labor) as the determination of what exchange value measures in the capitalist social form, Marx’s demonstration of the logic governing the commodity form culminates in his demonstration of the necessity of its monetary form of appearance.⁷² If a thing does not possess this dual form, if, specifically, it does not possess an exchange value, Marx tells us, it cannot appear as, and

⁷⁰ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 91.

⁷¹ A great many of Marx’s principal propositions in this chapter are articulated in variations of this Aristotelean material conditional (as opposed to negative dialectical) form: “It follows from this that ...”; “If then we disregard the use-value of commodities, only one property remains, that of being products of labour”; “If we leave aside the determinate quality of productive activity, and therefore the useful character of the labour, what remains is its quality of being an expenditure of human labour-power”; “since the magnitude of the value of a commodity represents nothing but the quantity of labour embodied in it, it follows that all commodities, when taken in certain proportions, must be equal in value”; “[Commodities’] objective character as values is therefore purely social. From this it follows self-evidently that [value] can only appear in the social relation between commodity and commodity.” *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 128, 134, 136, 139, et passim. Unless I am mistaken, none of Marx’s demonstrative formulations in the first three chapters of *Capital* take the form of Hegelian negative dialectical logic, as in the classic example of the beginning of the *Logic*: “Being in general; being, and nothing else, without further determination” which is dialectically sublated to reveal “the unity of being and non-being [or] the identity of identity and non-identity.” G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010. pp. 47, 51.

⁷² I analyze Marx’s demonstration in greater detail, as well as its implications for the nature of capitalist slavery specifically, in the second chapter of *The Price of Slavery: Capitalism and Revolution in the Caribbean*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2022. See also Heinrich, *How to Read Marx’s Capital*.

thus is not, a commodity. Marx categorically and unambiguously affirms this often-overlooked point: “Money as a measure of value is the necessary form of appearance of the measure of value which is immanent in commodities, namely labor-time.”⁷³

As does Badiou in his general theory of the logics of worlds, Marx repeatedly emphasizes the criterion of *appearance* in his analysis, not just critically, but positively. This is to say that the object of his critique of the commodity, the substance of its value, and its various value-forms is not only to reveal the illusory, ideological nature of social relations under the capitalist social form. Marx undertakes in his analysis not just a negative critique of commodity fetishism, but also a positive construction of the commodity in the form of a thought-object, to demonstrate the logical necessity of its monetary form of appearance. In arguing that in commodity relations, value must take a monetary form of appearance, Marx is constructing not an adequate syntax of capital, but a materialist logic of the immanent necessity governing the existence of what counts as things and possesses value in the capitalist social form (commodities). *Capital* is not a well-ordered linguistic apparatus of semantic analysis that would *infer* or prove the necessary existence of the capitalist social form and its attendant value-forms; instead, given the *a priori existence* of this social form, *Capital* simply reconstructs, in the attribute of thought (as opposed to extension), as the logic of this world, a real object. Marx proceeds in materialist fashion from the unproven, axiomatic and reasonable presupposition that accumulated commodities and generally commodified social relations do in fact exist and prevail, and furthermore define the capitalist social form *per se*, to then reproduce in thought the real structure of this social form via the demonstration of the necessary consequences of this predominance.

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The expression of the value of any commodity in the form of the universal equivalent (money) fully abstracts not only from the material use-value of that commodity, but universally, from the material specificity of all commodities, finally to “express what is common to all commodities”: abstract labour. The general form of value thus fully expresses the (commodified) social relations of the capitalist social form, in the form of the quantitative abstractions of exchange values. “By this [general] form,” Marx writes, “commodities are, for the first time,

⁷³ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 138.

really brought into relation with each other as values, or permitted *to appear to each other as exchange-values*.”⁷⁴ Here again, Marx underscores in his logic of capital the “positive nature” of a form of *appearance* that allows for a general social relation – between the commodities people exchange – at the same time that it fetishistically obscures the substance of those exchange values, abstract labour.

Since Marx’s analysis is not an economic theory, but a *critique* of economic theory, what the demonstration of the necessity of the quantitative, monetary form of appearance of value reveals are not specific numerical values (the object of econometric analyses, from profit rates to unemployment figures), but rather the nature and substance of the various categories that constitute the forms of appearance of the capitalist social form.⁷⁵ The categorial logic of *Capital*, in other words, is not a philosophy of “substance” in the sense of the econometric, analytic manipulation of collections of objects or sets (commodities, profits, employment data, GDP, etc.); rather, from the moment Marx defines the substance of value as abstract labour, derivable only as a socially validated relation, *Capital* unfolds as a *category* theory of the capitalist social form.⁷⁶ Marx’s unprecedented accomplishment, in his logic of the forms of appearance of value in capitalism, is to have systematically demonstrated the absolute necessity that value take a monetary form of appearance in commodity society.

The consequence of Badiou’s reformulation of the domain and remit of logic as a categorial science of the necessary forms of appearance and existence of the beings in any given world is that without ever considering Marx’s *Capital* or even the capitalist social form in general, Badiou has quite surprisingly produced a

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158. Emphasis added by N. N.

⁷⁵ As Paul Mattick writes, “Marx’s model of the capitalist economy does not yield quantitative results that could be compared with economic data; it is capable neither of accounting for the actual price of goods on the market nor of predicting (or even accounting for) such phenomena as the rates of profit obtaining at one time or another. [Rather,] the phenomena (price representations of labour time) with which it is concerned [...] serve social functions involving the concealment of real relationships rather than their direct manifestation.” Paul Mattick, *Theory as Critique: Essays on “Capital”*, Chicago, Haymarket, 2019, p. 33.

⁷⁶ See Badiou’s comments on this distinction – in response to Jacques Desanti’s critique of the latent “substantialism” of *Being and Event* – where he presents *Logics of Worlds* as a category theory of *relations between existing things*, in Badiou, *Sometimes, We Are Eternal*, pp. 97–105.

theoretical formalization of the object of Marx's critique of political economy, one that constructs the adequate notion of a materialist logic of capitalism. It is not that *Logics of Worlds* accounts in the abstract, point by point, for the enormous complexity of *Capital* (though *Logics* contains many extraordinary formulations that begin to do just that, only a few of which I have indicated here), but, rather, that Badiou's materialist logic for the first time adequately accounts for the ontological status of Marx's critique. For while Marx famously takes leave of philosophy in the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach ("Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it"), the various ongoing attempts to map the movement of concepts in *Capital* back onto Hegel's *Logic* arguably cannot account for the theoretical and, indeed ontological specificity of this critique, but instead, implicitly or explicitly, tend to reinscribe Marx's critique of a singular social form as a universal and transhistorical (Hegelian) ontology. Instead, following Badiou, it is clear that despite its incompleteness, *Capital* constitutes nothing less than the historically and theoretically delimited, adequate, and systematic demonstration of the necessary forms of appearance of value in (and only in) the capitalist social form. In other words, *Capital* should and indeed must be read and understood as the science of the logic governing our world, the capitalist social form.

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World(s)¹

Introduction

The point of departure for this text is formulated in the “Conversation on the End of the World” between Achille Mbembe and Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schubackan, where Mbembe states “that we cannot think as if there was only one world or only one form of consciousness of the world. In consequence, not only the question of the world must remain open, but even the one about the world as an a priori.”² The consequence of this is that

the archives of this world in plural are themselves also plural – a multiplicity of worlds, a multiplicity of archives, if we wish to resume this idea in a simple formula. If we accept then that there is a multiplicity of worlds and a multiplicity of archives, it is also possible to admit that there are worlds that are finishing and others that are emerging and others that are in different situations from these as well. It is this simultaneity that should be thought. We cannot think the question about the end of the world as if it did not comprehend structurally, its own inverse in itself, namely the question about the emergence of the world, the world of another, and another world, and so on.³

To the problems Mbembe opens in this quote regarding the concept of world today, I would like to contrast what Alexander Galloway identifies as the poverty of contemporary philosophy: “What kind of world is it in which humans are

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¹ This article is a result of the research programme P6-0014 “Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy” and the research project J6-9392 “The Problem of Objectivity and Fiction in Contemporary Philosophy”, which are funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

² Achille Mbembe and Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schubackan, “Conversation on the End of the World”, in M. S. C. Schuback and S. Lindberg (eds.), *The End of the World: Contemporary Philosophy and Art*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017, p. 23.

³ *Ibid.*

* ZRC SAZU, Institute of Philosophy, Ljubljana, Slovenia

on equal footing with garbage? What kind of world is it in which the landscape is a chaotic nothing-world, unfounded at its core and motivated by no necessary logic (Meillassoux) or by the logic of the market (Latour)?”⁴ What Mbembe points out at the outset, then, contrasts with a poor philosophy that looks the other way in a world where man is equal to garbage.

There is a definite common ground for both of these lines of thought, which can be found in the statement *there is no capitalist WORLD without colonialism*.⁵ But before I come to this and the problems that need to be addressed in order to understand the issue with thinking “the world” today, I will further outline the two contrasting ways of approaching this concept.

Returning to the first one subsumed in Mbembe’s opening quotation, it is important to connect it to his 2013 book *Critique of Black Reason*, where he writes:

The question of the world – what it is, what the relationship is between its various parts, what the extent of its resources is and to whom they belong, how to live in it, what moves and threatens it, where it is going, what its borders and limits, and its possible end, are – has been within us since a human being of bone, flesh, and spirit made its first appearance under the sign of the Black Man, as *human-merchandise*, *human-metal*, and *human-money*. Fundamentally, it was always *our* question. And it will stay that way as long as speaking the world is the same as declaring humanity, and vice versa.⁶

“[T]he term ‘Black’ has been generalized,” Mbembe writes.⁷ “This new fungibility, this solubility, institutionalized as a new norm of existence and expanded to the entire planet, is what I call the *Becoming Black of the world*,”⁸ or *le Devenir-Nègre du Monde*. Mbembe contends that the systematic risks that Black

⁴ Alexander Galloway, “The Poverty of Philosophy: Realism and Post-Fordism”, *Critical Inquiry*, 39 (2/2013), pp. 364–365.

⁵ The central part of this text is based on the research and writings I did for the workshop *Conjunctural Geographies of Postsocialist and Postcolonial Conditions: Theory Thirty Years after 1989*, Leipzig, Germany, 15–16 May 2020.

⁶ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. L. Dubois, Durham, Duke University Press, 2017, pp. 179–80. First published as *Critique de la raison nègre*, Paris, La Découverte, 2013.

⁷ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, p. 6.

⁸ *Ibid.*

slaves faced throughout early capitalism became the norm for the vast majority of subaltern people and that the new imperial practices we see today are linked to a tendency to universalize the Black condition. New imperial practices “borrow as much from the slaving logic of capture and predation as from the colonial logic of occupation and extraction, as well as from the civil wars and raiding of earlier epochs.”⁹

Another perspective, or more precisely, a philosophy of the becoming of the Black world, is offered by Kevin Everod Quashie when reflecting on black movements from the Combahee River Collective (CRC) to Black Lives Matter. CRC was a radical Black feminist organization formed in 1974 and named after Harriet Tubman’s 1863 raid on the Combahee River in South Carolina that freed 750 enslaved people. Its 1977 “Combahee River Collective Statement” formulated the interlocking of oppression and identity politics.¹⁰

Quashie emphasizes that

the idiom “a black world” names an aesthetic imaginary that encompasses heterogeneity. I take inspiration, as ever, from the worldmaking conceptualized prominently in black women’s feminism. When the Combahee River Collective’s “Black Feminist Statement” announces that “our politics initially sprang from a shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable,” it signals not only the enduring marginalization of black women in the world but also an imagining determined to locate philosophical and political meaningfulness through the specificity of black femaleness. There is a similar capaciousness in Hortense J. Spillers’s argument about black femaleness in the iconic “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” or in Alice Walker’s womanism, with its ever-widening pool of human insight cultivated from a black female vernacular idiom.¹¹

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He continues:

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰ The Combahee River Collective, “The Combahee River Collective Statement”, in Z. R. Eisenstein (ed.), *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Social Feminism*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1978, pp. 362–372.

¹¹ Kevin Everod Quashie, *Black Aliveness, or a Poetics of Being*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2021, p. 11.

As necessary as “Black Lives Matter” has proven to be, so efficient and beautiful a truth-claim, its necessity disorients me; to hear it said or see it printed as an emblem is existentially disorienting. I want a black world where the matter of mattering matters indisputably, where black mattering is beyond expression. I want to read and study in the orientation of a black world.

Today there is no reconciling the facts of our lives, which seem tethered to death, and the case for black aliveness. Both have to be true at the same time.

This work begins with a single premise, an instruction, really: imagine a black world. Such a directive acknowledges that the New World plunder of modernity and coloniality enacts a destruction of the world as it was and might have become, that the New World unorders the relationship of the human to place, time, other human. Or we might say there never was a world, that imperialism’s destructiveness is that it imposed a world logic. Either case describes world-failure that, among other horrors, mobilizes blackness as an antithesis to human life.¹²

Going back to the second previously mentioned line of reasoning, its representative figure is Quentin Meillassoux. His formal-mathematical manner of thinking flees from the world to think a world as a possibility based on chaos theory, leaning toward inhumanity. With Meillassoux, we discover “a way to think realities subsisting beyond the correlation and not dependent on it. What subsists in-itself, irrespective of the correlation, is a *‘time of a radical inhumanity’* and this is why he will place a strong emphasis on temporality when discussing the absolute.”¹³

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Peter Gratton explains that the world in Meillassoux’s thinking is based on the “*‘pas-tout’* – translatable as ‘not-all’, ‘not-whole’ or even ‘not-everything’”, which “refers to the non-totalisability or subsumability of subjects under a given universal.”¹⁴ It is based on Jacques Lacan’s *‘pas-tout’*, used mainly in his

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹³ Peter Gratton and Paul J. Ennis, “Introduction: From a Speculative Materialism to a Speculative Ethics”, in P. Gratton and P. J. Ennis (eds.), *The Meillassoux Dictionary*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, p. 8.

¹⁴ Peter Gratton, “Non-whole/Non-all”, in *The Meillassoux Dictionary*, p. 126.

Seminar XX, Encore (1972–1973)¹⁵ and explored in “L’Étourdit” (1973).¹⁶ Gratton explains:

For Meillassoux, until Cantor, what was possible was thought under a set of possibilities, even if highly improbable. In each set or World, there is a given range of chances. For example, for a die, the chance of rolling a one is one out of six. But what Meillassoux says is that there is no totalisable set of all possible sets or universes. As such, while within this World we have a number of possibles, the universe itself cannot be totalised in terms of its possibilities. This he refers to as ‘world’ (lower case) or the ‘virtual’, the illimitable non-Whole of possibilities of creation in hyper-chaos.¹⁷

“For Meillassoux,” as Gratton and Paul J. Ennis reformulate Meillassoux’s “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign,”¹⁸

given the capacities of hyper-chaos, it is conceivable that the current stability of natural laws has been upended before – that is, the facts of the physical laws have themselves changed. Meillassoux argues there were previous Worlds capitalised to distinguish them from the world of the non-Whole – prior to this one. They are (1) the World of inorganic matter; (2) the World of organic matter; and (3) the World of organic matter and thought. In this way, Meillassoux differentiates between the notion of World and ‘world’, since each World emerges *ex nihilo* from the ‘world’ of hyper-chaos. The essential point here is that once one is willing to accept Meillassoux’s ontological vision that no non-contradictory possibility can be discounted, then we see the possibility of a new World to come, which has immense implications for ethics.

Meillassoux argues at various points that from one World to the next there is a qualitative leap that cannot be explained in terms of the physical laws of the pre-

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX: Encore*, trans. B. Fink, New York, W. W. Norton, 1998.

¹⁶ Jacques Lacan, “L’Étourdit”, in *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, pp. 449–496.

¹⁷ Gratton, “Non-whole/Non-all”, p. 126.

¹⁸ See Quentin Meillassoux, “Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign”, paper presented at the Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany, 20 April 2012, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/886529/539a4b4a8c213179c159eefc04a28947.pdf>, accessed 7 September 2021.

vious one. Hence, each World is *sui generis* or self-causing: the World of thought could not have come out of the laws governing organic matter and organic matter, he avers, could not have been caused by simple matter. In this manner, speculative materialism ‘affirms’ the ‘radical contingency of our world.’¹⁹

In short, as Gratton and Ennis point out in their conclusion regarding Meillassoux’s 2008 paper²⁰:

There is no need to detail all those kinds of spectres Meillassoux describes – the dead child, the victims of heinous massacres of all sorts – since only the most affectless of us do not feel the existential weight of the horrors of this or that death, as well as all the Holocausts of history. To be human is to live under the shadow of this wide work of mourning. For Meillassoux essential mourning over these spectres is impossible in our current World. What words could console us concerning them?²¹

To this question, I would immediately respond that the idea of the world in Mbembe’s thought is about temporalization and another history. Mbembe argues that a negation of time (i.e., a colonial view of time) serves to produce a humanity without history.²² Being “radically located *outside of time*,” or *to connect* to the initial logic of repetition – it is “*repetition without difference*. Native time was sheer repetition – not of events as such, but the instantiation of the very law of repetition. Following Fanon, Mbembe understands decolonisation as precisely a subversion of the law of repetition – as a “possibility to reconstitute the human

¹⁹ Gratton and Ennis, “Introduction”, p. 14.

²⁰ See Quentin Meillassoux, “Time without Becoming”, paper presented at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Middlesex University, London, United Kingdom, 8 May 2008, https://speculativeheresy.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/3729-time_without_becoming.pdf, accessed 7 September 2021.

²¹ Gratton and Ennis, “Introduction”, p. 15.

²² See Marina Gržinić, “Memory and History and the Act of Remembering”, lecture at *The Boundary Condition. About the Archive and Its Limits* seminar, MACBA, Spain, 16 February 2018, <https://www.macba.cat/en/exhibitions-activities/activities/boundary-condition-about-archive-and-its-limits>. See also Marina Gržinić, “Introduction: Burdened by the Past, Rethinking the Future. Eleven Theses on Memory, History, and Life”, in M. Gržinić, J. Pristovšek, and S. Uitz (eds.), *Opposing Colonialism, Antisemitism, and Turbo-Nationalism: Rethinking the Past for New Conviviality*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020, pp. 1–21.

after humanism's complicity with colonial racism."²³ We should be clear that we are dealing with another history, not that of white supremacy, which believes itself to be the only valid history (of progress leading into the void). The point is to take colonialism and coloniality into account. Mbembe says at the very end of this text that we must escape the status of victimhood, and break with the "good conscience" and the denial of responsibility. Only through this double approach will we be able to formulate a new politics and ethics based on the call for justice.

In order to understand the antagonistic nature of these two positions, I propose that we take an unexpected path, summed up in the maxim *there is no capitalist WORLD without colonialism*. Or rather, we will undertake a conceptualization that illuminates the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the world at stake.

There Is No Capitalist WORLD without Colonialism

Capitalist dominance and its mode of reproduction are based on processes of racialization and class and gender discrimination that centrally redefine the relationship between labor and capital, the extraction of surplus value (profit) as conceived in the Marxist critique of political economy, as well as the dispossession of land, violent processes of othering, and the functioning of (neo)liberal institutions with their ideological and repressive apparatuses.

The relationship between capitalism and colonialism, since they work hand in hand, can be paraphrased through the dictum of decolonial theory, "there is no modernity without coloniality," just as there is no capitalism without colonialism. The intertwining of colonialism and capitalism tangentially affects the form of what is, in the parlance of Marxism, the base of capital, the mode of capitalist reproduction, and likewise the superstructure of the capitalist social, political,

²³ Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive", a paper forming the basis of a series of public lectures given at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), the University of Cape Town (in conversation with the Rhodes Must Fall movement), and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Stellenbosch (as part of the Indexing the Human Project), 2015, <https://wiser.wits.ac.za/system/files/Achille%20Mbembe%20-%20Decolonizing%20Knowledge%20and%20the%20Question%20of%20the%20Archive.pdf>, accessed 7 September 2021.

knowledge, and institutional regimes that aggregate within a given capitalist formation, i.e., necrocapitalism, financial capitalism, turbo-capitalism, etc.

This text reflects on the relation between capitalism and colonialism in order to rethink two historical forms of capitalism that turn out not to be historical at all, but are fully functional in the present moment: racial capitalism and settler capitalism, or racial-settler capitalism as its common formation. Thus, my main thesis is that in order to critically assess the institutions built on the soil of colonialism that perpetuate the worlds of neoliberal global capitalism, financial capitalism, and necrocapitalism, we need to rethink the two main divisions mediated by decolonial theory and decolonization as analytical tools: the racial/colonial divide and the imperial/colonial divide.

To do this, we must first observe the convergence of colonialism and capitalism and how theory, past and present, reflects on their relationship. Below, I would like to explain the hyper-violent mode of the relationship between labor and capital, to the point where we move from slavery and racism to the concept of democracy itself. In this analysis, I also want to emphasize the inherent role of geography – the banality of the world as East, West, North, and South – in the processes of racialization that stems from past enslavement and racism and persists today as the structural and institutional racism that reverberates in the concept of racialization. What do I mean by this? A long-lasting, never-ending process of differentiation, violence, and exclusion based on the ideological concept of race. More than that, racialization refers not only to people, ethnicities, and non-citizens or second-class citizens, but also to geography. The geography of the former East and the contemporary South is a racialized geography.

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Primitive Accumulation and Capitalism

Nikhil Pal Singh argues that one of the biggest problems in understanding the role of colonialism and violent racialization and enslavement within capitalism is the distinction between the so-called pre-phase of capitalism, i.e., primitive accumulation, and what follows it as “proper” capitalism.²⁴ This problem is well elaborated in the 2021 book *All Incomplete* by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten:

²⁴ Nikhil Pal Singh, “On Race, Violence, and So-Called Primitive Accumulation”, *Social Text*, 34 (3/2016), pp. 27–50.

Let's approach this again by way of Afropessimism's special stringency. No slave, no world, as Frank Wilderson says; and given that this wall is erected and comes down, like its black heroes, in the world, those heroes have failed (at abolition); and so the world remains, in all its geocidally, genocidally extractive relation to earth and the differences earth bears. Such analysis zeroes in on the undeniably anheroic, the hero who fails, who fails to cohere into the monumental, who fails to instantiate any coherence of a people, as statue, statute, status, or state. She would appear, most devastatingly, as never to have been erected, never to have been torn down, as unable to fall in having always already fallen into abandon and dispossession.²⁵

In this pre-phase of capitalism, Marx registers the violence, the hyper-violence, necessary to form the super-exploited people under slavery, which will then figure as only a pre-stage of "proper" capitalism and its development. The extraordinary violence of primitive accumulation, as Singh points out, poses an "enduring historical and theoretical challenge," which "revolves around how to interpret the temporal and conceptual cleavage,"²⁶ a split between the primitive accumulation of capital and the ordinary accumulation of capital in what we might call "real" or "developed" or "proper" capitalism.

For Singh, this presents a limitation in Marx's work "for thinking about the ongoing development of racial categories – more precisely, the social reproduction of race as an ascriptive relationship anchored in ongoing violence, dominion, and dependency."²⁷ Thus, for Singh, Marx's focus on developed capitalism

can lead to an inattention, even indifference to how capital establishes new lines of social and historical genesis in which the ongoing differentiation between free labor and less than free labor, and the manifestation of that differentiation in racial, ethnic, and gender hierarchies within laboring populations, is retained as an instrument of labor discipline, surplus appropriation, and even a measure of capitalism's progressivism, in that it purports to render such distinctions anachronistic over the long run.²⁸

²⁵ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete*, Colchester, New York and Port Watson, Minor Compositions, 2021, p. 140.

²⁶ Singh, "On Race", p. 33.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Singh asserts that

Marx's oeuvre, which frequently compares the contemporaneous forms of work carried out by workers and the enslaved people during this time, exemplifies the problem we face, both offering support for what W. E. B. Du Bois once called the "slavery character" of capitalism, particularly in its Anglo-American ascendancy, and yet contributing to a problematic conceptual relegation of African slavery within the history of capitalism that has haunted radical politics ever since.²⁹

Singh concludes: "In this New World iteration, primitive accumulation is not yet capitalism for Marx; it is plunder."³⁰ The result is that in "real" or "developed" or "proper" capitalism whiteness comes to be associated "with property, citizenship, wages, and credit, along with the renewal of surplus and/or superexploited subjectivities and collectivities at the openly coercive, lawless/law-defining edge of capitalist accumulation by dispossession."³¹

As early as in 1983, the assertion of Marxist theory that capitalism in its primitive accumulation phase was not yet proper capitalism was challenged by Cedric Robinson in his seminal book *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*.³²

As Robin D. G. Kelly writes of Robinson's concept of racial capitalism in the introduction to *Boston Review's* 2017 issue on "Race, Capitalism and Justice":

Robinson challenged the Marxist idea that capitalism was a revolutionary negation of feudalism. Instead capitalism emerged within the feudal order and flowered in the cultural soil of a Western civilization already thoroughly infused with racialism. Capitalism and racism, in other words, did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of "racial capitalism" dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide. Capitalism was "racial" not because of some conspiracy to divide workers or justify slavery and dispossession, but because racialism had already permeated Western feudal so-

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²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³² Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2000. First published by Zed Press, 1983.

ciety. The first European proletarians were *racial* subjects (Irish, Jews, Roma or Gypsies, Slavs, etc.) and they were victims of dispossession (enclosure), colonialism, and slavery *within Europe*. Indeed, Robinson suggested that racialization within Europe was very much a *colonial* process involving invasion, settlement, expropriation, and racial hierarchy.³³

Robinson wrote in 1983 that the

violent event of colonial aggression and its corollary of “Indian” slavery had already been transmuted in [Benjamin] Franklin’s [1753] neo-nativistic “American” mind into a relationship of supplication secured by an economic rationale; indeed, the dependence of “new Comers” on natives already reversed. The curtain of supremacist ideology had by now begun its descent on American thought, obscuring from the historically unconscious generations of descendants of colonialists and later immigrants the oppressive violence and exploitation interwoven in the structure of the republic.³⁴

Or, to put it simply, Marx was mistaken when he believed that the European bourgeoisie would rationalize social relations in the course of capitalist development; instead, “real” or “developed” or “proper” capitalism racialized these relations even more brutally. In Singh’s words:

As subsequent anti-Marxist critics have pointed out [...], slavery in this register is paradoxically both indispensable for thinking capitalism and “unthinkable” as such: sometimes it seems “closer to capitalism’s primal desire [...] than wage [labor],” while at other times it represents what has been superseded by an order of oppression whose stealth (or veiled) power rests upon a supposed ability to dispense with violent dominion.³⁵

³³ Robin D. G. Kelley, “What Did Cedric Robinson Mean by Racial Capitalism?”, *Boston Review*, 12 January 2017, <https://bostonreview.net/race/robin-d-g-kelley-what-did-cedric-robinson-mean-racial-capitalism>, accessed 6 September 2021.

³⁴ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 77.

³⁵ Singh, “On Race”, p. 29.

Racialized Geographies

The processes of racialization and discrimination are repetitive and continuous. It is important to understand the hyper-violent mode of the relationship between labor and capital and that this violence ominously defines (neo)liberal-parliamentary democracy (Mbembe speaks of racial democracy³⁶) and its institutions to this day.

Moreover, contemporary capitalism and racism reinforce the transformation of all social, political, and economic relations in contemporary Europe. We see how well-rehearsed procedures that work in the West are implemented in the East. The formerly socialist states of Eastern Europe adopted the white power regimes of their occidental brothers, quickly and brutally imposing a merciless logic of hyper-neoliberalism over the entire territory. However, the critique of some decolonial writers that the former socialist countries of Europe are dysfunctional, archaic, obsolete, and therefore excluded from the decolonial agenda as presumably being unable to develop a critical stance is similar to the post-World War II narratives with which the Occident, instead of dealing with the Holocaust, antisemitism, and the genocides of World War II, reframed the discourse as a struggle between democracy and totalitarianism.³⁷

It can be said loudly and at length that we, and by that I mean Slovenians, other citizens of the former Yugoslavia, and, more widely, the socialist bloc of the former Eastern Europe, were considered “a piece of shit” (to describe something simply as annoying, barbaric and smelly) during the transition to capitalism, in the 1990s. This does not, however, excuse post-socialist people drifting into hyper-nationalism and turbo-fascism.³⁸ A common explanation and historical

³⁶ See Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. S. Corcoran, Durham, Duke University Press, 2019.

³⁷ See Madina Tlostanova, “The Postcolonial and the Postsocialist: A Deferred Coalition? Brothers Forever?”, *Postcolonial Interventions*, 3 (1/2018), pp. 1–37. Tlostanova states in an exaltation of colonial modernity that “The USSR with its showcase ideology offered a grand utopia or a new religion. The failed socialist modernity has lost its most important future vector and turned into a land of the futureless ontology. By losing to the capitalist modernity, it failed to meet the expectations of so many ‘wretched of the earth.’” *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁸ For turbo-fascism see Žarana Papić, “Europe After 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascisation of Social Life and Body Politics in Serbia,” in M. Gržinić (ed.), *The Body*, special issue, *Filozofski vestnik*, 23 (2/2002), pp. 191–205.

excuse for this drift is that we have been colonized by various imperial powers and by socialism in the past. This constantly repeated “mantra” helps many post-socialist – now turbo-capitalist – nations in the territory of former Eastern Europe embrace the local right-wing hyper-nationalist fascists and political profiteers, who function like Mafioso organizations, thus bringing them to power. And since such processes are also at work in the Occident (albeit differently, not through turbo-fascism, but through postmodern fascism, hyper-individualization, and the war state), support for local predatory politics among international neoliberal politicians is not surprising.

To put it in another way, as Harney and Moten have asserted in *All Incomplete*:

The humanization of the flesh is the racialization of the flesh. It is the catastrophe that befalls the species-being, one not even Marx can reverse. This is why logistics is the science of whiteness in/as the science of loss.

Such is the peril to flesh/earth by the time of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, as Denise Ferreira da Silva teaches. Surveillance. Access. Transparency. Resilience. The globalized, generalized fear of loss is everywhere logistics sees the need to straighten out our tangled flesh. And everywhere logistics finds monstrosity, it humanizes it. Now, to be obscure, as Saidiya Hartman instructs, is to be entangled; it is to be hunted, to be subject to the subject of the grasp.³⁹

And further, “Logistics emerges as much as the science of loss prevention as the science of moving property through the emptiness, of making the world as it travels by filling it. This is not making the road as we walk, in the anarchist tradition. This is converting everything in its path into a coordinated time and space for ownership.”⁴⁰

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Logistics is key, since it discloses “white science”; as Hartney and Moten write:

And what is the nature of our work in surveillance capitalism? Logistics. We bear, in the obsessive self-management of ‘our’ clicks and strokes, the overdetermination logistics lays down. It is both through and as a set of applications we apply –

³⁹ Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

both on and underneath a field of platforms we erect – that our labor further concentrates the means of production with the goal quite simply and starkly of preventing us from taking care of one another, from looking out for one another, by making us look at one another, which is taking care of them.⁴¹

Post-socialism is an almost infinite transition to turbo-fascist capitalism. The post-socialist state exclusively reinforces its national format and induces, as much as possible, hyper-violent capitalist relations: it is violence carried out by the state and its apparatuses to naturalize racist labor. Framing racialization, dehumanization, and othering precisely by examining the capitalist system of reproduction fully executed throughout the former Eastern Europe allows for the exploration of racialized (re)production, the nexus between labor and capital, and the operation of capitalism as the other side of colonialism, or vice versa. The required analysis is not merely semiotical, but frames labor and its forms, i.e., slave labor, wage labor, and disposable labor, as key components.

Harney and Moten assert, in reference to Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*,⁴² that a specific surveillance capitalism's predatory economic logic is at work in necrocapitalism. Though exposing a critique, they precisely encapsulate the relation of capital labor:

Zuboff argues that information technology now makes its money from gathering, packaging, and selling massive amounts of data on our everyday behavior. Thus, Facebook or Google do not make money by targeting your tastes or behavior with advertisements as is commonly assumed. According to Zuboff, they have no interest in us individually, though that does not mean these tools do not also individuate. Rather, it is the aggregate data that matters because it can be used not to track but to change behavior. She notes, moreover, that intervening in aggregate provides even more valuable aggregate data. Facebook is spying on you only insofar as it is spying on us, according to Zuboff; and if we are its raw material, and its product, then her employment of the concept of primitive accumulation is justified. Problematically, this argument appears to assume capital without labor, labor having been replaced by an algorithm that will have carried out itself. But

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴² Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2019.

what we learn from the Italian autonomists, and from centuries of theorization by Africans experiencing the nightmare of total subsumption, which Zuboff's assumption of absent work extends, is that we are raw material, product, and labor, too. Our work makes this economic logic, or any economic logic, work.⁴³

The last decades of turbo-fascism and hyper-nationalism, however, also brought about important political impulses for new activism and political trans-national solidarities throughout the entire space of the formerly socialist Eastern Europe.

The Racial/Colonial Divide

In what follows, I would like to shed more light on these relations of separation. In the next two subsections, I will approach racialized geographies through two different divisions. The first is the racial/colonial division, while the second is the imperial/colonial division. We will see that through these divisions we get a matrix of the world that, in the case of the racial/colonial divide, divides the global world and Europe according to different but equally important ways of extracting wealth and dispossession, on the one hand, and shaping the social, on the other (as forms of fascism, populism, and liberalism). In the case of the imperial/colonial divide, which is related to Europe's relationship with its former colonies, the colonial past is transposed into an aphasic configuration.

The racial/colonial divide traverses and reorganizes two forms of capitalism: racial capitalism and settler capitalism. In racial capitalism, the connection between labor and capital is at stake, while in settler capitalism, the connection between land and capital is at stake. Sarah E. K. Fong theorizes them together; she speaks of racial-settler capitalism "as an intervention into prevailing approaches to racial capitalism and settler capitalism."⁴⁴ She emphasizes "first, that the development of capitalist relations in the United States depended upon both the exploitation of racialized labor and the accumulation of Indigenous lands," and second, "how the violent relations of racial-settler capitalism are re-

⁴³ Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, p. 18.

⁴⁴ Sarah E. K. Fong, "Racial-Settler Capitalism: Character Building and the Accumulation of Land and Labor in the Late Nineteenth Century", *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 43 (2/2019), p. 27.

made through attempts to cultivate consent and desire among African-descended and Indigenous peoples.”⁴⁵

For racial capitalism, the most important internal process is racialization; for settler capitalism, it is colonization, because “labor exploitation is indebted to theories of racial capitalism, which identify the fundamentally racial nature of labor exploitation.”⁴⁶ As Fong argues, Cedric Robinson’s “stratifications between labor and capital are organized by racial difference such that racialized lower classes provide the labor and resources necessary for the accumulation of wealth by the ruling classes. For Robinson, the term *racial capitalism* identifies the imbrication of capitalist production and the differential valorization of racialized life.”⁴⁷

Racial capitalism (chattel slavery is the best way to think of it) prioritizes the devaluation of racialized lives and the subordination of racialized labor. In chattel slavery, the enslaved person is legally made the personal property (chattel) of the slave owner. It is clear that through the myth that wage-labor, unlike slave labor, can be freely sold on the market in contrast to slave labor, the processes of capitalist-colonial violent racialization and exploitation have not disappeared, but persist to this day.

Shannon Speed argues in a 2017 text⁴⁸ that Latin American states are settler colonial states, emphasizing in particular this land-colonial relationship based on Patrick Wolfe’s 1998 *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*.⁴⁹ Speed underscores “the land–labor binary” elaborated in most of Wolfe’s work and reiterated in his recent 2016 *Traces of History*,⁵⁰ which “has become an often-unspoken and largely unexamined premise of the settler state in ways that occlude significant complexity and foreclose recognition of settler structures.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Shannon Speed, “Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala”, *American Quarterly*, 69 (4/2017), pp. 783–790.

⁴⁹ See Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, London, Cassell, 1998.

⁵⁰ See Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*, London, Verso, 2016.

⁵¹ Speed, “Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala”, p. 783.

Here, we can bring in Quashie's reflections on the enduring afterlives of slavery and coloniality and the ways in which Black life can be wrested from its proximity to death. Quashie departs initially from "Christina Sharpe, whose *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* characterizes 'wake' as an idiom not only of consciousness but also of life's deathness: 'In the midst of so much death and the fact of Black life as proximate to death, how do we attend to physical, social, and figurative death and also to the largeness that is Black life, Black life insisted from death?'"⁵² Quashie states that this attending to life is what Sharpe theorizes as "'wake work,' the materialization of being through death such that 'even as we experienced, recognized, and lived subjection, we did not simply or only live in subjection and as the subjected.' *In the Wake* is Sharpe's pursuit of 'the modalities of Black life lived in, as, under, despite Black death'"⁵³

Quashie's conclusion from this reading is overwhelmingly powerful:

I read Sharpe's study as a definitive articulation of black pessimism as a field, especially its exploration of what cultural theorist Saidiya Hartman describes as the enduring afterlife of slavery and coloniality. Indeed, by placing the terms of death (including "abjection," "negation," "terror," and "nonbeing") at the center of thinking about blackness, black pessimism has reenergized a critique of liberal humanism's uncritical faith in progress and its fallacies of freedom. The meaning of black freedom, these scholars remind us, cannot be indexed to the Enlightenment and cannot be mapped in the syntax of Western norms; there is no end to the condition of coloniality and captivity – no end, but there is life in the midst and aftermath of those interminable conditions.⁵⁴

We must also recognize that criminal fraud over indigenous land titles must be seen as a structural part of the U.S. economy. Joanne Barker addresses the co-production of U.S. imperialism, colonialism and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. She says, referring to Simpson Leanne, that because of

U.S. imperialism and colonialism – historical and present today – Indigenous relationships and responsibilities to the land are difficult at best. In maintain-

⁵² Quashie, *Black Aliveness*, p. 8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

ing life practices that are land based, Indigenous people come “face-to-face with settler colonial authority, surveillance and violence because, in practice, it [land] places Indigenous bodies between settlers and their money [...] Being a practitioner of land as pedagogy and learning in my community [...] [is] a process of learning how to be on the land anyway.”⁵⁵

Barker is Lenape, Turtle Clan, and in many of her influential analyses explores the violent procedures of the dispossession of Lenapehoking (Lenape territory) carried out under the necro-articulatory grip of the U.S.A. as an imperial formation. Fong also returns to this point when she writes that settler capitalism “foreground[s] the ways in which Indigenous peoples have experienced territorial dispossession and genocide in the interest of land accumulation and exploitation.”⁵⁶

The accumulation and dispossession of territories provide the soil in which extractive and racialized economies can develop. In “Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities”, the authors expose that “[f]inancialization, debt, and the accelerated concentration of wealth today work through social relations already configured and disposed by imperial conquest and racial capitalism,” and that “[r]acialization – manifesting in systemic and everyday forms of devaluation, exploitation, and expendability, as well as the violence of racial terror and carceral regimes – and ongoing colonial modes of settlement, occupation, governmentality, and jurisprudence work in tandem with more capacious forms of US global militarism and empire.”⁵⁷

Racial capitalism is very effective in neoliberal global capitalism as it kills the social structure within the West and drives it to reproduce white supremacy. In Marxist parlance, the superstructure is also racialized in order to “freely” exploit racialized labor. What is essential is that these processes do not leave out the social; on the contrary, for extraction and dispossession through racialization to really work, the space of the social must also be racialized, i.e., loaded with rac-

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⁵⁵ Joanne Barker, “Decolonizing the Mind”, *Rethinking Marxism*, 30 (2/2018), p. 209.

⁵⁶ Fong, “Racial-Settler Capitalism”, p. 27.

⁵⁷ Jodi A. Byrd, Alyosha Goldstein, Jodi Melamed, and Chandan Reddy, “Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities”, *Social Text*, 36 (2/2018), pp. 1–18, accessed online at: https://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1521&context=english_fac, accessed 7 September 2021.

ist and class ideologies. These ideologies support and feed liberal individualism (the notion that everything is “free” to exchange and therefore free to sell), and obscure the fact that democracy works exclusively through violence (democracy is only promoted and recalibrated through the constant use of violence).

In 2015, Jodi Melamed analytically uncovered the importance of emphasizing the power of racial capitalism on three levels: 1. “primitive accumulation – where capital is accrued through transparently violent means (war, land-grabbing, dispossession, neo/colonialism)”⁵⁸ while forming the basis of capitalist reproduction; 2. ideologies of individualism, liberalism, and democracy that blossom from this very fundament and destroy any sense of community; and 3. new forms of political activism that challenge these relations.⁵⁹

That is why activism, solidarity, and social justice must be central to the politics of the future.

Racial capitalism

Settler capitalism

Racial/Colonial Divide

Racialization	Colonization
Racialized labor/discrimination	Colonized land/accumulation
Exploitation	Dispossession
Labor/capital/profit	Land/capital/profit
Chattel slavery	Indigenous/native land
Slave capitalism	
Slave labor, wage labor, obsolete labor	Indenture extraction ⁶⁰ /profit
Debt/capital/profit	Devastation/gentrification

Settler capitalism and settler colonialism are organized around the imposition of space over time, which means that the total dispossession of land by the

⁵⁸ Jodi Melamed, “Racial Capitalism”, *Critical Ethnic Studies*, 1 (1/2015), p. 76.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Indenture is precisely grasped by Harney and Moten, for whom to “indent” is “to serve the debt.” See Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, p. 79.

necrocapitalist power structure and its violent supremacist regimes are central. In the context of the dispossession of Indigenous people, the ultimate goal is the destruction and elimination of communities, the people. At the same time, capitalism cannot reproduce itself without the extraction of surplus value from racialized labor. Racialized labor exploitation and territorial expansion as accumulation through dispossession, Fong argues, constitute the liberal self, which is the object and tool of racial, colonial subjugation.⁶¹

GLOBAL WORLD

North to South	extraction of capital from racialized labor
South to North	dispossession from land, elimination of the “Other”

The racial states in Europe, which means all of them at the moment, ignore social justice and human rights. The situation of refugees is directly related to colonialism and forms of neo-colonialism, and of course to abandoned collectivity.

EUROPE

West to East		
time/technology	property/hyper-privatization	hyper-individualization/fascist mob
East to West		
time/labor	land/hyper-devastation	nation-alism ⁶² /fascist populism

In the West, time is technology. In the former East of Europe, time equals labor exploitation. In the West, space only exists as property, total privatization; public space has disappeared. In the former Eastern Europe space is ruined, mismanaged, property plundered and finally privatized through violent gentrification. We need to address the formerly socialist Eastern Europe in terms of racism, nationalism, and debt. In Eastern Europe, instead of communities, we have only hyper-nationalism. In the West, a populist mob of hyper-individualized particles dominates.

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Harney and Moten describe this as follows:

⁶¹ Fong, “Racial-Settler Capitalism”, p. 27.

⁶² The hyphen is not a mistake, but a necessary disclosure of all the derived results of the nation as such.

Every step they take is a standing of ground, a stomping of the world out of earthly existence and into racial capitalist human being. It grows more pronounced the more it is threatened, consumed by its own feedback loop, and it produces sharper and sharper subject reactions in the face of this threat. This is the old/new fascism: not the anonymity of following the leader, but the subject reaction to leadership, which can just as easily imagine itself to be liberal dissent from, as supposedly opposed to a lock(e)-step repetition of, its call.⁶³

This is an important redefinition of the various forms of protest. Neoliberal capitalism has produced a fragmented, individualized position, protesting neoliberal individuals, whereas the Black Lives Matter movement, for example, adheres to the tradition of blocks of bodies on the street moving forward and stopping, taking a step back, waiting, and moving on, in lockstep.

Perhaps it is important to say that the dimension of time associated with technology in the West and labor in the East could be read to mean that the West is more advanced, more developed, but being subordinated to the speed of mobile devices and exploited by the relationship between labor and capital simply means that there are two kinds of racialization of time at work in advanced capitalism.

The Imperial/Colonial Divide

I would like to re-examine the particular decolonial position that the former Eastern Europe was colonized, that the Soviet Union colonized the former Soviet republics, and that the elimination of socialism is a process of decolonization. This leads to post-socialism being positioned in parallel with postcolonialism. This obfuscation can be clarified by analyzing the imperial/colonial divide. The answer lies in decolonization.

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Seloua Luste Boulbina, in “Decolonization”, an analysis of the term for *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, published online in 2019, develops a remarkable analysis of how to think decolonization.⁶⁴ She notes “that there is no conceiv-

⁶³ Harney and Moten, *All Incomplete*, p. 17.

⁶⁴ Seloua Luste Boulbina, “Decolonization”, in *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, 24 May 2019, <https://www.politicalconcepts.org/decolonization-seloua-luste-boulbina/>, accessed 7 September 2021.

able decolonization without the *correlation* of a society's political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, particularly on the post-colonial side."⁶⁵

She emphasizes the difference between postcolonial and "some sort of low-cost decolonization [that] is typically post-imperial."⁶⁶ The imperial, in such a low-cost reading, is "proper to the ancient metropolis and ancient societies, which apply the idea to objects rather than to social and political structures."⁶⁷ She asserts: "Politically, the question extends distinctly on both sides of an imperial-colonial line that I wish to highlight, in order not to conflate problematics that are totally different."⁶⁸ This equation of the imperial/colonial divide presents the imperial in relation to the peripheries, which is why the colonial is not a question of center and periphery but of imperialism. Imperialism is exploitation through colonization, through the use of military force, violence, genocides. So, when colonization is mentioned in relation to the former Eastern Europe, we are in fact talking about European postimperial countries (former metropolises) and not postcolonial African countries (former colonies).

For Luste Boulbina, decolonization captured through the imperial/colonial divide means that it "underwent a double displacement: on the one hand, from the metropolis to the colony and then from the colony to the metropolis; and, on the other hand, from the political field to the academic."⁶⁹ She explains that "The French doctrine of a 'colonial pact' was established on the basis of an eloquent division: the metropolis was destined for industrialization, whereas colonies had to provide raw materials."⁷⁰ She asserts: "This is how the idea of 'decolonization' becomes associated, and then conflated, with the dissolution of the European colonial empires in Asia and Africa and the subsequent emergence of new independent states. Within the academic field, this idea continues to migrate toward historiography."⁷¹ She shows that this is a misunderstanding since the imperial stands between the imperial center and the periphery, but decolonization means dismantling imperialism and colonization.

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⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Or, more to the point, it is important to see the postimperial and the postcolonial through the postcolonial lens rather than through a semiotic analysis that conflates them. Decolonization is not about the philosophy of history of the imperial city exploiting the periphery, but about dismantling imperialism, that is, ending capitalist colonialism.

The Imperial/Colonial Divide

Imperial centers/peripheries

Imperialism/colonialism

As Luste Boulbina states:

It is clear that the situation of African countries is not comparable to that of the former colonies of the Americas, with the exception of South Africa. [...] The slave-based former colonies of the Americas, all rooted in a settler model, must be differentiated from the last “modern” colonies of Africa, which are not, except and particularly Algeria, settler colonies. The independent states of the Americas must also be differentiated from African independent states. To put these matters schematically: the independences of the American continent have benefitted Europeans, with the exception of Haiti, which became the first “Black Republic” in 1804. The independence movements across the African continent benefitted the autochthonous populations, with the notable exception of South Africa, which only held its first “multi-racial” elections in 1994. In this continent, Algeria is the only former settler colony to have been entirely vacated of its European population. What is at stake in sovereignty is shaped to a large extent by the date of independence – those of the nineteenth century or the most recent ones achieved in the twentieth century – and by the presence or absence of Europeans.⁷²

Conclusion

I can state that what we see all around us in this time of neoliberal global capitalism is that we are increasingly confronted with a political and social amnesia that profits from the almost complete obliteration of the past, the intensifying processes of de-historicization and de-politicization. Central to these processes is the logic of (neoliberal) repetition that produces at least two different pro-

⁷² *Ibid.*

cedures of (de)historicization. On one side, we have the logic of the neoliberal Western world that works as a pure trans-historical machine, and on the other, in the regions in the East and in the South of Europe, we detect a forced technique of embracing historicization as totalization. In both cases, the result is a suspension of history that works with the primary intention of disposing of any alternative within it. Mbembe suggests that the demythologizing of certain versions of history must go hand in hand with the necessary “*demythologizing of whiteness*.”⁷³ As Mbembe explains: “This is not because whiteness is the same as history. Human history, by definition, is history beyond whiteness. Human history is about the future.”⁷⁴

On the other side of discussions, we could say almost outside of philosophy, at its margins, we find the theoretical concepts of the late Édouard Glissant (1928–2011), “especially since his ideas have developed from observing and living the transition to globalization after decolonization and departmentalization to the current moment.”⁷⁵

In sharp contrast to globalization and its push for uniformity backed by capitalist “*lois du profit*,” Glissant’s concept of the “*tout-monde*” in [and] of itself produces a resistant discourse to globalization. His project develops his own theory of Relation to arrive at a poetics of being *of the world*, or *worldness*: the imagining of a world in which all peoples (humanities) of the *terre-monde* put into language (speaking, writing) their experiences and their being, so as to be heard by other peoples. Rather than accepting the domination of global hierarchies, Glissant proposes imagining the *real*, through a process that he calls *creolization*: cultures are constantly changing with the influence of other cultures’ languages, ways of being, without losing themselves to any dominant uniform culture.⁷⁶

⁷³ Mbembe, “Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive”, no page.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Sara C. Hanaburgh, “Global Wreckage and Consumer Illusions: Responses to the Human Effects of Economic Globalization in Sub-Saharan African Francophone Novels and Films, 1973–2006”, PhD thesis, New York, Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2012, p. 225.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

John E. Drabinski suggests,⁷⁷ and I reiterate, that the chaotic mix Glissant has been dealing with since his earliest work arises from the Caribbean as the crossroads of the world. The slave trade and then colonialism brought an incompatible but fertile cultural dynamic to the archipelago, producing creolized forms of culture. What is the significance of these forms of culture, asks Drabinski, and what theoretical lessons can be drawn from these forms? As he contends, Glissant's later work extends his concept of creolization, initially an internal feature of the Caribbean, to the idea of *tout-monde*. *Tout-monde* denotes an aggressive, forward-looking imperative to bring global cultures into contact and to harness the productive chaos that emerges from that contact. "A poetics of the whole world."⁷⁸

Let me finish as I started, going back to the *Critique of Black Reason* and Mbembe's firm view of the World of today.

On the one hand, we must escape the status of victimhood. On the other, we must make a break with "good conscience" and the denial of responsibility. It is through this dual approach that we will be able to articulate a new politics and ethics founded on a call for justice. That said, to be African is first and foremost to be a free man, or, as Fanon always proclaimed, "a man among other men." A man free from everything, and therefore able to invent himself. A true politics of identity consists in constantly nourishing, fulfilling, and refilling the capacity for self-invention. Afrocentrism is a hypostatic variant of the desire of those of African origin to need only to justify themselves to themselves. It is true that such a world is above all a form of relation to oneself. But there is no relation to oneself that does not also implicate the Other. The Other is at once difference and similarity, united. What we must imagine is a politics of humanity that is fundamentally a politics of the similar, but in a context in which what we all share from the beginning is difference. It is our differences that, paradoxically, we must share. And all of this depends on reparation, on the expansion of our conception of justice and responsibility.⁷⁹

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⁷⁷ John E. Drabinski, "Sites of Relation and 'Tout-monde'", *Angelaki*, 24 (3/2019), pp. 157–172.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, p. 178.

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Worlds as Transcendental and Political Fictions¹

Introduction

It is common to think of works of fiction (not only in literature, but also in cinema and other media) as creating imaginary alternative worlds in which their narratives are set. Literary theory often refers to the philosophical concept of possible worlds as a means to theorise the construction of such fictional worlds. In this article, however, I reverse this perspective and propose to think of the philosophical concept of world as a category that belongs to the order of fiction. This entails a careful specification of what fiction might mean in this regard, but also requires some clarifications with respect to the transformations that the concept of world underwent in modern and contemporary philosophy.

Starting with the latter, it should first be noted that the modern scientific revolution invalidated the pre-modern conceptions of world as a cosmological or ontological category. In his study of this revolution, Alexandre Koyré convincingly showed how the emergence of modern science led to “the disappearance, from philosophically and scientifically valid concepts, of the conception of the world as a finite, closed, and hierarchically ordered whole.”² A string of contemporary thinkers later argued that this “destruction of the Cosmos”³ should be deemed final and irreversible, since the very nature of what is real (either cosmologically or ontologically) cannot be adequately described by such a

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² Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*

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metaphysically charged concept.⁴ It is precisely from a realist perspective that we can thus argue that the concept of world should be discarded (unless we simply use the word world as a synonym for reality or factuality). From this perspective, world is thus nothing more than a fiction, but in a pejorative sense of a mere philosophical fantasy.

What I propose in the following goes in another direction and relates to a different genealogy of the modern concept of world. Koyré analyses the abandonment of the traditional conception of the cosmos, but it is precisely the revolutionary period of modern thought he examines that also produced a new way of thinking the concept of world that moves away from the question of totality (the world as a closed whole) and focuses instead on multiplicity. With Malebranche and especially Leibniz, there appears a new understanding of the multiplicity of worlds that differs greatly even from the cosmological speculations on the existence of other worlds beside our own. According to Leibniz, a world is a specific construction of a multitude of substances (monads). This ontological multiplicity can be arranged in different ways so that it constitutes an infinite number of possible worlds. Therefore, the multiplicity in question does not refer to *other* worlds but to different possible arrangements of the same ontological reality – it is the potential multiplicity of *our own* world.

What, then, is the status of this multiplicity of worlds if it is not considered in a cosmological way? An influential contemporary philosophical use of the concept of possible worlds appeared in relation to modal logic, where it enabled significant developments by clarifying the notions of possibility and necessity. To this *logical* status of the multiplicity of worlds, however, I propose to add a *transcendental* status that can be discerned in some tendencies in contemporary philosophy. While taken *logically*, multiple possible worlds present different versions of how things might have been, taken *transcendentally*, the multiple worlds describe different frameworks that define the parameters of how the

⁴ As stated by Jacques Lacan, for example: “If we leave behind philosophical discourse, nothing is less certain than the existence of a world.” Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, Book XX: Encore*, trans. B. Fink, New York, W. W. Norton, 1998, p. 30. A similar conclusion can also be found in Gabriel Markus, *Why the World Does Not Exist*, trans. G. Moss, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2015, and Roland Végső, *Worldlessness After Heidegger: Phenomenology, Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

ontological multiplicity is arranged so that it constitutes an ontical reality. I am referring here specifically to Alain Badiou's *Logics of Worlds*, in which worlds are presented as transcendental structures that define how ontological multiples come into appearance.⁵

Badiou's conception of the multiplicity of worlds, however, is only one of several attempts in contemporary (especially French) philosophy to clarify the relation between the ontological multiplicity and the multiplicity of worlds. The works of Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Jacques Rancière also display this tendency in one way or another.⁶ The radical idea common to these philosophers is that the multiplicity of worlds is no longer confined to the realm of possibility, but has become actualised. Multiple worlds do not merely describe how reality might have been. Instead, our experience of reality has become, they claim, affected by the co-existence of divergent, yet overlapping worlds. Simultaneously inhabiting multiple worlds has, according to these philosophers, in fact become a part of the human condition. In contrast to the realist tendencies in contemporary philosophy that argue against any kind of transcendental "correlationism" that mediates our experience of reality,⁷ this approach could thus be called *hypercorrelationist*, as it takes into account the coexistence and interference of multiple transcendental frameworks.⁸ This also distinguishes this approach from the Kantian transcendental that defines *a priori* forms of possible experience, which cannot be changed, varied, or multiplied.

It is no coincidence that the Leibnizian conception of multiple worlds (via its application in modal logics) allowed literary theory to grasp the construction of fictional worlds imagined by literature. From the perspective offered by this con-

⁵ Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds. Being and Event*, 2, trans. A. Toscano, London, Continuum, 2006.

⁶ I return to Deleuze and Rancière below, but I leave aside Nancy, whose concept of world(s) owes a great deal to the phenomenological tradition, which I do not address in this article. See, for example, Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. J. S. Librett, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997. I also do not address in this article the topic of the loss of the world, often associated with the phenomenological concept of world (and politically with Hannah Arendt).

⁷ See particularly Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. R. Brassier, London, Continuum, 2010.

⁸ I explain this approach in more detail in Rok Benčin, *Rethinking the Concept of World: Towards Transcendental Multiplicity*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming.

ception, world is no longer an ontological category: it does not refer to what is real *per se*, but to the different possibilities of actualisation or to the coming into appearance of what is (ontologically) real. Therefore, a world is always a construction, an arrangement, a perspective on what is real, and thus moves closer to fiction. Many critics have, however, pointed out that there are significant differences between the philosophical idea of possible worlds and what is actually at stake in the construction of fictional worlds in literature and other forms of art. Yet, from a transcendental perspective on the multiplicity of worlds, I will argue, this division is necessarily blurred. Leibniz himself, as we will see, resorted to novels as illustrations of how possible worlds should be understood. Deleuze also references works of literature to explain how divergent worlds are simultaneously actualised. Badiou himself, while insisting on the objective status of worlds, also presents worlds in a somewhat fictional way, as I will show in what follows. Rancière as well shows how fictional structures are required to produce a sense of belonging to a common world.

It is thus on the background of understanding worlds in terms of a transcendental multiplicity that I propose to consider worlds as fictional. Fiction, here, does not refer to representations of imaginary worlds. Rather, it refers to the transcendental structures that frame our experience of reality. These structures are neither real nor imaginary, but display a certain objectivity as they impose the coordinates of experience that direct and limit the way reality appears to us. In this sense, fictional worlds also have a social or even a political existence. As Rancière recently put it, the coordinates of visibility and intelligibility that define a common world also “determine the ways in which subjects occupy this common world, in terms of coexistence or exclusion, and the capacity of those subjects to perceive it, understand it and transform it.”⁹ Traditionally, the concept of world has been present in political philosophy through the cosmopolitan ideal. But can cosmopolitanism survive the modern destruction of the cosmos? I will try to show below that Immanuel Kant established modern cosmopolitanism precisely as a fictional perspective that narrates history as if it were a novel. Yet, with the multiplication of worlds, the perspective of cosmopolitan unification should also be questioned. Following Rancière, we will observe how

⁹ Jacques Rancière, *Modern Times: Essays on Temporality in Art and Politics*, Zagreb, Multi-medialni institut, 2017, p. 12.

the emancipatory political perspective should rather be placed within the dissensual bifurcation of worlds.

In the first part of this article, I will elaborate on these insights by analysing Deleuze's and Badiou's multiplicity of worlds from the perspective of the blurred distinction between possible, actual, and fictional worlds. In the second part, I will discuss the political existence of fictional worlds. I will show how Kant first defines cosmopolitanism as a fictional perspective on history, and how this kind of political fiction can be re-examined from the perspective of Rancière's definition of politics as a conflict of worlds.

From Fiction as World to World as Fiction

In her book on the concept of possible worlds in literary theory, Ruth Ronen showed that while the appropriation of this philosophical concept by theoretical discourses in literary studies was highly productive, it also came at the price of a certain metaphorisation of the concept.¹⁰ Careful examination reveals a number of differences between possible and fictional worlds. Ronen accounts for this distinction in terms of their relation to the actual world: "Possible worlds are based on a logic of ramification determining the range of possibilities that emerge from an actual state of affairs; fictional worlds are based on a logic of parallelism that guarantees their autonomy in relation to the actual world."¹¹ While possible worlds are derived from the actual world on the basis of alternative possibilities (a world in which Caesar crosses the Rubicon and a world in which he does not), fictional worlds create their own reality, which does not necessarily refer to a possibility within the actual world and can even be impossible and contradictory. Yet, even the most "possible" or realist fiction is still equally fictional. Not only do possible and fictional worlds differ on the basis of their relation to the actual world, they are also differently structured. A possible world has the same completeness as the actual world since it retains all of the same characteristics, except for those related to the distinct possibility that it realises (e.g. Caesar does not cross the Rubicon). A fictional world, on the contrary, necessarily remains incomplete, since it is limited by what the literary text presents

¹⁰ Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 74–75, 229.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

of it.¹² As Jean-Jacques Lecercle notes, fictional worlds are “framed” and “furnished”: everything outside the frame remains unknown (and strictly speaking non-existent), while the frame is furnished by objects, events, and characters that are singled out.¹³ Lecercle adds that while it is in the nature of the idea of possible worlds that there are multiple possible worlds, only fictional worlds are truly singular – since each work of fiction creates its own world, unlike the possible worlds, which are always variations of the actual one.

Given these differences between possible and fictional worlds, it is all the more interesting that Leibniz himself seemed to have welcomed the comparison. He discusses his conception of possibility in relation to works of fiction on at least two occasions, citing d’Urfé’s *Astrea* and Barclay’s *Argenis*. On both occasions, Leibniz elaborates on his distinction between the notions of possibility and compossibility: for something to be possible, it does not necessarily have to be compossible with (i.e. possible in) our own world. The stories and characters of these fictional works are possible because they are “clearly and distinctly imaginable” and do not “imply any contradiction.”¹⁴ They are not, however, compossible with this world, since in order for such characters and events “to exist in fact, it would be necessary for the rest of the universe also to be entirely different from what it is.”¹⁵ Possible worlds are therefore not limited to potential versions of the actual world and should be considered independently from the actual world, like works of fiction are.

Evidently, one could still argue that the possible world of an *Astrea* or an *Argenis* could still be generated from the actual world if enough changes were applied. Yet, what is more important is that Leibniz’s discussions of works of fiction show how possible worlds, just like fictional ones, are heavily reliant on imag-

¹² Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Interpretation as Pragmatics*, New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1999, p. 186.

¹³ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, “Error/Mirror: How to Generate Fiction”, in M. Porée and I. Alfandary (eds.), *Literature and Error: A Literary Take on Mistakes and Errors*, New York, Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 109–122. Also published as Jean-Jacques Lecercle, “Napaka/ogledalo: kako generirati fikcijo”, *Filozofski vestnik*, 34 (3/2013), pp. 111–123.

¹⁴ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “The Philosopher’s Confession”, trans. L. Strickland, <http://www.leibniz-translations.com/confession.htm>, accessed 15 March 2019; Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, L. E. Loemker (ed.), Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1989, p. 661.

¹⁵ Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, p. 661.

ination: just like fictional narratives, they focus on singular characters, events, and actions. That is where a fictional dimension of any possible world can be detected. Generation by ramification (possible worlds) might not be that different than generation by imagination (fictional worlds). Not only because, as Leibniz shows, other possible worlds are something to be imagined, but also because the function needed to produce a possible world from the actual one (inverting the truth value of a proposition) already singles out the events and characters that “frame” this particular possible world. Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon is one such example, as is the story of the palace of destinies at the end of Leibniz’s *Theodicy*. There, Theodorus browses through the infinite array of possible worlds not at random, but through a specific character, Sextus, observing his many possible fates. Even though a possible world is complete, everything that remains outside the frame of the realisation of particular other possibilities is completely out of focus, which makes the completeness merely abstract. While the completeness of possible worlds is abstract, fictional worlds – incomplete by definition – are also not without an at least implied completion. Such implied completeness of fictional worlds could be the basis for a redefinition of what Roland Barthes called the reality effect in literature: all the surplus details in literary description serve to imply that there is a world (if unknowable) outside the frame. The abstract and implied completeness of the world are not that different, considering that the world outside the singularities in focus is blurred in both instances.

What interests us here are not so much the technical details of distinguishing between the structural characteristics of actual, possible, and fictional worlds, but the blurring of these distinctions implied by the proliferation of actual worlds. If there is an overlapping multiplicity of actual worlds, what is the relation of this multiplicity to the multiplicity of possible and fictional worlds? Is the proliferation of actual worlds to be understood as the actualisation of possible and/or fictional worlds? I will try to answer these questions by briefly examining two accounts of the multiplicity of worlds I have already mentioned, namely those of Deleuze and Badiou. We will see that in both accounts the process of actualisation is not understood simply as a realisation of a possibility, but as a contingency that transforms the field of possibility. We will also see that the proliferation of worlds clearly endows actuality with a fictional dimension.

Deleuze's subversion of Leibniz makes the multiplicity of possible worlds actual. Yet, this actualisation is not a realisation of a possibility. Rather, it is a realisation of what Leibniz called impossibility. Caesar crosses the Rubicon or he does not: for Leibniz, both events are possible, but not compossible within the same world. The two opposite possibilities can only be parts of two different worlds. Deleuze, on the contrary, describes a process of a bifurcating becoming of impossibilities: "with its unfurling of divergent series in the same world, comes the irruption of impossibilities on the same stage, [...] where Caesar crosses *and* does not cross the Rubicon."¹⁶ Deleuze's multiplicity of worlds is thus a multiplicity of actualised *possible* worlds, where opposite possibilities can coexist.

Yet, for Deleuze, the actualisation of divergent worlds is not an actualisation of distinct possible worlds, but a becoming of a divergent series of singularities in the "chaosmos". We thus get a glimpse of the ontological multiplicity as "a formless *ungrounded* chaos" of singularities, which is not, according to Deleuze, a realm of possibility, but a field of virtuality.¹⁷ Actualised divergent worlds are structured as possible worlds, but they are not actualisations of pre-existing possibilities. The coexistence of impossibilities is a consequence of a constant redistribution of singularities in the becoming of bifurcating and diverging worlds. This constitutes the chaosmos, the creative tension between virtuality and actuality, between the chaos of singularities and the multi-cosmos of worlds.

Deleuze's possible worlds, like Leibniz's, are differentiated by particular events and characters, which gives them a fictional dimension. It is no wonder, then, that Deleuze resorts to literature to describe the multiplicity of diverging worlds as "a 'chaosmos' of the type found in Joyce, but also in Maurice Leblanc, Borges, or Gombrowicz."¹⁸ The term "chaosmos" itself comes from Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" seems to be Deleuze's favourite illustration, though, as it appears in many of Deleuze's texts, usually in the context of subverting Leibniz: "This is Borges's reply to Leibniz: the straight line as force of time, as labyrinth of time, is also the line which forks and keeps

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. T. Colney, London, The Athlone Press, 1993, p. 82. My emphasis.

¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, London, Continuum, 1994, pp. 68–69.

¹⁸ Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 81.

on forking, passing through impossible presents.”¹⁹ A musical parallel is also proposed by Deleuze, contrasting Baroque harmony (Leibniz’s own example) with the Neo-Baroque “polyphony of polyphonies”, a term borrowed from Pierre Boulez.²⁰ It is finally Nietzsche who, for Deleuze, completes the subversion of Leibniz. The will to power enables us to understand, “in opposition to Leibniz,” how impossibilities may emerge together through an affirmation “of the false and its artistic, creative power.”²¹ The affirmation of divergence is an artistic act.

While Deleuze’s multiple worlds are essentially structured as *possible* worlds (with all the annotations we have just described), Badiou’s multiple worlds are structured as *fictional* worlds. This claim should immediately arouse suspicion in any reader of *Logics of Worlds*. Therein, Badiou clearly states that worlds are *objective* transcendental structures that can only be properly explained through mathematical logic. What, then, justifies the claim that Badiou’s multiplicity of worlds is a multiplicity of actualised fictional worlds?

Surprisingly, Badiou actually characterises worlds as fictions at one point in *Logics of Worlds*, but only in relation to the ontological multiplicity worlds are appearances of. Compared to being-qua-being, worlds are shown to be mere appearances or fictions: “The only inflexible truth regarding the intimate decomposition of the worldly fiction of being-there is that of being-qua-being. The object objects to the transcendental fiction, which it nevertheless is, the ‘fiction’ of the One in being.”²² This formulation, which is not further elaborated on anywhere else in the book, is a covert homage to Lacan. It refers to a passage from Lacan’s text “L’étourdit”, in which Lacan opposes the real to any “fiction of Worldliness.”²³ Beyond “the World” as a philosophical illusion, according to Lacan, there is a need to find other “fixions” of the real, starting from the not-all and the impasses of logic. Combining “fiction” and “fixation”, Lacan points out

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 131. See also Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 82.

²⁰ Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 82.

²¹ Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 131.

²² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, p. 221.

²³ “Recourir au pastout, à l’hommoinzun, soit aux impasses de la logique, c’est, à montrer l’issue hors des fictions de la Mondanité, faire fixation autre du réel: soit de l’impossible qui le fixe de la structure du langage.” Jacques Lacan, *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 479.

that our relation to the real as the impossible is fixated within the structure of language. Even though he rejects Lacan's focus on language, Badiou draws a parallel by putting ontological multiplicity in the role of the real, i.e. the impossible (or the impasse of logic) that can decompose the fiction of worlds. Yet, the way transcendentals compose objects out of a pure multiplicity is also a transcendental fiction in the sense that it is only through such fictions that being can appear. Transcendentals thus fixate being-qua-being as being-there, in a world.

My intention here, however, is to show that worlds are not merely fictional in relation to being as the real, but are also immanently structured as fiction. Returning one last time to the distinction between possible and fictional worlds, we have seen that while possible worlds are complete and generated by evoking divergent possibilities, fictional worlds are incomplete and generated as partial (framed) parallel realities, furnished with (imaginary) objects, characters, relations, and events. Contrary to Deleuze, who focuses on divergent possibilities (that are no longer part of different possible worlds but emerge on the same stage), Badiou describes worlds as transcendental frames that single out parts of the ontological multiplicity and give them an intensity of appearance.

Consider a couple of examples Badiou uses to explain his concept of the transcendental. The first example comes from the story of *Ariadne and Bluebeard*, Paul Dukas's opera whose libretto was adapted from a play by Maurice Maeterlinck, in which Ariadne, who marries Bluebeard, attempts to liberate his former five wives from their captivity. In contrast to what we can assume would be a Deleuzian take on the story, Badiou is not interested in alternative possibilities that could alter the course of events, e.g. the five wives follow and/or do not follow Ariadne to freedom. Badiou is rather interested in the structural logic of appearance that regulates identities, differences, and relations between the characters that constitute the world of this opera, and the relation between (real) being and its (fictional) appearance (reflecting on the relation between the real women that inspired and/or sang the role of Ariadne).²⁴ Badiou's interests thus coincide with the way the concept of world is used in literary theory.

The second example Badiou introduces is not taken from any work of fiction, even though it could be read as a passage of prose. The world in question is the

²⁴ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, pp. 115–125.

world framed by an autumn evening at a country house: “At the moment when I’m lost in the contemplation of the wall inundated by the autumnal red of the ivy, behind me, on the gravel of the path, a motorcycle is taking off.”²⁵ Badiou reflects on how the appearance of the ivy is centred around its red leaves and how the façade provides the link that connects the ivy and the house as belonging to the same world. While the redness of the autumn leaves dominates this world, the ivy’s roots hold a minimum degree of existence: they are a necessary part of it, but do not actually appear within it.²⁶ Despite the objectivity of worlds and their firm logical architecture Badiou develops, one could say that distinct worlds nevertheless seem stylistically framed (fixated in language, as Lacan would say): the centre of this world is not simply ivy, but what the observer describes as its “blood-red leafage.”²⁷ Badiou sets this world around an observer (himself) who first focuses on the redness of the ivy and is then distracted by the motorcycle, which implies that there is at least a degree of perspectivism involved in any world.

Some of Badiou’s examples are more “realistic” in that they describe social and political realities rather than a personal experience. Yet, the point is not to cast doubt on the objective existence of worlds, but to show that this objectivity has a fictional structure. Badiou’s worlds are framed in space (e.g. a specific country house and its surroundings) and time (an autumn evening). They are furnished with characters (Bluebeard and Ariadne), relations (the six wives), objects (the ivy, the house), and events (Ariadne’s escape), which appear within their worlds with various degrees of intensity. As framed and furnished, these worlds are incomplete: within each world, only a section of the ontological multiplicity appears. These are parallel worlds not generated by ramification from the actual world but by framing the ontological multiplicity.

To claim that the structure of such worlds is fictional is not to deny that there is a logic to their construction. Rather, it is to claim that there is a logic of fiction that supplements the mathematical logic Badiou uses to explain the construction of worlds. Without adding the fictional logic to the mathematical one, there is sim-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁶ Such “inexistents” (parts of objects that are part of a given world even though they do not appear within it) become central later on in Badiou’s book as that which has the potential to dissolve a world’s logic of appearance.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

ply no way to explain the framing of worlds, i.e. the perspective that defines the parameters of a given world as world. Worlds are generated by a frame that covers a part of the ontological multiplicity and singles out the multiples as objects. As Jean-Jacques Lecercle puts it, “a fictional world is constructed by a series of interpellations of entities into singularities, individual elements of the world.”²⁸ Badiou’s logical apparatus might explain in detail the way the transcendental operates, once a world is given, but on its own it cannot account for the very moment of setting a frame upon a selected piece of the ontological multiplicity that “interpellates” it into a world. Worlds are generated by this transcendental framing, which forms the fictional dimension of worlds.

The fall of the distinctions between actual and non-actual worlds does not entail a denial of the existence of an ontological reality or a socio-economic totality. It simply states that world is not a concept designed to describe either of them. Worlds as transcendental frameworks have a fictional structure that affects reality. The second part of the article discusses some of its effects.

The Cosmopolitan Fiction and the Conflict of Worlds

Kant first introduces cosmopolitanism in relation to the question of whether history can be understood as following a natural plan that guarantees that humanity is on the course of progress. In the “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective”, Kant is torn between suggesting that an affirmative answer to this question resembles a scientific hypothesis or a fictional tale. At the beginning of the text, Kant compares this idea to Kepler’s and Newton’s discoveries of natural laws, which suddenly clarified seemingly “eccentric” phenomena.²⁹ At the end, however, he admits that such a hypothesis “could yield only a *novel*.”³⁰ Kant’s hesitation is symptomatic, since it reflects a contradiction at the heart of his undertaking: resurrecting the cosmopolitan ideal after the destruction of the cosmos. The metaphysical and teleological assumptions that the cosmopolitan ideal was based on when it was first developed by the Stoics are not compatible

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²⁸ Lecercle, *Interpretation as Pragmatics*, p. 186.

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, P. Kleingeld (ed.), New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15. Emphasis in the original.

with a post-Copernican critical approach to philosophy.³¹ Kant seems to indulge here in the speculative fantasy that a metaphysical assumption would reveal itself as a natural law. Nevertheless, Kant acknowledges that such an assumption can only be considered a useful fiction. While epistemologically the assumption cannot hold, it can still be retained due to its practical value, i.e. the moral benefits of the progressive vision of humanity it offers.

Kant defines cosmopolitanism as a perspective upon history, or, more precisely, as a projection of a retrospective, a look back on history from its endpoint, the realisation of its natural plan. As creatures that nature equipped with reason, according to Kant, humans are destined to fully develop their rational capacities, which is only possible collectively, in a reasonable form of society on a global scale. The natural predispositions of mankind can only be achieved within a cosmopolitan condition. Yet, cosmopolitanism is not simply an ideal – a preferred goal – but the assumption of an actual process leading up to it. What Kant is looking for is some sort of evidence or at least a convincing argument that cosmopolitanism is not merely how reason imagines an ideal end to history, but that history is actually developing towards its reasonable end. Hence the two alternative introductions: progress can either be proven in experience, which would make it a scientific hypothesis, or it can be imagined, which makes it a fiction – history could thus be read as a novel.

Kant first tries out the scientific path. Some “faint signs” of progress can be identified within the emerging movement of the Enlightenment, but this falls short of a convincing proof.³² The results of his empirical research are underwhelming and the text ultimately sways towards fiction with the leading metaphor of history being a novel. The comparison to a novel is significant, not because the assumption that the history of humankind follows a natural plan can only be deemed a fiction, but because what is required is precisely to imagine history as a narrative. While history may at first glance seem like an absurd succession of events, the cosmopolitan perspective reveals it as a well-structured narrative in which humanity eventually manages to overcome all obstacles and finally

³¹ See Martha Nussbaum, “Kant and Cosmopolitanism”, in J. Bohman and M. Lutz-Bachmann (eds.), *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant’s Cosmopolitan Ideal*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1997, pp. 25–57.

³² Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, p. 13.

achieve the purpose that was set for it at the start. The idea is thus that history has the structure of fiction, wherein fiction is understood according to a certain rationality of fiction, i.e. as a narrative in which events make sense from the perspective of the end they inevitably lead to. The cosmopolitan “novel” narrates history as a fiction of progress.

As long as cosmopolitanism is merely a perspective, the hopes for its realisation are pinned on the existence of nature as the narrator who knows the end of the story because it is its author. Simply put, it depends on our faith in natural providence. Its practical benefits aside, the question of whether this story can nevertheless be considered true will continue to haunt Kant throughout his political writings. In two further texts on the issue, Kant will try to make the cosmopolitan perspective more realistic not by finding the scientific proof that progress is real, but by materialising providence. In the famous “An Answer to the Question What Is Enlightenment?”, in which Kant provides the ultimate modern formulation of enlightenment as *sapere aude*, the courage to think for oneself, Kant also questions the capacity of individuals to be able to emancipate themselves from their own immaturity.³³ Even though the initial idea is to use reason “without the direction of another,” it is nevertheless necessary to put one’s faith in the hands of the enlightened elite, who will spread the spirit of enlightenment in the sphere of public discourse. This process is tolerated by the enlightened monarchy with its motto of “argue, but obey.”³⁴ Rejecting revolution, Kant opts for the long-term perspective of gradual improvement towards (a delayed) emancipation under the supervision of an enlightened state. It is ultimately the then King of Prussia who Kant appoints as the worldly incarnation of providence.³⁵ Kant returns to discussing cosmopolitanism in “Toward Perpetual Peace”, wherein he finds new ways of reconciling the fact and fiction of progress.³⁶ In order to alleviate its fictional status, Kant naturalises providence. Since the surface of the Earth is round and limited, its peoples are faced with the necessity to eventually come to some sort of understanding. Driven by the natural conditions of life on Earth, the social conditions for cosmopolitanism gradually emerge. Potential

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³³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–19.

³⁵ I discuss these texts in relation to contemporary reaffirmations of the Enlightenment in Rok Benčín, “Ideas and Their Destinies: Enlightenment, Communism, Europe”, *Filozofski vestnik*, 40 (2/2019), pp. 61–79.

³⁶ Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, pp. 67–109.

objections that the globally interconnected social reality can also be seen from the perspective of deepening antagonisms are disqualified in advance since it is precisely through antagonism that the plan of nature operates. The path to peace leads through war, which enables Kant to present his position as even more realistic. However, it could easily be argued that the sole reason for the existence of the narrative of progress is to restrain the event that might bring it to a premature end – the revolution implied by *sapere aude*, i.e. the direct subjectivation of reason. The need to materialise providence is the need to delay emancipation by taking it out of the hands of those who are supposed to be emancipated.

Kant addresses the question of historical progress once more in the “Contest of Faculties”, where he returns to the scientific metaphor, comparing the hypothesis of progress with the Copernican turn.³⁷ The original question, i.e. can the hypothesis of historical progress be confirmed in experience, now receives a stunning new answer. Kant now finally discovers a “historical sign” that proves, “even for the most rigorous of theories,” that the capacity nature bestows upon humanity is indeed historically active and therefore that the fiction of progress is real.³⁸ While in previous texts Kant tried to embody or naturalise providence by realistically referencing actual social processes or natural conditions, he now reiterates that it is impossible to assume the position of providence. Progress can therefore not be confirmed by empirical facts and processes but by something much more elusive and precarious – an affect triggered by an event. The French Revolution helped Kant finally prove that progress is not merely a fantasy. But it is not the event itself that proved it, since its immediate effects were disastrous and its achievements could still be reversed. The proof was in the enthusiasm of the spectators that sympathise with the revolutionary efforts from abroad. The revolution might be local, but the participation in its sentiment that followed spread throughout the world with an intensity that will never be forgotten, regardless of the aftermath of the particular event itself. Even though Kant does not discuss cosmopolitanism explicitly here, the revolutionary enthusiasm becomes a cosmopolitan affect. The sentiment of sympathisers proved that what happened in France “can happen among all the peoples on earth.”³⁹

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 154, 158.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

This affective cosmopolitanism is what ultimately makes the fiction of progress real. Yet, the evidence that Kant finally found might not actually confirm what he was looking for. Perhaps the political affect brought about by the Revolution is indicative of another kind of fictional rationality. What the event proves is that humanity's natural predisposition, which requires a cosmopolitan condition to fully develop, can be historically effective. Despite what Kant claims, however, such enthusiasm actually does not prove that the cosmopolitan condition will ever actually be achieved. It only proves the cause of progress, not its continuity. It proves that reason can appear as a historical force if it is directly politically (revolution) or at least affectively (enthusiasm) subjectivised. Kant thus comes back to what was implied in his initial definition of enlightenment as the direct subjectivation of reason. Another kind of fictional rationality is at work here: not the fiction based on narrative progression from the beginning to a pre-determined end, but fiction as organised around an exceptional kind of event, an event that condenses all of human history into one fragile moment of uncertain destiny.

Kant's writings on history display the political consequences of the modern destruction of the cosmos. The lack of its cosmic grounds stretches cosmopolitanism between two different rationalities of fiction: a plot-driven fiction in which all events make sense from the perspective of the end inscribed in the beginning and an event-driven fiction in which an exceptional event breaks the story into two parts but provides no guarantees regarding the end to which it might lead. In the first kind of fiction, doubts regarding the subjectivation of reason are resolved by objectifying progress. The state or empirical social processes can be viewed as materialisations of providence, the real-world guarantee that history is a reasonable process after all. The second kind of fiction, on the other hand, is radically subjective, since it is driven by the political subjectivation of reason in the present. The price to be paid for this is that progress itself is hanging in the balance. Such exceptional events can only be *signs* of progress, signs that cannot be objectified as stable processes. Kant oscillates between these two rationalities of fiction and often produces contradictory compromises, at the same time justifying and condemning dissent and revolution.

Rancière's declaration that "there is no world politics" makes it clear that he is not a thinker of the cosmopolitan ideal.⁴⁰ The broad political perspectives that encompass Europe, world citizens, and humanity aim for "a whole that is equal to the sum of its parts," a type of whole that Rancière considers to be essentially deprived of politics.⁴¹ Political universality does not begin with a consensual perspective that puts together all the parts of a whole, but with "the singular construction of disputes," which occur where there is a manifestation of "a part of those who have no part."⁴² In politics, a whole can never be identical to the sum of its parts, since what constitutes the parts as having something in common is always characterised by a particular distribution of bodies and capacities that turns out to be contingent whenever bodies appear out of place or display capacities that should not belong to them. Those who have no part can only stake their claim by provoking a bifurcation of worlds. Instead of posing "world" as a political ideal, Rancière understands politics through a paradoxical and conflictual coexistence of worlds: "*The essence of politics is the manifestation of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one.*"⁴³

According to Rancière, worlds are composed of forms of visibility and intelligibility that define the perception and understanding of phenomena, events, and situations that shape a shared reality and the ways various subjects can take part in it. Rancière does not hesitate to characterise such forms as fictions. These fictions, however, are not mere illusions; they are what produce our sense of reality: "A fiction is not the invention of an imaginary world. Instead it is the construction of a framework within which subjects, things, and situations can be perceived as coexisting in a common world and events can be identified and linked in a way that makes sense. Fiction is at work whenever a sense of reality must be produced."⁴⁴ Rancière's concept of world is closely related to what he calls the "distribution of the sensible," which he describes as a Foucauldian

⁴⁰ Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. J. Rose, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 139.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 123–125.

⁴³ Jacques Rancière, "Ten Theses on Politics", in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, S. Corcoran (ed.), London, Continuum, 2010, p. 37.

⁴⁴ Rancière, *Modern Times*, p. 13.

historisation of the Kantian *a priori* forms of sensible experience.⁴⁵ The distribution of the sensible allows us to understand how the apparently immediate facts of sense perception depend on the historically variable transcendental structures that determine the way subjects perceive and occupy worlds. Dictating what can or cannot be seen, who can and cannot be heard, the distribution of the sensible can be described as “the dividing-up of the world (*de monde*) and of people (*du monde*).”⁴⁶

But the question is not only how to move away from cosmopolitan consensualism by acknowledging the elementary political value of dissensus. The question is also why political conflict should still be formulated as a conflict of *worlds*. Rancière claims that political dissensus is not merely a confrontation between interests or opinions. If it were so, there would be no need to articulate political conflict as a conflict of worlds, since the sides of the conflict could be considered to belong to the same world. This would be a conflict between already constituted parties that negotiate their position and stake within the whole. In contrast thereto, dissensus is “the demonstration of a gap in the sensible itself,” which means that the issue it addresses concerns the very constitution of the partners, objects, and stage of discussion.⁴⁷ Dissensus makes the gap between two transcendental renderings of the same situation become apparent: “Political demonstration makes visible that which had no reason to be seen; it places one world in another – for instance, the world where the factory is a public space in that where it is considered private, the world where workers speak, and speak about the community, in that where their voices are mere cries expressing pain.”⁴⁸ When those who have no part display a capacity to participate in the common world, they manifest another world that lays claim over the same sensible reality. Therefore, a conflict of worlds should not be understood as a clash between separate worlds that have nothing in common. What is manifested is rather a presence of two worlds in one.

The primacy of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one is also the reason why Rancière rejects Habermas’s insistence on the distinction between the in-

⁴⁵ Jacques Rancière, *The Aesthetics of Politics*, trans. G. Rockhill, London, Continuum, 2006, pp. 12–13.

⁴⁶ Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics”, p. 36.

⁴⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 38.

⁴⁸ Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics”, p. 38.

nerworldly argumentation, necessary for communicative action, and the poetic world-building function of language. Reducing politics to the common world of communicative rationality, which is posited as a moral ideal, necessarily ignores dissensus. It neglects the fact that “the demonstration proper to politics is always both argument and opening up the world where argument can be received and have an impact – argument about the very existence of such a world.”⁴⁹ Rancière therefore proposes to think politics from the point of view of a split between two worlds, two rival transcendental framings of the common. Dissensus is thus a point of bifurcation between several worlds. It is here that Rancière identifies the crux of modern politics: “the multiplication of those operations of subjectification that invent worlds of community that are worlds of dissension.”⁵⁰

Without suggesting a new transcendental, a redistribution of the sensible, the demonstration would only be perceived within the dominant transcendental as an expression of pain, deprived of public significance. It is only effective if it opens up a new world in which it can be perceived as addressing something in common. Another world emerges, a world that is not simply another addition to an indifferent multiplicity of worlds, but a world formed in a dissensual (non-) relation with a specific already existing world. A world where a factory is a public space cannot coexist indifferently with a world in which such is considered private. The paradox of dissensus as the presence of two worlds in one is that it is simultaneously a demonstration of a split between two worlds and a demonstration of another common world that unites them.⁵¹ When the workers emerge as political subjects, they manifest, on the one hand, that there is no common world: the world they find themselves in does not include them and their cause as a public matter. On the other hand, however, they act as if such a world existed, as if they can act in the public sphere within a community of equals, from which they are actually excluded. What their manifestation reveals is not (only) a separate world but a reframing of the common one.

With this in mind, we can return to the two types of fictional rationality that we analysed in relation to the Kantian cosmopolitan ideal. Rancière is strongly op-

⁴⁹ Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 56.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

posed to “the logic of Enlightenment in which the cultivated elites have to guide the ignorant and superstitious lower classes in the path of progress,” a path “of infinite reproduction of inequality in the name of the promise of equality.”⁵² Kant’s dilemma between the direct subjectivation of reason and the materialised fiction of progress returns with Rancière opting firmly for direct subjectivation against progressive representation. The idea of the mature guiding the immature is based on the assumption of inequality and thus betrays in practice the equality it pronounces as its goal. The dependence of such an idea of progress on a narrative structure – which we have observed in Kant – is emphasised by Rancière with his inversion of Lyotard’s thesis on the end of grand narratives. According to Rancière, the grand narratives in fact never ended. In the aftermath of the post-2008 financial crisis, Rancière states, we have seen state authorities and financial elites take on the role of the mature acting in the name of progress, proposing a narrative of historical necessity in which the markets dictate urgent reforms. On the other hand, we have seen the rise of new political subjectivations, e.g. the Occupy movement, which engage another kind of temporality, not the narrative temporality of progress, but rather the temporality of moments or events in which bodies and capacities are redistributed.

Rancière traces the genealogy of the dilemma between the two rationalities of fiction, one based on the event and the other on narrative structure, beyond Kant to Aristotle and his preference for poetry over historical chronicle. What is at stake in this famous passage from *Poetics* is in fact a dilemma between two types of fictional rationality that define two constructions of historical temporality as well as two kinds of participation in historical time. Poetry is truer, for Aristotle, since it causally links events according to necessity and verisimilitude, while the historical chronicle merely lists the empirical succession of events. The advantage of the former is precisely that it is capable of linking events into a narrative. Rancière shows how Aristotle’s poetic hierarchy rests on a social hierarchy between two classes of people:

There are people whose present is situated within the time of events that might arrive – the time of action and of its ends, which is also the time of knowledge and of its leisure: in short, the time of those who have time and who, for that

⁵² Jacques Rancière, “Communists Without Communism?”, in C. Douzinas and S. Žižek (eds.), *The Idea of Communism*, London, Verso, 2010, pp. 167–168.

reason, are called active men. And there are people who live in the present of things which merely happen, one after another, the restricted and repetitive time of the production and reproduction of life: in short, the time of those who don't have time: those men that are called passive, not because they do nothing, but because they passively receive time, without enjoying either the ends of action or the time of leisure which is an end in itself. In this way, the causal rationality of temporal linkage between events is bound up with a hierarchical distribution of temporalities which is a distribution of forms of life.⁵³

Modern grand narratives, Rancière claims, applied the Aristotelian rationality of fiction to history itself. History as a narrative of progress perpetuates inequality by drawing a division between two ways of participating in historical time: on the one hand, the enlightened elite, well positioned to understand and use for their own ends the necessities and impossibilities dictated by the historical arc, and on the other, those to whom history merely happens as a mere succession of events, the rationality of which exceeds their capacity for knowledge and action.

The temporality of political subjectivation, on the other hand, is not the temporality of a narrative, but a temporality of an exceptional event in which history is condensed. It occurs in moments of temporal fissure that have the power to “engende[r] another line of temporality” along with a redistribution of the spaces and bodies that occupy them.⁵⁴ It also coincides, we should add, with the unexpected findings of Kant's search for evidence of progress. As we have seen, the enthusiasm for the French Revolution does not actually prove that history is structured as a narrative in which any event can be related to the ultimate realisation of human capacities under the supervision of the mature, but that an event breaking history in two can connect to anyone anywhere based on the generic human affective and rational capacity. Such connectivity between moments or events, based on equality, is the alternative world-building principle to the one suggested by the narrative of progress.

But to what extent can such new transcendentals resist the world they are in conflict with, or, for that matter, a number of other worlds with which they share

⁵³ Rancière, *Modern Times*, p. 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33. This temporality of micro-events coincides, according to Rancière, with the new fictional logic introduced by realist and modernist novelists.

ontological or sensible multiples with? Obviously, such micro-worlds exist within other worlds in a dissensual way and have very real forces staked against them. Antonia Birnbaum offered the clearest elaboration of this problem as one of articulating the conflict of worlds with the conflict of forces.⁵⁵ An alternative transcendental may indeed emerge in the way Rancière describes it, Birnbaum claims, but it is itself inscribed in a field of forces and antagonisms. The conflict of forces should thus not be ignored, but also not presented as the ultimate real world to which all fictions should simply be reduced. In the light of what I have tried to develop here, the question would be how such new transcendentals can be extended beyond the initially limited sphere of their emergence, inevitably taking into account the conflict of forces, but without wanting or being able to rely on progressive narrative logic? The issue is not to reduce the multiplicity of worlds back to the world of social totality, but how to understand and contribute to the expansion of dissensual worlds.

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⁵⁵ Antonia Birnbaum, *Égalité radicale: diviser Rancière*, Paris, Amsterdam, 2018, pp. 178–235.

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Jean-Jacques Lecercle*

***Dispersed are we* : roman des mondes et monde du roman dans *Between the Acts*, de Virginia Woolf**

(i)

Le livre de Rok Benčín¹ opère rien moins qu'une révolution copernicienne dans la conception du concept de monde. Il laisse de côté l'approche phénoménologique du « monde » comme monde de l'expérience, le *Lebenswelt* de Husserl, pour revenir à Leibniz et à la pluralité des mondes. Mais avec une différence essentielle : non une pluralité de mondes possibles (telle que la philosophie analytique l'a développée – ou encore la théorie littéraire de Pavel à Eco, mais une multiplicité *réelle* : notre monde n'est pas *le* monde mais *un* monde, monde singulier qui coexiste et se recoupe avec une multiplicité d'autres mondes, tout aussi réels. Ce mouvement philosophique (de l'unicité du monde à la multiplicité des mondes possibles et de leur possibilité à leur réalité) s'appuie sur deux thèses.

Première thèse : ces mondes réels qui coexistent et se recoupent ne sont pas des ensembles d'objets et de faits (comme était le monde pour le premier Wittgenstein) mais des cadres transcendants, des organisations spécifiques de l'espace et du temps, dans lesquels se déploie notre expérience. Benčín pratique ce qu'il appelle un « hyper-corrélationnisme » et son concept de « transcendantal » est un concept kantien relu à travers le Badiou de *Logique des mondes*. D'où l'apparent paradoxe : les mondes sont en excès sur l'être (multiplicité des cadres qui peuvent encadrer différemment les mêmes objets) et pourtant l'être est en excès sur les mondes (il n'y a jamais de totalisation *du* monde - chaque cadre laisse un reste ontologique).

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¹ Rok Benčín, *Rethinking the Concept of World: Towards Transcendental Multiplicity*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, à paraître. See also, in this issue, Rok Benčín, "Worlds as Transcendental and Political Fictions", *Filozofski vestnik*, 42 (2/2021), pp. 221–243.

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Deuxième thèse. Ces transcendants ont la structure de la fiction. C'est là la thèse la plus originale (et celle qui mérite le plus discussion). Dire qu'un cadre transcendantal a une structure de fiction, c'est dire (et ici on passe de Badiou à Rancière et apparaît le concept ranciérien de « partage du sensible ») que la construction du cadre spatio-temporel à l'intérieur duquel les sujets, les objets et les situations sont perçus comme appartenant au même monde, comme faisant monde, est de type fictionnel. Car la fonction de la fiction est précisément de décrire un partage du sensible, d'opérer un recadrage des coordonnées temporelles de notre monde quotidien et de faire percevoir un autre monde à l'intérieur de celui-ci.

C'est cette thèse, qui à ce stade est encore pour moi problématique, que j'entends explorer (assez librement) en lisant *Between the Acts* comme un roman, si j'ose l'expression, benčinien.

(ii)

*Between the Acts*² est le dernier roman de Virginia Woolf. Elle en avait terminé la rédaction mais n'avait pas encore opéré les dernières corrections lorsqu'elle est morte. L'intrigue est soumise à une stricte unité de temps et de lieu : vingt-quatre heures (« *a June day in 1939* »³), dans un manoir au milieu de la campagne anglaise. Mais la ressemblance avec une intrigue traditionnelle, au sens d'Aristote (une histoire complète, avec un début, un milieu et une fin, avec tension téléologique vers la fin) s'arrête là. Ce que le roman met en scène c'est une situation, non une intrigue : un manoir, une famille (le premier tiers du roman se passe à l'intérieur) et une représentation théâtrale, un *pageant* (les deux autres tiers se passent sur la terrasse, où les villageois jouent une pièce, comme ils le font tous les ans lors de la fête du village). Un lieu donc, chargé d'histoire familiale, symbolisée par les portraits des ancêtres (même si cette histoire ne date que d'un seul siècle et qu'un des portraits a en réalité été acheté chez un antiquaire). Une famille (le frère et la sœur, veuf l'un comme l'autre ; le fils et son épouse, unis par les liens du mariage, les enfants et l'amour qu'ils se portent, et séparés par la haine qu'ils se portent également). Un *pageant* enfin, qui est l'équivalent laïque des *mystery plays* médiévales et l'équivalent contem-

² Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

porain des *mummers' plays* folkloriques : il se compose d'une série de scènes retraçant l'histoire, du village ou de la nation. Des écrivains ne dédaignaient pas, à l'occasion, de prêter leur concours aux villageois : E.M. Forster est censé en avoir écrit deux, et Virginia Woolf se fait plaisir en imaginant le *pageant* qu'elle aurait pu écrire. En l'occurrence, l'objet du *pageant* n'est rien moins qu'une histoire de l'Angleterre, depuis sa naissance, incarnée par une très jeune personne qui a du mal à se souvenir de son texte, jusqu'au moment présent (« *Ourselves !* ») - rappel et récapitulation de ce qui fait un monde commun aux villageois et aux habitants du manoir, cadre transcendantal ou partage du sensible que l'on nomme anglicité (*the Englishness of English customs*, comme, dans un titre célèbre, Gombrich parlait de *The Englishness of English Art*). Mais ce cadre transcendantal, avec sa prétention d'unicité (une même histoire pour tous) et d'unification (la communion dans la célébration des faits éclatants et des héros illustres), avec l'illusion de l'harmonie retrouvée d'une société commune qui unit, le temps d'une fête villageoise ou d'un partie de cricket sur le *village green*, les « deux nations », riches et pauvres, aristocratie et populace, exploités et exploités, se présente en réalité sous la forme non d'un chaos mais d'une dispersion. Dispersion du monde narré (conflits intra-familiaux, distance entre les générations, oppositions de classe – maîtres et domestiques, *gentry* et villageois, mais aussi fragmentation non totalisable des scènes qui présentent une histoire de l'Angleterre pleine de trous) ; et dispersion de la narration du monde, par multiplication des points de vue, pensées confiées par bribes au lecteur, ou fragments de conversation sans queue ni tête, bref tout ce qui est typique de la dernière manière de Virginia Woolf.

La question que pose le roman, la question qu'il se pose, est alors celle de l'unification de cette dispersion : comment faire de cette multiplicité de mondes *un* monde (ce qu'échouent à faire les moyens traditionnels comme le *pageant* lui-même) ? Comment faire surgir de ce roman des mondes un monde du roman ? La réponse que le texte suggère est que c'est en allant jusqu'au bout de la dispersion que celle-ci se transmue, par retournement dialectique, en une forme d'unité.

Car tel est le mouvement du roman. Il nous présente la multiplication des mondes par dispersion, chaque personnage construisant son monde propre dans un cadre transcendantal qui peine à se recouper avec celui de ses proches, dans une société qui peine à faire monde. Ainsi les propriétaires âgés du ma-

noir, le frère et la sœur, vivent chacun dans leur cadre mondain (« *She belonged to the unifiers, he to the separatists* »⁴) – non un monde individuel ou personnel mais un cadre, en recoupement partiel avec une multiplicité d'autres cadres (car tous les séparatistes ne se séparent pas à partir d'un même point de vue), y compris un recoupement interne au groupe familial, opéré par les souvenirs partagés. Il y a donc, au sein de cette dispersion un mouvement d'unification, unification familiale par l'affection et la mémoire, et tentative d'unification sociale par l'histoire et sa représentation théâtrale – car le canon de l'histoire nationale comme le canon de la grande littérature, nationale elle aussi, engagent des partages du sensible. Et ce mouvement, qui va de la dispersion à la tentative d'unification trouve son point culminant dans le passage d'une multiplicité de mondes représentés (par esquisses et instantanés) à *un* monde, le monde du roman, qui interpelle le lecteur à sa place et lui offre, le temps d'une lecture, le partage d'un sensible enfin unifié. Car la fiction est le mode privilégié de représentation de la négociation d'un partage du sensible, par homologie de structure. Et nous commençons à comprendre ce qu'est cette structure de fiction du cadre transcendantal, cette dialectique de la dispersion et de l'unification qui est la dialectique de la constitution des mondes.

(iii)

Cela commence donc par la dispersion. Le titre déjà l'annonce. Ce qui tout au long de la rédaction devait être le roman d'un lieu (le roman devait s'appeler *Pointz Hall*, le nom du manoir) devient, la rédaction achevée, le roman de l'entre-deux, le roman de l'entracte : moment de suspension entre deux moments d'action, moment de repli sur soi et de dissolution d'un public convoqué comme unité par l'action théâtrale, dont la fonction est de faire monde, ne serait-ce que le temps d'une représentation.

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Cette dispersion est explicitement nommée par le leitmotiv qui m'a fourni mon titre. A la fin du premier acte, un phonographe annonce l'entracte en répétant, avec une insistance lancinante, la formule : « *Dispersed are we* »,⁵ ce sur quoi le public se disperse physiquement en se dirigeant vers la grange et vers la tasse de thé qu'elle promet. Mais cette réunion autour de la boisson nationale ne re-

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

fait pas de cette dispersion une unité, elle ne fait que manifester la multiplicité et la séparation des intérêts, des préoccupations, des souvenirs - toutes bribes de partage du sensible qui ne font plus monde.

Le roman insiste bien sur cette dispersion, car chacun des personnages, en route vers la grange, reprend le leitmotiv à son compte (« *'Dispersed are we,' Isabel-la followed her, humming* »⁶). Et l'on comprend que la formule persiste dans la semi-conscience des personnages, car sa forme linguistique même inscrit la dialectique dont elle exprime un des aspects : en inversant l'ordre attendu des mots (« *We are dispersed* »), elle fait du mot *dispersed* à la fois un thème (ce dont il est question, l'information déjà connue) et un focus (ce sur quoi on insiste) ; mais paradoxalement, en rejetant le thème attendu, *we*, elle en fait un nouveau focus, repassant par-là de la dispersion à l'unification. Et à plusieurs reprises le texte joue sur cette dialectique : « *'We,' said Giles, 'We ?* »⁷ ; ou encore, « *Then the music petered out on the last word we* »,⁸ où s'exprime clairement la difficulté à faire monde commun.

Le phonographe, qui répète la formule, accompagne le mouvement du texte, d'entracte en entracte, jusqu'au dernier entracte, où il proclame l'unité enfin atteinte par harmonie : « *The gramophone was affirming in tones there was no denying, triumphant yet valedictory: Dispersed are we; who have come together. But, the gramophone asserted, let us retain whatever made that harmony.* »⁹ Mais c'est pour reconnaître presque immédiatement l'échec de ces retrouvailles : « *The gramophone gurgled Unity – Dispersity. It gurgled Un...dis... And ceased.* »¹⁰ La dispersion semble l'emporter.

Cette atmosphère de dispersion, par multiplication des mondes et échec des tentatives d'unification se marque dans le texte par un autre leitmotiv, lexical cette fois. A la lecture on ne peut qu'être frappé par la répétition de trois mots accolés, qui forment collocation : *orts, scraps and fragments*. La répétition d'une collocation rare, et sa redondance interne attirent l'attention : *orts*, mot rare, désigne des restes de nourriture ; *scraps*, des bribes, d'aliments, mais pas

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

seulement (un *scrap book* est un cahier dans lequel on conserve des bribes d'information, articles découpés ou recettes de cuisine) ; *fragments*, étymologiquement, désigne des brisures. Telle est l'incarnation linguistique de la dispersion des mondes : il n'y a pas *un* monde, il n'y a que des restes, des bribes et des brisures de monde. Et si l'on suit les occurrences de ces trois mots au fil du texte, on se rend compte que cette dispersion concerne tous les aspects de la situation.

Ainsi, Isabella, bru du chatelain, voit Mrs Manresa, la non-invitée surprise qui s'est imposée, non comme une personne unifiée mais comme *scraps and fragments* : des bribes de corps ou de vêtements, comme les chapeaux et manteaux cartésiens, (« *her hat, her rings, her finger nails* »), mais pas une personne avec une histoire propre (« *But not her life history* »).¹¹ On ne perçoit l'autre, dans le commerce social, que comme bribes et fragments de personne, non comme unité.

Ainsi, à la fin du premier entracte, Miss La Trobe, qui a écrit et mis en scène le *pageant*, écoute les réactions du public qui revient de la grange. Ce qu'elle perçoit, ce sont des « *scraps and fragments* » de conversation.¹² L'interlocution sociale est faite de bribes de parole (le « bavardage » heideggerrien) : dispersion de la parole sans unité, et donc sans sens, digressions coqs à l'âne, clichés etc.

Ainsi, à l'extrême fin de la représentation, tous les acteurs entrent en scène en même temps et récitent des bribes de leur rôle (« *each declaimed some phrase or fragment from their parts...* »¹³) : ils imitent et moquent ainsi le bavardage du public – la fonction de la représentation est de re-présenter la dispersion de la parole sociale.

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Ainsi, après la dernière scène, lorsque l'histoire nationale narrée est arrivée au présent, et que les acteurs, au lieu de jouer un rôle se contentent de présenter aux spectateurs des miroirs dans lesquels ils se voient par bribes (une tête ici, un bras là), une voix conclusive (une voix anonyme, qui parle à la cantonade par le biais d'un mégaphone) s'adresse au public pour lui rappeler son existence par bribes et fragments :

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall, and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps mistakenly, civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves?¹⁴

Mais l'identité personnelle des membres du public est au dernier moment préservée par un incident de la technique (« *A hitch occurred here. The records had been mixed* »), et une voix humaine se fait entendre (« *Anyway, thanks heaven, it was somebody speaking after the infernal bray of the anonymous megaphone* »), et de ce chaos de paroles anonymes naît une unité harmonique (« *Compelled from the end of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. And some relaxed their fingers; and others uncrossed their legs* »).¹⁵ Ce répit, toutefois, est de courte durée, car la dispersion a pénétré la subjectivité des spectateurs : ce ne sont plus seulement les paroles qui sont bribes et fragments, ce sont les personnes mêmes : « *Was that voice ourselves ? Scraps, orts and fragments, are we also that ?* ».¹⁶

Si bien qu'à l'extrême fin du roman, ce que retiennent de la pièce Lucy, la sœur du châtelain et Isa, sa bru, ce sont ces trois seuls mots (« '*Orts, scraps and fragments*', [Isa] *quoted what she remembered of the vanishing play* »¹⁷). Car ces trois mots décrivent la constitution des mondes : mondes fragmentés de la parole, de la société en tant qu'elle est faite de paroles, mondes de la représentation idéologique de la société dans le sens commun, les idées reçues, mais aussi la littérature et son canon (et le *pageant* lui-même est fait de restes, bribes et brisures). En même temps, ils engagent la dialectique de la dispersion et de l'unité, qui fait le mouvement des mondes et leur tentative d'unification dans *un* monde, par distribution des places (séparatistes et unitaires) et encouragement au désir jamais satisfait d'unification, malgré les échecs répétés. Il nous faut maintenant regarder de plus près ce mouvement dialectique.

(iv)

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 131–132.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

Le sens de la dialectique de la dispersion et de l'unité est maintenant clair. Le partage du sensible vers lequel le besoin d'unité tend est un partage dans les deux sens du terme. Non seulement une *distribution* du sensible (ce qui est le sens du concept de Rancière), mais un partage de cette distribution, de ce partage, afin de constituer, par négociation constante (et, c'est le thème du roman, échec répété), un cadre transcendantal commun. Le roman met en scène trois types de négociation, à l'intérieur de trois institutions (dont une importante fonction, peut-être la plus importante, est précisément cette négociation).

La première de ces institutions est la famille : les habitants du manoir. Ils incarnent, par couple, le mouvement de la dialectique. Le frère et la sœur ne cessent de s'irriter : elle interrompt ses réminiscences de l'Inde, il se moque de ses convictions religieuses. Mais ils partagent et un lieu (la maison familiale) et des souvenirs d'enfance, d'où la tendresse de leur relation. Le jeune couple, au centre du roman (c'est sur leur rapport qu'il se clôt) ne se parlent pas, tout au long de cette journée : elle est amoureuse d'un fermier voisin, qu'elle connaît à peine, il finit par emmener Mrs Manresa, la non-invitée surprise, « visiter la serre ». Il y a donc entre eux de la haine, mais il y a aussi de l'amour (« le père de mes enfants », pense Isa, sombrant consciemment dans le cliché¹⁸), sur lequel nous reviendrons. Haine et amour : voilà le corrélat psychologique de la dialectique de la dispersion et de l'unité.

La seconde de ces institutions est l'histoire, en tant qu'elle est histoire nationale, et donc histoire mythique : *England as a green and pleasant land*, ou le mythe de l'anglicité comme unité d'un peuple dans son histoire. Une histoire en miettes, réduite à quelques hauts faits, et donc chargée idéologiquement (dans les années trente le Parti Communiste britannique avait organisé à Londres son propre *pageant*, contre-histoire faite de scènes de luttes populaires : les lud-dites et les chartistes plutôt que la conquête de l'Empire). Cette histoire est donc structurellement faite de restes, bribes et brisures, pour des raisons de temps (comme le comprend le public, il faut parfois sauter quelques siècles si on ne veut pas y passer la nuit), mais aussi pour des raisons de forme, puisque la narration prend la forme de tableaux, séparés par des entractes (organisant ainsi, comme on l'a vu, le battement de l'unité et de la dispersion du public). Une histoire faite de pleins et de trous, donc, dans une représentation faite d'actes

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

et d'entractes, et un public uni et dispersé, les trois mouvements se réunissant dans le dernière scène, censée représenter le présent, où comme on l'a vu les acteurs présentent au public des miroirs, les transformant ainsi en acteurs de l'histoire (de l'histoire narrée et de l'Histoire), mais réduits, comme cette histoire, à l'état de fragments. Et ce présent est un réel qui insiste, et menace la construction idéologique de l'histoire nationale, car nous sommes en 1939 et la guerre s'annonce : le discours conclusif du pasteur sera interrompu par douze avions de combat qui survolent la scène en formation,¹⁹ et l'on comprend l'irritation de Giles, le mari, qui revient de Londres et a du mal à accepter la futilité, qu'il juge irresponsable, de la cérémonie, alors que l'apocalypse s'annonce. Une Histoire en trompe l'œil donc, dont l'unité est fragile et sans cesse fragilisée.

La troisième de ces institutions est la littérature en son canon. Car cette Histoire n'est pas tant historique que littéraire. Les différents tableaux sont des moments obligés du canon de la grande littérature : les pèlerins de Canterbury de Chaucer, une comédie des erreurs shakespearienne, une comédie de la Restauration, un roman victorien. Virginia Woolf se fait plaisir et donne libre cours à son goût pour le pastiche. Cette pratique du pastiche engage un abyme : des pièces dans la pièce dans le roman ; mais elle engage surtout une dispersion : on a affaire non à une « grande tradition », pour reprendre le terme de F.R. Leavis, ni même à une tradition tout court, mais à une série de caricatures, les pastiches tournant volontiers à la parodie. La comédie de la Restauration, *Where there's a Will, there's a Way* (et il y est question, bien sûr, de testament) vire rapidement à la farce ; la comédie élisabéthaine pousse à l'extrême l'improbabilité de la comédie des erreurs shakespearienne ; le roman victorien accumule les clichés du genre : la jeune héroïne rêve de partir vers l'Est convertir les indigènes, sa matrone de mère se demande si le nouveau *curate* est déjà marié. La forme même du *pageant* interdit l'unité d'une tradition, mais la distance parodique augmente la dispersion. Et pourtant, dans cette dispersion, le public se reconnaît : réminiscences scolaires, lectures obligées d'une littérature qui a fait la langue (la langue de Shakespeare) et par là a contribué à la construction de la nation. Ce n'est pas un hasard si un des personnages, Isabella, s'exprime, dans ses pensées, en vers, et si le texte est criblé d'allusions poétiques : même troué, même réduit à la farce, le canon résiste, si grande est sa charge idéologique.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Ce n'est pas un hasard si le roman inclut la littérature dans les institutions de négociation du partage du sensible.

A ces institutions, il faut ajouter le roman lui-même. On attend bien sûr de lui qu'il constitue un cadre transcendantal, ce qu'il est : unité de lieu, unité de temps, unité d'action donnée par la téléologie du déroulement de la cérémonie. Mais cette unité de structure est rongée par la tendance à la dispersion : derrière l'apparent déroulement cérémoniel, qui semble faire de l'intrigue une histoire complète selon Aristote, avec début milieu et fin, il y a la fragmentation du roman lui-même, qui est composé non de chapitres mais de « scènes », en général courtes, séparées par des astérisques, ce qui non seulement fragmente le déroulement historique, mais interdit un véritable déroulement diégétique. Et ces scènes sont elles-mêmes faites de bribes et brisures : fragments de pensées, bribes de conversation, par multiplication des sources énonciatives qui n'en constituent pas pour autant de véritables points de vue. On aura reconnu là la technique pointilliste caractéristique de Virginia Woolf. Non pas un monde du roman, mais un roman des mondes – mondes singuliers, en séparation semi-chaotique, qui ne parviennent pas à constituer un monde.

(v)

Et pourtant. Dans cette dispersion, dans ce semi-chaos, l'aspiration à l'unité, à la négociation d'un transcendantal partagé persiste : elle renaît après chaque échec, relançant sans arrêt la dialectique. Il me faut maintenant envisager ces tentatives et ces négociations.

L'expression la plus claire de ces tentatives d'unification est le discours du pasteur à la fin de la représentation. Miss La Trobe, l'auteure de la pièce, ayant refusé de prendre la parole pour expliquer le sens de sa création, c'est le pasteur qui la prend et qui risque, avec toutes sortes de précautions de langage, une interprétation (il en profite pour lancer la quête pour la réfection du toit de l'église) - voix autorisée d'une institution dont la fonction est précisément d'interpréter et ce faisant d'unifier la communauté. Nous avons du mal à faire société en termes de famille et de nation mais nous sommes une communauté chrétienne, une paroisse. C'est donc le pasteur qui énonce la formule qui s'oppose au « *Dispersed are we* » du phonographe, formule qui résume son inter-

prétation : « *We are members of one another* ». ²⁰ Loin d'être la représentation de bribes d'Histoire et d'une tradition lacunaire, la pièce est pour lui le lieu d'une fusion, et la représentation devient une sorte de communion. Là où les autres institutions sociales échouent, la religion, dont la fonction est étymologiquement de faire lien, doit réussir.

Mais cette ultime tentative échoue elle aussi, pour trois raisons. La première est que le public ne comprend pas ce que le pasteur essaie de lui dire (et il finit lui-même par interrompre son discours pour ouvrir sa blague à tabac, renonçant par là à son autorité religieuse). La seconde est que Miss La Trobe, l'auteure, se sont trahie par cette interprétation, comme elle se sent trahie par les réactions du public (« *Reality too strong, she muttered. 'Curse'em !'* » ²¹). Et la troisième, qui est sans doute la plus importante, est que la formule est contradictoire : on peut être membre d'un groupe, pas d'une autre personne - la formule achoppe sur les difficultés de l'identité personnelle que la scène des miroirs a mis en lumière, dispersion de la personne autant que dispersion du groupe.

Il n'y a donc pas de solution institutionnelle, les appareils idéologiques échouant à proposer un partage du sensible véritablement partagé. Mais cela ne veut pas dire qu'il n'y a pas de solution. Une autre solution se profile, toujours-déjà présente, malgré son échec institutionnel sous la forme de la tradition et du canon. C'est bien entendu la littérature, la représentation, la fiction, cette fiction dont la structure est homologue à celle du transcendantal : le monde du roman construit sur le roman des mondes. C'est la fiction, les actes au sens théâtral du terme, qui font de ces toujours-déjà dispersés un public. Le seul monde unifié possible est le monde de la fiction. Et l'on comprend comment opère cette homologie de structure : la dialectique de l'acte et de l'entracte est homologue à la dialectique de l'unité et de la dispersion.

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Cette unification par la littérature, qui par le jeu de l'abyme fait de nous lecteurs et lectrices un public, reste bien sûr ambiguë et la dialectique est sans fin – sans terme définitif. Car la structure de la fiction est structure de distance, comme en témoigne la distance ironique du pastiche vis-à-vis d'une tradition que néanmoins elle célèbre. En témoigne également l'échec apparent de Miss

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

la Trobe, car le public n'a rien compris à ses ambitions esthétiques, et elle se prend à rêver d'une pièce sans public et finit par se rendre au pub, comme si la vie quotidienne venait dégonfler la prétention de monde de l'œuvre d'art. Et cette ambiguïté est celle du langage lui-même, qui est poésie (on se souvient que le personnage d'Isa se parle à elle-même en vers, réminiscent de la poésie d'Edward Thomas, le poète georgien),²² mais qui est aussi fait de clichés, expressions toutes faites, comptines, bref toutes formes de bavardage - du prêt à penser linguistique qui offre au locuteur le réconfort de la reconnaissance.

Si bien que la littérature, art du langage, finit par apparaître comme la seule vraie relève des contradictions de la dialectique : la seule unification véritable est celle du monde du roman, qui malgré le choix narratif et stylistique de la dispersion (multiplication des scènes et des sources énonciatives), fait retour vers l'histoire complète aristotélicienne dans la figure de la boucle - cette figure qui relie l'incipit et l'explicit en sautant par-dessus le corps du texte. Voici en effet comment commence le roman : « *It was a summer's night and they were talking[.]* »²³ Et voici comment il finit : « *Then the curtain rose. They spoke.* »²⁴ Il y a ici, dans l'opposition des deux verbes, *speaking* et *talking*, deux usages du langage. Dans la première scène, la famille parle, dans une conversation banale et quotidienne : ils parlent, nous dit la suite du paragraphe, de fosse septique et d'adduction d'eau. Dans la dernière scène, Isa et Giles, qui se sont détesté et évité tout au long du roman, se retrouvent enfin seuls, dans ce mélange d'amour et de haine qui va les faire se quereller, puis se retrouver dans l'acte physique d'amour dont, nous dit le texte, jaillira peut-être une autre vie sous la forme d'un troisième enfant : une fois tombé le rideau de la représentation théâtrale se lève le rideau de la vie et ils se parlent, au-delà du bavardage quotidien. Mais cette parole pleine, parole de la vie, est aussi la parole du roman, qui permet le passage de *talking*, le bavardage quotidien, à *speaking*, la parole pleine : la dialectique de la dispersion et de l'unité se relève non seulement dans l'unité retrouvée du couple, mais aussi dans l'unité du style et du texte qui fait de nous, lecteurs pris dans son langage, une communauté unie par la lecture. Car au-delà des tentatives ratées des institutions, de la famille à la religion, en passant par le canon littéraire et l'histoire nationale, la véritable unité entre les êtres

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²² Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf : an Inner Life*, Londres, Allen Lane, 2005, pp. 376 sqq.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

humains se trouve dans le langage, et l'histoire pseudo-aristotélicienne du roman est donnée par une suite de formules langagières : « *they were talking* », « *dispersed are we* », « *we are members of one another* », « *they spoke* ».

(vi)

Le roman de Virginia Woolf répond à sa façon à la question que pose Rok Benčín : qu'est-ce qui fait un monde ? Cette façon woolfienne peut se formuler en sept thèses.

Thèse 1. Le chaos du sensible est organisé/harmonisé par un partage du sensible. Car le sensible est fait de *orts, scraps and fragments*, qui ne font pas spontanément monde.

Thèse 2. Chaque personne fait monde, ou tente de faire monde, en construisant un transcendantal – d'où le danger de multiplication des mondes.

Thèse 3. Ce danger est contenu par le fait qu'une telle construction n'est pas un processus individuel mais un processus social, dont l'opérateur est le langage : on fait monde en parlant le monde.

Thèse 4. Puisque le processus est social, le partage du sensible est toujours issu d'un partage du partage, d'une négociation de la distribution du sensible opérée par le transcendantal. Ce partage au second degré est inscrit et sédimenté dans des mythes, traditions et superstitions, bref dans des phénomènes idéologiques, produits/reproduits par des appareils. On passe par là d'une multiplicité de mondes à un monde commun.

Thèse 5. La littérature, dans ce partage du partage, a un rôle spécifique. C'est en quelque sorte un transcendantal-abyme, qui non seulement fait monde en tant qu'institution (canon d'une littérature nationale, langue de Shakespeare, grande tradition) mais présente et représente le processus de négociation du partage du sensible. Vieux thème marxiste : l'œuvre d'art est à la fois prise dans l'idéologie et ce qui permet de prendre conscience du caractère idéologique de l'idéologie. La littérature parvient à cette fonction politique-critique en faisant passer le lecteur du roman des mondes au monde du roman.

Thèse 6. La construction d'un monde par partage du sensible est fragile et sans cesse renégociée : elle est exprimée par la dialectique, qui n'a pas de fin, de la dispersion et de l'unité retrouvée. Mais cette unité retrouvée reste temporaire, car il n'y a pas, dans cette dialectique, de relève définitive : le monde du roman unifie un groupe de lecteurs dans le temps, qui est temps de communion, de la lecture, mais ce groupe, la lecture finie, retombera dans la dispersion, comme l'ont fait les spectateurs du *pageant*.

Thèse 7. Pourtant cette négociation a des résultats : un résultat social (construction d'un monde commun soutenu par le mythe : *England's green and pleasant land*), et un résultat individuel (construction d'une personne à partir des bribes et brisures d'individu, comme les images dans les miroirs que tendent au public les acteurs du *pageant*). Dans les termes d'une autre philosophie du langage : le sujet est la somme de ses interpellations, son autonomie se situe dans les interstices entre les interpellations diverses et contradictoires, donc dans le jeu des interpellations *dans les deux sens du terme*. La dialectique de la dispersion et de l'unité, qui est au cœur du roman de Virginia Woolf, est la dialectique de la subjectivité.

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Architecture and the Distribution of the Sensible

Introduction

According to Jacques Rancière, some practices and knowledges can be studied in terms of the cartographies of the common worlds they imply. Engaging Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible, this article discusses architecture (along with discourses that produce knowledge of architecture) as one such practice. It raises the question of what role architecture – with its spatio-temporal presence and materiality, along with its forms and purposes – has in the production of social space and time. Following Rancière's understanding of the politics of aesthetics, it examines the different ways in which architecture creates a specific form of sensory experience related to the distribution of the sensible that constitutes a common world.

But in order to grasp the specificity of architecture – after all, Rancière develops his conception of aesthetic politics mainly in relation to artistic practices and discourses – the article opens with Theodor W. Adorno's reflections on architecture as a purposeful art. Adorno's critique of functionalism allows for a thorough rethinking of architecture by questioning the functions and purposes it accommodates as inscribed within social antagonisms. Adorno enables us to understand how architectural imagination includes but also surpasses purposefulness and its social dimension by producing a particular sense of space – an idea that can be compared to what Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible. While Adorno enables us to understand how the social is inscribed in architectural form, Rancière makes it possible to examine the different forms of aesthetic politics that architecture can employ in order to create a framework of a future common world.

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With the aim of understanding how architecture can intervene in the dominant order of spatial planning and the real estate market today, we reconsider the aesthetic politics Rancière ascribes to the three “regimes of art” (the ethical, the

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representational, and the aesthetic) in relation to selected examples from architecture past and present, from the Looshouse to the Quinta Monroy housing estate project by the studio Elemental and Jean Nouvel's Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art.

Purposes, Irrationalities, and Contradictions

In one of his rare dealings with architecture, "Functionalism Today", Adorno wrote:

The work of an artist, whether or not it is directed toward a particular purpose, can no longer proceed naively on a prescribed path. It manifests a crisis, which demands that the expert – regardless of his prideful craftsmanship – go beyond his craft in order to satisfy it.¹

The text was written in 1965 as a presentation to the German *Werkbund*. Adorno's critical position was based on observing the reconstructions of the post-WWII world and his belief that the crucial dilemmas that brought about the devastation of war were not being addressed. This was also true for architectural (re)constructions. In Adorno's critical re-evaluation of the field, architecture was positioned within the broader social domain of the post-WWII public space. He called for a rethinking of city planning, the principles of reconstruction, and by the same token, raised the question of the existence or non-existence of a collective social subject for the benefit of whom such planning was supposed to be carried out.

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In order to address these issues and the crisis the architectural profession found itself in, he highlighted the need to reconsider the double-faced character of architecture: on the one hand, architecture is an autonomous art form, and on the other, a functional object, a *purposeful art*.² Defining architecture as a purposeful art implies that there is an inherent link between architecture and social reality. When using the word architecture, there is always an implication of

¹ Theodor W. Adorno, "Functionalism Today", trans. J. Newman and J. Smith, in N. Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

some kind of societal purpose, of a function the building is to perform. When it comes to design, the intended function of the edifice to be constructed is, in most cases, presented to architects in a simplified, abstract way. Planning a construction entails imagining and drawing the walls and roofs that delimit the areas in which certain activities will take place. In doing so, architects approach the problem with their own imagination and connect building-making to a vast history of architectural ideas. However, any social reality is full of antagonisms that cannot be resolved in the domain of architecture. Rather the opposite, architecture is conditioned precisely by these social antagonisms.

For Adorno, architecture thus clearly manifests a fundamental contradiction between society and “human productive energies.”³ While society develops them, it also chains people to the relations and conditions of production imposed upon them. Consequently, the people who constitute the productive energies become deformed according to their working conditions. If, on the other hand, functionalist architecture is understood in a purely objective manner (as in the New Objectivity movement, which Adorno criticised in his paper), its function appears purposeful only because the interpolation of architecture in the antagonistic socio-economic processes is not given proper consideration:

Something would be purposeful here and now only if it were so in terms of the present society. Yet, certain irrationalities – Marx’s term for them was *faux frais* – are essential to society; the social process always proceeds, in spite of all particular planning, by its own inner nature, aimlessly and irrationally. Such irrationality leaves its mark on all ends and purposes, and thereby also on the rationality of the means devised to achieve those ends.⁴

Function and Ornament

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In “Functionalism Today”, Adorno discussed the problems concerning functionalism in relation to the work of Adolf Loos, one of its protagonists both as an architect and a cultural critic. Loos is famous for his fierce critique of ornamentality in the name of function, even juxtaposing ornament and crime in the title of his best-known essay. However, Adorno drew attention to Loos’s writings on

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Schönberg's music, which Adorno considered to be far from anti-ornamental. Adorno skilfully articulated the issues concerning the relation between function and ornamentality through a comparison between architecture and music, making visible how modern concepts developed in both fields. By referencing Schönberg's *First Chamber Symphony*, which Loos himself praised, Adorno pointed out that Schönberg's composition, recalling a central motif from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* and the theme from the First Movement of Bruckner's *Seventh Symphony*, actually created an ornamental theme. His observations thus show that the question of ornament was not obsolete in modern music, but became part of an inventive experimental approach, in this case "the model of the first extreme constructivist complex in modern music."⁵ Consequently, it was possible to explore the manifold relationships of musical components going beyond the importance of the individual tone.⁶

One can observe similar architectural experimentations during the period. Modern architecture denounced the ornament but continued to employ craft and material in an ornamental way. Its form adapted to the new modes of production, while the configuration of the façades still echoed the tripartite division articulating the base, shaft, and capital, a method of visually organizing the exterior similar to the composition of a classical column. Interior space was reinvented through elements often designed with materials in ornamental fashion; these elements continued to be the carriers of spatial compositions that simultaneously opened the experience of form with transparency, reflections, light, etc. However, even though functionalism presupposed purpose as something self-evident, it was in fact already subdued in socio-economic antagonisms and the accompanying ideologies of usefulness, effectiveness, practicality, and the like.

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Adorno also emphasised the contemporary "*Kunstgewerbe* religion," as he called it, which praised the so-called nobility of matter and inspired both architecture and autonomous art.⁷ It inspired Schönberg to understand musical material as matter that could be recomposed and situated in a new structure. Similarly, in architecture, spatial compositions were reinterpreted within new methods of

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

construction, while materials were crafted in a way that follows and articulates their own immanent form.

According to Loos, forms needed to be reinvented through the technological innovation of handicraft and not borrowed from art. This corresponded to the belief in a preconditioned connection between material and form, according to which the material, the substance itself, is already invested with meaning and bears with it its own adequate form. Adorno questioned this “cult of materials,” which was, according to him, already denounced by industrially produced materials and other products.⁸ Loos’s functionalism could not escape the fact that decisions regarding the articulation of form and material are unavoidable. There are no pure functions, ornaments, or materials, as all are based on socio-economic conditions that affect perceptions and bodies and thus the sense of space created by the design.

Composers and architects in Loos’s time could experiment with form autonomously to discover new constructions and expressions, but how these were received inevitably depended on the changing world and consequently on the changing sensibilities. It depended on how the public was ready to accept the “recombination” of the old in the new compositions and how the works could produce meaning by creating a sense of space and being purposeful. The physical properties of the material form were only a part of a more significant dilemma about how the sense of space was related to the social and spatial structures and conventions that conditioned its perception. Adorno wrote:

The tone receives meaning only within the functional structure of the system, without which it would be a merely physical entity. Superstition alone can hope to extract from it a latent aesthetic structure. One speaks with good reason of a sense of space (*Raumgefühl*) in architecture. But this sense of space is not a pure, abstract essence, not a sense of spatiality itself, since space is only conceivable as a concrete space, within specific dimensions.⁹

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A concrete physical space is, like sound, not an isolated aesthetic entity; it is a part of a town, city, and landscape. The sense of (architectural) space is condi-

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

tioned by such surroundings. Likewise, in music the sensibility needed to hear the delicateness of a theme in a sonata is related to the structure of the musical composition, its history, and the everyday sounds the listener experiences in the background.

The Sense of Architectural Space

For Adorno, the main subject of discussion in “Functionalism Today” was the form of purposeful art and the way the social is inscribed in it. Architectural form uses its materiality to delimit space for a particular purpose. But, according to Adorno, this is not enough for “great architecture”: the criterion that defines such greatness is the mandatory elevation of the sense of space beyond the realm of purposefulness with the use of architectural imagination.¹⁰ Though the architectural form is inherent in its purpose, architectural imagination can elevate it from its domain. In doing so, architectural creativity can create a sense of space out of materiality and retroactively elucidate the complex relations of spatial production. Architectural form as such is accessible to the viewer not through the recognition of architectural standards and the social conventions they correspond to, but through the specific aesthetic experience it enables.

Adorno discussed Loos’s texts, but his built work is worth reconsidering in the light of these questions, since the sense of space his buildings create speaks of an antagonistic world his architecture belongs to. Adorno was critical of Loos’s writings, but in his architecture one can discern an elevation beyond socially prescribed purposes, although it is conditioned by them. This made his objects function differently from the then established norms of the architectural profession. His designs functioned in a subversive way.

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Loos was and is today well known for his stripped-off facades and rich interiors. Encountering his white cube-like villas in the bourgeois residential surroundings must have been a perplexing experience at the time of their construction. The interiors were, on the contrary, playful with their use of space and warm, with decorative marble, wooden elements, and oriental rugs. Loos avoided historical ornaments; however, his interiors were still “decorated” with crafted materials. When applied, they had an ornamental effect.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

The Looshouse, his most controversial project with its bare façade, was built in front of one of the entrances to the Viennese imperial palace. He was heavily criticised for its non-ornamental and white design, and according to a well-known myth, the emperor always used an alternative exit so as not to face it. However, it was not all-white. The ground floor exterior was clad in green marble, the entrance was emphasised with Doric columns, and the interior was covered with wood. At the same time, mirrors alluded to the interior of a French department store. Instead of historicist or secession-like ornaments, Loos incorporated the column as a classical element into the exterior design to articulate the public space of the square the house was facing.

Not far from the Looshouse, Vienna's *Ringstrasse* replaced city walls with public parks and institutional buildings, including the imperial palace. The reconstruction lasted a few decades, spanning from the mid 19th century up to WWI. The representation of public institutions was based on historical styles alluding to the supposed meanings of past eras: the parliament as a Greek temple, the university as a renaissance palace, the town hall as a gothic cathedral, etc. The railroad connected outer districts of Vienna, which had previously functioned outside the centre, to the new emerging metropolis. The city expanded under the new conditions of capitalist production. The change in the material production of space simultaneously affected the relations of power and trade. The growing metropolis tied people to new production processes and, according to Adorno, "deformed" them according to the new working conditions.

Looking at the Looshouse today, it continues to convey the message of a critique of taste from more than one hundred years ago. Over time, the city centre has come under the regulations of historic preservation, attempting to freeze the aesthetic relations in space. The central vertical dominant of the inner city remained the church; the imperial palace was its major horizontal edifice monumentally facing the Ring and the centre. To understand the Looshouse entails understanding its position in the context of the then-growing metropolis, which outside the Ring included construction of "palaces for rent" decorated with ornamental historicist motifs.

Loos's critique of ornament, while applying the material in an ornamental fashion in its distinct location, is not merely a critique of décor, but of the emerg-

ing public space shaped by the new conditions of capitalist production and the tastes of the rising bourgeois society. This critique invented a particular form of aesthetic experience different from that which the dominant order was trying to establish. Its representation was a negation of the dominant architectural conventions of the time.

To experience Loos's villas as a shock, they had to be constructed in bourgeois neighbourhoods. Encountering his blank façade was a micro event in an urban stroll. The way he approached the design of forms ascribed new meaning to space, craft, and the material itself. It produced a new sense of reality – a reality conditioned by the irrationalities hidden by the capitalist society. These new surroundings, conditioned by new materials and industrial production, opened the doors to a new kind of criticism in art and architecture. They created a new public that dissentingly anticipated a new shared world, the form of which was retroactively connected to the sense of space it produced.

With this in mind, we can reconsider Loos's built work following Adorno's social and aesthetic reflections on architecture. According to Adorno, the social is not external to the aesthetic form, be it in the sphere of autonomous artworks or purposeful art. On the contrary, the social is always inscribed immanently into the form itself. This is why at the end of "Functionalism Today" he claims that even as a purposeful art, architecture "demands constant aesthetic reflection."¹¹ For Adorno, the inscription of the social into the autonomous form – as it is developed historically amidst social antagonisms – is the proper object of aesthetic analysis. This allows us to see how purposes could be elevated by great architecture and ultimately leads to the realisation that there can be no strict division between autonomous and purposeful art:

The purpose-free (*zweckfrei*) and the purposeful (*zweckgebunden*) arts do not form the radical opposition which [Loos] imputed. The difference between the necessary and the superfluous is inherent in a work and is not defined by the work's relationship – or the lack of it – to something outside itself.¹²

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Yet, Loos designed his project precisely around the tension between the necessary and the redundant immanent to form. His detailing of materials was rethought in relation to the experience of space defined by the architectural form he invented and not to the past styles and historicist motifs employed by other contemporary developments, and thus to something outside of the invented form itself. Nonetheless, the effect the form had on its public was unavoidably conditioned by the rapidly transforming world, including the expanding industrial production and the production of space appropriate to the needs of the emerging mass society.

Distribution of the Sensible

In order to think architecture socially and aesthetically at the same time, as Adorno does, we should first consider its role in the production of social space. The production of social space begins with planning infrastructure and the uses of buildings. It interpolates the natural environment in planning strategies and transforms landscapes according to the conditions and relations of production. The totality of the activities in the natural and social environments envisaged by architecture with delimited areas of different shapes and materials it designs corresponds to contemporary standards of how society is supposed to function. Yet, the sense of space that architecture introduces is not determined merely by social projections of space, even though they condition it. It is not identical to the social space it overlaps with, nor to the (natural) environment it might overlook or from which materials are gained for its construction.

The material presence of architectural form inevitably mediates a relationship between the environment and the social space-time in a particular way. What elevates the architectural experience beyond function is a sense of space pertaining to a specific type of fiction. It establishes an impression of a shared common world through the sense of space it creates. Here, following Rancière, I do not use the word fiction as the invention of an imaginary world, but as “the construction of a framework within which subjects, things, situations can be perceived as coexisting in a common world and events can be identified and linked in a way that makes sense. Fiction is at work whenever a sense of reality

must be produced.”¹³ Thus, what Adorno elaborated as a sense of space can be linked to Jacques Rancière’s concept of the distribution of the sensible, which he describes as a “set of relationships between ways of being, seeing, thinking and doing which determines at once a common world and the way in which these or those subjects take part in it.”¹⁴

We often think of artistic practices as establishing their own space-time, and the same can be said about architecture. The distribution of the sensible is present in architecture even before the lines of floor plans and sections are drawn on paper. It is imagined in the form of the presumed uses for which buildings are to be constructed. It is present in how different areas of physical space within the natural environment are planned to be used for food production, the excavation of materials, nature parks, industrial zones, or residential neighbourhoods, schools, and galleries. Furthermore, it is imagined how subjects will move between different activities in certain time intervals, how many years they will attend which institution, and what infrastructure is needed to make this possible. The transformations of land and (public) space are imagined via abstract diagrams and maps that make it possible to transfigure everyday environments according to fictitious conditions in line with contemporary theories of progress. This way of seeing space introduces a particular kind of environment in which activities are seen as purposeful only through the imaginary framework of productivity and profitability, but it does not guarantee a socially just and healthy environment for the future.

Consequently, the conception of space implied by the real estate investment market today does not produce a sense of a functioning common world. Although everything is planned, calculated and legally defined, a sense of reality, a sense of space that would amount to a common world is missing. Empty housing estates sold out before being finished, luxury housing situated next to favelas, spectacular buildings erected in times of humanitarian and environmental crisis – the fiction that produces this space has distorted our sense of reality. The imaginary distribution of the sensible that forms space in our daily

¹³ Jacques Rancière, *Modern Times: Essays on Temporality in Art and Politics*, Zagreb, Multi-medijalni institut, 2017, p. 13.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12. See also Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. G. Rockhill, London and New York, Continuum, 2011, pp. 12–19.

lives is increasingly alien and destructive. A meaningful future seems absent from architecture, which seems to contribute to the space of conflict rather than producing a sense of a common world for emancipated communities.

The categories of time and temporality have disappeared from social questions and projections. Development revolves around the present moment, transience, consumption. Time, which plays a vital role in the distribution of the sensible, has become invisible in planning. Yet, it cannot be avoided as it is critical when considering the cyclical processes of the natural environment and human life. These processes are changing and remind us that we need to encapsulate reality differently. A fiction of a new common world that we could believe in has yet to be reinvented.

Aesthetic Politics

Rancière rarely mentions architecture in his writing, but let us consider his arguments on the politics of modernism in art before returning to the distribution of the sensible at work in architecture today. He maintains that the emergence of the autonomy of art was intrinsically linked to the anticipation of an emancipated community to come, which led to two opposing aesthetic politics. On the one hand, there was the aesthetic politics that equated transforming the forms of art with transforming the world. In this new, transformed world, art would no longer constitute a separate sphere of reality. On the other hand, there was the aesthetic politics that preserved the autonomy of art by rejecting all forms of compromise with the practices of power and the forms of the aestheticisation of life in the capitalist world.¹⁵

Rancière considers both kinds of aesthetic politics (building a new world and preserving the autonomy of art in the face of the capitalist world) to have been diluted by an ethical turn, which coincided with the end of the Cold War.¹⁶ The first kind of aesthetic politics, which collapsed along with the Soviet dream, underwent a soft version of this ethical turn. This includes, for example, the architects and designers who aimed to revitalise communities by redesigning

¹⁵ Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. S. Corcoran, Cambridge and Malden, Polity Press, 2009, pp. 129–131.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

public spaces, or relational artists who made unusual interventions into city suburbs and landscapes.

The second aesthetic politics underwent a hard version of the ethical turn, which transformed the politics of aesthetic autonomy into ethics. The struggle to preserve autonomy made it possible to inscribe into artworks the unresolved contradiction between the aesthetic promise and the reality of an oppressive world. With the turn towards ethics, however, the promise of emancipation disappeared. This promise became interpreted as a lie from the perspective of the catastrophe – the concertation camp – that set the ultimate point of reference for any discourse on art in the irresolvable past event that casts a shadow on any political project in the future.

Modernism contains a contradiction “between two opposed aesthetic politics, two politics that are opposed but on the basis of a common core linking the autonomy of art to the anticipation of a community to come, and therefore linking this autonomy to the promise of its own suppression.”¹⁷ According to Rancière, the ethical turn – and not so-called postmodernism – signals the end of modernism, not as a trend or a style, but as a long-lasting contradiction of opposing aesthetic politics that stem from the same core. Rancière is consequently critical of the contemporary artistic dispositives since they refer – through the interpretive schemata of our experience – to a single ethical community in which the distinction between politics and justice can no longer be thought. In an ethical community, politics is no longer possible.

Similar arguments can be detected in architectural discourse. The most symbolic example of the failure of modernist aesthetic politics that can be understood as the point of reversal is probably the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe, a modernist housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1972-1976. The project became infamous for its poverty, crime, and racial segregation soon after its completion in 1956. When the buildings were demolished they became a symbol of the failure of urban planning renewal, public-policy planning, and public housing. It also came to be seen as an indictment of architecture’s modernist aspirations running contrary to “real-world” social development, making it clear that architecture, with its form alone, cannot provide solutions to political problems. Charles Jencks

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¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

referred to the demolition as the moment when modernist architecture died.¹⁸ The fate of modernist architecture was also referred to by Fredric Jameson, who acknowledged the importance of Jencks's work for having described the first signs and symptoms of postmodernism.¹⁹ As is well known, the question of postmodernism was first raised precisely in the context of architecture.

The worlds of art and architecture are closely related. Both were affected by the postmodernist discourse, but due to its function, purpose, materiality, and large scale, architecture has wider social consequences in comparison to art. Autonomy in modernist architecture (as in art) was associated with the anticipation of an emancipated community to come. Its sense of space was conditioned by two imagined distributions of the sensible through which its content, materiality, and location were determined to correspond to either the Eastern or the Western "vision" of the future. If modernist architecture in socialist contexts was a material condition of a society supposedly transforming into its socialist future, modernist architecture, conditioned by capitalism, like in art, supposedly resisted forms of compromise with practices of power and the aesthetisation of life. Aesthetic politics was in both cases conditioned by the (spatial) planning of the state via its public institutions. In both cases, modernist architecture also renounced previous practices of representation. Formal concerns superseded stylistic and typological considerations. To achieve an appropriate sense of space, however, architects needed to meaningfully articulate both form and public space. For this reason, architectural modernism invented new details, elements, constructions, spatial compositions, materials, new senses of transparency, etc., to achieve a particular form of sensory experience. In doing so, it also created new conventions and rules on how to envisage form itself.

Even though the same principles of rethinking form in public space can be used today, the fall of the Berlin Wall created a new sense of reality that simultaneously reconditioned the distribution of the sensible. When the market-driven economy became the dominant perspective of "progress", the societal planning of post-socialist contexts dissolved, and their property underwent a process of wild privatisation. The fall of the socialist state in the "East" and the weakening

¹⁸ Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, New York, Rizzoli, 1977, p. 9.

¹⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London and New York, Verso, 1991, p. 62.

of the welfare state in the “West” consequently reconditioned spatial planning, while post-WWII development strategies persisted and depoliticised key questions regarding the post-socialist transformations. And it is in this context (in the context of the reimagined distribution of the sensible) that the established rules and conventions of architectural modernism today fail to create a sense of a credible new world. Consequently, architecture is repeatedly criticised as being too formal.

Architecture and its Discontents

The emerging problems brought about by the alien and destructive space produced by construction under the conditions of the market-driven economy have become challenging to address within the existing planning system. Since the issues are globally interconnected, an efficient systemic response in spatial planning would be difficult to achieve. Under such circumstances, what role does architecture play (it should be taken into consideration that architects only design a small percentage of the built environment), and which problems can it address by inventing new fictions that try to encapsulate reality differently? Taking the concept of the distribution of the sensible into account, let us reconsider Adorno’s notion of great architecture, supposing that architectural imagination can elevate form from the domain of purpose by creating a sense of space out of materiality and elucidating the complex relations of spatial production.

After the disappointments with modernism and postmodernism, heroic architectural visions do not seem feasible. In the contemporary world, the role of the architect, like the role of architecture, has been radically transformed. Today, the critique of architecture regularly revolves around the figure of a star architect, or “starchitect”. Although this critique most obviously refers to spectacular buildings, it can also refer to notable socially engaged projects, which is only one of many symptoms of the contemporary discontent in the field of architecture. One of the high-profile projects to mention in this regard is the Quinta Monroy housing estate by the studio Elemental in Iquique, Chile, built in 2003.

The architects were involved in planning a residential neighbourhood on the site of a favela and needed to provide housing for the one hundred families that lived there. The municipality provided the budget for the project, which allowed for the construction of 40 m²-sized houses, while the site on its own was not big

enough to provide space for all the families without building higher than the ground floor. The residents threatened to go on a hunger strike if the plan of the architects was to design multiple-storey buildings, since high rise construction would not allow individual families to extend their apartments.²⁰

The architects conceded that 40 m² per family was not enough for a decent family life. In a long participatory design process, they negotiated with the future residents that the project would nonetheless be built in three floors, but in a way that would allow the residents themselves to build extensions and double the area of their row houses. The design thus predicted an unplanned intervention, something that was yet to happen. The residents could produce the extensions with their own hands. Their interventions became an integral part of the project and are today visible on the façade.

Looking at the Quinta Monroy situation from outside architectural discourse, but through the lens of what Rancière calls the ethical indistinction, one can observe that with the participatory design process a consensus was achieved as regards how to construct the space. Consequently, the final process of participatory construction left no room for political disagreement concerning the most fundamental issue: how to negotiate for the right to a decent place to live. The apparently successful integration of the residents as participants into the construction and design of the new neighbourhood swept under the carpet the question of how to solve the housing problem as regards those excluded from the property market. In short, if we accept the designed solution as an actual solution to a common existential problem, we thereby obscure the inherent difference between politics and justice.

In the sense of the space produced by the constructed extensions, one can recognise and understand what the project of the architect was and what the residents made themselves. The image of the façade reveals the process. The extensions vary in colour, size, and material. The image they portray can be associated with the image of a self-made favela, only that here it has become part of an

²⁰ See Alejandro Aravena, “My Architectural Philosophy: Bring the Community into the Process”, *TEDGlobal*, 2014, https://www.ted.com/talks/alejandro_aravena_my_architectural_philosophy_bring_the_community_into_the_process?language=en, accessed 1 December 2021.

orchestrated whole and is as such interesting for architectural discourse. What the result brings to the discussion is the inclusion of an unplanned space-time, a process that was not envisioned within the spatial planning strategy; a sense of space this particular community shares and has made visible in materials and in relation to architectural form.

Nevertheless, the project has also been subject to criticism, ranging from its problematic financing, the crime that subsequently emerged after life developed in the neighbourhood, to the fact that the municipality did not sufficiently help the residents find proper jobs, which meant that they became a part of corporate society as marginal exploited subjects, and last but not least, that the architect constructed an image of himself as a starchitect through the social problems of a marginalised community.²¹

Is the Quinta Monroy housing estate relevant as “great” architecture because some kind of emancipatory potential can be discerned in its form, because of the name of the architect, because of the sense of space it creates, the detailing, colours, or materials used? One could discuss all of the above. However, the project caught the attention of the international public due to the social problems it addresses, which can be discerned in its form. The unresolved social conflicts are a part of its aesthetic experience. If this project were to be judged according to conventional architectural criteria abstracted from its social context, it would most probably be regarded as irrelevant. However, in the last decades a certain “type” of architecture has started to be characterised by adjectives such as rebellious, socially engaged, green, sustainable, etc., and has gained a great deal of visibility in architectural discourse. Does this necessarily mean it is great architecture?

Regimes of Architecture

Modernist aesthetic politics might have failed in its attempt to construct a new fiction, a new sense of reality. Yet in doing so, it created new parameters of architectural discourse. Today, architecture is addressed through different discours-

²¹ See Sandra Carrasco, David O’Brien, “Revisit: Quinta Monroy by Elemental”, *The Architectural Review*, 4 January 2021, <https://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/housing/revisit-quinta-monroy-by-elemental>, accessed 1 December 2021.

es, which we will relate to Rancière's regimes of art to draw conclusions about the political dimension of architecture and the different futures it envisions.

According to Rancière, a regime of identification of art is a specific relation between artistic practices, forms of visibility, and modes of intelligibility that make it possible for a certain work to be identified as a work of art. In *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, among other works, he historically located the three regimes of art as different ways of recognising and defining objects as belonging to art or to a particular art: the ethical, representational, and aesthetic regimes.²²

In the ethical regime, a statue, for example, is conceived as an image of the divine. In this regime, images are judged according to their effects on the modus of being of individuals and collectives. The representational regime, on the other hand, considers artworks through the category of mimesis. Here, a statue is a product of a particular art, i.e. sculpture. It enacts a representation through the skill of the sculptor and his or her ability to assign appropriate expressive forms to appropriate figures. In the aesthetic regime, finally, a statue acquires the qualities of a work of art not due to its correspondence to the divine or to the canons of representation, but because of it belonging to an exceptional form of sensory experience based on free appearances. This form of experience opposes the ordinary sensorium, which is permeated with hierarchies and forms of domination.²³

In the three regimes of art (which emerged in different historical eras but have since coexisted), works are evaluated by different forms of artistic validity, all of which imply a certain relationship to politics. What all three regimes of architecture have in common is that in each one, architecture has a function linked to the construction of the social space within which architecture is installed and to which it responds. As such, architecture can be imagined within the limits of its own rules (the representational regime), by negating those rules in its own way by creating a sense of space (the aesthetical regime), or by addressing the ethical dilemmas of the contemporary world (the ethical regime). One can draw conclusions about the political dimension of architecture in relation to the three regimes. All three make visible the tensions between architecture and politics in the field of spatial planning. As Rancière explains:

²² Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, pp. 28–30.

²³ *Ibid.*

First artworks shape a world of pure beauty, which has no political relevance [the representational regime]. Second, they frame a kind of ideal community, fostering fanciful dreams of communities of sense posited beyond political conflict [the ethical regime]. Third, they achieve in their own sphere the same autonomy that is at the core of the modern project and is pursued in democratic or revolutionary politics [the aesthetic regime].²⁴

Rancière argues that the latter (the modern) paradigm collapsed with the ethical turn due to the new forms of social life and commodity culture, new techniques of production, reproduction, and communication. What are the consequences?

First, we will consider the Quinta Monroy housing estate as an example of an architecture of the ethical regime. This does not mean that the project is ethical in itself, nor does it necessarily mean that the architect that designed it is ethical. The architecture of the ethical regime creates a space for a community (of sense) to use according to its temporal and material conditions. It therefore makes visible the temporality of that community in space; but at the same time, the political practice of architecture is weakened. The consensus that comes with the project reconfigures the visibility of the common in a way that objectifies the collective situation of the favela, so that the people involved can no longer take part in a dispute, i.e. the polemical framing of a controversial world within the given world. Its aesthetic politics is consequently dismissed. The architecture of the ethical regime frames space for communities of sense beyond political conflict. This architectural space overlaps with social space and establishes its own spatio-temporal conditions as a reaction to the injustices and malfunctions of the spatial planning strategies recognised as flawed.

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Second, the representational regime, as transposed into architecture, evaluates constructions through the criteria of beauty, and established rules and conventions. It corresponds to the requirements of architectural codes; that is to say, it is the product of a certain skill on the part of the architect. At the same time, it puts into practice a certain representation that requires architects to assign appropriate expressive forms to their constructions. The representational regime

²⁴ Jacques Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics", in B. Hinderliter, V. Maimon, J. Mansoor, and S. McCormick (eds.), *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 32–33.

considers the canon of architecture and builds on it, whether in terms of style, form, space, or typology, by moving within its rules. Despite its political potential during and after the war period, modernism today is often interpreted as a set of rules, almost as a style, often impoverished of any engaging ideas. In this regime, projects today are often iterated as stylistic/typological solutions, without critical social ambition. As such, the architecture of the representational regime is based on the hierarchies and domination inscribed in the sensible, against which the aesthetic regime is established, and is thus not political in an emancipatory sense. Within this regime, architecture articulates public space as envisioned through different forms of power and consent.

The aesthetic regime, finally, is a regime in which architectural works are recognised as part of a specific form of sensory experience, different from the one presupposed by the order of domination. In this regime, sensory experience is situated in the aesthetic experience of the individual, but at the same time it inherently entails a comment on social space. Identified within this regime, works of architecture create an experience that establishes a distance from the social, and at the same time – through the modes of sensory experience and the forms of space they design – opens for reflection the construction of the contemporary world.

The aesthetic regime of architecture achieved the same autonomy that was at the core of the modern project. As we have already seen, Rancière claims that this identification between art, autonomy, and modernity collapsed with the ethical turn, which sacrificed emancipatory futures in the name of a catastrophic event in the past. However, imagining the future through a redistribution of the sensible never disappeared from architecture. Experiencing architectural forms can still create a critical sense of space and thereby render visible a specific relation between social space, human life, and its environment. The experience of architectural forms can still establish an aesthetic distance in the sense that Loos's villas did more than one hundred years ago.

One such example is the architecture of the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art designed by Jean Nouvel in 1994. This building is situated on Boulevard Raspail in Paris. The location is fenced off with a glass screen that constitutes one of the three glass “curtains” between which the architect developed the project. The interior, with all its functions, is located between two glass structures

in the centre, while the front “façade” appears to be missing some glass plates. Large tree branches have been growing through those openings since the 1990s. At first glance, the glass screen with missing plates confuses the passers-by, who might wonder if this is an unfinished building or perhaps a ruin. But the design is not accidental. In order to achieve such an effect, the architect had to carefully consider the composition of the glass wall, which was built around a big protected Lebanese cedar, planted on the site by Chateaubriand, thereby making it a part of the experience. Using transparencies and reflections, the architect created a sense of space in and around the building that contrasts with the experience of the boulevard and comes as something of a surprise, even a shock, to the visitor in the dense urban fabric of Paris.

Clearly, Nouvel invokes the rules and conventions of modernist architecture, but with the addition of a critical architectural gesture that creates a sense of space based on a critical reflection on the relation between the building, the natural processes on site, and the aesthetic experience of its visitors. His articulation of form first confuses visitors, but then creates an exceptional encounter with the building that challenges the linear temporality of construction by involving the temporality of natural processes in the architectural form. This creates a critical sense of space revealing an aesthetic politics that challenges the established norms and hierarchies of the dominant architectural and planning discourse. It enables a community of sense to envision a new framing of reality, to imagine a new fiction of a common world.

Reframing Reality

The emergence of the aesthetic regime of art, which Rancière described as an aesthetic revolution, also coincides with the historical context of a new mode of spatial production, to which, for example, both the Viennese Ring as well as Loos’s villas belong. This new form of aesthetic experience intervened in the everyday and made it possible for a new common world and new community of sense to emerge in opposition to the dominant aesthetic order and its political connotations. The context of art and architecture was brimming over with sensory microevents that suggested new possible worlds. While the representational regime of architecture today accelerates temporal processes of spatial planning, the architecture of the aesthetic regime can slow them down through the individual time of the aesthetic experience. The ethical regime, meanwhile,

establishes parallel temporalities by bringing communities together through spatial practices.

The effect of Loos's villas can be seen as being similar to the effect of Nouvel's glass façade or to many contemporary artworks. Recalling Adorno's comments on Schönberg's reinvention of the ornament, we could also reflect on how Edgar Varèse's percussion composition *Ionisation* (1930), for example, incorporated the sound of high and low sirens, bringing the sound of ports into the musical experience. The sound of a distant place re-emerged here and now in a new light. Similarly, Nouvel's construction makes pre-existing trees re-emerge differently within the sense of space created by the building. Such microevents were then and are today testimonies of the new emerging worlds that disrupt the established aesthetic codes. If architecture or music wanted then and want today to create a critical sense of reality, the fictions they construct have to reconsider time and time again the future that the emerging conditions of development and its ideologies bring.

Loos's architecture did not change the logic of capitalist investment, nor did it create a socially inclusive space. It did, however, contribute to constituting a sense of space that presented, with its material presence, a critique of the everyday bourgeois environment. The sensory experience it created by reimagining form, craft, material, space, proportion, mass, etc., contributed to establishing a new context in which an emerging community of sense could discuss the critical role of architecture in society.

Today, the weakening of the welfare state, the speculative visions of destructive consumerist progress, and the grim environmental prognosis call for a critical evaluation of our planning for the future. This comes at a time when room for critique in architecture is inevitably shrinking. Given the sense of societal urgency, the questions regarding the sense of architectural space and the notion of great architecture might seem insignificant. However, the sense of architectural space is inevitably related to the political distribution of the sensible and the way it frames reality through fiction. According to Adorno, great architecture elevates the sense of space beyond the realm of purposefulness with architectural imagination by carving out different experiences of architectural temporalities.

If spatial planning, as practiced by the dominant order, fails to create a sense of a credible future, different temporalities of architecture can be seen as a terrain on which to explore and trace possible futures for emancipated communities to come. Despite Rancière's critique of the ethical turn, the future never escaped architecture. The architectural imagination can help elucidate and reconfigure the distribution of the sensible. Through its material processes that establish a link between the built and natural environment, architecture can create new forms of temporal experiences in space, and invent new spatio-temporal landscapes, different than those produced by contemporary capitalist culture.

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How the True World Finally Became Virtual Reality

In the chapter “How the ‘true world’ finally became a fable” in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche enumerates the steps that led from the belief in the accessibility of the true world beyond the illusory world of appearances to the dismissal of this metaphysical myth. However, Nietzsche deems that the elimination of the “true world” brought about the obliteration of the apparent world as well: “The true world is gone: which world is left? The illusory one, perhaps? ... But no! we got rid of the illusory world along with the true one!”¹

In this paper, I will suggest that the philosophical hypothesis that we might live in a simulation² can be considered to be the last and most nihilistic episode in the series of narrations about the true and apparent worlds that Nietzsche sketched. As David J. Chalmers claims, “virtual reality is a sort of genuine reality, virtual objects are real objects, and what goes on in virtual reality is truly real.”³ Accordingly, the illusory world of appearances is considered to be equivalent to any computational simulation of it since the information that is relevant to achieve true knowledge in the physical world can be digitally reproduced. However, this means that the sensible world is completely lost since all the contradictory and chaotic qualities that characterize it as a becoming of appearances are dispensable. While the difference between the metaphysical

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, in *The Antichrist, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, trans. J. Norman, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 171.

² The philosophical hypothesis that we might live in a simulation has been popularized by Nick Bostrom’s paper “Are you living in a computer simulation?”, *Philosophical Quarterly*, 53 (211/2003), pp. 243–255. Many philosophers, scientists, and public figures have been taking the hypothesis seriously, for example: John Archibald Wheeler, “Information, Physics, Quantum: The Search for Links”, in W. H. Zurek (ed.), *Complexity, Entropy, and the Physics of Information*, Boston, Addison-Wesley, 1990, pp. 3–28; Elon Musk (“Joe Rogan & Elon Musk – Are We in a Simulated Reality?”, <https://youtu.be/ocM69oCKArQ>, accessed 25 July 2021), Silas R. Beane, Zohreh Davoudi, and Martin J. Savage, “Constraints on the Universe as a Numerical Simulation”, *The European Physical Journal A*, 50 (148/2014), pp. 1–9.

³ David J. Chalmers, “The Virtual and the Real”, *Disputatio*, 9 (46/2017), p. 309.

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supersensible realm and the sensible world is overcome, the latter is substituted by a computational model that corresponds to true and objective knowledge of reality. Hence, we are nothing more than brains in a vat whose true knowledge is completely independent of the nature of the beings we interact with: they are essentially patterns of information that are truly known once they can be algorithmically reproduced.

It is important to point out that this conception of knowledge is the condition for present-day machine learning, an automated system for producing predictions based on the recognition of patterns of information. From this perspective, any existing entity can be reduced to the algorithmic procedure that is responsible for its behaviour, for the specific outputs that are calculated in response to specific inputs. This allows one to predict the results of interactions (events that are determined by the encounter of differently behaving entities) in such a way that decisions (to release information) can be made that are suitable for producing the desired effects. For example, water can be known as a pattern of behaviour that is correlated to temperature variations, such that changes can be modelled as depending on a simple rule that allows one to predict the series of phenomenal appearances that unfolds ordinately during the process of heating up or cooling down. Within this conception, intelligent agents operate according to an inductive learning method that allows them to enlarge their knowledge of reality and construct increasingly accurate abstract models. Such models are predictive hypotheses about the functions that describe the regular patterns that identify the unfolding of phenomena (how something changes in relation to the changes of some parameter) or the constant spatial relations that characterize specific objects despite their apparent variations (for example, if one cannot say that all ravens are black, one can recognize all the possible ravens thanks to structural invariants). Like artificial intelligence systems, human agents can improve their knowledge by exploring data concerning the behaviour of systems in order to make ever more accurate predictive hypotheses. The cognitive procedure that allows humans to build algorithmic models of phenomena (to identify systems with rules or functions that determine their structural relations as well as the way in which they affect or are affected during interactions) follows the rules of probabilistic statistical inference. A hypothesis about this complex procedure is used to program learning machines. Moreover, the knowledge (not yet achieved) of this learning rule, or what we can call the logic of induction, can be used to determine the information that the brain considers to be pertinent

in recognizing the pattern of information that corresponds to the model of a phenomenal object (a category or concept): such information can be digitally supplied to obtain the desired brain responses, i.e. the recognition of specific objects that call for specific actions that are meant to gain the desired effects. True knowledge is then the coherent set of predictive hypotheses that ought to be believed in order to successfully interact with objects that are identified with patterns of algorithmically produced information. Hence, true knowledge is an algorithmic rule that allows one to link the most efficient response to the incoming information under the hypothesis that the received data can be interpreted as a part of a regularly unfolding series (a specific object “causing” the brain stimulation): the recognition of a pattern justifies the expectation of future variations and such expectations justify the selection of specific actions. Since any object is but a pattern of information, it does not make a great difference if such information is physically communicated to the brain through the senses or if it is conveyed by electrodes stimulating neurons. In any case, the cognitive system will operate correctly and true inferences can be made in both physical and virtual reality, since both material and digital objects are mere patterns of information. What Nietzsche called the apparent world, or the reality of chaotic and contradictory sense impressions, is then reduced to an ordered set of computable series of information whose truth can easily be determined by checking if the rule is able to generate possible variations that have not yet been observed. Such a world, composed of nothing but algorithmic procedures or computational models (anything that is truly known can be correctly simulated by a computer), is believed to be the product of a correct procedure for the production of knowledge. Metaphysics is then overcome by proving that true knowledge of the empirical world can be obtained independently of knowing the reason why reality is such rather than otherwise. What makes a hypothesis believable, in fact, is that it has been produced according to the rational procedure that ought to be followed in order to produce satisfactory models of perceived phenomena and can be grasped by analysing the predictive theories that are collectively considered to be true. This analysis of the most trustworthy hypotheses is supposed to unveil the cognitive or inductive procedure for constructing efficient models; these hypotheses can be tested by simulating learning procedures in artificially intelligent machines. To put it in another way, metaphysics is overcome by showing that the truth about experienced reality can be stated independently of its nature (its supersensible origin) but under the condition that reasonable beliefs are held as regards the complex inductive rule (or logic) that allows rational

beings to construct models to efficiently cope with streams of data by selecting the information that is pertinent to classifying the different causes of brain stimulation and by responding appropriately.

Chalmers's thesis – according to which virtual reality is as true as the apparent world we used to call “reality” – is inscribed in the conception of knowledge that supports our contemporary automated system of knowledge production and that considers any existent being to be an algorithmically generable pattern of information. Moreover, as we will see in this paper, Chalmers's thesis about the equivalence between the physical and the digital world can be deemed to be the effect of the achievement of the positivist effort for the “elimination of metaphysics”⁴ and an extreme consequence of the effort to establish objective criteria for judging the truth value of propositions about the apparent world. I will argue that Nietzsche's prediction about the obliteration of the apparent world has actually been fulfilled by Chalmers, and I will show why his theory must be considered one of the many fables that humans have been producing in order to organize the world according to their own ends. A fable that is believed to express true knowledge about reality but which is just an effect of the imposition of a non-necessary norm for constructing worlds suitable for the satisfaction of human needs. A fable whose necessary condition is the acknowledgment of the human creative capacity for lying, which is in continuity with the real as true becoming.

The Fable of the True World

That the world we are immediately aware of is an illusion is an old philosophical assumption. Ever since Plato's allegory of the cave, different versions of the myth have been presented so that the history of Western philosophy can be seen as a series of variations on the theme of the relation between the true and apparent worlds. From Nietzsche's perspective, this is the story of the progressive

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⁴ I refer here to the paper published by Rudolph Carnap in 1932, “Überwindung der Metaphysik durch Logische Analyse der Sprache”, *Erkenntnis*, 2 (1/1932), pp. 219–241, and translated into English by Arthur Pap as “The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language”, in A. J. Ayer (ed.), *Logical Positivism*, New York, Free Press, 1959, pp. 60–81. The reference to Carnap is motivated by the fact that Chalmers recognizes the influence of the *Aufbau* on his own research program (see David J. Chalmers, *Constructing the World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012.)

intensification of nihilism or the imposition of a system of valuation that favours the preservation and growth of the human species but which is blind to the real value of life as creative becoming.

In Plato's famous allegory, we are like prisoners in a cave of sensual perceptions where we take shadows for real things. The knowledge we have about the projected shapes is revealed to be false,⁵ not because the expectations based on the observed regularities are incorrect, but because such theories concern phenomena in the apparent world of the cave rather than the objects of the true world (ideas). It is important to point out that knowledge here does not merely consist in the capacity of addressing the physical objects that pass between the fire and the prisoners' backs and that produce the shadows on the wall (we could say the material but invisible causes of phenomena that our science aims to grasp). In Plato's myth, in fact, true knowledge can only be gained by looking into the sun, by turning away from any material concern and sensible attraction. The sun is a source of truth that is inaccessible to sense organs,⁶ a brightness that our eyes cannot bear: the objects of true knowledge are suprasensible and they can only be grasped in thought. The soul, as the non-material inner light, provides us with access to the true world and with it the possibility of contemplating the real objects of knowledge. The true world is attainable for Plato because, as Nietzsche says, "he lives in it, *he is it*."⁷ Such identification with the light of truth is possible because the philosopher has detached him- or herself from any sensible interference in order to participate exclusively in the true world.

Since Plato, philosophy has been characterized by a progressive distrust in the speculative power of reason (the faculty of ideas) and an increasing confidence in rationality, the faculty that aims to construct the appearances of the world

⁵ As Socrates suggests in this dialogue: "However, what if among the people in the previous dwelling place, the cave, certain honors and commendations were established for whomever most clearly catches sight of what passes by and also best remembers which of them normally is brought by first, which one later, and which ones at the same time? And what if there were honors for whoever could most easily foresee which one might come by next?" Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave", trans. T. Sheehan, <https://web.stanford.edu/class/ihum40/cave.pdf>, accessed 25 July 2021, book VII, 514a–517a.

⁶ "But I think that finally he would be in the condition to look at the sun itself, not just at its reflection whether in water or wherever else it might appear, but at the sun itself, as it is in and of itself and in the place proper to it and to contemplate of what sort it is." *Ibid.*

⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 171.

according to objective (universal) rules. While doubting the accessibility of the true world beyond the cave (the metaphysical reasons for the world to appear as it does), philosophers started to be interested in the mechanism that produces the observed regularities in the shadows. The goal was to turn the prison into a home that can be fashioned according to the satisfaction of human needs and desires (rather than according to spiritual aspirations). Men of knowledge decided to focus on the apparent world in order to discover the laws that organize the structure of its appearing and that can be exploited in order to increase the efficacy of actions. In the empiricist and positivist version of the story, the disposable world is the ideal or metaphysical one, while useful knowledge is based on experience and relates to the mathematizable constant relations among the observed facts. The platonic light of reason is now seen as the obscure normativity of unprovable principles (metaphysical dogmatism) and the real light is the rational capacity to produce hypotheses whose truth depends upon their practical efficacy. As David Hume suggested, most philosophical speculations should be forgotten since they are useless:

If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask: does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.⁸

However, the abolition of the true world has not been achieved by the empiricists and the positivists, who were merely sceptical about the possibility of obtaining certainty and who thought that absolute truths were just inaccessible for us. The true world is a fable that can still be told even when the representation of the apparent world cannot be considered to be necessarily true: for sceptics like Hume, any theory is, to a certain extent, a fable, even though fables can be evaluated with respect to pragmatic criteria. The abolition of the “true world”, on the other hand, occurred when the fable was prohibited as meaningless, as the product of an uncoherent and unacceptable use of language. The actual obliteration of the true world rests on the belief that logically necessary truths can be stated about the apparent world, which, for this very reason, is the only object of

⁸ David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, as quoted by A. J. Ayer in the “Editor’s Introduction” to *Logical Positivism*, p. 10.

true knowledge. That is why I suggest that logical positivism can be deemed to be a further step in the trajectory sketched by Nietzsche: the true world is indeed abolished together with the elimination of metaphysics and any discourse on things whose descriptions are not logically implied by the axiomatic definitions of the most elementary items composing the only accessible and true reality.

The originality of logical positivism is that the impossibility of metaphysics as a science does not depend upon what can be known, but upon what can be said. As Carnap puts it:

A language consists of a vocabulary and a syntax, i.e. a set of words which have meanings and rules of sentence formation. These rules indicate how sentences may be formed out of the various sorts of words. Accordingly, there are two kinds of pseudo-statements: either they contain a word which is erroneously believed to have meaning, or the constituent words are meaningful, yet are put together in a counter-syntactical way, so that they do not yield a meaningful statement. We shall show in terms of examples that pseudo-statements of both kinds occur in metaphysics. Later we shall have to inquire into the reasons that support our contention that metaphysics in its entirety consists of such pseudo-statements.⁹

Accordingly, while the “true world” is abolished as the object of pseudo-statements, the apparent world is revealed to be the referent of statements that can be proven true or false and can therefore be truly known. From this standpoint, knowledge is a process that consists of finding the axiomatic premises that imply the macroscopic and phenomenal descriptions as consequences. This process unfolds by testing the hypotheses that are supposed to be supported by the available evidence, which allows one to verify the degree of logical implication between premises (atomic observational statements) and consequences (predictions): the aim is to judge the truth value of any scientific hypothesis by checking if it can be analytically derived from the definitions of elementary terms. Such definitions concern the behaviour (how they are affected and how they affect each other) of elementary entities, the interactions among which produce more complex objects characterized by specific ways of acting and reacting. Beings should then be defined according to their causal role within a network of beings. Any being can therefore be identified as a stable pattern of

⁹ Carnap, “The elimination of metaphysics through logical analysis of language”, p. 61.

relations (which does not vary under the action of external forces). Thus, philosophy is no longer the science of the supersensible objects of thought, but a critical discipline that analyses propositions in order to assess their truth value according to purely logical and rational criteria.

In order to fully understand why Nietzsche claims that the abolition of the true world also entails the abolition of the apparent world, I propose to consider more recent developments regarding Carnap's insights. In particular, I will take into account Chalmers's thesis that virtual beings are objects of true knowledge in the same way that material entities are.

***The Matrix* as Metaphysics**

I propose to consider *The Matrix* as a version of the story of the true and the apparent world that completes the series sketched by Nietzsche. As is well known, this movie is about the discovery that the world we live in is a computer simulation and that we are actually brains in a vat under the control of intelligent machines that use human bodies as batteries. After realizing the truth, the protagonist decides to fight the malevolent AI and liberate humanity from slavery. At first sight, it might seem that *The Matrix* is a contemporary edition of the allegory of the cave; however, the similarities are only superficial. The essential difference is that most beliefs about the physical organization of reality are the same inside and outside the simulation, so that once we are disconnected from the Matrix, we find no "true" knowledge, but a world where most of the truths we possessed are still valid. To put it another way, the objects of true knowledge are the same inside and outside the cave since such objects are not material beings but regular patterns of brain stimulations. Such patterns can be perfectly instantiated by bits of information, which is why we might not realize that we are brains in a vat rather than wired to a genuine reality. The hypothesis that we live in a simulation without being aware of it can then be considered proof that any perceived world is the effect of brain stimulation and that it does not make a big difference if the causes of phenomenal representations are material or digital objects (streams of data). The "Matrix Hypothesis" is not a sceptical argument meant to cast doubt on the truth of our scientific knowledge of reality, but a thought experiment confirming that our knowledge of the apparent world is true independent of the nature of the entity our brains are wired to. As Chalmers explains:

I think that even if I am in a matrix, my world is perfectly real. A brain in a vat is not massively deluded (at least if it has always been in the vat). Neo does not have massively false beliefs about the external world. Instead, envatted beings have largely correct beliefs about their world. If so, the Matrix Hypothesis is not a skeptical hypothesis, and its possibility does not undercut everything that I think I know.¹⁰

To understand why the hypothesis that we might live in a simulation is meant to prove that our knowledge is true independent of the nature of the objects that stimulate the brain, it is important to clarify Chalmers's epistemological perspective. His main source of inspiration is Carnap's structuralism,¹¹ i.e. the idea that it is possible to understand the most elementary physical relations (how atomic elements are defined by their respective mode of interaction) in a way that enables us to determine all possible macroscopic effects. However, Chalmers does not commit to the assumption that the structure of reality is reflected by logical relations and that the totality of truths can be deduced from the definitions of primitive observational terms. Rather, he thinks that acceptable inferences should not contradict the set of the most fundamental beliefs and that such beliefs constitute a coherent ground of reliable hypotheses that, even though they cannot be taken to be absolutely true, are the premises that allow one to judge the truth value of the proposed consequences. As a cognitivist, Chalmers believes that the very fact that we represent the world as a coherent set of phenomena that can be identified as regular patterns of brain stimulations depends upon the underlying causal structure of reality. Since reality is a network of entities defined by the nomic or causal role they play with respect to each other,¹² brain states are themselves causally determined within the same web of structural relations. In agreement with cognitive philosophers such as Thomas

¹⁰ David J. Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics", <http://consc.net/papers/matrix.html>, accessed 25 July 2021, p. 2. This paper was originally written for the philosophy section of the official *The Matrix* website (2003) and was subsequently published in C. Grau, (ed.) *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005. The same argument appears in Chalmers's book *Constructing the World*, Oxford University Press, 2012, in the excursus "The Structuralist Response to Skepticism" (pp. 431–440). I am quoting the text available on David J. Chalmers's website.

¹¹ See the "Introduction" in Chalmers, *Constructing the World*.

¹² *Ibid.*, p 432.

K. Metzinger and Andy Clark,¹³ Chalmers claims that knowledge can be obtained through the process of making hypotheses about the structures (i.e. real objects) that cause recurrent patterns of impressions. Accordingly, the representation of reality is the effect of the recognition of regular relations among received pieces of information (phenomenal objects are like virtual maps of the possible causes of recurrent series of stimulations). Scientific enquiry thus consists of making increasingly precise hypotheses about the causes of the regularly observed patterns, which are supposed to depend upon the rules of interactions among unobservable particles. In short, brain states are determined by interaction with real objects, while phenomenal objects are hypothetical virtual maps based upon regular patterns of stimulation that are supposed to identify the external causes of perceived changes in the brain, e.g. the brain state that corresponds to the perception of a table depends on matching between the hypothetical pattern of stimuli that is supposed to characterize a table and the pattern of present impressions (information input). Moreover, the pattern of perceptions that identify a table can be explained in terms of interaction among more basic entities. Perceived patterns can be considered to be the effects of the rules that determine interactions at the most basic level, rules being the hypotheses as to the premises from which all possible true brain states are derived as consequences. This means that ordinary concepts – those associated with the representation of macroscopic objects or with recurrent patterns of brain stimulation – ought to be inferred from scientific concepts about the most basic structural patterns. Accordingly, beliefs about the underlying physical structure of the world can be used to clarify the relations among the concepts that are associated with the brain state caused by macroscopic objects. Normative beliefs, then, are rules of inference that allow us to judge the truth value of descriptions of the apparent world without supposing a logical structure of reality but which still assume that a coherent set of beliefs about reality can be adopted. As Chalmers explains:

The inferential role of a concept can be construed as a normative role, constituted by good inferences that the concept might be involved in. On one construal, the inferential role will be an a priori role, involving the a priori justified inferences that the concept is involved in. On another, it will be a sort of analytic role, involv-

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¹³ See Thomas K. Metzinger “Why Is Virtual Reality Interesting for Philosophers?”, *Frontiers in Robotics and AI*, 5 (101/2018), pp. 1–19; Andy Clark, *Natural Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technology and the Future of Human Intelligence*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.

ing the trivial or cognitively insignificant inferences that the concept is involved in. Either way, inferentialism will give special weight to *entry inferences*: good inferences from thoughts constituted by primitive concepts alone to thoughts involving the concept in question.¹⁴

While learning consists in confirming the hypothesis about the very basic rules that support further inferences, knowledge is the capacity to produce correct inferences (to assert true consequences from given premises). This capacity allows conscious beings to anticipate future states starting from an observed present state in such a way that they can select the actions whose consequences are the most desirable in the scenario that will probably be actualized.

Now, the reason why Chalmers claims that we can gain true knowledge in virtual reality is that we can actually control our avatars in order to interact in a satisfactory way (for example, in a game scenario) and that such knowledge depends on the same learning process that we apply in material worlds: in any case, it is a matter of making correct inferences about the events that should be expected when some conditions are observed. In the same way that we can grasp the underlying structure that determines the regular patterns of phenomena in a material environment, we can also understand the basic rules of interaction among the digital objects that stimulate our brain as streams of data. Moreover, when a virtual reality is, like in *The Matrix*, a simulation of the material world, we correctly expect the basic structures of the two worlds to correspond to each other, although they are instantiated by different kinds of structures (material and digital). Since knowledge is based on patterns of brain stimulations, the capacity to make good inferences can be acquired independently of the nature of the objects we causally interact with: the structure of digital objects causes brain states that are analogues of those caused by the structure of material objects. As a consequence, most of the beliefs that are true in the material world are also true in the simulated world. As Chalmers explains:

Carnap held that all our hypotheses about the external world are in effect structural hypotheses, concerning the existence of objects satisfying a certain structure. And he held that we can know in principle whether any structural hypothesis obtains. If so, then we can know that the external-world truths obtain. Even if

¹⁴ Chalmers, *Constructing the World*, p. 463.

we are in the evil-genius scenario, or the Matrix scenario, the relevant structure among our experiences obtains.¹⁵

In the Matrix scenario, a computer is simulating the structure of the world and, even though this structure is made of data, the brain states obtained and their relations are exactly the same. For example, the brain state corresponding to the perception of a table will be the same when the table is touched by my organic hands or by my avatar's hands. The material and the virtual are both apparent worlds since they are the phenomenal effects of the interaction between the brain and the structure of the elements that stimulate it. That they are both apparent worlds means that the qualities that we attribute to things, for example colours or smells, are but the effects of the interaction between regular causal patterns and the brain: a material apple is not red; it is the non-coloured structure of the apple that causes the brain state of redness, in the same way a digital apple is a pattern of data that produces the conscious state of redness.

I think it is much better to hold that even after Galileo, ordinary claims such as "The apple is red" are true. The apple is not Edenically red, but it is structurally red: that is, it has the property that plays the structural role associated with redness in causing experiences and the like. Likewise, ordinary claims such as "The apple is round" are true. The apple is not Edenically round, but it is structurally round: that is, it has the property that plays the structural role associated with roundness, in causing experiences and the like.¹⁶

Thus, it does not make a real difference if the redness of the apple is caused by a material object or by a digital object. In both cases, we can obtain the knowledge necessary to predict the future states of the apparent world in order to interact efficiently. Any apparent world can be truly known and the truth of this knowledge rests on the fact that, in order to be a coherent set of phenomena, a world must be a pattern that emerges from the rules that determine the behaviour of its fundamental elements.

The inferences that are correct in the material world are valid in its simulation as well: rather than a sceptical argument casting doubt on the truth of our knowl-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

edge, the Matrix Hypothesis can be considered to be a thought experiment that proves that true knowledge concerns the formal aspects of the underlying structure of the world and that such knowledge is valid independent of the qualitative nature of this structure. This entails that a virtual object can be considered to be a real object rather than a fictional object:

Simulations are typically designed to replicate the abstract causal organization of an original system. A property such as being a calculator depends only on this organization, which is also present in a simulation, so a simulated calculator is a calculator. The same reasoning explains why a virtual calculator is a calculator.¹⁷

However, the question as to the actual nature of the underlying structure, i.e. if it is material or digital, cannot be answered by science, since the latter can only access the fundamental functions (the respective roles played by fundamental elements) that characterize the structure. Such a question is then, according to Chalmers, a legitimate metaphysical question:

Where physics is concerned with the microscopic processes that underlie macroscopic reality, metaphysics is concerned with the fundamental nature of reality. A metaphysical hypothesis might make a claim about the reality that underlies physics itself. Alternatively, it might say something about the nature of our minds, or the creation of our world. [...] In particular, I think the Matrix Hypothesis is equivalent to a version of the following three-part Metaphysical Hypothesis. First, physical processes are fundamentally computational. Second, our cognitive systems are separate from physical processes, but interact with these processes. Third, physical reality was created by beings outside physical space-time.¹⁸

Accordingly, the Matrix Hypothesis is an acceptable metaphysical claim and, even though it is not possible to verify it from within the simulation (it does not produce true knowledge), the proposed speculation does not contradict most of the normative beliefs we are rationally committed to. As Chalmers explains, the Matrix Hypothesis is equivalent to other metaphysical theories about the nature of the structure that is the object of scientific knowledge from the perspective of its functioning (science knows how elements work independent of their qualita-

¹⁷ Chalmers, "The Virtual and the Real", p. 325.

¹⁸ Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics", p. 3.

tive being: a lever, for example, is defined by its function rather than by the matter it is made of). For instance, the hypothesis that the world has been created by a god standing outside space-time is equivalent to the hypothesis that our reality is a computer simulation that has been programmed by intelligent machines. However, metaphysics is not considered to be a real science that produces true knowledge of the supersensible realm in which the phenomenal appearance of the objects of experience is grounded. Metaphysical speculations are irrelevant with respect to the justification or invalidation of the scientific construction of phenomenal reality. Following the positivist endeavour of liberating scientific enquiry from philosophical justification, metaphysics can be considered to be overcome as it is no longer needed to legitimize the truth of our statements about experienced reality. Moreover, metaphysical discourses are now judged according to the criteria of science as statements whose truth value cannot be assessed. Yet, while Carnap defined them as meaningless, Chalmers claims that they can be considered to be meaningful even though they do not convey any useful information. After all, scientific hypotheses can be judged to be true or false independent of metaphysical assumptions.

If one believes that God created the world, and if one believes that God is outside physical space-time, then one believes the Creation Hypothesis. One needn't believe in God to believe the Creation Hypothesis, though. Perhaps our world was created by a relatively ordinary being in the "next universe up", using the latest world-making technology in that universe. If so, the Creation Hypothesis is true. I don't know whether the Creation Hypothesis is true. But I don't know for certain that it is false. The hypothesis is clearly coherent, and I cannot conclusively rule it out. The Creation Hypothesis is not a skeptical hypothesis. Even if it is true, most of my ordinary beliefs are still true.¹⁹

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Metaphysical reflections, then, do not provide any access to a true world with respect to which the reality we are immersed in would be a mere appearance. Rather, metaphysical hypotheses are acceptable when they do not contradict the truth of normative beliefs about the perceived world. These normative beliefs refer to the functions of the elements that compose the world as a mechanism that causes phenomenal representations in the brain. Everything is thus considered to be part of a machine whose structure determines illusory qualitative images

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

in the brain, a machine with which the brain can interact to bring about desired effects (rewarding brain states). Knowledge of the causal structure of reality allows conscious beings to engage in practices that depend upon the recognition of the possible functions that a being can assume within a network where other beings express a specific mode of reacting in response to incoming inputs and acting by releasing outputs. Here, truth is a matter of formulating inferences that allow one to efficiently interact with the environment by anticipating the results of the actions that are supposed to bring about the desired reactions. Hence, true knowledge is independent of any metaphysical assumption about the nature of known beings that are known merely as expected series of actions and reactions.

However, even though truth no longer depends upon belief in the true world (the exterior cause of the being of the apparent world) and true knowledge is supposed to concern the world we are immersed in, this makes of the scientific representation of reality nothing more than a fable, a fable about the mathematical structure that characterizes beings and makes their digital simulation possible. As Nietzsche claims in *The Will to Power*, it is because we simplify appearances by reducing them to the repetition of identical cases that we are justified in believing that they depend upon a logical or mathematical structure.

Our psychological perspective is determined by the following:

1. that communication is necessary, and that for there to be communication something has to be firm, simplified, capable of precision (above all in the identical case). For it to be communicable, however, it must be experienced as adapted, as “recognizable”. The material of the senses adapted by the understanding, reduced to rough outlines, made similar, subsumed under related matters. Thus, the fuzziness and chaos of sense impressions are, as it were, logicized.
2. the world of “phenomena” is the adapted world which we feel to be real. The “reality” lies in the continual recurrence of identical, familiar, related things in their logicized character, in the belief that here we are able to reckon and calculate.²⁰

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, New York, Vintage Books, 1968, § 569 (Spring-Fall 1887), pp. 306–307.

Accordingly, the idea that the world consists of a series of facts that can be objectively inferred from knowledge of the basic mathematical structure of reality is a consequence of the falsification of sensible events. As Nietzsche puts it:

Our subjective compulsion to believe in logic only reveals that, long before logic itself entered our consciousness, we did nothing but introduce its postulates into events: now we discover them in events – we can no longer do otherwise – and imagine that this compulsion guarantees something connected with “truth”. It is we who created the “thing”, the “identical thing”, subject, attribute, activity, object, substance, form, after we had long pursued the process of making identical, coarse and simple. The world seems logical to us because we have made it logical.²¹

The mathematical reconstruction of reality is certainly useful in order to survive in the reality we are part of, but the usefulness of a hypothesis with respect to human ends does not prove its truth. According to Nietzsche, the abolition of the metaphysical world as the real source of truth merely resulted in making logic the new criteria for establishing what ought to be considered true: “logic would be an imperative, not to know the true, but to posit and arrange a world that shall be called true by us.”²² It is because propositions regarding reality must be evaluated with respect to the posited rational rules (the formula that describes how fundamental entities behave) that any world that can be correctly described is considered real, even though such reality remains nothing but a non-necessary construction. This construction, however, is useful, so its value is relative to human goals: rationality imposes the arbitrary demand of constructing the common world as a norm, but does not provide any true knowledge of the sensible world, whose sensual appearance exceeds the artificial simplification that is imposed on it. Moreover, it is because rationally constructed worlds are environments in which we can actually make successful decisions that we think that the truth of our knowledge about them has been proven. However, as Nietzsche observes:

In valuations are expressed conditions of preservation and growth. All our organs of knowledge and our senses are developed only with regard to conditions of pres-

²¹ *Ibid.*, § 521 (Spring-Fall 1887), pp. 282–283.

²² *Ibid.*, § 516 (Spring-Fall 1887; rev. Spring-Fall 1888), p. 279.

ervation and growth. Trust in reason and its categories, in dialectic, therefore the valuation of logic, proves only their usefulness for life, proved by experience – not that something is true.²³

Since stable beliefs are needed in order to survive and endure as defined identities, we project in the real world the existence of stable beings (which can be recognized by observing the regularities of the events that are supposed to be the effects of their interactions). Nevertheless, this useful construction of the world is a falsification of reality, an apparent world that we ought to believe to be true because we cannot actually live without this kind of a lie. That is why the abolition of the true world as a meaningless fable brought about also the dismissal of the apparent world: with the apparent world being reduced to a rational construction based on idealized elements, we have lost the overwhelming sensual excess of which appearance actually consists.

The Unbearable Truth of Reality or Why We Need Lies

If the true metaphysical world is a fable and the apparent world has been substituted by a useful construction, what is truly real? According to Nietzsche, the truth is that there is no truth because there are no stable beings (about which something true can be said): the world is a pure becoming and becoming is a pure appearance without underlying appearing beings. As he claims, “the antithesis of this phenomenal world is not ‘the true world’, but the formless in-formulable world of the chaos of sensations – another kind of phenomenal world, a kind ‘unknowable’ for us.”²⁴ The world in itself is the same as it is actually perceived: a chaos of sensual properties and qualities that cannot be known without being betrayed and reduced to a collection of simplified entities or constant and quantifiable relations. However, knowledge of the world as pure appearing (rather than as the appearance of some idealized set of elementary and mathematized beings) is not possible, since nothing actually true can be said about it. Hence, “the world with which we are concerned is false, i.e., is not a fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meager sum of observations; it is ‘in flux’, as something in a state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing

²³ *Ibid.*, § 507 (Spring-Fall 1887), p. 275.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, § 569 (Spring-Fall 1887), p. 307.

but never getting near the truth: for—there is no truth.”²⁵ As a consequence, the scientific representation of the apparent world is a useful lie. The problem, according to Nietzsche, is that this lie, which allows the human species to preserve itself, also prevents the expression of humankind’s highest values. Even though scientific knowledge as an attempt to dominate nature by reducing it to a set of repeatable simplified beings is an expression of the *will to power*, it is an inadequate expression that limits the creative forces of becoming by imposing forms whose value is relative to the satisfaction of human needs rather than being equal to the absolute value of creative forces. The nihilism of positive knowledge depends on the fact that the world is conceived as a dead mechanism deprived of “life” and “will”, a mechanism without meaning that tends toward a final state of equilibrium or entropic dissolution (the final death of everything rather than eternal self-creation through self-destruction). Moreover, the representation of reality as a set of parts defined by their respective functions includes humans whose performances (practical and cognitive) are judged with respect to the rational norms that are supposed to ensure the dominant role of the species and its growth rather than the expression of the fundamental Dionysian instincts. The rules governing the construction of the scientific world are imperatives that establish the correct or valuable inferences that rational beings ought to make in order to preserve an order of the world that is suitable for the welfare of the population. As Nietzsche claims:

The task is to make man as useful as possible and to approximate him, as far as possible, to an infallible machine: to this end he must be equipped with the virtues of the machine (– he must learn to experience the states in which he works in a mechanically useful way as the supremely valuable states; hence it is necessary to spoil the other states for him as much as possible, as highly dangerous and disreputable).²⁶

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Such an “economic evaluation” of human beings is, according to Nietzsche, the most extreme danger, the real expression of nihilism as the negation of the will to power, the suppression of the truth that men are not defined by their preferences and social roles but by being equal to the anti-identitarian forces of becoming. Rather than being brains in a vat that are mechanically compelled

²⁵ *Ibid.*, § 616 (1885-1886), p. 330.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, § 888 (Spring-Fall 1887; rev. Spring-Fall 1888), p. 474.

to behave according to the laws of rationality to maximize individual utilities, men ought to aspire, according to Nietzsche, to be artists, to embrace the real sensible chaos of becoming and celebrate being part of the irrational power of the whole.

The extreme point of nihilism is reached when humans are “truly” known or rationally constructed as automatons that perform correct calculations of the actions needed to achieve the given goals in a world reduced to the virtual reality of a game. The extreme point of nihilism corresponds to the reduction of the human to a pattern of information that can be known or modelled in the same way as any other system is known and modelled, i.e. as a series of operations that can be simulated by an algorithm. This stage corresponds, in fact, to the total obliteration of the difference between representation (the constructed phenomenal world) and reality since the representing subject has been finally reduced to a constructible phenomenon whose value is that of a means like any other. In particular, humans – like anything else – are reduced to exploitable resources of information and are thus an object of evaluation according to economic criteria: that is why, according to Nietzsche, a hero or a new species of men is now needed to reverse all values.

The reduction of man to an algorithmic procedure is the condition for creating a perfect virtual reality. In fact, comprehending the functioning of cognition is necessary in order to provide the brain with all the information necessary to obtain the representation of a coherent reality where one can act efficiently while holding true beliefs. The understanding of cognition concerns the elucidation of the rules of rational decision-making, which are based on the correct anticipation of the unfolding events (since the whole process was generated by the algorithmic rules that identify phenomena). Knowledge of these rules can be used in order to predict individuals' behaviour in such a way so as to select the best decisions with respect to expected strategies: this is, for example, what the predictive algorithms we interact with on digital platforms do. However, the reduction of humans to rules on decision-making based on predictive models of phenomena and specific preferences make them not only predictable by machines, but also models for constructing intelligent machines. We are about to reach the point at which humans are no different than their artificial simulations or artificially intelligent systems. However, in order to become models for the efficient behaviour of machines, humans have to submit to the norm of constructing the

kind of reality where utilities can actually be maximized and where intelligent algorithms can be successfully used to improve strategies and to produce useful knowledge. The infinite possible states of such a reality – the market reality is a good example – can be computed by accessing the rules that determine the respective actions and reactions that produce observable events. An apparent world in which anything that can happen can be anticipated (even though it is not always correctly predicted) and therefore simulated, a world where types of agents are modelled as algorithms that compete to satisfy a given set of preferences by learning the preferences of others, is a lie that is so strongly believed that it comes to be the formula of any possible reality. If any possible objectively known world can be reduced to a computer simulation, then any immersive and coherent virtual reality game can be correctly believed to be real since one can learn to interact efficiently by learning its rules. We believe so strongly that the world is truly a network of encounters among beings defined by their behaviour (algorithmic rules) and that such knowledge sets us free to satisfy our preferences that we no longer feel the chains that force us to construct the world as a rational game that can be successfully played. It no longer matters whether we know the origin of the structural laws that organize the world we are immersed in, as far as they are perceived as the necessary conditions of any rational world-making. It seems even more acceptable to speculate that such rules have been made by a foreign AI and that we live in a computer simulation than to admit that the rules have been made by us and that we are the authors of the lie that we believe to be the true structure of reality. Against the type of man that takes the lie of the algorithmic definition of beings to be the only true condition of any apparent world, Nietzsche opposes the artist, who knows that we cannot survive without lies and that the only authenticity consists of being faithful to the creative power of lying by contributing to the ever-changing appearance of a world where no identity appears.

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Metaphysics, morality, religion, science – in this book these things merit consideration only as various forms of lies: with their help one can have *faith* in life. “Life *ought* to inspire confidence”: the task thus imposed is tremendous. To solve it, man must be a liar by nature, he must be above all an *artist*. And he *is* one: metaphysics, religion, morality, science – all of them only products of his will to art, to lie, to flight from “truth”, to *negation* of “truth”. This ability itself, thanks to which he violates reality by means of lies, this artistic ability of man *par excel-*

lence – he has it in common with everything that is. He himself is after all a piece of reality, truth, nature: how should he not also be a piece of *genius in lying*?²⁷

Nietzsche's conception is the perfect reversal of Chalmers's. For the latter, any fiction is "truly real" under the condition of being logically coherent, of depending on a knowable structure that causes its correct representation in a rational mind, i.e. a brain that performs the calculations that are needed to preserve itself in any environment, while for Nietzsche no constructed world is real, and thus any reality that is believed to be truly known is a fiction. Hence, there is only one reality and nothing true can be said about it. Nevertheless, besides "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent," there is another option. This option is not available to men of logic but only to the artist, for whom the chaos of becoming appears in the form of an artwork, a form that does not make it knowable as a defined being but does make it sensible. An artwork is a form imposed on becoming as an affirmation of the will to power, a lie that does not pretend to be the truth but is sincerely offered as a lie, as a pure appearing (rather than the appearance of something defined or simplified). The artist is faithful to the truth of the impossibility of truth and he or she offers his or her lies to contribute to the creativity of always changing forms through which the highest power of the will is expressed: "art is worth more than truth."²⁸ In creating forms as true lies, the artist aspires to be identical to the will to power rather than to be an identity acting in agreement with human valuable ends. In an artwork, the unrepresentable becoming of which reality consists is embraced for what it is, without any ambition to provide a true image of it, but with the pride of being part of the flux in which any stable form is, at the same time, a transitory expression of the whole and which will come back eternally as an instant whose value cannot be compared or measured.

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Conceived as becoming or will to power, the apparent world is finally liberated from the fable of the "true world", from the "metaphysical hypothesis" that somebody or something might have created it from the outside as a determinate being (a structure). As we have seen, this hypothesis cannot be ruled out by Chalmers and by all the philosophers who conceive of reality as an effect of the being of a structure, of a set of rules that cannot explain their own coming

²⁷ *Ibid.*, § 853 ("Art in the 'Birth of Tragedy'"), pp. 451–452.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

into being. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, the metaphysical hypothesis of the eternal recurrence excludes the possibility of believing in a creator of the world. As eternal recurrence, reality is a circular becoming that has neither a beginning nor an end, an infinite flux limited by nothing and constantly producing and destroying anything it can produce by reproducing itself. As Nietzsche poetically describes in the last pages of *The Will to Power*:

This, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil”, without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself – do you want a name for this world? A solution for all its riddles? A light for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men? – This world is the will to power – and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides.²⁹

While the man of knowledge evaluates the states of the world with respect to utility and himself with respect to the efficacy of his inferences, the artist-philosopher evaluates the states of the world according to their incomparable value of necessary manifestations of becoming and himself as becoming equal to the will to power, thus contributing to the creation of sensible appearances.

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²⁹ *Ibid.*, § 1067 (1885), p. 550.

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Noa Levin*

Spectres of Eternal Return: Benjamin and Deleuze Read Leibniz

Eternal Return and the Structure of Expression

In several short texts written during the last twenty years of his life, G. W. Leibniz considers the possibility that worldly events recur eternally. Although his ideas on the doctrine of eternal return reappear in various forms and contexts, they have not received much attention until recently. In part, this is due to their very late publication. A full version of these texts, alongside Leibniz's correspondences on the topic, was published for the first time only in the 1991 edition edited by Michel Fichant.¹ Prior to its publication, partial versions edited by Couturat (1902) and Ettliger (1921) had appeared. To date, these texts have not been fully translated into English or German. Another reason that they are not more widely available, and have not garnered more attention, is that they do not easily fit in with the prevalent view of Leibniz as an optimist and champion of the continual progress of humanity. Moreover, Leibniz's theological and mystical concerns are often dismissed as peripheral to his philosophical project.² This article reads these texts in conjunction with two authors who provide exceptions from this trend, and do not shy away from the metaphysical aspects of Leibniz's work: Walter Benjamin and Gilles Deleuze.

In their own readings of Leibniz, Benjamin and Deleuze both emphasise his concept of "expression", which describes the way in which each simple substance, or monad, expresses, or mirrors, the ever-changing world, thus serving

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¹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *De l'Horizon de la Doctrine Humaine (1693)*, *La Restitution Universelle (1715)*, M. Fichant (ed.), Paris, Vrin, 1991.

² See Donald Rutherford, *Leibniz and the Rational Order of Nature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995. During the twentieth century the interpretations of Couturat and Russell, which prioritised Leibniz's logics above all other domains of his thought, were especially influential. See Bertrand Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz. With an Appendix of Leading Passages*, Nottingham, Spokesman, 2008; Louis Couturat, *La logique de Leibniz d'après des documents inédits*, Paris, Ancienne Librairie Germer Baillière, 1901.

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as a “perpetual living mirror of the universe.”³ In other words, the structure of expression denotes the immanence of the world and its history, in abbreviated form, in each of its simple substances. Benjamin uses this structure to describe how each work of art includes its “fore- and after-history,” just as, according to Leibniz, every monad is “pregnant” with its past, present, and future histories.⁴ Deleuze’s concept of the event similarly draws on Leibniz’s “complete individual notion”, including its predications, which Deleuze reformulates as the immanence of virtual worlds within our own.⁵

Deleuze and Benjamin are both drawn to expression as the spatial equivalent of eternal return: the notions of a multiplicity of worlds simultaneously existing within our own (Deleuze) or an infinity of ideas, each containing an image of the world (Benjamin), replace the infinite repetition of this world. This structure opens up space for virtual, other worlds that do not exist in actuality but enable heterogeneity within our world.⁶

Both authors put forward their own temporal theories of eternal return, yet these have rarely been read in conjunction with their respective receptions of Leibniz. The article argues that Deleuze and Benjamin recognise the immanent, enfolded, or virtual structure of expression as one of the guiding principles of Leibniz’s metaphysics, ontology, and theory of knowledge, and appropriate this structure in different ways into their own philosophies, as a figure of space and time. In highlighting this structure in Leibniz’s reflections on eternal return, their respective readings serve to subvert the widespread perception of Leibniz as univocally supporting historical progress.

³ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Monadology”, § 56, in *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*, R. Latta (ed.), London, Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 119.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. H. Eiland, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2019, p. 27; Leibniz, “Monadology”, § 22, p. 231.

⁵ See Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. T. Conley, London, The Athlone Press, 1993, p. 53. On the “complete individual notion,” see Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Discourse on Metaphysics”, § 8, in *Philosophical Essays*, R. Ariew and D. Garber (eds.), Indianapolis, Hackett, 1989, pp. 40–41.

⁶ For a reading that links Deleuze’s concept of the virtual with Benjamin’s understanding of language as a medium, see Samuel Weber’s “Imapart-ability: Language as Medium”, in *Benjamin’s -abilities*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2010, pp. 31–52.

This article discusses concepts of eternal return in general, and specifically the concept of apokatastasis used by Leibniz to reflect upon return. A Greek term designating restoration, and used to describe the Stoic cycle of cosmology, apokatastasis was adopted by Christian theologians, most notably Origen of Alexandria, who used it to describe the restoration and salvation of all souls. The term therefore has both a Stoic and Christian lineage, the latter based on an apostolic reference to Jewish eschatology, namely St. Peter's speech in Acts 3.21, describing Christ "whom heaven must hold until the times of that restoration of all things (*achri chronōn apokatastaseōs pantōn*)."⁷ It follows that apokatastasis is interlinked with messianic traditions, both Jewish and Christian. The return of all things is described as a universal restitution following the return of the Messiah.

Benjamin uses the term apokatastasis in different texts written in his last years. In "The Storyteller", he refers to Origen's doctrine of universal salvation from *De Principiis*, describing it as the "entry of all souls into paradise."⁷ In the *Arcades Project*, he describes apokatastasis as part of a "methodological proposal for the cultural-historical dialectic."⁸ Therein and in notes for his last text "On the Concept of History", Benjamin also discusses eternal return in relation to Friedrich Nietzsche and August Blanqui.⁹ Yet his concept of apokatastasis, although recently receiving some attention, is not often linked to his reading of Leibniz.¹⁰

Deleuze does not make use of the term apokatastasis, yet eternal return is a key theme in his work. The concept is developed in early works such as *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, *Difference and Repetition*, and *Logic of Sense*, and is later reaffirmed. Deleuze directly cites Nietzsche's concept of return developed in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as the main source for his own concept. But Deleuze's con-

⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Observations on the Work of Nicolai Leskov", in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, 1935-1938, H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings (eds.), Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 158.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin, Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999, [N1a,3], p. 459.

⁹ Blanqui's doppelgänger world of "present eternalised" is described as the "phantasmagoria of history itself." *Ibid*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁰ For a reading that does make this connection, see Fabrizio Desideri, "Intermittency: The Differential of Time and the Integral of Space, the Intensive Spatiality of the Monad, the Apokatastasis and the Messianic World in Benjamin's Latest Thinking", *Aisthesis rivista on-line del Seminario Permanente di Estetica*, 9 (1/2016), pp. 177-187.

cept of return, as informed by Leibniz and Nietzsche, is most conspicuously apparent in *Difference and Repetition*.

I will first contextualise Leibniz's elaborations of return within his reflections on history, theology, and knowledge. Then I will discuss Leibniz's reflections on return expressed in three texts written towards the end of his life, and show how these play an important role in his later philosophy. His views on perfection and progress are not clear-cut, as we shall see, and moreover for Leibniz progress and return are not contradictory. Benjamin's engagement with the concept of apokatastasis and Deleuze's conceptualisation of eternal return will then be elaborated, highlighting how these are interlinked with their readings of Leibniz. Deleuze and Benjamin, it will be shown, recognised the radical potential of Leibniz's understanding of space and time and took these a step further as part of their respective criticism of progress-driven historiographies. Finally, I will suggest that not only progress but the potential for its critique derive from Leibniz's philosophy, although only the former has been privileged by most historic-philosophical accounts.¹¹

Perfection and Progress

Leibniz mentions Origen's apokatastasis explicitly in his *Theodicy* (1710), one of the only works published during his lifetime.¹² Therein he praises Origen's ideas of return as enabling the salvation of all beings, calling "Apokatastasis Panton" a "great and learned work."¹³ Leibniz uses the idea of universal salvation in order to defend the existence of a perfect, omnipotent, and just God in a world in which evil and human suffering exist.

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Leibniz's solution to the problem of the compatibility of our God-created, best of all possible worlds, on the one hand, and the freedom of human beings, on the other, hinges upon what he calls the "pre-established harmony" (*une har-*

¹¹ Reinhart Koselleck, for example, credits Leibniz with the invention of historical progress: "ultimately, the aim of completeness was temporalised (first by Leibniz) and brought into the process of worldly occurrence." See Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 265.

¹² Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, trans. E. M. Huggard, Eugene, Wipf and Stock, 2007.

¹³ *Ibid.*, § 17, pp. 135–136.

monie *préétablie/prästabilierte Harmonie*). The universe, according to Leibniz, is composed of an infinite number of simple substances, or “monads”, as he calls them in his later works, each belonging to one of an infinite number of series. Since ours is the best of all possible worlds, a fine balance between these infinite series must be retained. Accordingly, all series are harmonised upon creation following a divine plan or script, yet the monads remain free agents in so far as the way this script, or “*détail*”, as Leibniz terms it, is executed.¹⁴ Leibniz illustrates this conception by describing several bands of musicians playing in separate rooms so that they do not see or hear one another, yet because each of the musicians follows the same score, their music harmonises perfectly.¹⁵

Leibniz’s system, as presented in the *Theodicy* and elsewhere, is hierarchal and directed towards what he describes as the “perfect” and the “morally good”. All monads constantly strive to moral and metaphysical perfection, motivated by their “appetition”, which drives them from less perfect to more perfect perceptions. Comparable to Spinoza’s *conatus*, “appetition” is defined as a directional force or drive that motivates the soul towards perfection or fulfilment. Leibniz’s understanding of the individual as endowed with active, vital force, her freedom consisting in a degree of spontaneity, therefore underpins his view of the moral perfection of humankind as constantly developing. Leibniz often employed the metaphor of the monad’s movement from confused to distinct perceptions, from darkness to light, in order to describe the process of perfection. As Kosseleck and others have noted, Leibniz’s ideas were influential for eighteenth century *Aufklärung* thinkers, informing the concepts of individualism and progress developed by Kant, Herder, and the Historicists in their philosophies of history.¹⁶

¹⁴ See Leibniz’s *Monadology*, § 12: “But besides the principle of change, there must also be a complete specification of that which undergoes the change [*un détail de ce qui change*], which constitutes, so to speak, the determination and [*variation*] variety of simple substances.” Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Leibniz’s Monadology: A New Translation and Guide*, trans. L. Strickland, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014, p. 62, translation modified by N. L.

¹⁵ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Lettre à Arnauld (1687)”, quoted in *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*, p. 47.

¹⁶ See Michel Serres, *Le système de Leibniz et ses modèles mathématiques: Etoiles, schémas, points*, Paris, PUF, 1990, p. 215; Lewis W. Spitz “The Significance of Leibniz for Historiography”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 13 (3/1952), p. 343; Koselleck, *Futures Past*, pp. 266–268.

This seems to point in the direction of the epitomised narrative of Leibniz as a precursor of progress, yet an internal contradiction in Leibniz's metaphysics complicates things. The state of perfection functions as a teleological goal towards which all things progress, but is also already present at their origination, through the principle of pre-established harmony.¹⁷ Although Leibniz does his best to avoid absolute predestination, his concepts of perfection and harmony force upon him a weaker form of historical predetermination. This is apparent in his repeated statements that the "marks" of the future are inscribed upon the monad, and his conviction that "the present is pregnant with the future; the future can be read in the past; the distant is expressed in the proximate."¹⁸ These statements seem to contradict linear progression into the future, a prerequisite for the idea of historical progress based on human agency. Similar ideas of temporal circularity are developed in Leibniz's late reflections on eternal return.

Leibniz's "Apokatastasis": Between Origen and Plato

Leibniz develops his ideas on return in three principal texts, dating from rather late in his career: "De L'horizon de la doctrine Humaine", written 1693; "Apokatastasis", and "Apokatastasis Panton", written in 1715.¹⁹ He also refers to return in his correspondence on several occasions, and briefly mentions doctrines of return in texts such as *Monadology* and *Theodicy*. As we shall see, Leibniz's position on return had shifted to an extent during the twenty years between him writing the first text and the two later ones.

In "De l'horizon de la doctrine humaine", Leibniz's first sustained engagement with eternal return, he takes inspiration from "The Sand Reckoner", in which Archimedes attempted to calculate the maximum number of grains of sand that can fit into the universe.²⁰ As noted by Fichant and others, Leibniz reworks, in this text, themes he had studied in "De Arte Combinatoria", and applies a com-

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¹⁷ This is the problem, in Serres's terms, of how progress can be possible in the best universe: "can the best become better?"; Serres, *Le système de Leibniz*, p. 218.

¹⁸ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason", § 13, in *Philosophical Essays*, p. 211.

¹⁹ Leibniz, *De l'horizon de la doctrine humaine*, pp. 35–67.

²⁰ Archimedes, "The Sand Reckoner", in *The Works of Archimedes. Edited in Modern Notation with Introductory Chapters*, T. Heath (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 221–232.

binatorial methodology popular during his time to the question of the limits of human knowledge.²¹ Instead of calculating physical particles of matter as did Archimedes, Leibniz sets out to calculate the number of possible true and false statements that the universe may contain. These make up human knowledge; that is, everything that can be uttered or enunciated in words. Leibniz argues that the number of such statements is finite due to the finite number of words and letters with which they are formed.

He concludes that if humanity persists in its current form, at some point the limit of possible human expressions will be reached, and the human production of knowledge will begin to repeat itself. Yet he remains undecided: “but perhaps the number of enunciabile truths, although finite, will never be exhausted, just as the interval between a straight line and the curve of a hyperbola or conchoid is never exhausted.”²² His struggle between the two positions is understandable, since on the surface, supporting eternal return would contradict the theory of the world’s constant striving towards perfection, a main tenet of Leibniz’s philosophy.

Leibniz does not directly reflect, in this text, upon the question of the repetition of history or events implied in his conclusion of the limited nature of knowledge. He does so, more than twenty years later, in the two texts bearing the Greek titles *Αποκατάστασις* and *Αποκατάστασις πάντων*. The argument that Leibniz repeats in both drafts, similar to that made in the earlier text, proceeds as follows. The number of books of a given size is finite because the number of letters and words is finite. If the public annual history of the earth can be related in books of a given size, then the number of public histories is limited. Hence if humanity lasts long enough in the current state, past public histories must return. This is the same with private histories; hence it follows that if humanity lasts long enough, the life of specific individuals will return.

²¹ See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Dissertation on the Art of Combinations 1666 (selections)”, in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, L. E. Loemker (ed.), Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1976. Catherine Wilson mentions *Sefer Yezirah*, which described creation as a combination of the twenty-two Hebrew letters. See Catherine Wilson, *Leibniz’s Metaphysics: A Historical and Comparative Study*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 42.

²² Leibniz, “De l’horizon de la doctrine humaine”, quoted in Allison Codert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic, 1995, p. 112.

The argument hinges upon the second statement, linking the repetition of events and their historiographic accounts, from which he concludes that historical events and individual lives will repeat themselves: “Hence it follows: if humanity endured long enough in its current state, a time would arrive when the same life of individuals would return, bit by bit, through the very same circumstances. I myself, for example, would be living in a city called Hannover located on the Leine river, occupied with the history of Brunswick.”²³ In both later texts Leibniz supports the idea of return more wholeheartedly than in the earlier one. In “Apokatastasis Panton” Leibniz concludes by adding that even in the event that humanity does not endure eternally, necessary truths, such as mathematical theorems, would at some point begin to repeat themselves, since the means by which they are expressed are finite.

In the longer “Apokatastasis”, viewed by Fichant as the ultimate version, Leibniz explains how eternal return is to be reconciled with his metaphysical system as presented elsewhere, according to which all individuals include enfolded, virtual scripts of their future that unfold as time goes by.²⁴ In order to do so, he puts forward a new argument, according to which return and progress are not contradictory. Rather,

even if a century is repeated, in that which concerns the sensible events, or that which books can describe, it will not be repeated in each and every aspect: for there will always be distinctions, even imperceptible ones, which cannot be described, because the continuum is divided into an infinity of actual parts, to the point that in each section of material there is an infinite world of creatures that cannot be described by any book, no matter how long. Surely, if bodies were made of atoms, everything would return precisely in the same collection of atoms, as long as new atoms do not become mixed up in these [...] but such a world would be a machine such that a creature with perfect finitude would be able to know perfectly. And for this reason, it may be that things progress little by little, even if imperceptibly, towards the better, following the revolutions.²⁵

²³ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “Apokatastasis Panton”, trans. D. Forman, 2017, <https://philarchive.org/archive/LEIAPA-4>, accessed 30 September 2021, p. 2; Leibniz, *De l’Horizon de la Doctrine Humaine*, p. 65.

²⁴ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “La Restitution”, in *De l’Horizon de la Doctrine Humaine*, p. 73.

²⁵ *Ibid.* My translation.

Leibniz's concept of eternal return is not absolute, but allows for minute, sometimes indiscernible changes that resist the historian's quill. These are explained by the infinite divisibility of the continuum that makes up the created world. The "nested" structure of the chains of organic being that comprise Leibniz's natural world, according to which each contains an infinity of smaller beings, is used to explain unpredictable variations that make absolute return impossible. Leibniz's vision of return, in opposition to atomistic and mechanistic worldviews, includes minute differences. He suggests that the slight changes in the patterns or arrangements of parts of beings cannot be recorded in books; organic life exceeds its textual representation, implying a gap between historical events and the way they are narrated.

Fichant surmises that the thesis of return is overcome by that of progress, yet it seems that in these two later texts Leibniz argues that not only are the two not contradictory, but rather that the "revolutions", or the repetitions of history, are *necessary* for the progression of humanity. That which repeats itself is not exactly the same; rather, each cycle is different in some small way from those it follows.

Thus in a letter to his correspondent Adam Theobald Overbeck, Leibniz refers to a conversation that they had about "the revolution or palingenesis of all things," describing return as the re-creation, or rebirth of all things.²⁶ In a fragment from 1701 Leibniz writes that "if human minds endure and experience Platonic years, the same men return, not simply so that they might return to the earth but so that they might progress towards something greater in the manner of a spiral or a winding path. This is to step back in order to jump further, as across a ditch."²⁷

It seems Leibniz hesitates between two different forms of doctrines of eternal return. The first is a cyclical cosmology such as held by the Stoics and Plato.²⁸ The second consists of doctrines of universal salvation that describe the restoration of the fallen world to its original perfection, such as Origen's. Both Plato's doctrine and Origen's, the latter indebted to Platonic thought, view return or

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁷ Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p.114; Leibniz, *De l'Horizon de la Doctrine Humaine*, p. 59.

²⁸ See Plato, *The Timaeus of Plato*, R. D. Archer-Hind (ed.), London, Macmillan, 1888, pp. 129–131.

resurrection as intertwined with perfection. They differ in that Plato emphasises the cosmological, cyclical repetition of all events, while for Origen return brings about universal salvation and makes the world progress towards Godly perfection and unity. Leibniz's "pre-established harmony" is, however, distinct from conceptions of the restoration of original perfection in that it allows a degree of spontaneity. God created things according to a harmonious design or "script", yet they have a degree of freedom in their execution of the divine plan. Moreover, as opposed to ideas of restoration, the structure of pre-established harmony is, as mentioned, a circular one, in which perfection is "pre-established" or original, yet also consists of a goal towards which one should aspire.

Alison Coudert and others suggest that the version of universal salvation that can be found in Lurianic Kabbala distinctly informed Leibniz's work.²⁹ Coudert argues that the change between Leibniz's position in "De L'Horizon de la Doctrine Humaine" and the two later texts resulted from his acquaintance with Francis Mercury van Helmont, a leading Christian Kabbalist of the period.³⁰ Helmont's ideas were informed by the doctrine of *tikkun* (reparation), which suggests that all souls can be redeemed by God if one performs good deeds, through which the world may be restored to its former state of perfection.

By 1715, Coudert suggests, when Leibniz wrote the two "Apokatastasis" texts, he had made up his mind in favour of universal salvation following an intellectual exchange with van Helmont, whose concept of redemption allowed an easy way out from the problem of created evil, since it ensures the ultimate redemption of all beings.³¹ However, there is more continuity between the three texts than admitted by Coudert.³² They rather provide evidence of Leibniz's constant struggle with the concept of progress, a struggle which he never decidedly resolved.

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²⁹ See Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 5.

³⁰ Fichant rather argues that the change in Leibniz's view was informed by Lutheran theologian Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649–1727); see Michel Fichant, "Ewige Wiederkehr oder unendlicher Fortschritt: Die Apokatastasisfrage bei Leibniz", *Studia Leibnitiana*, 23 (2/1991), p. 137.

³¹ Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, p. 118.

³² Coudert admits, however, that Leibniz never explicitly states that he believes in universal salvation or restoration; she suggests these views were too controversial to express in his age of theological conflicts; see *ibid.*, p. 133.

Historical Apokatastasis and Disenchantment

In “The Storyteller: Observations on the Work of Nicolai Leskov”, dedicated to the Russian writer, Benjamin discusses the declining art form of storytelling (*Erzählen*).³³ The narrative form of the story is defined by the possibility of its retelling, that is, by its repeatability. Benjamin describes the process in which, while listening to the story, the listener attempts to engrave it in her memory so that it can later be retold.³⁴

Leskov belonged to a world in which experience and its repetition had value. The essay describes a process of decline in the value of experience, and therefore in storytelling as an art-form, which began in the wake of the First World War. The form of storytelling permitted continuity both between experience and its communication, and between the storyteller and her listeners.³⁵ The rise of the novel, in its dependence on the written form of the book, broke the link between experience and its communication. It dispersed the “community of listeners” constructed around the ever-repeated, told and retold stories, focusing instead on individualised experience.³⁶

Benjamin’s focus in the essay is on the transmission of personal events and experiences rather than the repetition of collective historical events as discussed by Leibniz, yet he makes the connection between the individual and collective retelling of events through the concepts of “remembrance” (*Eingedenken*) and “tradition”.³⁷ Benjamin refers to the intergenerational chain of transmission described by Jewish scripture.³⁸ The decline in the art of storytelling is also a crisis of tradition, a break in the chain of the transmission of experienced events between generations. Thus, the crisis in expressing individual and collective experience is one.

³³ Benjamin, “The Storyteller”, p. 158.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

³⁸ Oral transmission of the Torah and Passover *hagada* (deriving from the verb meaning “to say or tell”) is an important Jewish command; see *Mishna*, Pirkei Avot 1: “Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly.”

Benjamin synthesises, in this essay as elsewhere, elements from the Jewish and Christian eschatological traditions, emphasising the connection between the destruction of individual and universal experience through reference to Origen's doctrine of eternal return:

Few storytellers have displayed so profound a kinship with the spirit of the fairy tale as did Leskov. This involves tendencies that were promoted by the dogmas of the Greek Orthodox church. As is well known, Origen's speculation about *apokatastasis* (the entry of all souls into paradise), which was rejected by the Roman Catholic church, played a significant part in these dogmas. Leskov was very much influenced by Origen. In keeping with Russian folk belief, he interpreted the resurrection less as a transfiguration than as a disenchantment [*Entzauberung*], in a sense akin to fairy tales.³⁹

Benjamin links Leskov's "kinship with the spirit of the fairy tale," a narrative form created, as Benjamin explains, to fend off mythic fears, with Origen's doctrine of apokatastasis, which he elucidates as a theory of universal salvation or restitution. Yet rather than describing Origen's influence on Leskov as leading to a theory of restoration, he describes it as "disenchantment," reminding us that fairy tales contain not only magical moments but also their undoing.

Benjamin makes paradoxical use of the term *Entzauberung*, which Max Weber uses to describe the devaluation of religion by modern society.⁴⁰ Here Benjamin uses it to describe Leskov's Origen-influenced interpretation of resurrection as a reversal of the process of perfection. While Leibniz alluded to Origen's doctrine of apokatastasis to describe a process of perfection that comes about in minute steps through repetition, Benjamin turns the term on its head to denote a process of destruction of the perfect façade or semblance that is linked, elsewhere, with redemption.⁴¹

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³⁹ Benjamin, "The Storyteller", p. 158.

⁴⁰ Benjamin explicitly responded to Weber's *Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion* in the fragment "Capitalism and Religion" from 1921; see Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, 1913-1926, M. Bullock and M. W. Jennings (eds.), Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 288-291.

⁴¹ See Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 1938-1940, H. Eiland and M. W. Jennings (eds.), Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 390. Benjamin's conception of redemption (*Erlösung*) is understood

Weber's description of modernity as haunted by the ghosts of religion is echoed in Benjamin's suggestion that the process of secularisation, which brought about the rise of modernity, is coupled by an impoverishment of experience. Leskov's "disenchantment" therefore parallels the decline in storytelling. "The Storyteller" was written several months after the second version of the "Artwork" essay, and the decline of the art of storytelling has its counterpart in the decline of the aura described therein.⁴² The "aura" of the work of art, arising from its unique presence in time and place, vanishes with the introduction of reproducibility, the possibility of reproducing its image in multiple copies.⁴³ The mechanically repeated production of precise copies replaces the repetition of experience through storytelling, in a parallel process to the replacement of myth by history. The mythical elements do not disappear, then, but rather take another form. Benjamin, like Leibniz, uses the concept of apokatastasis in order to consider the repeatability of events, but the results of this repeatability bring about destruction rather than perfection. However, this destruction, or disenchantment, is productive in that it makes visible a new, nostalgic beauty in that which is about to disappear.⁴⁴

In a fragment from "Convolut N" of the *Arcades Project*, apokatastasis is presented contra Hegel's dialectical model of progress:

Modest methodological proposal for the cultural-historical dialectic. It is very easy to establish oppositions, according to determinate points of view, within the various fields of any epoch, such that on one side lies the 'productive', 'forward looking', 'lively', 'positive' part of any epoch, and on the other side the abortive,

by Löwy as referring to both the concept of apokatastasis and Jewish messianism. Both concepts, he writes, share a double meaning: in apokatastasis, the restitution of the past is at the same time a renewal. The same dual meaning, the restoration of the past, on the one hand, and a utopian inclination, on the other, resides in the Jewish messianic tradition. The Jewish, messianic and cabbalistic equivalent of the Christian apokatastasis is, as Scholem argues in his article "Kabbala" in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1932), *tikkun*. Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*, London, Verso, 2016, pp. 83–84.

⁴² Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Second Version", in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3, pp. 101–133. See Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, London, Verso, 1995, p. 134.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁴ Benjamin, "The Storyteller", p. 146.

retrograde and obsolescent. [...] On the other hand, every negation has its value solely as background for the delineation of the lively, the positive. It is therefore of decisive importance that a new partition be applied to this initially excluded negative component so that, by shifting the angle of vision [*Verschiebung des Geschichtswinkels*] (but not its scale [*maßstäbe*]!) a positive element emerges in it too – something different from that previously signified. And so on, ad infinitum, until the entire past is brought into the present in a historical apocatastasis.⁴⁵

Benjamin ironically suggests a “modest” proposal for a materialist historiography. Instead of easily finding dichotomic oppositions between the positive and negative in every epoch, he proposes breaking the negative into components and shifting one’s point of view to open up a view of the positive within the negative. This repeated procedure results in a “historical apocatastasis” that continues to infinity. The entirety of the past is brought into the present, which means there is no selection involved in this apocatastasis. On the other hand, each cycle is slightly different than the previous one through shifting the angle of vision. Benjamin describes, in other words, a process of infinite differentiation as an alternative to Hegelian dialectics. Return is described as seeing what already exists in a new light, from a new angle or point of view.

Eternal return takes the form, in the *Arcades Project*, of the process of commodification deriving from mass production. Benjamin’s critique of progress, we must keep in mind, is also a critique of capitalism, as motivated and preconditioned by progress. As Buck-Morss writes, commodification reveals the true nature of progress as the repetition of the ever same. Progress is exposed as producing a process of a mythical, automatised return in a phenomenon unique to capitalist society: fashion.⁴⁶

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To summarise, unlike Plato, Origen’s and Leibniz’s concepts of eternal return, which link return to a process of approaching heavenly perfection, Benjamin describes Leskov’s return as a process of destruction or decline. The decline of storytelling is part of a bigger process in which history replaces myth, only to succumb to mythical return in the guise of progress. Benjamin describes sto-

⁴⁵ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N1a,3], p. 459.

⁴⁶ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999, p. 97.

rytelling as a secularised chronicle; the process of secularisation detaches the story from its mythical origins, still present in Leskov. The storyteller's horizon is hence disenchantment, that is, secularised salvation. The repetition of events in storytelling is replaced, during the modern era, by their repeated narration in secularised historical accounts, while the idea of progress replaces universal salvation.

Although Leibniz is not mentioned by name in the Leskov essay, the "life" of the story, as described therein, resonates with the idea of the work of art as a monad that virtually contains its "fore- and after-history" from the *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*.⁴⁷ In "The Task of the Translator", Benjamin similarly describes translation as the "after-life" (*Nachleben*), which is in a sense virtually contained within the original work.⁴⁸ Benjamin is informed by Leibniz's description of future events as contained within the "complete individual", and elsewhere, ideas and truths as existing virtually within us.⁴⁹

In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin returns to this idea, describing a "critical point" in time in which the artwork accedes to legibility.⁵⁰ Critique or translation, the "afterlives" of a work, are inscribed or virtually present within it, and can be actualised through its imperfect repetition. As in the case of the "methodological proposal" cited above, repetition enables novelty to emerge through minute variations of one's point of view. This imperfect repetition, or repetition with a difference, is to be distinguished from the commodification of objects that produces perfect, identical copies as in August Blanqui's alarming model of eternal return, to which Benjamin refers in his "Exposé" of the *Arcades Project*.⁵¹ Hence the "founding concept" of historical materialism, according to Benjamin, is the "actualisation" of virtual histories, in which the new is produced through

⁴⁷ Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, p. 27.

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 253–263.

⁴⁹ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Preface", in *New Essays on Human Understanding*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 49. Serres notes that, for Leibniz, both knowledge and existence develop in a manner analogous to reading, and the fundamental state of being is the "impression of expression" (*l'impression de l'expression*). Serres, *Le Système de Leibniz*, p. 543.

⁵⁰ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, [N3,1], p. 463.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

imperfect repetition, as opposed to “progress”, in which the identical is repeated without allowing novelty to emerge.⁵²

The Eternal Return of Impossible Worlds

In his concept of eternal return, Deleuze puts forward, like Benjamin, a critique of historical progress, seeking to challenge, first and foremost, Hegel’s dialectic thought. Eternal return alone, according to Deleuze, can transcend dichotomic thought through unlimited repetition, reaching beyond the oppositions between negative and positive, identical and different. By consisting of continual movement, always “becoming”, yet never striving towards or reaching any external goal, eternal return challenges Hegel’s teleological, progress-driven conceptions of thought and history.

When outlining his concept of eternal return, Deleuze insists he is not referring to the repetition of the “Same” or of the “Identical”, but rather of that which is different. This seems to indicate that his concept of eternal return drastically breaks from the traditions of cyclical cosmology and universal restitution that Leibniz and Benjamin draw on.

How could the reader believe that Nietzsche, who was the greatest critic of these categories, implicated everything, the Same, the Identical, the Equal, the I and the Self in the eternal return? How could it be believed that he understood the eternal as a cycle, when he posed ‘his’ hypothesis with every cyclical hypothesis? How could it be believed that he lapsed into the insipid idea of an *opposition* between a circular time and a linear time, between ancient and modern time?⁵³

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Deleuze does not mention, in his readings of Leibniz in *Difference and Repetition*, *Logic of Sense*, or *The Fold*, the texts in which Leibniz directly discusses eternal return, probably because Leibniz’s “Apokatastasis” and “Apokatastasis Pantou” were not translated and widely discussed until the appearance of

⁵² *Ibid.*, [N2,2], p. 460.

⁵³ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. P. Patton, London, Continuum, 2004, p. 299.

Fichant's edition in 1991.⁵⁴ Deleuze nevertheless often mentions Leibniz when discussing eternal return, for example in *Difference and Repetition*:

Leibniz's only error was to have linked difference to the negative of limitation [...] because he linked the series to the principle of convergence, without seeing that divergence itself was an object of affirmation, or that the impossibles belonged to the same world and were affirmed as the greatest crime and the greatest virtue of the one and only world, that of eternal return.⁵⁵

Deleuze is referring to Leibniz's concepts of "compossibility" and "impossibility". According to Leibniz, as mentioned, the existence of our world is contingent upon its selection by God from among from the multiplicity of possible worlds. Leibniz distinguishes between the "possible" and the "compossible", the latter designating that which conforms with the actual system. In order to exist in actuality, all things must fit together, according to the principle of pre-established harmony. There is an infinity of possible yet "impossible" worlds; however, only our world exists in actuality because it contains everything that is jointly possible, or *compossible*. As opposed to the current day "multiverse" argument for the actual existence of infinite universes, or David Lewis's modal realism, for Leibniz, the multiplicity of worlds, or universes, do not all exist in actuality.⁵⁶ This does not mean that they do not exist at all; rather, they exist on a different modal level than our own world. Leibniz highlights that not every possible substance must be actualised at some point; only those that are jointly possible, or compossible, are actualised by God's choice of our best of possible worlds.⁵⁷

In Deleuze's radical reading of Leibniz, all impossibles, or "virtual worlds" as Leibniz sometimes refers to them, must exist together in our one and only world. That is, the infinite "returns" are in fact a multiplicity of worlds that ex-

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⁵⁴ "De L'horizon de la doctrine humain" was published by Louis Couturat in 1901, but not in full. See Michel Fichant, "Avant Propos", in Leibniz, *De l'horizon de la doctrine humaine*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 51.

⁵⁶ See David K. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986.

⁵⁷ For Leibniz's distinction between the metaphysical and physical necessity that underlies these various modal levels of existence, see Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "On the Ultimate Origination of all Things (1697)", in *Philosophical Essays*, pp. 149–154.

ist simultaneously, constantly generating differences within our own universe. Deleuze's main critique of Leibniz, whom he describes in *Difference and Repetition* as a thinker of the identical, targets the "limitation" of Leibniz's philosophical system, manifest in his contention that the infinity of series that make up the universe converge towards God. Deleuze seeks to surpass these limitations through what he views as Nietzsche's Dionysian, open-ended eternal return.

In *The Fold*, this critique becomes implicit to the extent that Badiou accurately describes the voice of Deleuze, in this work, as that of "Deleuze-Leibniz".⁵⁸ Thus, he excuses the lack of diverging series in Leibniz's philosophy by suggesting that these were only imaginable after Leibniz's time, during the neo-Baroque. In order to avoid diverging series existing side-by-side, Deleuze writes, Baroque thinkers like Leibniz relegated each to different worlds. "With the neo-Baroque, with its unfurling of divergent series in the same world, comes the interruption of compossibilities on the same stage, where Sextus will rape *and* not rape Lucretia, where Cesar crosses *and* does not cross the Rubicon."⁵⁹ Although this modern "restaging" of Baroque drama can only happen in the neo-Baroque, Leibniz comes closest to its articulation in his description, in his *Theodicy*, of the "crystal pyramid", as Deleuze calls it.

The myth that seals Leibniz's *Theodicy* is described elsewhere by Deleuze as "a source of all modern literature."⁶⁰ Leibniz retells the story of Sextus Tarquinius, son of the last Etruscan king ruling Rome, who raped Lucretia, wife of Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus – an act that led to the foundation of the Roman Republic. His version of the myth centres on the priest Theodorus, who travels to Athens at the bidding of Sextus, and falls asleep in the Goddess's temple, waking up before a palace. "You see here the palace of the fates, where I keep watch and ward. Here are representations not only of that which happens but also of all that which is possible," says Pallas Athena, daughter of Jupiter, who appears at the gates.⁶¹ She accompanies Theodorus through the palace halls, showing him

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⁵⁸ Alain Badiou, "Gilles Deleuze, The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque", in C. V. Boundas and D. Olkowski (eds.), *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, London, Routledge, 2019, pp. 51–69.

⁵⁹ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 82.

⁶⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, trans. H. Tomlinson and R. Galeta, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 303.

⁶¹ Leibniz, *Theodicy*, § 414, p. 375.

a multiplicity of possible worlds, brought to life by her voice, every one of which representing a possible fate for Sextus. These worlds, virtually existing side-by-side in the magical palace and activated by sound and touch, each populated by its own Sextus, are impossible yet simultaneously possible.

In one of the halls Theodorus sees a grand volume, and, asks Athena what it is; she replies that it is the history of the world they are in.⁶² In Leibniz's myth, a multiplicity of virtual worlds, each with its own history, is contained in a unique spatial construct, Athena's pyramid-shaped palace. In a sense, it comprises a spatialised version of the doctrine of eternal return: instead of the infinite repetition of our single world and its history, there is an infinite multiplication of worlds and histories all converging at the magical locus of the palace.

Leibniz's "crystal pyramid" is the most complete expression of his theory of multiple compossible worlds, serving as final proof of his theory of God's selection of the best world out of an infinity of possible ones. Theodorus finally reaches the "real true world" at the top of the pyramid, where he understands that Sextus's sin, committed freely, had served the greater purpose of founding the Roman Empire. One of the morals of the story being that although everything has a reason, according to Leibniz's "principle of sufficient reason", these are often hidden from mortal eyes.

For Deleuze, there is no best of possible worlds, and the immanence of multiple worlds within our own articulated in *The Fold* by "Deleuze-Leibniz" was pre-empted by the figure of eternal return as described in *Difference and Repetition*. As Ansell-Pearson writes, in his concept of eternal return Deleuze expounds an "ethics of the event."⁶³ This concept forms part of Deleuze's challenge of Kant's transcendental system through the relational, open-ended thought

⁶² *Ibid.*, § 415, p. 376.

⁶³ Keith Ansell Pearson, "Living the Eternal Return as the Event: Nietzsche with Deleuze", *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, 14 (1997), p. 66. Ansell-Pearson suggests these ethics are inspired primarily by Bergson, but as manifest in *The Fold*, it is Leibniz's understanding of predication as event-producing change that underlies Deleuze's concept of the event and its ethical implications, expressed in early works through the concept of eternal return.

of the event, or in other words, through the articulation of “planes of immanence”.⁶⁴

Selection and difference, principles Deleuze later outlines in relation to Leibniz’s philosophy, are crucial to his reading of Nietzsche.⁶⁵ However, while in Leibniz’s system it is God who selects the best, actual world from among many; in Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche, eternal return serves in itself as a principle of selection. Deleuze describes eternal return as a reformulation of Kant’s categorical imperative, in which universalisation is replaced with repetition: “whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return.”⁶⁶

In Leibniz’s differential and infinitesimal calculus, difference is understood through a common ground, or system, rather than by converting differences into one another. The principle of continuity, which follows the same logic of infinitesimal differences, underlies his relational metaphysics, in which things are comprehended not by their stable essence, but rather through their function in a system and their relations to other components. This forms the basis for Deleuze’s understanding of “intensity”. As he writes in the fifth chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, “every intensity is differential; by itself a difference.”⁶⁷ Deleuze describes difference as internal, “intensive” or qualitative, unlike quantitative differences such as size or number. The differences produced by returns are variations in intensity, or degrees of power. Deleuze comes close to Leibniz’s description, in “Apokatastasis”, of minute, sometimes imperceptible differences between repeated events. Leibniz seems to be referring, like Deleuze, to differences in intensity, that is, differences in degree rather than in kind.

Through his concept of eternal return, Deleuze proposes a new way of thinking time, in which a difference of intensity replaces hierarchisation. Unlike Ben-

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⁶⁴ Deleuze describes Nietzsche’s “eternal return” as a “plane of immanence”; see Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell, London, Verso, 2011, p. 65.

⁶⁵ Catherine Malabou argues that Nietzsche does not have a concept of difference; see Catherine Malabou, “The Eternal Return and the Phantom of Difference”, *Parrhesia*, 10 (2010), pp. 21–29.

⁶⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. H. Tomlinson, New York, Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 68.

⁶⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 222.

jamin, who viewed Nietzsche's eternal return as a form of a mythic repetition, and described commodification – the result of repeated production – as perpetuating capitalism and progress; Deleuze calls for a form of eternal return, based on his interpretation of Nietzsche as delineating an opposition between ancient and modern figures of return.⁶⁸ In the former, ancient version, Deleuze writes, time is subordinated to a cyclical, eternal movement of the world. The eternal cycle is predestined, resulting from divine decision. In the latter, modern version, time is no longer subordinated to movement and the cycle results from blind chance or necessity.⁶⁹ In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze describes how, for Nietzsche, the inseparability of chance and necessity guides the notion of eternal return, “the necessary result of all chance.”⁷⁰

Although Zarathustra is a teacher and prophet-like figure, the becoming (*devenir*) of eternal return is not oriented towards a future (*avenir*) of messianic expectation nor of capitalist progress. For Deleuze, return does not lead to perfection, salvation, or destruction. It simply affirms becoming, thereby posing a challenge to dialectical and transcendental thought. Deleuze's model of return is therefore unlike the one Benjamin refers to in many ways, yet they share the critique of progress-driven thought and history, as well as supporting an anti-historicist, unhinged, interrupted temporality.

Spectres of Return

While the radical critiques of progress offered by Benjamin and Deleuze in their concepts of eternal return cannot be found in Leibniz's discussion of apokatastasis, the widespread casting of Leibniz in the role of an optimist anticipator of historical progress is just as misleading. It forms part of a prevalent historical narrative, according to which the Enlightenment concept of progress was the result of a process of secularisation, through which Judeo-Christian eschatological theories were replaced by historical teleology. Hans Blumenberg challenges

⁶⁸ As he writes, “thinking the idea of eternal recurrence once more in the nineteenth century, Nietzsche becomes the figure on whom mythic doom is now carried out.” Walter Benjamin, “Paralipomena to ‘On a Concept of History’”, in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, pp. 403–404.

⁶⁹ See Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. D. W. Smith and M. A. Greco, London, Verso, 1998, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 29.

this view, tracing the lineage of the concept of progress to ancient astronomers that preceded Leibniz by thousands of years.⁷¹

Rather than reaching a decisive standpoint supporting progress or universal salvation, Leibniz's last ruminations on return describe repetition as that which brings about difference and produces novelty. In the final pages of his text, he uses a range of examples that contradict the notion of a precise cyclical repetition of all that exists. Thus, he writes, using a melodic image, that "we can conclude that the human species will not always stay in its current state, because it does not conform with divine harmony to always strike the same cord."⁷² For Leibniz, nature, guided by divine harmony, dynamically unfolds like a piece of music, and therefore any repetition of notes, or events, would have to include variation.

The possibility in which humanity will reach a point in which humans are in possession of complete knowledge is incompatible with his metaphysics, according to which only God has perfect knowledge, and our knowledge as finite beings will always be limited. However, he distinguishes between logical theorems or statements, which, he argues, might at some point all be known, and sensible truths, derived from experience rather than reason, which may be varied to infinity. Since short logical statements will reach a finite point, Leibniz writes, they should be extended and enriched by sensible truths garnered from experience, implying that science should become more diverse and detailed in order to better reflect the complexity of nature. If science adopts these guidelines, Leibniz argues, we will be able, in the future, to analyse the precise structure of a fly, which, Leibniz writes, is far more complex than that of a circle.⁷³ Leibniz uses this example of organic life as requiring the most intricate form of knowledge, which may only develop across centuries.

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Leibniz describes return with minute differences as necessary for scientific advancement in complex fields such as biology or psychology in which individual contributions are limited and achievements may only be advanced by each

⁷¹ See Hans Blumenberg, "On a Lineage of the Idea of Progress", *Social Research*, 41 (1/1974), p. 6.

⁷² Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, "Apokatastasis", in *De l'horizon de la doctrine humaine*, p. 75.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

generation contributing to the collective amassment of knowledge. Thus the arguments in favour of progress are interwoven with those for return. Moreover, the notion of return as necessary for progress fits with the tensions in Leibniz's metaphysics more generally. As mentioned, despite the apparent unidirectionality of the monad's movement towards perfection, Leibniz's concept of pre-established harmony is at the same time inherently circular. Pre-established harmony is not a mere given, but a continual, repeated process of actualisation, following God's selection of the best possible world. As Benjamin and Deleuze highlight in their readings of Leibniz, the fissures in his system are necessary for maintaining its perfect façade.

Although neither refers directly to Leibniz's late reflections on eternal return, Deleuze and Benjamin link Leibniz's spatial structure of expression, which allows the inclusion of multiple, virtual worlds within our own, with the structure of eternal return. Their readings make manifest that what is at stake in Leibniz's reflections on eternal return is the inherent repeatability of events rather than their actual repetition. Benjamin and Deleuze draw on Leibniz's immanent, enfolded, or virtual forms in their own conceptions of virtuality; whether termed the "fold" or "virtual history", these serve the critique of teleological thought and progress, enacting a spectral return of Leibniz's apokatastasis in the twentieth century "neo-Baroque".

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Povzetki | Abstracts

Bruno Besana

The World: The Tormented History of an Inescapable Para-Concept Part I: The Pre-History of the “World”

Keywords: the world, totality, singularity, cosmogony, philosophy of nature, indetermination, infinity, Aristotle, Plato

The world has not always been there. At least not in philosophy. This two-part article examines the complex interplay of concepts among which the idea of the world appeared, and analyses the characteristics that allow it to play a central role in the space of philosophy. These are found to be fundamentally two. First, its capacity to identify with the idea of a closed, ordered totality (the classic idea of the cosmos), at the same time as it erodes the consistency of the latter and opens the philosophical space onto a positive use of the idea of indetermination. And second, the way in which it operates inside several well-ordered philosophical systems as a point of confusion: as a blurred point that lacks the type of clarity and distinction normally required of philosophical concepts, and that nonetheless appears to be important enough not to be expelled from philosophy. The first part of the article, published in this issue, reconstructs some of the coordinates within which the problematic notion of the world comes to appear. The planned second part will investigate how the idea of the world comes to play a central role within contemporary philosophy by allowing for a new articulation between the idea of the universal and the idea of totality – which produces a cascade of effects, the most notable of which are a new articulation of the idea of subject, and of the relation between philosophy and praxis.

Bruno Besana

Svet: mučna zgodovina neizogibnega para-koncepta. Prvi del: predzgodovina »sveta«

Ključne besede: svet, totaliteta, singularnost, kozmogonija, filozofija narave, nedoločenost, neskončnost, Aristotel, Platon

Svet ne obstaja od nekdaj. Vsaj ne v filozofiji. Članek v dveh delih bo raziskal kompleksen preplet konceptov, sredi katerega se je pojavila ideja sveta, in analiziral njene značilnosti, ki ji omogočajo igrati osrednjo vlogo v prostoru filozofije. Tu gre predvsem za dve potezi. Prvič, njena zmožnost definirati idejo zaprte, urejene totalitete (klasična ideja kozmosa), pri čemer spodkopava konsistenco slednje in odpira filozofski prostor za pozitivno rabo ideje nedoločenosti. Drugič, njena zmožnost vnašati zmedo v nekatere dobro urejene filozofske sisteme. V njih deluje kot nejasna točka brez jasnosti in razločnosti, ki

ju običajno zahtevamo od filozofskih konceptov, a obenem pridobi preveliko težo, da bi jo iz filozofije izgnali. Pričujoči prvi del članka rekonstruira nekatere od koordinat, znotraj katerih se pojavi problematični pojem sveta. Načrtovani drugi del bo raziskal osrednjo vlogo, ki jo ideja sveta odigra v sodobni filozofiji, ko omogoči novo artikulacijo med idejo univerzalnega in idejo totalitete. To proizvede cel niz posledic, med njimi pa gre izpostaviti predvsem novo artikulacijo ideje subjekta in razmerja med filozofijo in prakso.

Peter Klepec

World? Which World? On Some Pitfalls of a Concept

Keywords: world, world-view, philosophy, Lévy, Marx, Ruda, Freud, Heidegger, Adorno, Nancy, Badiou

“The world” as a concept necessarily involves many difficulties and contradictions. The text presents some of them in a rather circular way, underlining the fact that we are always confronted with the dilemma of what to do with the world, or rather, what, which, and whose world we are dealing with. Beginning with some arguments about the claim that “the world is (out there),” and then moving on to certain dilemmas related to some views on the two-world theory, one inevitably comes across Marx’s thesis that the ultimate goal in relation to the world should be to “change it”. The text also presents some contemporary views thereon of Badiou, Nancy, and Ruda. Taking into account all these arguments and adding insights from Freud, Husserl, Heidegger, and Adorno as to the world and one’s worldview, we can only agree with Badiou’s statement about the only true goal of philosophy: “Philosophy has no other legitimate aim except to help find the new names that will bring into existence the unknown world that is only waiting for us because we are waiting for it.”

Peter Klepec

Svet? kateri svet? O pasteh nekega pojma

Ključne besede: svet, svetovni nazor, filozofija, Lévy, Marx, Ruda, Freud, Heidegger, Adorno, Nancy, Badiou

Pojem »sveta« je nujno izpostavljen številnim zagatam in protislovjem. Tekst na krožen način predstavi nekatere izmed njih, pri čemer poudari dejstvo, da smo vedno pred dilemo, kaj s svetom storiti oziroma s kakšnim, katerim in čigavim svetom imamo opravka. Začenši z nekaterimi argumenti v zvezi s trditvijo, da je »svet (tam zunaj)«, prek dilem, povezanih z nekaterimi pogledi na teorijo dveh svetov, neizogibno trčimo ob Marxovo tezo, da bi se morala poanta v zvezi s svetom na koncu glasiti »spremeniti ga«. Ob tem predstavimo nekaj sodobnih pogledov na obravnavano temo Badiouja, Nancyja in Rude. Če k tem argumentom in spoznanjem dodamo še poglede Freuda, Husserla, Heideggerja

in Adorna na svet in na svetovni nazor, potem se lahko le strinjamo z Badioujevo tezo o edinem resničnem cilju filozofije: »Edini legitimni cilj filozofije je pomagati najti imena, ki bodo pripeljala do obstoja še neznanega sveta, ki čaka le na nas, ker mi čakamo nanj«.

Roland Végső

On Acosmic Realism

Keywords: *Weltschmerz*, *Weltliteratur*, Benjamin, acosmism, speculative realism, Meillassoux, Harman

In order to be able to raise the question of the “world” today in an effective way, we have to reactivate the Goethean categories of *Weltliteratur* and *Weltschmerz* for a critique of our own historical moment. We need to understand the phenomenon of *Weltschmerz* as a symptom of the impossibility of *Weltliteratur*. Going beyond the context of the original formulation of these categories, we could argue that something akin to the historical phenomenon of *Weltschmerz* emerges every time the ideological constitution of the world threatens to fail. Today, we live in an age of a generalised state of cultural disorientation that has produced its own *Weltliteratur*, which includes a wide range of discourses about the “world” – from officially endorsed theories of economic globalisation, to scientific treatises on the Anthropocene, environmental protest movements, philosophical pamphlets, all the way to world-historical conspiracy theories. Yet, an anxiety concerning the impossibility of world-formation in general is also recorded in these documents. In order to be able to capture our contemporary *Weltschmerz*, the article turns to the young Walter Benjamin’s suggestion that the task of this age is to produce an “objective” (rather than subjective) *Weltschmerz*. However, the most effective tools to conceptualise this objective *Weltschmerz* come from the traditions of philosophical acosmism. It is a notable philosophical development of our times that some elements of the acosmic tradition have recently resurfaced in speculative realism. Thus, speculative realism could be described as a possible site of our contemporary *Weltschmerz*: its acosmic metaphysics is repeatedly tamed by a mournful longing for the world.

Roland Végső

O akozmičnem realizmu

Ključne besede: *Weltschmerz*, *Weltliteratur*, Benjamin, akozmizem, spekulativni realizem, Meillassoux, Harman

Da bi lahko smiselno postavili vprašanje »sveta« danes, se moramo spomniti na Goethejevi kategoriji *Weltliteratur* in *Weltschmerz*, ki nam omogočata kritiko našega lastnega zgodovinskega trenutka. Pojav *Weltschmerz* moramo razumeti kot simptom nemožnosti *Weltliteratur*. Če ti kategoriji uporabimo izven konteksta njune izvorne formulacije, lahko

ugotovimo, da se nekaj podobnega zgodovinskemu pojavu *Weltschmerz* pojavi vsakič, ko se zdi, da bo ideološka konstitucija sveta zatajila. Danes živimo v dobi posplošenega stanja kulturne dezorientacije, ki je proizvedla svojo lastno *Weltliteratur*, vključno s širokim razponom diskurzov o »svetu« od uradno privzetih teorij ekonomske globalizacije prek znanstvenih traktatov o antropocenu, okoljskih protestnih gibanj, filozofskih pamfletov pa vse do svetovno-zgodovinskih teorij zarote. Toda v teh dokumentih je moč prepoznati tudi splošno tesnobo ob nezmožnosti formacije sveta. Da bi lahko zajel sodobni *Weltschmerz*, se članek obrne na zgodnjega Walterja Benjamina in njegovo pripombo, da je naloga naše dobe proizvesti »objektivni« (namesto subjektivni) *Weltschmerz*. Vendar najbolj učinkovito orodje za konceptualizacijo takšnega objektivnega *Weltschmerz* najdemo v filozofski tradiciji akozmizma. Z zanimanjem lahko opazamo, da se nekateri elementi akozmističnih tradicij danes vračajo v spekulativnem realizmu. Slednjega bi lahko torej opisali kot možno mesto sodobnega *Weltschmerz*: njegovo akozmično metafiziko vedno znova ukroti žalujoče hrepenenje po svetu.

Ruth Ronen

The Actuality of a World: What Ceases Not to Be Written

Keywords: actuality, possible worlds, impossibility, Aristotelian modalities, Lacan and the sexual relationship

“There is no longer any world,” wrote the late philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy in 1993, and in this paper, the sense of this loss of world is analysed in terms of the modal notions of necessity, impossibility, and possibility. Modal differentiation can illuminate what constitutes the sense of actuality in a world, and hence, what it is that has been lost regarding this actuality of being in a world. Modal thinking does not rely on knowledge of the true state of affairs, nor on having a constant grasp on necessity: modal thinking enables us to discern the actual by way of the *relations* between necessity, possibility, and impossibility. It is on the basis of these relations that a mode of rethinking actuality is suggested. In order to pursue this line of thought, I rely on Jacques Lacan’s understanding of modalities as writing operations, concentrating mostly on certain sections from his Seminar XXI (1973–1974), wherein he refers to Aristotelian modal logic and mentions the analytic philosopher Jaakko Hintikka (as one of Aristotle’s commentators). This ternary relation between Aristotle, Hintikka, and Lacan suggests a different outlook on the actual being-such of a world. The being-such of a world, its actuality, is understood as a contingency (what ceases not to be written), a possibility emerging from the relation between what is declared necessary and what is impossible. The paper shows the implications of such a modal understanding of actuality, as demonstrated in Lacan’s view of human sexuality and sexual difference.

Ruth Ronen

Aktualnost sveta: kar se preneha ne zapisovati

Ključne besede: aktualnost, možni svetovi, nemožnost, Aristotelove modalnosti, Lacan, spolno razmerje

»Ni več sveta,« je zapisal pokojni filozof Jean-Luc Nancy leta 1993. V tem članku je občutek izgube sveta analiziran z vidika modalnih pojmov nujnosti, nemožnosti in možnosti. Modalna diferenciacija lahko osvetli problem dejanskosti v svetu in s tem tisto, kar je bilo izgubljeno v povezavi z dejanskostjo biti v svetu. Modalno mišljenje ne temelji na vednosti o resničnem stanju stvari ali stalnem razumevanju nujnosti. Omogoča nam razločiti dejansko na podlagi *razmerij* med nujnostjo, možnostjo in nemožnostjo. S pomočjo teh relacij predlagamo nov pogled na modalnost. To storimo s pomočjo razumevanja modalnosti kot operacij zapisa pri Jacquesu Lacanu, pri čemer se osredotočamo predvsem na njegov XXI. seminar (1973–1974), v katerem se sklicuje na Aristotelovo modalno logiko in omeni analitičnega filozofa Jaakka Hintikka (kot enega Aristotelovih komentatorjev). To trojno razmerje med Aristotelom, Hintikka in Lacanom sugerira drugačen pogled na dejansko biti-takšno sveta. Biti-takšno nekega sveta, torej njegovo dejanskost, razumemo kot kontingenco (kar se preneha ne zapisovati) – možnost, ki vznikne iz razmerja med tem, kar je razglašeno za nujno, in tem, kar je nemožno. Članek razišče implikacije modela razumevanja dejanskosti, kakršno je predstavljeno v Lacanovem pogledu na človeško seksualnost in spolno razliko.

Jan Völker

The End of Life Is Not the Worst: On Heidegger's Notion of the World

Keywords: Heidegger, world, earth, truth, anthropocene

The article proposes to reconsider the late Heidegger's examination of the concept of the world, as for Heidegger the eradication of all life on planet earth is not the most horrible thing that could happen. It is the impossibility of thinking the world that exposes us to something worse: the loss of our link with being. Following Heidegger, to think the world is not only necessary to prevent the extinction of life on earth, but, moreover, the loss of thinking the world lies at the beginning of the crisis we are living through.

Jan Völker

Konec življenja ni tisto najhujše: o Heideggerjevem konceptu sveta

Ključne besede: Heidegger, svet, zemlja, resnica, antropocen

Članek predlaga razmislek o Heideggerjevem poznem razumevanju koncepta sveta. Po Heideggerju namreč izginotje življenja na zemlji ni najbolj grozna stvar, ki se lahko zgo-

di. Naša nezmožnost misliti svet nas izpostavi nečemu hujšemu: izgubi naše povezave z bitjo. Na Heideggerjevi sledi ugotavljamo, da misliti svet ni le nujni pogoj za preprečevanje izumrtja življenja na zemlji, ampak je izguba mišljenja sveta prav začetek krize, ki jo trenutno preživljamo.

Magdalena Germek **Anatomy of the World**

Keywords: Badiou, world, anatomy of the world, truth, Rembrandt, Donne

In this article, we discuss Badiou's concept of the world through the somewhat unusual metaphor of "the anatomy of the world". The anatomy of the world allows us to approach the concept of the world through the idea of its constitution, architecture, structure – its anatomy. But as we show in the first part of the text, in order to derive the anatomy of the world, we need a corpse of the world – the world must die. Following the philosophy of Alain Badiou, we demonstrate that the world in its objective existence is indifferent to the question of life and death. Whether the world lives or dies depends only on the realisation of the truth procedures in the world on the basis of which the world is subjectivised. The world suffers from mortifying impulses, as the reactive and obscure forms of subjectivity actively work against the realisation of truths in the world. Through the artistic presentations of anatomy by Rembrandt van Rijn and John Donne, we also elaborate the tense relationship between the corpse of the world (from the perspective of the scientific procedure of truth) and the life of the world (from the perspective of the artistic procedure of truth). Although art often sees science as something that kills the world, our final point is that the world can also come to life through science.

Magdalena Germek **Anatomija sveta**

Ključne besede: Badiou, svet, anatomija sveta, resnica, Rembrandt, Donne

V članku se Badioujevega koncepta sveta lotevamo skozi nekoliko nenavadno metaforo »anatomije sveta«. Anatomija sveta nam omogoča pristop h konceptu sveta skozi idejo njegove konstitucije, arhitekture, strukture – torej anatomije. Da pa bi lahko izvedli anatomijo sveta – kot pokažemo v prvem delu besedila – potrebujemo truplo sveta, svet mora namreč umreti. Izhajajoč iz Badioujeve filozofije pokažemo, da je svet v svojem objektivnem obstoju indiferenten do vprašanja življenja in smrti. Ali svet živi ali umre, pa je odvisno od realizacije resničnostnih postopkov v svetu, na podlagi katerih se svet subjektivira. Svet mortificirajo reaktivne in obskurne forme subjektivnosti, ki aktivno delujejo proti realizaciji resnic v svetu. Skozi umetniške primere prikaza anatomije pri Rembrandtu van Rijnju in Johnu Donnu odpremo tudi vprašanje napetega odnosa med

truplom sveta (s perspektive znanstvenega postopka resnice) in življenjem sveta (s perspektive umetniškega postopka resnice). Čeprav umetnost pogosto vidi znanost kot nekaj, kar svet ubije, je naša zaključna poanta v tem, da lahko svet zaživi tudi skozi znanost.

Nick Nesbitt

Capital, Logic of the World

Keywords: Badiou, Marx, *Logics of Worlds*, *Capital*, Lacan, logic

Despite his longstanding silence regarding Marx's *Capital*, I wish here to argue that Badiou has in fact, in the three volumes of *Being and Event*, produced the materials for a contemporary logic of the capitalist social form. He has done so, however, in the form of an arsenal of abstract concepts that have yet to be precisely measured against Marx's critical and formal reproduction of capitalism, the systematic exposition of which consumes the three volumes of *Capital*. I first argue that Badiou's general disinterest in the logic of capitalism and Marx's *Capital* specifically takes on a strongly symptomatic, spectral presence in the 1994-1995 seminar *Lacan: Anti-philosophy 3*. Secondly, while it is true that Badiou's *Logics of Worlds* never discusses the logic of appearance that governs all capitalist things (i.e. commodities), it is possible nonetheless to read *Logics* as an abstract translation and formalisation of Marx's *Capital*. In this view, *Capital* should quite simply be read as a systematic demonstration of the logic of what Marx calls the capitalist social form, which is to say, in Badiou's jargon, the logic or science of the appearance of things in the capitalist world. In a sense, then, this means nothing more, though nothing less, than subjecting the *Logics of Worlds* to a Marxian torsion: in order to demonstrate that which Badiou has neglected, Marx has in fact already accomplished (with his own specific formal, conceptual, and discursive means), i.e. the systematic, synthetic demonstration of the necessary forms of the appearance of commodities in the capitalist social form.

Nick Nesbitt

Kapital, logika sveta

Ključne besede: Badiou, Marx, *Logike svetov*, *Kapital*, Lacan, logika

Kljub njegovi vztrajni tišini v zvezi z Marxovim *Kapitalom*, bom tu postavil tezo, da je Badiou v treh delih *Biti in dogodka* dejansko postavil osnove za sodobno logiko kapitalistične družbene formacije. Toda to je storil v obliki abstraktnih konceptov, ki jih moramo šele natančno oceniti z vidika Marxove kritične in formalne reprodukcije kapitalizma v sistematični ekspoziciji, ki obsega tri zvezke *Kapitala*. Najprej trdim, da ima Badioujevo splošno nezanimanje za logiko kapitalizma v Marxovem *Kapitalu* posebej močno simptomatično in fantomsko vlogo v seminarju *Lacan: antifilozofija 3* iz let 1994-1995. Nato pravim, da je mogoče kljub temu, da Badioujeve *Logike svetov* sploh ne razpravljajo o logiki pojavljanja

kapitalističnih reči (torej blag), *Logike* vendarle razumeti kot abstrakten prevod in formalizacijo Marxovega *Kapitala*. S tega vidika bi morali *Kapital* razumeti preprosto kot sistematičen prikaz logike, ki jo Marx imenuje kapitalistična družbena formacija in bi jo v Badioujevem žargonu lahko poimenovali logika ali znanost pojavnosti reči v kapitalističnem svetu. To pa pomeni nič več in nič manj kot izpostaviti *Logike svetov* marksovski torziji: demonstrirati, da je tisto, kar Badiou zanemari, dejansko s svojimi specifično formalnimi, konceptualnimi in diskurzivnimi sredstvi že uresničil Marx. To pa je sistematičen in sintetičen prikaz nujnih oblik pojavnosti blag v kapitalistični družbeni formaciji.

Marina Gržinić **World(s)**

Keywords: colonialism, financial capitalism, necro-capitalism, racial/colonial divide, imperial/colonial divide

The main thesis of this text is that for a critical evaluation of the institutions built on the foundations of colonialism that preserve the worlds of neoliberal global capitalism, financial capitalism, and necro-capitalism, we need to rethink the two main divisions mediated by decolonial theory and decolonisation as analytical tools: the racial/colonial divide and the imperial/colonial divide. This text attempts to analyse the relation between capitalism and colonialism in order to determine the implications for the theoretical and philosophical thought of two historical forms of capitalism, which are not historical at all because they are fully functional in the present: racial capitalism and settler capitalism, or racial-settler capitalism, as it is called in its joint formation. In order to get to this point, we must first see the place of colonialism in capitalism and how theory is reflected in its relationship to the past and present. Last but not least, the question this article is occupied with is: "What kind of world is this where a trans person, a woman, or a man is treated like garbage?"

Marina Gržinić **Svet(ovi)**

Ključne besede: kolonializem, finančni kapitalizem, nekrokapitalizem, rasna/kolonialna delitev, imperialna/kolonialna delitev

Glavna teza tega besedila je, da moramo za kritično oceno institucij, zgrajenih na temeljih kolonializma, ki ohranjajo svetove neoliberalnega globalnega kapitalizma, finančnega kapitalizma in nekrokapitalizma, ponovno premisliti dve glavni delitvi, ki jih kot analitični orodji posredujeta dekolonialna teorija in dekolonizacija: gre za rasno/kolonialno delitev in za imperialno/kolonialno delitev. Besedilo analizira odnos med kapitalizmom in kolonializmom z namenom ugotoviti, kakšne posledice za teoretično in filozofsko misel imata

dve zgodovinski obliki kapitalizma, za kateri pa se izkaže, da sploh nista zgodovinski, ker sta v celoti funkcionalni v sedanjosti: rasni kapitalizem in naseljski kapitalizem, oz. rasno-naseljski kapitalizem, kot se imenuje njuna skupna tvorba. Da pa bi sploh prišli do tega, moramo najprej razumeti mesto kolonializma v kapitalizmu in njun odnos tako v preteklosti kot v sedanjosti. Nenezadnje odgovarjamo tudi na naslednje vprašanje: »Kakšen svet je svet, v katerem je trans/ženska/moški izenačen s smetmi?«

Rok Benčin

Worlds as Transcendental and Political Fictions

Keywords: multiplicity of worlds, possible worlds, fiction, Badiou, Deleuze, Kant, Rancière

By examining the idea found in the works of several contemporary philosophers that the multiplicity of worlds is no longer merely possible – as it was for Leibniz – but actually determines our experience of reality, the article proposes an understanding of worlds as transcendental structures that frame the ontological multiplicity. The article argues that such a proliferation of actual worlds implies that the concept of world should be seen today as a category that belongs to the order of fiction, making the world-building devices of literature relevant for understanding the contemporary experience of reality. The first part examines the conceptions of multiple worlds of Leibniz, Deleuze, and Badiou through the structural differences and similarities between possible and fictional worlds. While Deleuze actualises possible worlds, Badiou actualises fictional worlds. The second part explores worlds as political fictions, revisiting Kant's conception of cosmopolitanism via Rancière's definition of politics as a conflict of worlds. Rancière's formulation of political dissensus in fictional and narrative terms sheds a new light on Kant's description of cosmopolitanism as a perspective that presents history as a novelistic narrative.

Rok Benčin

Svetovi kot transcendentalne in politične fikcije

Ključne besede: množstvo svetov, možni svetovi, fikcija, Badiou, Deleuze, Kant, Rancière

Članek na podlagi raziskave ideje, ki jo najdemo pri nekaterih sodobnih filozofih, da množstvo svetov ni več zgolj možno, kot je bilo za Leibniza, ampak dejansko določa naše izkustvo realnosti, predlaga razumevanje svetov kot transcendentalnih struktur, ki uokvirjajo ontološko mnogoterost. V članku trdimo, da takšna pomnožitev dejanskih svetov implicira, da moramo danes koncept sveta dojemati kot fikcijsko kategorijo, s čimer svetotvorni mehanizmi književnosti postanejo relevantni za razumevanje sodobne izkušnje realnosti. Prvi del besedila razpravlja o Leibnizevem, Deleuzovem in Badioujevem pojmovanju mnogih svetov skozi strukturne razlike in podobnosti med možnimi in fiktivnimi svetovi. Medtem ko Deleuze aktualizira možne svetove, Badiou aktualizira fiktivne.

Drugi del raziskuje svetove kot politične fikcije, ko se skozi Rancièrovo definicijo politike kot konflikta med svetovi vrača h Kantovem pojmovanju kozmopolitizma. Rancièrova artikulacija političnega disenza v fikcijskih in narativnih terminih meče novo luč na Kantov opis kozmopolitizma kot vidika, ki nam kaže zgodovino kot romaneskno pripoved.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle

Dispersed Are We: The Novel of Worlds and the World of the Novel in Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*

Keywords: ideological apparatus, Benčin, transcendental framework, literary canon, dialectic, dispersion, national history, world, distribution of the sensible, Rancière, novel, subjectivity, unification, Woolf

Drawing on a forthcoming book by Rok Benčin on the concept of world (the multiplicity of real worlds as transcendental frameworks and the fictional structure thereof), the article proposes a reading of *Between the Acts* by Virginia Woolf that focuses on the dialectic of dispersion and unity. The novel presents a multiplicity of dispersed and fragmented transcendental frameworks that tend towards – an attempt that is always doomed to fail, but always begins anew – unification within the ideological apparatuses (family, religion, national history, literary canon). In this endless dialectic, literature occupies a singular place, for the fictional structure of these frameworks makes of it a transcendental-abyss, which enables passage from the novel of worlds to the world of the novel.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle

Dispersed are we: roman svetov in svet romana v *Med dejanji* Virginie Woolf

Ključne besede: ideološki aparati, Benčin, transcendentalni okvir, literarni kanon, dialektika, razpršitev, nacionalna zgodovina, svet, delitev čutnega, Rancière, roman, subjektivnost, poenotenje, Woolf

Na podlagi prihajajoče knjige Roka Benčina o konceptu sveta (mnoštvo resničnih svetov kot fikcijsko strukturiranih transcendentalnih okvirov) članek predlaga interpretacijo romana *Between the Acts* Virginie Woolf, osredotočeno na dialektiko razpršitve in enotnosti. Roman predstavlja množstvo razpršenih in fragmentiranih transcendentalnih okvirjev, ki se – zmerom neuspešno, a vedno znova – poskušajo združiti znotraj ideoloških aparatov (družina, religija, nacionalna zgodovina, literarni kanon). V tej neskončni dialektiki književnost zaseda edinstveno mesto, saj fikcijska struktura teh okvirjev ustvari transcendental-brežno, ki omogoča prehod od romana svetov v svet romana.

Nika Grabar

Architecture and the Distribution of the Sensible

Keywords: architecture, art, aesthetics, politics, space, form, regimes of art, world, fiction, Adorno, Rancière

Following Theodor W. Adorno's reading of architecture as a purposeful art, the article explores how the social dimension is inscribed into the purposes ascribed to architecture by establishing a relation between what Adorno calls a sense of architectural space and the distribution of the sensible as defined by Jacques Rancière. Considering Rancière's understanding of the political dimension of different "regimes of art", the article attempts to show how similar observations can be made regarding architecture. What implications do these regimes of architecture have for the constitution of a common world, given architecture's vast spatio-temporal presence?

Nika Grabar

Arhitektura in delitev čutnega

Ključne besede: arhitektura, umetnost, estetika, politika, prostor, forma, režimi umetnosti, svet, fikcija, Adorno, Rancière

Na podlagi razumevanja arhitekture kot uporabne umetnosti pri Theodorju W. Adornu članek raziskuje, kako se v arhitekturne smotre vpisuje družbena razsežnost. V ta namen Adornovo opredelitev občutka za arhitekturni prostor naveže na definicijo delitve čutnega pri Jacquesu Rancièru. Upoštevajoč Rancièrovo razumevanje politične razsežnosti različnih »režimov umetnosti«, članek pokaže, da je mogoče podobna opažanja prenesti tudi na arhitekturo. Kakšne implikacije imajo ti režimi arhitekture za konstitucijo skupnega sveta glede na neizogibno časovno-prostorsko prisotnost arhitekture?

Anna Longo

How the True World Finally Became Virtual Reality

Keywords: virtual reality, information, knowledge, metaphysics, becoming

As David J. Chalmers claims, "virtual reality is a sort of genuine reality, virtual objects are real objects, and what goes on in virtual reality is truly real." In this paper, I will suggest that the philosophical hypothesis that we might live in a simulation can be considered to be the last and most nihilistic episode in the series of narrations about the true and apparent worlds that Nietzsche sketched in *The Twilight of the Idols*. I will argue that Nietzsche's prediction about the obliteration of the apparent world has actually been fulfilled by Chalmers, and I will show why his theory must be considered one of the many fables that humans have been producing in order to organise the world according to their own ends.

Anna Longo

O tem, kako je resnični svet končno postal virtualna resničnost

Ključne besede: virtualna realnost, informacija, vednost, metafizika, postajanje

Kot pravi David J. Chalmers, je »virtualna resničnost vrsta prave resničnosti, virtualni objekti so pravi objekti, in kar se dogaja v virtualni resničnosti, je zares resnično«. V tem članku bom trdila, da lahko filozofsko hipotezo, po kateri morda živimo v simulaciji, razumemo kot zadnjo in najbolj nihilistično epizodo v seriji pripovedi o resničnih in navidezni svetovih, ki jo je orisal Nietzsche v *Somraku malikov*. Pokazala bom, da je Nietzschejevo napoved izginotja navideznega sveta dejansko izpolnil prav Chalmers. Njegovo teorijo moramo tako razumeti kot eno od mnogih zgodb, ki jih proizvedemo ljudje, da bi svet uredili v skladu z lastnimi cilji.

Noa Levin

Spectres of Eternal Return: Benjamin and Deleuze Read Leibniz

Keywords: apokatastasis, philosophy of history, repetition, modernity, baroque, multiverse, fold, virtuality

The late reflections of G.W. Leibniz on eternal return have often been dismissed as insignificant as regards his wider philosophy. This may be due to the prevalent championing of his optimistic views on the continual progress of humanity, which seem to contradict the notion of eternal return. Walter Benjamin and Gilles Deleuze both put forward concepts of eternal return that form part of their respective critiques of historical progress, yet these have rarely been read in conjunction with their views on Leibniz. This article argues, first, that for Leibniz progress and return are not contradictory, and second, that Benjamin's and Deleuze's concepts of return were informed, in different ways, by their readings of Leibniz, and specifically by his conception of multiple worlds as the spatial equivalent of eternal return. In doing so I will shed light on the contribution of Leibniz's philosophy not only to the progressive theories of history put forward during the Enlightenment, but also to the critique of these very visions.

Noa Levin

Duhovi večnega vračanja: Benjamin in Deleuze bereta Leibniza

Ključne besede: apokatastasis, filozofija zgodovine, ponavljanje, modernost, barok, multiverzum, guba, virtualnost

Pozne refleksije G. W. Leibniza o večnem vračanju komentatorji pogosto označujejo za nepomembne z vidika širšega konteksta njegove filozofije. To je mogoče pripisati velikemu poudarku, ki ga dajejo na njegove optimistične poglede na človeški napredek, kateremu

pojem večnega vračanja na videz nasprotuje. Walter Benjamin in Gilles Deleuze razvijeta vsak svoj koncept večnega vračanja v okviru njune kritike zgodovinskega napredka, kar pa redko povezujejo z njuno recepcijo Leibniza. Članek trdi, prvič, da si po Leibnizu napredek in vračanje ne nasprotujeta, in drugič, da je na Benjaminov in Deleuzov koncept vračanja na različne načine vplivalo njuno branje Leibniza, posebej pa njegovo pojmovanje mnogih svetov, prostorskega ekvivalenta večnega vračanja. S tem bomo osvetlili ne le prispevek Leibnizeve filozofije k razsvetljenskim progresivnim teorijam zgodovine, ampak tudi h kritiki teh vizij.

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Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, str. 31.
Ibid., str. 49

Citiranje delov monografij

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Ibid., p. 49.

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