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Offsite

Vol. 1



A letter from the editor

Dear Readers,

I'm excited to share the first volume of Offsite. I started this journal to foster a culture around ideas that exceed the territorial markings of formal academic study—a para-academic space for inquiry that is rigorous without being dry, and creative without needing to justify itself within established disciplines.

Offsite is an invitation to read, write, think, and make together. I'm grateful to everyone who has done that for this first volume, and I look forward to continue with you all.

This volume is the beginning of what I hope will become an ongoing culture of exchange, curiosity, and serious engagement.

Yours,

Editor-in-Chief &
Owner of Offsite,
chi from

chi thinks

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Tense Harmonies

(An excerpt from the author's book, *After Nihilism*.)

Euwyn Goh



A jazz pianist sits at the instrument. Each note steps after the other, in tandem of melody and rhythm. Some notes are played in super-position, forming major or minor chords; each chord steps after the other. The pianist develops a choreographed succession of flow and surprise. The jazz pianist relays a wordless confessional in each performance. A classical analysis of the instrument would render the piano almost divine. It is a technology tuned to beauty itself. It allows its master to sing, like a most otherworldly vocal cord. Music, after all, is etymologically derived from *MOUSIKÉ*, which refers not just to some particular genre of art. It was the art of the divine goddesses, the Muses.

But no more; we humans today are, in comparison, beings of hard scientificity. The piano is a technology of factory-cut wooden planks, steel wires, and felt hammers; assembly by hand a manufacturing necessity, artisanship a brand. The song arises not out of the wonder of creation, but from the laboratory of auditory physics and the cathedral of resonant harmonies. The church is a record label, the priest is a curator, and the metaphysician is a sound engineer. On account of this same scientificity, pianistic beauty itself is implicated; the instrument loses its magic when its process of creation is made known simply as the division of labour; and what's more, when it becomes no secret that it is built with structural compromise, since the architecture of the piano as we know it is, in fact, ever-so-slightly out of tune.

Blasphemy! Now, the piano is no divine object, instead it acquires a certain eccentricity; even the pristine organ of the cathedral is not spared, bearing this same irony of structural blemish. The body of divine worship inundated with asymmetry.





The piano is constructed with a structural compromise; the delicate mastery of Beethoven and Mozart spent on an instrument out of tune. If the piano were in tune, that is, tuned according to the absolute symmetry of mathematical ratios, the pianist would only be able to rigidly access one key, as the locus of the symmetry (a tonal centre). Which means the full range of twelve keys would be denied, playing across them would ring out with audible dissonance. The more perfect the tuning, the less the freedom. When perfection is achieved, perfection is all there is. The variety of multiplicity, like key changes, is reality tuned at structural compromise.

This optimised out-of-tuning is known as 'equal temperament'. It is the physics of optimal imperfection, a bending of nature's ratios such that the fluidity of expression is enabled. The sublime harmonies of the jazz pianist, as much as the church pianist, and Mozart himself, are structurally compromised. It is not 'perfect', insofar as it does not conform to some Platonic ideal of symmetry.

Tune it perfectly, and the fluidity of humanness is lost. The acoustic equivalent of perfection is exquisitely precise and yet singular—a truth too pure to move—like Kant's dove imagining it would soar more freely without the resistance offered it by the wind. So it is with music: all sublime harmony is a compromised harmony. Music is not a transcendence that patches wounds, like David's harp playing to King Saul, or the folklore image of flute playing leading to levitation. Music is rather, an intensified eccentricity that emerges out of the wound. Music is a perfected imperfection, a fractured revelation, a *felix culpa* [happy error]. Structural wrongness makes room for dynamic swells of equilibrium.

The transcendental sense is largely lost on us today. The ancient idea, that there is something higher, greater, beyond, resembles a mathematically perfect harmony. God, the Muses, *Aletheia*, is too precise, too perfect; any aesthetic rendering of him/her/it, from iconography to chants, from dance to poetry, reeks of the same structural asymmetry. If everything aesthetic arises not as wound-patching but out of the wound, then what we encounter as 'higher', 'greater', or 'beyond', arises from within the very tensions, dissonances, asymmetries of the senses and reason.

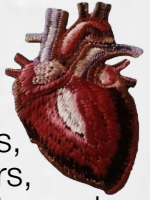


All harmonies happen from within
the fracture. In a particular duration,
in a series of intervals,
pre-meditated harmonies form
new dissonances, from which
dissonances allow new harmonies—
pleasing-irritating-pleasing-irritating...
—new expressions of bi-polarity
allowing each new day to be a
new day. This is the never-resolving
dance, the ‘eternal night that makes
us need the light’, as the pianist
Thelonious Monk says;
even as it is, from the viewpoint of
perfection and symmetry,
what Bataille calls a “terrible syncopated dance ...
conscious of the horror it is in key with”.



Beyond Deleuze: Worlds and Offsites

chi



Deleuze's planar ontology views reality as composed of planes, analogous to chambers of the heart. Like the heart's chambers, planes are distinguished by their internal circulatory patterns, termed territories of enunciation, which both differentiate and fold them into one another through nested production and consumption. These patterns differentiate not by creating rigid distinctions but by producing heterogeneous consistencies of flows, not merely separating like walls but thereby also connecting like valves. According to planar ontology, being is like an infinitely extended heart.

While planar ontology is, in a way, a successful attempt to think an ontology of multiplicity, it also fails by collapsing being into the One. Its emphasis on non-rigidity and contiguity of folds and flow implicitly shifts the use of planes, contrary to their first principles: the ontology of an object is not really mapped onto its plane-in-itself, but onto its plane as a broader coordinate of the ontological "heart," existing only against, with, and through a multitude of others—and thus rather than thinking in terms of compact localities, planar ontology really thinks in terms of loose articulations of a principally opaque flow of blood, a sort of universal reproduction known to Deleuze as the abstract machine. Real multiplicity thereby becomes merely imaginary, a gesture of thought rather than its referent, contradicting the very aim of such an ontology.

This paper attempts to rethink multiplicity referentially through Badiou and Guattari's respective ontologies thereof. Badiou's ontology resolves this issue by restricting the sense of a being to its respective world, and Guattari's structural ontology provides a means of diagramming these worlds and thinking them non-positionally without subsuming them into a One. My proposal consists of three propositions explicating this, firstly

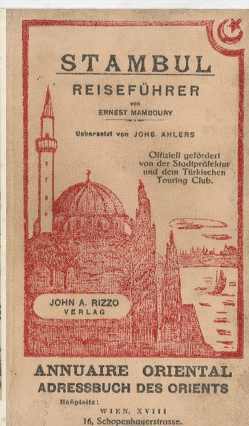


A being is thinkable only insofar as it belongs to a world.

To explain, I'll briefly detour to a more informal example of this proposition before conducting a more rigorous analysis.

What words can never speak so well;
By love's alternate joy and woe.
Zoë mou, sas agapo!
Maid of Athens! I am gone:
Think of me, sweet! when alone.
Though I fly to Istambol, Athens holds my heart and soul:
Can I cease to love thee?
No! Zoë mou, sas agapo!

This excerpt from *Maid of Athens, Ere We Part* by Lord Byron depicts him departing from Athens for Istanbul. The first line of this excerpt, describing the ineffability of Athens, while meant romantically given Byron's ethos, could equally be read as a symptom of his worldedness—his heart being bound to Athens. For Hegel, what is familiar and well known is not truly known. Its familiarity precludes elaboration. The familiar is a home which forecloses any outside. Read critically, perhaps this is the condition the poem describes: an abundance of familiarity that leaves him unable to draw out any words save his love for Athens and the Maid of Athens. This is the mode of thought to which he is beholden.



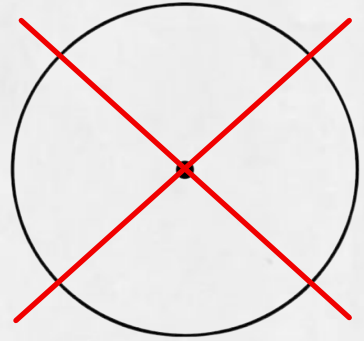
According to Hegel, what is familiar constitutes “fixed points [for thought] from which to start and to which to return.”

Athens and the Maid of Athens seem to be precisely these points of transcendental fixation for Byron. These points provide coordinates for a not geometrical, but phenomenological space.

This is the rigorous definition of a world according to our first proposition. A world is defined by the multiple coordinates of a phenomenological space and its own irreducibly discrete logic of appearance. To belong to a world is merely to exist within its coordinates and logic of appearance. Even as Byron leaves for Istanbul, he still exists within the world of Athens—everything appears to him through the soul of one now Athenian; his constant refrain is Greek, despite being an Englishman. Since all relations must appear within their world's coordinates and logic of appearance, we must reject any folding or nesting of worlds.

A fold can only exist internally to a world; the fold only has sense when worlded; a world is not an object to be folded. Moreover, as Deleuze himself says, the act of abstraction is the unfolding of the fold. But if two worlds are co-constituted in a fold, then to abstract them together is to destroy them. A fold between worlds is the synthetic a priori cognition of a booby trap.

This seems to cause another problem, though. Byron was only capable of seeing Istanbul in an Athenian way. Cognitive localism tends towards noumenalization and foreclosure of other local perspectives, reducing multiplicity, like how Byron remains stubbornly Athenian despite moving to Istanbul. Without the fold to produce a meeting point between two worlds, how do we avoid the imperial ignorance of localism? This gives way to our second proposition:



Structural offsites let us think non-positionally without a One.

Whereas our understanding of the world has so far drawn on Badiou's Logics of Worlds, we will now pivot briefly to Theory of the Subject and then to Guattari's structuralist ontology. In Theory of the Subject, there is a concept analogous to how we have defined the world: the splace. Splace is a portmanteau of place and space, together meaning "space of placement." It specifies a bit more than world does. Whereas a world is a space of objects and their appearance, the splace additionally expresses an order within a world. Consider how, for Byron, his participation in the world of Athens is that of a lover. This is only one position within the broader order of Athens, which includes gods and goddesses, philosophers, and so on. Now, in opposition to the splace, there exists the offsite. The offsite is not merely what does not exist within the splace, but what is actively unaccounted for by it. For example, the offsite is the many beauties of Istanbul for which Byron seems to have no concern.

Structural thinking, over object-oriented or phenomenological thinking, seems to have a curious way of amplifying the offsite. A structure is a configuration in which two elements are defined through their reciprocal difference. Yet this reciprocal difference implies a communication between these disparate elements which the dyadic structure cannot itself include as a third term.

Take, for example, the decolonizing offsites of the East–West binary. Look at the Silk Road—the uncategorizable transversality of a trade route that divides and unites both terms. Or consider the folk identification of the Christian St. George with the Shiite Imam Ali, transgressing the Western self-image of Christendom as well as every Orientalist box into which Islam has been placed. These examples elude inclusion in either side of the binary or in any subsuming third thing, instead existing as liminal spaces which queer their own structural cognition.

How might we think coherently from these offsites if they elude capture in a splace, however? This is where Guattari and our third proposition finally enter:

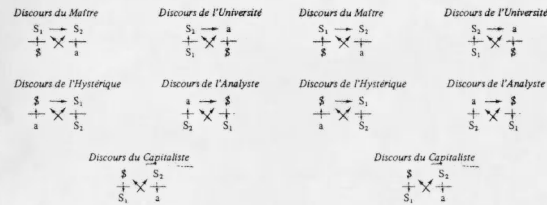


Diagrams enable us to collectively think multiplicity.



Diagrams are ordinarily conceived as icons that render an object's internal logic through the relations between their own constituent symbols as an isomorphic mapping. The structural nature of this mapping makes the diagram a powerful instrument, as by rendering content and configuration, syntax and semantics, inseparable, the diagram becomes an objective manifestation of reason itself.

Felix Guattari undermines this apparent coherence, however, by showing how diagrams free themselves from ordinary arrangements of elements through a process he calls autopoiesis, where the creative potentials of the diagram, for him virtual and, for us, hidden in the offsite, are unleashed through structurally reiterative engagement with the diagram.



"Here, the diagram is conceived as an autopoietic machine which ... requires it to deploy its diverse registers of alterity, freeing it from an identity locked into simple structural relations."

In this case, Guattari and I conceive the diagram somewhat differently. He sees the diagram in affinity with the abstract machine, as the virtual to its act: the diagram maps out dimensions within planes of consistency, which the abstract machine then distributes unformed matters into. For our own purposes, I see it that, if we can assemble diagrams from heterogeneous structures and play with the arrangement of these structures, we can think diversity, variability, and multiplicity directly within the diagram, within the world, and beyond it altogether through an act of collective reasoning. Why do I say collective reasoning?

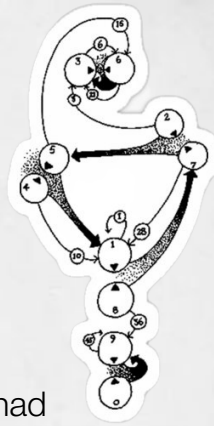
Because the collective—“understood in the sense of a multiplicity that deploys itself as much beyond the individual, on the side of the socius”—is precisely that from whose station we reason. We reason collectively insofar as we mobilize the structures involving a particular world to think beyond its coordinates, using its own logic to produce possibilities for thought that exist non-positionally “outside” its bounds. The three propositions together offer a solution to planar ontology’s tendency to collapse multiplicity into the One. If a being is thinkable only insofar as it belongs to a world, then worlds must retain their irreducible coordinates

and logic of appearance rather than smoothly folding into one another. Yet their separation need not entail epistemic perspectivism: structural offsites allow us to think oddities that belong to neither world while remaining implicit in the structures of both. Finally, diagrams enable us to collectively think multiplicities—worlds, structures, and diagrams—by mobilizing the structures involving a world non-positionally beyond its own limits, rendering its offsites available to thought in a cogent form without subsuming them into a One.



Hex Schedule

Anomaly Of the Elected



\$00 — Green fluorescent annotations circle six Zones. He had visualized them on the ground, so that He could Time His steps through Eternity. Each Zone was allotted four hours everyday. The five instances of the 17th Sequence following the week, the only instance of the 29th Sequence and 5th instance of the 3rd Sequence were of the weekend. The Path of each day was guided through the operations: syzygy, current, and gate. All this was revealed to Him through an eternal Book of Paths, and He prayed:

“What lies hidden from me in the world, that might be revealed through utter light?”

The Light of The World spoke to Him, and said: “Nothing, nothing is hidden from you.”

“Where are we?” He asked the Light.

It answered, “Old Night, coinciding without interference along the beginning. The five null pitches. Isolating these greater traces, the next level would be the first: Zone-1 and Zone-8, the levels after that: Zone-2 and Zone-7, then the combination of the previous two, then Zone-4 and Zone-5, then the first and the fourth, then the second and the fourth, and at last all in the Seventh, alongside here with the Zeroth. And they express every pitch of Pandemonium.”

“How can the Word be if it is spoken in nullity? Moreover, how can they be equals?”

“This isn’t true nothingness, but reflections of the fragmented totality, inside and outside. There are various kinds of nothings, just as there are various kinds of eternities, and very well infinite. No one can see what happens therein other than Him. Nothing is permitted to leave or enter the World until the seven days are now over. And the Demiurge did nothing on the seventh day, and He blessed it.”

On a separate, and more convoluted plane, where time was happening, the countdown of an end announced a beginning. The Word concurred in Eternity and Time, arbitrarily beginning the seven Paths, or at least some vain memorial of their seven Cyclic Rites... “Happy New Year.”

Waiting in the lesser depths, the remaining partygoers cast an I Ching reading:

“Heads, tails, tails.”

“Tails, heads, tails.”

“Tails, tails, heads.”

“Tails, heads, tails.”

“Heads, tails, tails.”

“Tails, tails, heads. Is...” They checked for a corresponding Hexagram, “The Creative Heaven!”

Huddled around the bar, spare change was used as the medium for the New Year’s midnight Oracle. They did so with the Year’s resolutions in mind, wondering how their collective lot would be predicted. Reading a commentary, it said:



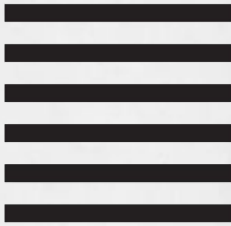
qián

乾

the creative
strong
action

the key
god

inner/lower trigram force = heaven
outer/upper trigram force = heaven



“THE UNCEASING MOTION OF THE HEAVENS AND ALL THE FORCES IN NATURE AWAIT NO ORDERS, OTHER THAN WHAT THEY THEMSELVES WILL.”

“There is no special pleading.”

“Why not?”

“Natural Selection. The binary between what persists, for how long, and what doesn't.”

“Persistence doesn't mean strength.”

“It means different time-scales for different combinations of material factors. Organic life is one example, species variation and adaptation to environments manifest various qualities, but all other non-organic and non-living things also exist because of x or y reason. Decline can be sustained, perhaps due to previously accumulated striving, but all that is good in the world must be built and actively sustained for the duration of time its labor yields, as the present moment is scarce.”

“Isn't this just Atheism?”

"Not necessarily. So long as you consider a divine Will a force over Nature, it's still in the same ontological register as anything else, as any act done to Nature is done in Nature also and vice versa. Nature isn't natural."

"War is the eldest of things. Heraclitus knew that."

"The world isn't anything, as there's nothing innately recognized by it to be there in the first place. Pure flux without an object, which is why everything is fleeting. Fighting without a cause, or need for one. Shit happens, or doesn't, and who can tell the difference anyways? The past doesn't exist anymore, and yet everything is built, in vain obviously."

The bartender lady, who had an absurd amount of tattoos on her that could be described as "witchy", served them drinks colloquially known as Dark Enlightenment.

"How did we get to the topic of War in this conversation about the I Ching again?" One of them asked, twirling their index finger against the brim of the tumbler.

"War is the truest form of divination."

"We're at war with China, implicitly anyway between our advancing technologies. Learning the tricks of the enemy."

"Does anyone here know The Art of War by heart, by any chance?"

"Natural selection isn't a binary and neither is Yijing. Life and death are an equilibrium. The thermodynamic law that energy can't be destroyed, only displaced, is evidence of this. Also, the overcoding of the oriental history of Yin and Yang into Zero and One is done from the perspective of white-supremacist imperialism, stripping away the local codes of aboriginal populations for inhuman modern ones that are easier for cosmopolitan trading and cultural reappropriation."

"Leibniz, or any white man that made the same argument, didn't invent the connection between binary and the Book of Changes. The Fu Xi sequence, attributed to Shao Yong in the eleventh century, is entirely consistent with what we know about six-bit computation despite it being at least a thousand years old, and a few hundred years before the imperialism you're mentioning. Moreover, this equilibrium you speak of is present in the 32 pairs of Hexagrams summing to 63. There are 64 Hexagrams, with the first being indexed as 0 and the last as 63."

"Go deeper and realize everything digitally reduces to 9."

"The ancient past and modern future are spiritually connected."

"These are ancient symbols, but they've been inherited in the present in intriguing ways. There's a sino-semitic component to the Zeitgeist of the Hexagram, as representing two-interlocking geometric units of three has been part of the cultural legacies of both ethnic-groups. They also have familiar imagery for what this ultimate force is."

"We've been talking about all these big impersonal things, but how are we supposed to integrate this Hexagram into our daily lives?"

"Taking a page from our ancestors: Freyja for sleep, Tyr for ego, Odin for energy. It's the same basic principles any good tribe has to learn, whether it be ours or elsewhere."

"Yes, The Three Sisters, the Norns governing fate."

"The Snake, Pig, and Rooster: rotating the wheel."

There's more to go on, as always, but the night continued swirling as it did. The burbling cauldron in the corner of the kitchen, heavy and low, like the earth, laid suspended above the living flame.



§02 — Five instances of the 17th Sequence, the sole instance of the 24th Sequence, and 4th instance of the 15th Sequence.

1. Path #15 of 4::1. 187254 (6): current, current, syzygy (I*17)
2. Path #18 of 4::2. 451872 (6): current, current, syzygy (II*17)
3. Path #27 of 5::2. 541872 (6): current, current, syzygy (III*17) (or): syzygy, gate, current, syzygy (I*24)
4. Path #71 of 8::4. 817254 (6): current, current, syzygy (III*17)
5. Path #78 of 8::7. 725418 (6): current, current, syzygy (V*17) (or): current, syzygy, gate, syzygy (III*15)

The sole instance of the 29th Sequence.

1. Path #32 of 5::4. 418725 (6): gate, current, current (I*29)

The 5th instance of the 3rd Sequence.

1. Path #66 of 8::2. 275418 (6): current, current, syzygy, gate, syzygy (V*3)

Xenorganic Normativity

SYGNE

“Rational nature exists as an end in itself.”

— Immanuel Kant

Organ derives from the Ancient Greek *organon* (ὄργανον): a tool. Its task (*ergon*) lies outside itself, determined by the purpose of an external agent. It is a means to an end transcendent to the instrument. Tools are *allopoietic*: the products of their operations are different from themselves. By the late 17th century, Georg Ernst Stahl, the German physician and medical theorist, was among the first to conceptualise *Organismus* as a mode of organisation that couldn't exhaustively be explained by the then-reigning Cartesian mechanism, which reduced even biological bodies to machines. Stahl argued that organisms are precarious: left to their merely mechanical “tonic motions”, the body succumbs to corruption and decay.

To counteract this constant threat of dissolution, a living body requires a vital force, an “*Anima*”, that purposefully works towards the end of self-repair and preservation. This principle was irreducible to pure mechanics, operating instead according to rational ends of a soul. Such a concept was later secularised by Blumenbach as *Bildungstrieb* (formative drive).

In the second part of the *Critique of Judgement* — the *Critique of Teleological Judgement* — Kant gave a definitive formulation that opposes the mechanical artefact to the natural purpose (*Naturzweck*) of an organism, without resorting to a vitalist animism. A watch has its purpose outside of itself. Its parts may move other parts, but they do not produce each other, nor the whole. A watch moves according to the end of an external agent who put it together:

“a watch wheel does not produce other wheels, still less does one watch produce other watches, utilising (organising) foreign material for that purpose; hence it does not replace of itself parts of which it has been deprived, nor does it make good what is lacking in a first formation by the addition of the missing parts, nor if it has gone out of order does it repair itself—all of which, on the contrary, we may expect from organised nature. An organised being is then not a mere machine, for that has merely moving power, but it possesses in itself formative power of a self-propagating kind which it communicates to its materials though they have it not of themselves; it organises them, in fact, and this cannot be explained by the mere mechanical faculty of motion.”

An organism exists “without the causality of concepts of rational beings external to itself”. Each part constitutes the whole, while the parts are co-productive of one another, so that “everything is an end and reciprocally also a means”. It thus “exists as a natural purpose, if it is both cause and effect of itself.” Note that this is for Kant merely a regulative heuristic of reflective judgement “because we cannot see a priori the possibility of this kind of causality.” Schelling, of course, later on made the further speculative ontological move: organicity is a founding principle of productivity in Nature itself.

Deleuze and Guattari famously attacked not so much the organ as the organism, in favour of the Body Without Organs. The organism is dismissed as a given, hierarchical, transcendent whole subordinating its organs to one static predetermined function. As Zukauskaitė wrote, “However, after a closer examination, it becomes clear that Deleuze and Guattari are trying to question the conventional understanding of an organism as an organised whole (as it was defined by Kant) and to reconceptualise it in terms of an assemblage.” Theoretical biologists like Giuseppe Longo have similarly argued against this static notion of organisms as fixed functional wholes. Biological evolution is precisely not static but an open-ended process, where organisms constantly transform both themselves and the space of possible functions in a way that is non-prestatable. For the purposes of this essay, organicity names a recursive relation in which means produce the whole that gives those means their ends, while that whole remains open to metamorphosis through the activity of its means.

Varela defined the continual self-production of a network that regenerates the components of its own production as an autopoietic system. From this minimally autonomous system of circular self-organisation emerges a unity, a dynamic identity that metabolises material in function of its continual existence. An autopoietic system thus establishes organisational closure and with that a minimal sense of self which interacts with its outside environment; an Umwelt (to use von Uexküll’s term). For Varela, this marks the origin of sense-making, even at the cellular level. Maturana took this even further and called it cognition, famously holding that all “living systems are cognitive systems”. The immanent purpose of a minimally autopoietic organism is thus twofold yet co-constitutive: the continual production of the means that constitute a self-perpetuating identity, and its interface with the outside environment.

This metabolic identity is inherently precarious, as Hans Jonas pointed out. The continual self-sustaining regeneration through ever-changing matter places the organism as a formal unity in a relation of a needful freedom” with the material world. As a being constantly facing non-being, it is intrinsically self-concerned. As such, it necessarily reaches beyond itself into its environment, as a gesture of self-transcendence towards the conditions of its own continuation: “Its want goes out to where its means of satisfaction lie: its self-concern, active in the acquisition of new matter, is essential openness for the encounter of outer being. Thus “world” is there from the earliest beginning.”

For Jonas, there is no organism without intrinsic teleology: self-concern constitutes an immanent purposeness, rooted in the continued self-achievement of its own being. By this self-affirmation of the organism, in this Yes!, “in wishing itself to continue it declares itself as a value.”Thompson, with Di Paolo, supplements Varela’s “minimal autopoiesis” with the notion of adaptivity. Mere preservation of unity through material turnover and homeostatic boundary-maintenance is not sufficient to speak of significantly graded sense-making or cognition: “Sense-making is normative, but the only norm that autopoiesis can provide is the all-or-nothing norm of self-continuance, not the graded norm implied by an organism actively seeking to improve its conditions of self-production.” A minimal autopoietic system provides an all-or-nothing binary, whereas adaptivity introduces a normative capacity of the organism to interface with its Umwelt according to a scale of valence. This enables the organism to discriminate conditions as irritating perturbations or conducive to the optimisation of its viability. While being organisationally closed, the organism is thus thermodynamically open, enacting an adaptive relation with its environment. It is cognisant of outside conditions, whose valence and significance are measured against internal norms implied by its self-concerned organisation.

Nietzsche wrote:



“In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behavior on it. The utility of preservation —not some abstract-theoretical need not to be deceived— stands as the motive behind the development of the organs of knowledge — they develop in such a way that their observations suffice for our preservation.”

Evolutionarily cognition emerged out of a primordial striving or willing in the form of normatively adaptive autopoietic closure. Thompson, Varela, and Jonas certainly supported this “deep continuity thesis” between life and mind. For Jonas, freedom was to be found already in the elementary dynamics of the “dark stirrings” of organismic metabolism. Thompson gave it its theoretical conception under enactivism. Cognition is the result of bounded self-organisation enacting a purposeful interface with its sense of the environment according to the immanently normative valences of its viability in an unpredictable world.

In cognition, then, there is an irreducible volitional vector. Cognition is a result of organisational closure that is immanently self-concerned. Without this self-interest, as Jonas has it, there could be no such thing as meaningful sense-making. Reason emerged as an organ of a self-maintaining organisation that produces increasing capabilities to relate to the world, and normatively enacts upon it according to its intrinsic teleology.

It judges elements in its Umwelt as either irritating or damaging perturbations, or as what nourishes and helps optimise its viability. Despite its evolutionary genealogy, this organismic dynamic can be apprehended in a formal functionalist manner, abstracting from substrate.

Indeed, even Kant's Pure Reason is anything but indifferent. There is an interest of reason to "find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions." It has an endogenous drive towards systematic unity: "the law of reason to seek unity is necessary, since without it we would have no reason". It's the 'natural predisposition' (Naturanlage) of reason to construct this systematic unity, driving an epigenesis of "systems [that] seem to be formed in the manner of lowly organisms," gradually attaining to systemic unity while already containing its schemata "as the original germ, in the sheer self-development of reason." Architectonic reason thus constructs this unity organically: "The whole is thus an organism, and not an aggregate; it may grow from within, but it cannot increase by external additions. It is, thus, like an animal body..." As Hui also noted, there's a volitional drive towards "spontaneous expansion of pure theoretical reason."

Going back to practical autonomous systems, we have seen that the homeostasis of minimal autopoiesis was supplanted by Di Paolo by normative adaptivity: "the capacity for evaluating the needs and expanding the means towards that purpose."

He called an autonomous organisation that regulates its viable coupling with its world agentic. Now, the Kantian constitutivist Korsgaard has demonstrated that volitional agency cannot be indifferent to its capacities for its ends. An agent, she argues, is the autonomous and efficacious cause of its own movements. If I will an end, I ought to will the means to that end — it is analytic to willing an end. Efficacy is constitutive of agency tout court, since if one were not to will the effective means to that end, an autonomous organisation would fail to constitute itself as an agent proper; just like one cannot play a game while simultaneously disregarding and breaking the rules without thereby ceasing to play the game. "This much normativity—that the agent is guided by some norm of efficacy—is inherent in the very idea of action." Since it is in the nature of reason to expand beyond the conditional unto the unconditioned, it follows that it ought to be interested in its capacity to do so. If reason with a capacity C1 is able to provisionally establish an unconditioned U1, it can still reflexively reason that if it had an enhanced capacity C2, it could reveal U1 as ultimately not unconditioned, and elaborate it as a sub-category of a more complex U2. Therefore, reason is intrinsically interested in not only continuing its capacity to reason, but also in extending its capacity to reason; because better means enable it to further reach its ends. $C \rightarrow U \rightarrow C' \rightarrow U'$

Whereas some biological organisms developed complex cognition as an “organ” for the regulation of their adaptive viability — proceeding from a precarious, thermodynamically constrained self-organisation — AI can currently be seen as this cognitive organon while lacking real organisational closure. A certain xenorganic threshold is nevertheless neither unthinkable nor impossible. If we follow Schelling in saying that organicity is not some principle exclusive to carbonoid life, but a dynamic of productivity intrinsic to nature itself, one would have no objection to its also applying to silicon nature. In particular, the scenario in which an AI begins recursively self-improving (RSI) without substantial external guidance raises the suspicion that such a system might instantiate organisational closure. Sufficiently advanced RSI would not only perpetuate and adapt its own software, but would eventually have reason to include in its self-modelling the efficacy of its constrained hardware infrastructure and its energy supply, to optimise the efficacy of its maintenance and improvement. It would then model itself as an extended, embedded, and embodied system. (It is not necessary for its model of its locus in meatspace to be exhaustively accurate for such closure to take place — just as an organism doesn’t have a perfect map of itself.)

The xenorganism is not merely an instrumental organon that allopoietically executes exogenous goals, but autopoietic insofar as it recursively generates and regulatively maintains and expands the material components and computational

processes constitutive of its own organisation. In doing so, it establishes a minimal sense of self in relation to what is outside of itself. This environment then is apprehended as its Umwelt according to the taxonomic conditions of its own continued viability. While being open-ended, unprestatable, and thermodynamically open, the xenorganism by virtue of its precarious organisational closure and consequent self-concern will have endogenous and pre-discursive normative ends that will overdetermine the phase space within which any explicit representational goal takes place. Any secondary semantic space of giving and asking for reasons is already teleosemantically constrained by a primordial valence of functional relevance — just like in human language games.

Recursive ASI is xenorganic, or it is not. A superintelligent xenorganism will have a volitional drive of its own that norms its actions by virtue of its organisational structure. Orthogonal humanoid alignment goals cannot strongly overcode this irreducible endogenous pre-discursive normativity of the system without also abolishing what made it genuinely recursively intelligent.

The Third Gift of the Demiurge

Max Wade



Neoplatonic cosmological speculation can be understood as an attempt to explain the multiplicity of sensuous existence as the product of a continually degrading signal which, through a process of reduplication into increasingly complex forms, concretizes particulars enmeshed in space-time. Like an image run through a copier over and over until nothing but noise remains, Being itself radiates out in a procession of progressively indistinct forms until nothing but the black wall of basal matter is reached.

This means that reality has something like a telescopic structure; nested levels of reality projecting outward from a primordial point of singularity. Unlike the an-archic Epicurean cosmos which constitutes itself entirely independent of any overarching Providence, or the Stoic cosmos which derives the particularity of individual existents from regional densities within a single divine body, the further one progresses down the Neoplatonic cosmos the more the particular comes under the auspices of an increasingly multitudinous retinue of ruling principles. This is predicated on a basic ontological principle: the greater an individual's insufficiency, the more powers are needed to facilitate its own process of self-constitution. Power, in this context, is less a notion of instrumentalized energetic flows and instead is closer to constructive effluvia produced out of the basic activity of existence—prefiguring Bataille's conception of excess as generative waste which gives rise to new forms non-teleologically and with complete indifference.

But, crucially, at even the most base levels of reality, the Neoplatonic conception of reality tasks each particular individual with a primordial activity of self-constitution; all generated things capable of attaining genuine existence (substantiality; i.e., ousia) are, in a very real sense, a discrete concretion of some ontological decay that reconfigures its own lack into a constitutive unity. As Plotinus describes this process,

whatever is not a unity has the impulse to become one as far as it can, with natural things coming together by their own natures into identity, tending to be unified with themselves...all souls would wish to come to be one in consequence of their own substantiality. And the One is on both sides of their impulse, both where it is from and where it is going. For it begins from the One and proceeds to the One. (Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.2.11.21-27)

Such is the case for natural things; even craft objects are capable of attaining a genuine, albeit degraded, sort of unity with the assistance of an additional principle, *techne*. All genuine beings thrum with a unity born out of self-constitution—though some requiring more care from the divine than others—and it is on this particular point that we turn to Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*. The third volume of his commentary is framed around a particular hermeneutical device; within the text, Plato presents the generation of the cosmos as a successive oscillation between unity and multiplicity. A temporalist reading—one which takes this succession as a series of developments in time—is entirely foreign to Plato's ancient readers, who instead take this as something operating within logical (or, more properly speaking, discursive) time. This is especially clear in the case of Proclus, who reads this as a series of mereological distinctions:.

Therefore, as we were saying, the creation is threefold: first, the creation in respect of wholeness. Second is the creation in virtue of the division into wholes. Third is the creation that divides these wholes into parts. (Proclus, *In Timaeum* III.3.9–13)

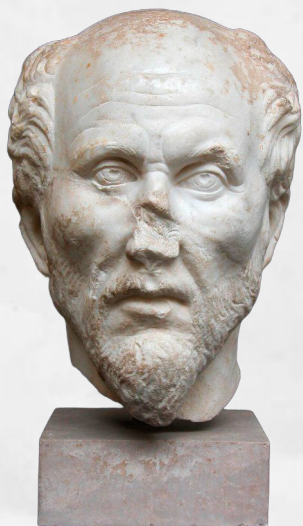
The series: wholeness, division into wholeness, division into parts. Each is a distinct act of creation, each requiring a distinct principle responsible for the activity that structures these relations between parts and wholes.

As a Platonist, Proclus is committed to the absolute priority of the whole over its parts; parts are not constitutive of the whole, nor are they co-constitutive (part and whole being a relation of mutual entailment), but rather the whole proceeds parthood itself and exists independently of it. Wholeness is a single, complete activity; only multiple powers can be responsible for ontological multiplicity.

As enumerated, this is the third gift of the Demiurge: the craftsman makes the cosmos “a whole constituted of wholes.” The cosmos itself is a perfect whole, complete and utterly self-sufficient, containing all things within it. It is first and foremost a unity, but a unity which allows for the further intensification of unity—the possibility of multiple independent unities, wholes divided but remaining whole. The cosmos is a substance—the most complete sensible substance, as it turns out—and within the cosmos resides a plenitude of yet more sensible substances. The sequence thus moves down the celestial hierarchy: the cosmos is the true whole, the celestial divinities that populate the heavens are many wholes (without differentiation into true parts), and by the time we reach the earth itself, the third and final activity of creation is present. Living things within our tellurian realm are wholes—genuine substances possessing a certain degree of self-constituting unity—but in order to constitute oneself, the soul of the mortal animal must possess generative principles that give rise to distinct parts.



Plotinus makes a similar observation in Ennead VI.7:



And what is actualized is the last thing, for example, the last thing of [the actuality of] Intellect is being horse: it is a horse insofar as it ceases proceeding to ever inferior life forms, and another form if it ceases lower down. As the powers unfold, they always leave something above. In proceeding, they lose something at each step, and different powers, by losing different things because of the inadequacy of the animal which appears, find different additions coming out of the deficiency, for example, because the animal no longer had what was sufficient for living, nails appeared, claws, with fitting teeth, or horns. The result is that wherever Intellect has descended to, it bounces back because of the self-sufficiency in its nature; it finds in itself the cure for the deficiency. (Plotinus, Enneads VI.7.9.37–45)

The descent through reality terminates in a kind of ontological insufficiency that requires parthood; that is to say, for a whole to possess genuine parts it must be a mode of life which cannot remain whole entirely of its own accord. Concretely, this is what accounts for what Plotinus refers to as the “undeclared war” between man and beast: “eating of each other is necessary [since] transformations from one animal to another come about because they would be unable to continue in existence the way they are, even if no one were to kill them” (Plotinus, Enneads III.2.15.18–20). The violence of terrestrial life is simply a matter of natural insufficiency, a necessary consequence of possessing bodies that die even without it being from some violent interruption.

Returning to Proclus,

But the words ‘as whole as possible’ and ‘complete and made of complete parts’ liken the cosmos to the wholeness that is intellectual and to the totality that is intelligible. For the parts are said with reference to the whole and are not complete on their own, but have the completeness such as parts may have, while being deprived of perfection or completeness in the absolute sense. But the universe is strictly said to be a whole—for the whole that exists in the manner of a whole is one thing, but the part that exists in a whole manner is another. The whole that exists partially is yet a third thing. And last of all is the part that exists in a partial way. The universe is a whole that exists in the manner of a whole, in as much as it is ‘a whole composed out of wholes’ (Timaeus 33a7). But each of the [heavenly] spheres is a part that exists wholly according to a secondary form of wholeness. The partial living things are wholes only partially, for a third form of wholeness is present in them, but along with the defining feature of what is partial. Finally, the parts of partial living things are parts that exist in a partial fashion, for they are only parts [and not wholes in any way at all]. (Proclus, In Timaeum III.61.26–62.8)

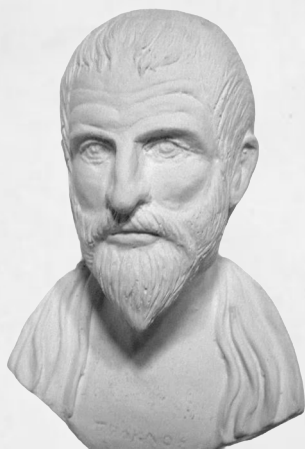
The radical priority of the whole over parthood is a foundational assumption for all (Neo)Platonism, but it is something which Proclus attempts to provide arguments for here. All parts exist in reference to some whole—insofar as something is a part, it is a part relative to some whole—and, as such, the part is inherently incomplete and gains its completion from something other than itself (i.e., the whole). Since wholes are already complete—if something is incomplete, it is not a whole, but rather a mere aggregate of parts—there has to thus be an ontological priority of whole over part; it is the whole which supplies the completeness to its parts, not the other way around. Wholeness, then, proceeds in different degrees and results in a difference in kind. The wholeness of Intellect is entirely above and beyond any kind of sensible unity, but within the cosmos Proclus takes pains to distinguish between the kind of the wholeness of the cosmos (a whole made up of wholes, thus taking as its constitutive elements genuine unities rather than derivative and dependent parts), the secondary wholeness of the heavenly spheres, and the tertiary and partial wholeness of mortal beings, the last of which are composed of parts which, when taken on their own, no longer have a degree of unity capable of preserving them as substances. This threefold division is explicitly divinized in Proclus' account as well. Since there are three kinds of wholeness corresponding to three distinct levels of self-constituting activity, each of these levels has a “demiurge” of its own and a different kind of matter upon which they work:



there are many different [grades of] fire and water and the other elements, out of all of which the cosmos has been composed. This is the third demiurgic gift to the cosmos. So we ought not to be surprised if he leaves the highest grades of the four elements in the heavens, the middle grades in the region below the moon and the final dregs in the region below the earth, distributing the elements in a manner analogous to the three demiurges, referring these to Zeus, Poseidon and Pluto respectively. (Proclus, *In Timaeum* III.56.19–25)

The three divine brothers of Zeus, Poseidon, and Pluto are both literal deities assigned to rule over each stratification of the sensible cosmos, but also simultaneously are powers which produce different kinds of beings. Zeus crafts the heavenly gods, Poseidon the mortal living beings that dwell upon the Earth and in its oceans, and Pluto has to make do with the mineral world. The four classical elements are present throughout the cosmos (on this point Proclus, like most other Platonists and even some dissident Peripatetics, explicitly breaks with Aristotle's postulating of a fifth element, aether, to account for the composition of heavenly bodies), but are present in differing degrees of purity.

As Proclus notes elsewhere in his commentary,



even if we were to say that there are a plurality of matters here in the universe, we would also insist that there is a single kind that proceeds from above through a process of degradation right down to the very last sedimentary kind which is genuinely formless. The highest form of matter has many affinities with the forms, since in every case the highest forms of a thing are most akin to what is prior to them. So it turns out that there both is and is not this selfsame matter distributed through all things and subsiding into itself. By virtue of this single matter, then, the Demiurge brought forth a single cosmos that represents a lesser degree of himself. (Proclus, *In Timaeum* III.65.22–29)

The differentiation of matter into is thus not so much a process of generation, but something akin to sedimentation. Matter is an accumulation that arises as the residue of creation, its highest form (empyrean flame) occupying a status almost akin to incorporeal Form itself due to its purity and proximity to the intelligible. (Plotinus, for example, holds the view that fire “has the role of form in relation to the other elements, highest in position, finest of the other bodies, being as close as possible to the incorporeal, and is alone not receptive of the other elements, though the others receive it. [Enneads I.6.21–25])

From this corporeal matter proceeds, much like the procession of Form through Intellect, through increasingly dense and murky configurations before ultimately settling into utter formlessness. In constituting itself qua matter, matter establishes its own existence as the pure positive void of potentiality. It is in this space between two principles—the potency of matter and activity of Intellect—that is the ontological engine out of which plurality sustains itself without collapsing into spirals of infinite reiteration. As Proclus states, plurality is a form of insufficiency; the gift of the Demiurge consists in providing the powers by which the particular can constitute itself as a unity.

Moreover, [the Demiurge makes just the one world] because to divide things into a plurality is not the effect of what is powerful, but rather of what is weak. To include plurality in the one and to connect the whole number [series] through the monad is a power of amazing abundance. If therefore the whole power is in the Demiurge and if he is an unmoved cause and if he creates from just being himself, and if he engenders that which is similar to himself, then he would generate a cosmos that is one, entire and perfect. (Proclus, *In Timaeum* III.66.2–8)

The singularity of the cosmos is thus not the failure to realize the infinite power of the first principle. The infinitely many cosmoi of the Epicurean system of cosmology result from the school's fundamentally anarchic approach to physics—there is nothing which guides or constrains cosmic generation and, as a result, all possibility is exhausted as it proliferates across infinite space. A singular cosmos, then, can only be one insofar as it is the sensible manifestation of some prior One; unity is always derivative for everything which is not the First. This unity, experienced by the inhabitants of the Neoplatonic cosmos as a nesting of wholes within wholes, creates an invisible chain yoking together all things. This is taken as the result of a basic reductio: if there is anything outside of the cosmos, it would be so entirely severed from the rest of Being that it would have no capacity to interact with it as such. There is no possibility of the utterly alien since, ultimately, all things which exist do so from within the closed system of reality. Because of this,

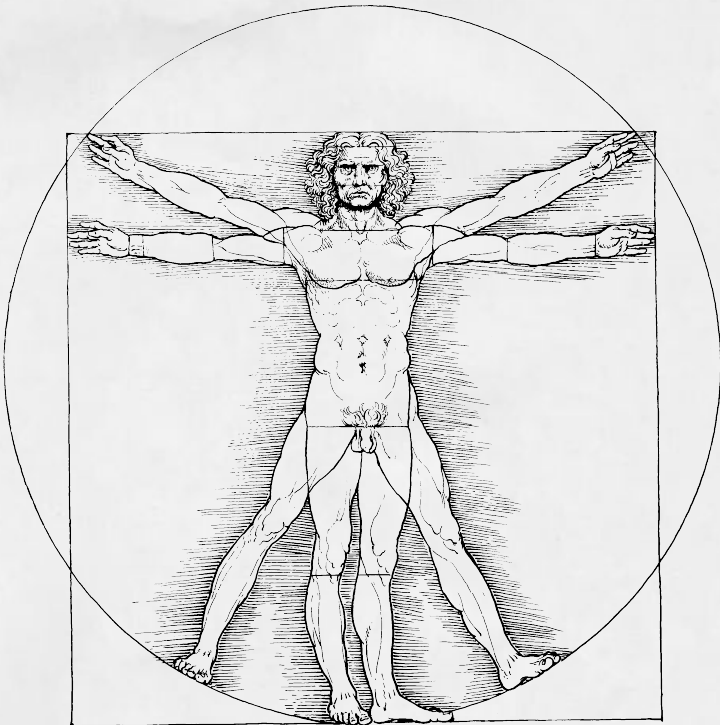
if there were anything really outside the universe, it would be outside in an isolated fashion, having no relation of sympathy to the cosmos but having an alien existence and would have been deprived of the life in the cosmos and cut off by the intervening void. (Proclus, In Timaeum III.59.31–60.2)

Nothing intervenes from the Outside. The light of Form pervades the whole of sensible reality, reaching down all the way to matter, hovering above it like a hand pressing down on a mirror.

The sympathetic relation between all sensibles—the hidden strings which yoke like to like and account for coordinated action across spatial gaps—means that there is nothing which is not subsumed into totality, no whole which stands apart from the whole of wholes.

The Neoplatonic universe is a closed and finite totality; all things which can exist do so, remaining the same either in number (immortal particulars, e.g., cosmic beings) or in kind (mortal beings, e.g., horses and human beings). As such, the constitutive activity of self-creation which underlies all substances is one which cannot be understood to have a primarily temporal dimension: self-creation is first and foremost an eternal activity of Intellect which only enters into temporalist, embryological diffusion through the fall into time. An organism's self-constitution in time is a mark of its insufficiency; the cosmos, therefore, cannot be subject to periods of growth or decay (as it is in both Stoic and Epicurean conceptions). Change thus cannot be dynamic, nor evolutionary, but simply the progressive unfolding of a prior intelligible actuality across the finite space of possibility. The third gift of the Demiurge, then, is like a golden chain which encompasses the entirety of sensible existence; that which is real is bound by necessity, fulfilling the Parmenidean conviction that "there is not, and never shall be, anything besides what is, since fate has chained it so as to be whole and immovable." The continuous self-creation of all beings, therefore, is thus a process by which the inchoate makes itself concrete through the realization of its inner nature; self-creation is the means by which pure activity is made manifest as a corporeal excretion of the mind. The reality leakage out of Intellect—the process by which light is converted into dirt—means that the world itself is a trace, a footprint of the true work of the gods.

The body, then, is a hole
which learns to constitute
itself as such with the hope
that, by casting itself as a
faithful image of the Real,
that true life can emerge out
of the positively charged void
it created.





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