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## **The Night in which all Dinosaurs wear Nightcaps - *A supplement to Žižek's critique of Meillassoux***

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*When you are philosophizing you have to descend into primeval chaos and feel  
at home there.*

Ludwig Wittgenstein

### **Introduction**

This essay develops Slavoj Žižek's critique of Quentin Meillassoux's speculative materialism. The first part consists of a discussion of Meillassoux's 'principle of factuality' (which states that only contingency is necessary) and Ray Brassier's problematization of this principle's self-referentiality. The second part takes up Žižek's critique of Meillassoux, which solves the problem of self-reference by dialecticizing the principle of factuality, ending up with the thesis of the contingency of necessity. The third part is an elaboration of Žižek's critique in which the main lacuna in Meillassoux's philosophy, i.e. the lack of any account of the genesis of subjectivity, is seen to lead to a disavowal of 'constitutive mythology' as theorized by Markus Gabriel. It is argued that Meillassoux's notion of 'hyper-Chaos' is in fact the core of his mythology, which becomes especially clear when contrasted with an alternative mythology, namely Henri Bergson's vision of 'creative evolution'. Finally, it is shown

how Žižek's critique of Meillassoux gravitates toward this mythology of creative evolution as his Lacanian version of dialectical materialism is reformulated in the light of the speculative realist problematic.

## 1. The Necessity of Contingency

Of the various philosophies collected under the umbrella term 'Speculative Realism', the *speculative materialism* of Quentin Meillassoux stands out as the most rigorously argued and far-reaching among them. In his *After Finitude*, Meillassoux sets out to reverse Kant's Copernican turn with the intent of grounding scientific discourse speculatively rather than transcendently. Nearly all contemporary thought, in being somehow faithful to the critique of metaphysics, can be characterized as 'correlationist': it is the correlation between subjectivity and objectivity that is thought as primary in relation to its terms, any attempt to think subject and object independently of one another is discarded as hopelessly 'naïve'. For Meillassoux, however, it is modern science that confronts correlationism with a problem, the problem of 'ancestrality'. Ancestral phenomena are those phenomena that allow scientists today to infer the existence of a past world in which consciousness did not yet exist – a world, then, without manifestation-of-the-world. Meillassoux's argument is designed to show that correlationism, in all of its variants, cannot accommodate the implied concept of a purely objective world preceding any form of subjectivity.

In addition to the more or less imaginary adversary that is the 'correlationist', Meillassoux also has a real opponent, namely Hegel, whom he defines as a 'speculative idealist'. Meillassoux's relation to Hegel is complex. In asking how, if not through postulating a transcendental subjectivity of some sort, the scientific claims pertaining to the 'arche-fossil' (i.e. the 'body of evidence' for ancestrality) might be made sense of at all, Meillassoux discovers an inconsistency in correlationism and attempts a radicalization of correlationism from within, thereby mirroring the Hegelian move vis-à-vis Kant of ontologizing what is at first taken to be a merely epistemological condition. Meillassoux then claims *speculative* access to a conceptually necessary Real that is nevertheless 'non-metaphysical' in that it is not a necessarily existent entity but precisely the necessary *impossibility* of any such entity, i.e. the *necessity of contingency*. But this affirmation of the necessity of contingency has a very different meaning from the one it does in Hegel. Meillassoux recognizes that Hegel makes room for contingency as a necessary moment in his system, but:

this contingency is deduced from the unfolding of the absolute, which in itself, *qua* rational totality, is devoid of contingency. Thus, in Hegel, the necessity of contingency is not derived from contingency as such and contingency alone, but from a Whole that is ontologically superior to the latter. This is precisely what separates the factual from the dialectical – or to put it more generally, and using our own terminology, the speculative from the metaphysical. (Meillassoux 2008: 80)

What Meillassoux terms the ‘principle of factuality’, then, states that “*only facticity is not factual* – viz., only the contingency of what is, is not itself contingent” (Meillassoux 2008: 80).

This ‘principle of factuality’ is the main target of the criticism made by Ray Brassier (who also happens to be Meillassoux’s English translator) in his *Nihil Unbound*, a work that generally breathes the same posthumanist atmosphere as *After Finitude*. It is after providing a long, thorough and sympathetic account of Meillassoux’s work that Brassier, in a subchapter entitled ‘The paradox of absolute contingency’, formulates his criticism, which goes to the heart of Meillassoux’s undertaking: How, if one rejects idealism, can the principle of factuality be the expression of a necessary truth? For it seems that, if it is a necessary truth, i.e. if it is true that all that is, is necessarily contingent, then it would have to apply even to itself. To reject idealism is to disallow any kind of abstract ‘floating’ of something like a ‘principle of factuality’ above the tangible facts themselves. Thus the principle of factuality must itself be grounded in facts – but how can it be? “What we should refuse,” writes Brassier “...is that it is necessary to exempt the thought that ‘everything is necessarily contingent’ from the existential ‘fact’ that everything is contingent on the grounds that a transcendental abyss separates thinking from being. Once the recourse to this transcendental divide has been ruled out, we are obliged to consider what follows if the principle refers to itself” (Brassier 2007: 89).

This is where the snake bites its own tail. Meillassoux’s insistence that talk of a ‘transcendental subject’ is only meaningful to the extent that it is seen to have an *existence* in that embodiment conditions it even if it is itself the transcendental condition for the appearance of bodies,<sup>i</sup> must also mean that he cannot consistently grant an exceptional status to the things that are thoughts, including the thought expressed by his own principle of factuality. This thought is a thing, in that it has no reality over and above its being-thought, which is a material process. But if this thought itself is a thing, then, according to what it itself says, its own existence must be contingent. But if the thought, that everything that exists exists contingently, itself exists contingently, then it cannot be the expression of a necessary truth, since in order to be true (or false) a thought must first of all *exist*.

This at least is an assumption underlying Brassier's critique. We may disagree, pointing to the example of mathematics: don't we all agree that the thought that '1+1=2' is true even if there is nobody to think it? The question is how we conceive of the meaning of 'true', which is something said of thoughts, in the absence of thoughts being thought. If truth can subsist in the absence of thought, then it must be possible to conceive of 'truth' as a property of something other than thoughts, for example Platonic Ideas. But then we apparently need an extravagant ontology to account for truths that we think are quite mundane. The correlationist is precisely the philosopher who wants to avoid having to postulate exotic entities to account for the world as he finds it. He is willing to go as far as to accept that '1+1=2' is only certainly true 'for us', even if he cannot say what it would mean for it not to be true 'in itself', because he can find no way of making a choice from the various options he has of grounding the truths he experiences in a transcendent reality that cannot be experienced.<sup>ii</sup>

What if, on the contrary, the principle of factuality *does not* refer to itself? In that case there is something that exists necessarily – the thought that everything exists contingently itself exists necessarily. This of course would be unacceptable for Meillassoux. The thought would destroy itself – paradoxically – precisely in 'immortalizing' itself.

So the question becomes how the self-referential character of the principle of factuality can be preserved without the truth of the thought that only contingency is necessary itself becoming contingent, though also without basing this truth in anything immaterial. This is where Meillassoux's concept of 'intellectual intuition' comes in. It is in a personal correspondence with Brassier that Meillassoux has responded to the objection by maintaining that "the paradox can be averted by carefully distinguishing the *referent* of the principle from its (factual) existence" (Meillassoux as quoted in Brassier 2007: 91). But it is only through intellectual intuition that Meillassoux thinks he can keep these things apart. This again interposes *ideality* between reference and meaning, or necessity between contingency and necessity, or a deduction between description and deduction. Of course, Meillassoux wants to undo these associations. He wants us to believe that his is a new kind of intellectual intuition that turns these things around, that allows us to think the relation between necessity and contingency from within our own contingency. But this, for Brassier, is the weakest link in the chain of arguments through which Meillassoux breaks with correlationism. For what Meillassoux is in effect trying to get away with is a re-establishment of correlationism on a higher level of abstraction. There is little in what Meillassoux says about 'intellectual intuition' that goes beyond merely stating that it is possible, or that it must be possible, since we

can, with the scientist, conceive of a reality that excludes our conception of it.<sup>iii</sup> In his Goldsmiths lecture,<sup>iv</sup> Meillassoux comments on what he calls the “risk of using an idealist expression in order, of course, to subvert its meaning” (Meillassoux 2007b: 433) and suggests renaming intellectual intuition ‘dianoetic intuition’. Drawing a contrast between his own approach and that of François Laruelle, he explains:

I thought that facticity was the sign of the finitude and ignorance of thought. I thought I had, in facticity, a relation to my own deficient subjectivity. I discover now that what I took for human idiocy was truly an intuition, a radical intuition – that is, a relation to the Great Outside. We have a *nous* unveiled by a *dianoia*, an intuition unveiled by a demonstration. (Meillassoux 2007b: 433-434)

Meillassoux believes that such an intuition must be possible because he thinks that the correlationist’s attachment to ‘human idiocy’ involves him in an inconsistency with regard to the notion of ‘possibility of ignorance’.<sup>v</sup> Brassier, though appreciative of Meillassoux’s effort, is not impressed by the notion of intellectual intuition. If we need ‘intellectual intuition’ in order to refer to the reality of absolute contingency or ‘hyper-Chaos’ as Meillassoux comes to conceive of it, then the reference – which is to say, the *truth* – of the principle of factuality is determined by an ideality, a *thought* saying: ‘everything that is, is necessarily contingent’. Brassier concludes that “[i]ndeed, it is unclear how the referent ‘absolute contingency’ could ever be rendered intelligible in anything other than a purely conceptual register” (Brassier 2007: 93).

## 2. The Contingency of Necessity

Brassier’s critique, then, leads us to the question as to the meaning of ‘materialism’. What kind of materialism can Meillassoux be presenting us with if he continues to rely on an ideal form of access to the Real? In a wide-ranging interview in *The Speculative Turn*, Slavoj Žižek comments on the meaning of materialism today, inviting us to break with vulgar materialism, yet without relapsing into an equally vulgar idealism. “Materialism,” for Žižek, “has nothing to do with the assertion of the inert density of matter; it is, on the contrary, a position which accepts the ultimate Void of reality—the consequence of its central thesis on the primordial multiplicity is that there is no ‘substantial reality’, that the only ‘substance’ of the multiplicity is Void” (Žižek 2011: 407).

If Alain Badiou’s notion of ‘inconsistent multiplicity’ is a good example of what Žižek has in mind here, then, to the extent that the sense in which Badiou’s mathematical ontology can be squared with materialism is nonetheless still

problematic,<sup>vi</sup> Žižek's dialectical materialism solves the problem by asserting the *inherently problematic* character of material reality as such. He achieves this reconception of materialism through a reading of Hegel that is diametrically opposed to that of Meillassoux. The former is not the thinker of a closed universe of self-necessitating thought that Meillassoux and others take him to be; rather, the retro-active positing of one's own presuppositions that is the essential movement of the dialectic is a version of the inherent subjective mediation of objective reality that cannot be reduced to 'correlationism' since the implied subjectivity is nothing over and above its negation of the 'immediate' material proto-reality which, in fact, is an abstraction appearing only in hindsight.

The only way in which Meillassoux manages to differentiate his position from Hegel's is by refraining from engaging with the most difficult question, which is precisely the question of the subject, which Meillassoux thinks is the cause of all evil in philosophy, yet for which he has no explanation in terms of his own philosophy – the subject, for Meillassoux, emerges 'ex nihilo.'<sup>vii</sup> For Žižek, the intellectual horizon of the Kantian problem that determines Meillassoux's hopes for thought actually still limits him, in that it withholds him from being impressed by the deeper problem of the genesis of subjectivity, of phenomenality, of manifestation itself. What is needed is "a theory of subject which is neither that of transcendental subjectivity nor that of reducing the subject to a part of objective reality" (Žižek 2011: 415). It is to Hegel that we must turn for such a theory. But, as it turns out, this does not mean that Žižek simply disagrees with Meillassoux. Not only does he not say that the principle of factuality is false; he in fact seems to agree that it is true, but he conceives of its truth as having a meaning that is more fully developed, rather than contradicted – or more fully developed precisely in being contradicted – in Hegel.

Although he does begin to contradict himself, Meillassoux doesn't take the contradiction far enough. As we have seen, it is through intellectual intuition that Meillassoux believes we are able to discover a "contingency with no limit other than itself" (Meillassoux 2008: 82) and as we know from Brassier's critique, Meillassoux's claim of being able to proceed from contingency itself to the thought of its necessity without reducing this contingency to a contingency that is merely for-thought, is highly questionable. Žižek strengthens Brassier's case when, commenting on the way in which Meillassoux 'ontologizes' what the correlationist conceives of as a 'possibility of ignorance', he notes that "[t]he ontological proof of God is here turned around in a materialist way... In both cases, we are dealing with the direct passage of the notion to existence..." (Žižek 2011: 412). Meillassoux's is a kind of negative ontological argument, but an ontological argument no less. Yet the implied

*subjectivity* – i.e. the noetic or for-thought character of contingency – is not necessarily incompatible with its *objective* reality, as long as we are willing to embrace the dialectical inscription of negating subjectivity into objective reality as such, which is a move that Meillassoux resists. According to Žižek, it seems, the mutual proximity between Hegel and Meillassoux is limited only by the latter's unwillingness to give up the absolute validity of the law of non-contradiction which – not so paradoxically if we are to accept Žižek's reading of Hegel – is also what binds him to idealism. As we have seen, this residual idealism is a consequence of Meillassoux's need to affirm that the principle of factuality does apply to itself – if it doesn't apply to itself, then it undermines itself by allowing the thought that it itself expresses to be a necessarily existent entity. For Žižek's Hegel, accepting this necessary existence of the thought would be unobjectionable, not because Hegel is a 'panpsychist' who has no problems with a necessarily existent thought, but because, for Hegel, *this necessity would itself be contingent* – this being nothing other than an alternative formulation of the mechanism of 'retro-active positing of one's own presuppositions' through self-negation or 'Aufhebung'. Meillassoux thinks he can allow one term of a distinction to mediate between itself and its opposite without letting the original dichotomy – which, whether 'horizontally' or 'vertically', is after all what gives the terms their meanings – cut across the mediating term. But the 'necessity' predicated of contingency must itself be defined in opposition to a contingency of a higher order, which must ultimately return to mediate between itself and this necessity, i.e., the logic according to which one would be able to project a self-predication of necessity into infinity ("...necessity is necessarily necessarily necessary etc. etc.") is an illusory logic or a logic of illusion evoking a 'bad infinity' to be avoided only through a properly dialectical conception of infinity as an openness inherent in totality, or a *contingency of necessity*. For that is what the dialectical nature of the relation between subject and object, the equation of subject and substance, ultimately amounts to: "[I]t is not only the inner necessity that is the unity of itself and contingency as its opposite, necessarily positing contingency as its moment. It is also contingency which is the encompassing unity of itself and its opposite, necessity; that is to say, the very process through which necessity arises out of necessity is a contingent process" (Žižek 2011: 414-415).

Unlike Brassier, who finds fault with Meillassoux as well as Badiou for failing to disengage themselves fully from idealism and turns to Laruelle's Non-Philosophy as an axiomatic, i.e. non-dialectical framework for a transcendental realism, Žižek takes the side of correlationism by dialecticizing Meillassoux's principle of factuality, thereby suggesting that, despite appearances, the story of finitude is not over yet.<sup>viii</sup>

### 3. The Necessity of Mythology

In the opening chapter of *Mythology, Madness and Laughter*, Markus Gabriel further develops Žižek's critique of Meillassoux in the context of a discussion of subjectivity as the agent of *mythologization*. Making a turn from Hegel 'back' to Schelling, Gabriel argues strongly for the necessity of mythology as an expression of our finitude, a *non-literal*, i.e. non-logical configuration of implicit beliefs which, as 'world-picture', is the only thing that can bring the disseminations of Logos to a temporary halt:

Whenever we try to determine the presuppositions governing a discourse about some object domain or other, we *ipso facto* generate higher-order presuppositions governing our meta-discourse to the effect that we are never capable of formulating any fully self-transparent meta-language. Nevertheless, discourse needs to stabilize its preconditions incessantly in order to defend itself against the ongoing threat of absolute indeterminacy. (Gabriel 2009: 18)

Mythology is oblique. The only thing that can stop the infinite regress of metalanguages is the dark, substantive underside of the transparency of the subject, i.e. in relation to the logical subject the myth functions exactly like the *objet petit a* in relation to the psychological subject. If you dig deep enough, every philosophy will reveal its 'unconscious', an underlying constitutive mythology, a guiding metaphor to frame the logical investigation – every 'discourse' must come with its 'figure'. The archeological metaphor of 'digging' is felicitous here precisely because it is so easily sexualized. What is the speculative materialist's object-cause of desire if not the fossil? Referring to Meillassoux's comparison of the correlationist to the creationist who asserts that fossils were created *as such* by God to test our faith, Žižek remarks that "[w]e should nonetheless insist that the Christian solution, meaningless though it is as a scientific theory, contains a grain of truth: what Lacan calls the *objet a*, the subject's impossible-Real objectal counterpart, is precisely such an "imagined" (fantasmatic, virtual) object which never positively existed in reality – it emerges through its loss, it is directly created as a fossil" (Žižek 2012: 645). In the light of Gabriel's critique it is interesting to note that the archeological metaphor is also used by Wittgenstein, who associates "the inherited background against which I distinguish between true and false" (Wittgenstein 1999: 15e, §94) with what we call a 'world-picture': "The propositions describing this world-picture might be part of a kind



of mythology. And their role is like that of rules of a game; and the game can be learned purely practically, without learning any explicit rules” (Wittgenstein 1999: 15e, §95). In response to the question of how it is that one is able to obey a rule, Wittgenstein states: “If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: “This is simply what I do”” (Wittgenstein 2001: 72e, §217).

Meillassoux’s disavowal of the figurative in favour of a “fully transparent” literality is blatant. His insistence that ‘ancestral statements’ (statements pertaining to arche-fossils) be taken literally – “*an ancestral statement only has sense if its literal sense is also its ultimate sense*” (Meillassoux 2008: 17) – is an immediate consequence of his adherence to the law of excluded middle (which, for Meillassoux’s purposes, seems to be interchangeable with the law of non-contradiction). This becomes obvious from the fact that, according to Meillassoux, in order to answer the question why the correlationist’s ‘non-literal’ interpretation of the scientist’s ancestral statements would be unacceptable, “all we have to do is ask the correlationist the following question: *what is it that happened 4.56 billion years ago? Did the accretion of the earth happen, yes or no?*” (Meillassoux 2008: 16) This forceful insistence on literality qua bivalence, which is crucial to Meillassoux’s argument as a whole and to his portrayal of the correlationist as wavering between a “yes” and “no” as answer to this question in particular,<sup>ix</sup> also serves to mask his own reliance on myth. But which myth?

Apropos of Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Gabriel remarks that scientific positivism, with its disenchanting world of mechanical interactions, “itself creates a new mythology. It betrays the will of creating a world in which the human does not need to take place and it is a way of suppressing the human need for meaning by creating a meaning in disguise in the form of a scientifically justified adoption of utter meaninglessness” (Gabriel 2009: 72-73). This seems to be a particularly apt description of the Speculative Realist ethos that has been taking shape in the last few years since the movement arose. Although Meillassoux is no positivist, a certain scientism is certainly one strong motivation for his project. But even where scientism is lacking, e.g. in Graham Harman’s ‘object-oriented’ version of speculative realism, a hostility to meaning-weaving ‘humanism’ can be discerned as the privative expression of a positive ‘constitutive mythology’ of coldness and homesickness for the dark, inanimate Outside.

In Meillassoux, the hub of this mythology becomes ‘hyper-Chaos’, a virtual un-ground to be imagined – if not conceived – as an inaccessible Time – “a chaos so chaotic that even becoming may arise and perish within it” (Meillassoux 2008: 69).

We should insist with Gabriel that this mythological dimension is not accidental or merely decorative: Meillassoux, like any other philosopher, needs such a mythology as a constellation, or perhaps more of a *collage*, of 'quilting points'. To draw attention to this mythological dimension is not to accuse Meillassoux of failing to offer a fully transparent rationale for his world-view; it is to shift from the logical to the mythological register in order to potentially *deepen* the analysis of that world-view and to be able to relate to it on an existential level.

Consideration of one very important element of Meillassoux's theory reveals an instructive parallel to Gabriel's thematization of the mythological. If hyper-Chaos is indeed the essence of time, then anything can happen or fail to happen for no reason at all as long as it is non-contradictory. This would make the apparent stability of the world that we happen to live in very improbable. Meillassoux's solution is to conceive of the world, in accordance with Cantor's transfinite mathematics, as 'non-totalizable': the stability of the world is then no longer improbable (nor probable), since the very notion of 'probability' only makes sense in relation to a totalizable world, just as one can only calculate the odds of throwing a certain number with a die if it has a finite number of faces. Thus there is nothing inherently surprising about the existence of the laws of nature, as long as we realize that they apply to a limited set of cases and are not themselves governed by higher laws: there are laws, but there is not, ultimately, a Law of laws – there is only hyper-Chaos.

Meillassoux summarizes his position as follows: "I posit that the law can be related to a universe of determinate cases; I posit that there is no Universe of universes of cases; I posit that time can bring forth any non-contradictory set of possibilities" (Meillassoux 2007a: 72). For Meillassoux, then, there is no such thing as 'the world as a whole'. This very thought is also the point of departure of Gabriel's argument for the necessity of mythology: "If to exist is to exist as an object within a domain, i.e. if existence presupposes determinacy, then the domain of all domains cannot exist. Otherwise it would be an object within a domain and therefore it would not be the domain of all domains because we would have formed a higher-order domain of all domains containing the supposed domain of all domains" (Gabriel 2009: 16). But whereas for Gabriel this non-totalizability is epistemological, so that he can conclude that "there is no way to refer to the domain of all domains within ordinary (propositional) language" (Gabriel 2009: 17), reserving this function for the extra-ordinary, non-propositional language of mythology, for Meillassoux non-totality is ontological, i.e. *there really is no domain of all domains*, and no amount of non-propositional language could bring it into being.

This contrast brings out the core of Meillassoux's vision in a way that allows us to map the possibilities for thought in terms of two distinctions, namely that of Totality vs. Non-Totality on the level of presentation (ontology) and that of the propositional vs. the non-propositional on the level of representation (epistemology), so that we end up with four logical options: 1) ontology of Non-Totality coupled to a propositional epistemology (Meillassoux); 2) ontology of Totality coupled to a non-propositional epistemology (Gabriel along with those he enlists, e.g. Wittgenstein, Heidegger); 3) ontology of Totality coupled to a propositional epistemology (Hegel, who has to reconceive of 'propositionality' itself as ultimately contradictory in order to render this option consistent); 4) ontology of Non-Totality coupled to a non-propositional epistemology (this option being the most neglected one and seemingly least attractive for philosophy, since philosophers are presumed to want to ideally preserve both Totality and propositionality, so that giving up one for the other (assuming one rejects the Hegelian option) is perceived to be reasonable, but giving up both for something else altogether seems tantamount to giving up philosophy itself; nevertheless there are philosophers who choose this option, Henri Bergson being arguably the most important example). But this neat quadripartition is haunted by the possibility of a correlationism that suspends judgment about the ontological aspect in part precisely through problematizing the 'sharp' distinction between the propositional and the non-propositional with respect to the epistemological aspect. The non-propositional 'mythology', as a configuration of habits that remains implicit in experience while informing our interpretations of propositions, is a 'form of life', as Wittgenstein called it, which allows us to assess the relative *probability* of these interpretations. Meillassoux's rejection of non-propositional ("non-literal") language, in as far as it is at the same time a rejection of mythology qua form of life, naturally leads to a certain 'disorientation' in that it is also a rejection of any basis for assessing the relative probability of interpretations; but Meillassoux speculatively transposes the resulting flux of interpretations to the ontological level, thereby paradoxically producing the ultimate interpretation by securing the inapplicability of the very notion of 'probability' to the in-itself.<sup>x</sup>

At one point in *After Finitude*, explaining how 'strong correlationism' allows for the most radical diversity of world-views, and having mentioned as one extreme example the thesis, going back to Descartes, of the possibility of a God who would be able to make a contradiction true in the in-itself, Meillassoux invites us to imagine a world that, as it turns out, bears an uncanny resemblance to the world of hyper-Chaos. He explains that

there is a 'nihilist counterpart' to the hypothesis of an all-powerful God, which could also be maintained. It would consist in upholding a thesis that rejects the *second* of Kant's absolute propositions, viz., *that there is* a thing-in-itself beyond our representations. For how would one refute *a priori* the claim that there is nothing beyond phenomena, and that our world is bounded by a nothingness into which every thing could ultimately sink? One could maintain that phenomena have no basis in things-in-themselves, and that all that exists are 'phenomenal realms', which is to say, transcendental subjects, coordinated between themselves but unfolding and 'floating' in the midst of an absolute nothingness into which everything could dissolve once more were the human species to disappear. (Meillassoux 2008: 36)

The fact, overlooked by Meillassoux, that such a world would be indistinguishable from a world in which these phenomenal realms would actually *coincide* with a noumenon (or noumena) in the habit of flashing into and out of existence 'at will' suggests that he has here unwittingly revealed the idealist as his *double*.<sup>xi</sup> The myth of inhuman hyper-Chaos turns out to be *internally* related to a countermyth of cosmic autopoiesis.

It is in Bergson's *Creative Evolution* that we can find a most illuminating disentanglement of concepts associated with these myths. Having established that "[t]he main problem of the theory of knowledge is to know how science is possible, that is to say, in effect, why there is order and not disorder in things" (Bergson 1998: 231), Bergson moves toward a conclusion that, as it were, preemptively recapitulates Meillassoux's, but *with a twist*: "Now, it is unquestionable that all order is contingent, and conceived as such. But contingent in relation to what?" (Bergson 1998: 232) For Meillassoux, order is contingent in relation to hyper-Chaos, which is supposed to be an absolute beyond the distinction between order and disorder. Yet it is of course telling that, despite being beyond that distinction, this absolute is imagined as a hyper-*Chaos*, a hyper-*Disorder*, and not as a hyper-*Order*. If we would now start to compare the 'realist' hypothesis of a hyper-*Disorder* ("necessity of contingency") with the 'idealist' one of a hyper-*Order* (the transcendental subjects "coordinated between themselves"), we would simply be repeating the problem as a conceptual problem on a higher level of abstraction, which would certainly lead to yet another repetition on an even higher level of abstraction etc. It therefore makes more sense to speak of the hypothesis of hyper-Chaos as an instance of mythology: Meillassoux places Chaos 'above' order and disorder as a purely insubstantial yet productive absolute, "something akin to Time" (Meillassoux 2008: 64).

From Bergson's point of view, such a pure productive void is pure nonsense, because for him the concept of 'disorder' is itself empty. 'Disorder' is never thought as a *total* absence of order, but always as the absence of one or the other *kind* of

order, namely the physical/automatic/mechanical order on the one hand and the vital/voluntary/organic order on the other. The idea of a 'pure disorder' or a disorder 'in-itself' is a conceptual illusion that arises from our going back-and-forth in our minds between these two kinds of order; we pass through a kind of conceptual equivalent of the 'blind spot', seeing nothing where in fact there is something. The notion of 'Chaos' is then nothing but a reification of the blankness of the blind spot. Bergson, adopting a pre-conceptual figuration quite different from Meillassoux's, places chaos *between* two kinds of order. And this should now allow us to understand the sense in which the *inconceivability* of the world of hyper-Chaos is confirmed in its *indiscernibility* from the world as posited in the 'nihilistic' hypothesis that Meillassoux believes could only be acceptable from the point of view of 'strong correlationism'. As Bergson explains:

[W]hen we affirm that we are imagining a chaos, that is to say a state of things in which the physical world no longer obeys laws, what are we thinking of? We imagine facts that appear and disappear *capriciously*. First we think of the physical universe as we know it, with effects and causes well-proportioned to each other; then, by a series of arbitrary decrees, we augment, diminish, suppress, so as to obtain what we call disorder. In reality we have substituted *will* for the mechanism of nature; we have replaced the "automatic order" by a multitude of elementary wills, just to the extent that we imagine the apparition or vanishing of phenomena. (Bergson 1998: 233)

And indeed, is there anything that allows us to differentiate the *ex nihilo* from the *causa sui*? Doesn't the abandonment of the principle of sufficient reason amount to a dissolution in the sense of a *redistribution* of power as opposed to an embracement of pure chance? According to Bergson, the notion of 'chance' is just as vacuous as that of 'disorder' since it "merely objectifies the state of mind of one who, expecting one of the two kinds of order, finds himself confronted with the other" (Bergson 1998: 234).

All of this would of course be part of yet another logical/conceptual line of criticism against speculative materialism, but the broader relevance of these remarks lies in the fact that they allow us to see how a constitutive mythology isn't only the unavoidable terminus of rational explanation, but also the source of conceptual production. The pre-givenness of some myth or other facilitates the production of fitting concepts that, exhausted in the confrontation with alternative concepts, always return to the security of their non-discursive origins. The myth of hyper-Chaos is the result, but also, and more fundamentally, the origin of Meillassoux's conceptual apparatus, which allows him to think pure chance, disorder, lawless being. But what, exactly, is the countermyth that allows Bergson to think that one *cannot* think these

things? The obvious answer is that it is the myth of dualism or duality, of the two kinds of order or two 'realms', one real and one not quite so real. The main problem for any version of this myth is how to imagine the relation between the two realms and their associated principles, and usually the solution is to raise one of the principles above the other. The way Bergson deals with this is no exception: spatial mechanism is derived from an essentially temporal vitality. Time, for Bergson, is not an insubstantial void but 'duration': "a change that is substance itself" (Deleuze 2006: 37).

### **Conclusion: The Bergson-Meillassoux relation as parallax gap**

A number of themes both unite and divide Meillassoux and Bergson. Both uphold, against the Kantian legacy, an accessibility of the in-itself through 'intuition'. But whereas for Meillassoux this intuition must be an intellectual intuition, Bergson's intuition is arational and based in a 'sympathy.'<sup>xii</sup> For both, the absolute is Time as virtuality: hyper-Chaos in Meillassoux, duration in Bergson. Hyper-Chaos is the *real* of the necessity of contingency that we intuit in becoming pervaded by a rational disclosure of our own mortality, our destructibility, our contingency – the precarious existence of the very thought process that allows us to conceive of this existence. The intuition of duration, on the contrary, reunites us with an eternal, immortal impulse, the *vital impetus* unfurling constantly in all manifestation, never truly absent, always latent when invisible – even, it is true, in the inanimate. The sharpest divergence concerns Meillassoux's wish to identify the mathematical, or *quantity*, with primary *qualities*, whereas for Bergson it is precisely the qualitative that is primary: mathematizable properties of things are those properties that arise from the correlation between intellection and matter, which are constituted by the same movement. We must see that "intellect and matter have progressively adapted themselves to one another in order to attain at last a common form" (Bergson 1998: 206). For Bergson, this implies an alternative to standard empiricism (according to which 'things' determine the shape of the intellect), as well as to transcendentalism (according to which the intellect determines the shape of things), and also to any theory of pre-established harmony, since the harmony that Bergson himself posits is neither pre-established (it *evolves*, in that matter and intellect are the outer and inner aspects of the 'relaxation' of duration), nor even fully harmonious, since matter can only ever be "on the way to geometry" (Bergson 1998: 218), i.e. its essence consists in a kernel of resistance to being fully dissolved in space, and this is a resistance to

*idealism*, at least in one sense of that term – a sense that, as we have seen, continues to haunt Meillassoux’s speculative *materialism*.

But the significance of the contrast between Meillassoux and Bergson does not, finally, lie in the ‘diametricality’ of the opposition of their conceptual systems. There is a more delicate, less geometrical – or perhaps only less ‘Euclidean’ – relation to be explored, that would exclude the possibility of viewing it as one more example of the perennial divide between philosophies of concreteness and of abstraction, emotion and calculation, etc. This relation becomes interesting when thought in terms of what Žižek calls ‘minimal difference’ – a slight shift of emphasis could allow us to see both of their projects in a new light, referred to a virtual point of intersection that is not above, but beneath their opposition; not a common presupposition, but a common center of gravity. Let us conclude, then, by singling out this point of intersection as the locus of a certain ‘curvature’ of logical space where two mythologies begin to take shape: the speculative realist mythology of cosmic indifference<sup>xiii</sup> on the one hand, and the mythology of creative evolution on the other.

Meillassoux distinguishes three possibilities for thought vis-à-vis the absolute: 1) the absolute is thinkable, but not knowable (Kantianism or ‘weak correlationism’); 2) the absolute is neither thinkable nor knowable (postmodernism or ‘strong correlationism’); 3) the absolute is both thinkable and knowable (this being the formal schema of speculation, idealist or materialist, depending on whether the thinkable and the knowable are fully or only partially identified). Like Donald Rumsfeld, who forgets the “unknown knowns,” Meillassoux fails to mention the fourth logical possibility: *the absolute is unthinkable, yet knowable* – there is a knowing that is not a thinking (but not a ‘fideism’ either). This knowing, the intuition that Bergson differentiates from ‘analysis’, is a knowing that requires thinking, that requires thought, in order to be reached and expressed, but that is not, at its heart, an intellectual operation. What if Meillassoux is too quick to dismiss this fourth possibility? So quick, in fact, that he nowhere mentions it as such.<sup>xiv</sup> What if thinking is indeed, like Meillassoux claims, fundamentally directed toward an outside of thinking, but we, ourselves not ever having been reducible to ‘res cogitans’ in the first place, are not wholly cut off from this outside *qua* outside?, and from our intimate acquaintance with this outside are able to produce a knowing that can transform thinking itself?

At first glance it might seem that Bergson’s notion of intuition is of the kind for which Hegel famously reproached Schelling. A closer look, however, reveals a subtler intertwinement of the Bergsonian and Hegelian conceptions of absolute

knowledge. If we consider that the ontological equivalent of the epistemological distinction between ‘thinking’ and ‘knowing’ is that between ‘possibility’ and ‘reality’ – since what is thinkable apart from knowability is what is conceivable as possibly real (i.e. the realizable or ‘actualizable’), and what is knowable apart from thinkability is the real not qua possible reality, but qua real possibility or what Bergson terms ‘virtuality’ – then it becomes obvious that the ‘knowability-without-thinkability’ of Bergsonian intuition is not simply in excess of the ‘thinkability-without-remainder’ of Hegelian *Aufhebung*. Rather, the very genesis of intuitive knowledge can, as it were from the outside, be reconstructed as a movement of two moments of merely ‘abstract’ thought cancelling each other out in a determinate negation.<sup>xv</sup> What this achieves is not a static, unilinear synthesis of opposites, but a dynamic ‘retrojection’, the “positing of the presuppositions” that Žižek at one point in *The Parallax View* illustrates precisely with reference to Bergson, quoting as follows from his *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*:

I never pretended that one can insert reality into the past and thus work backwards in time. However, one can without any doubt insert there the possible, or, rather, at every moment the possible inserts itself there. Insofar as unpredictable and new reality creates itself, its image reflects itself behind itself in the indefinite past: this new reality finds itself all the time having been possible; but it is only at the precise moment of its actual emergence that it *begins always to have been*, and this is why I say that its possibility, which does not precede its reality, will have preceded it once this reality emerges. (As quoted in Žižek 2006: 202)

Whether we conceive of it as actualization out of the virtual or as the *Aufhebung* of immediacy in the Concept, what both Hegel and Bergson attempt, and is lacking in Meillassoux, is a theory of individuation accounting for the mutual implication of subject and event – the former in the broad sense encompassing *Geist* as well as *élan vital*, the latter in the specific sense of the occurrence of novelty.

Žižek’s most severe criticism of Meillassoux, that of his inability to account for the genesis of subjectivity, ties in to the question of mythology at precisely this point. If we must concede that Meillassoux is right when he says that “the rivalry between the metaphysics of Life and the metaphysics of Mind masks an underlying agreement which both have inherited from transcendentalism – anything that is totally a-subjective cannot be” (Meillassoux 2008: 38), we must also ask ourselves whether the Meillassouxian myth of hyper-Chaos is a strong enough addition to the mythology of cosmic indifference to allow it to replace the mythology handed down to us by the likes of Hegel and Bergson. As we have tried to argue, Žižek’s



dialecticization of the principle of factuality opens a line of thought that clearly suggests that it is not.

At the end of his most sustained engagement with Meillassoux's work to date, Žižek challenges the latter's portrayal of correlationist 'retrojection'<sup>xvi</sup> as a willful ambiguity in the face of the 'rational' demand for bivalent literality. As we recall, Meillassoux's paradigmatic question to the correlationist is: "Did the accretion of the earth happen, *yes or no?*" (Meillassoux 2008: 16) Žižek is certainly as hesitant as any correlationist would be to fall for Meillassoux's literalist rhetoric:

So, to repeat Meillassoux's fossil question in the most direct way: is a dinosaur fossil proof that dinosaurs existed on Earth independently of any human observer, whether empirical or transcendental? If we can imagine transposing ourselves into the pre-historical past, would we encounter dinosaurs the way we reconstruct them today? Before rushing to an answer, we should remember how relative "external reality" is with regard to our point of view, which does not mean that we "created" it, but that out of the infinite complexity of the Real-in-itself a part or slice of reality was selected as correlative to our perceptual apparatus. (Žižek 2012: 647)

It is no coincidence that this insight, which is the end-point of a 'Lacano-Hegelian' argument in Žižek, is also the point of departure for Bergson's entire philosophy.<sup>xvii</sup> If intuition is what allows us "*to go back up the path that science descends*" (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 140), then we should perhaps not be so surprised to discover, having once reached the summit, that the spirit is a dinosaur bone.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> See Meillassoux 2008, 24-26.

<sup>ii</sup> For a discussion of the relation between necessity and contingency in Meillassoux and Hegel that focuses on their different views on the nature of mathematics and proof, see Van Houdt, 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> It should be noted here that the implied portrayal of the scientist is of course itself not obviously accurate. Physicists, having been confronted with the paradoxes of quantum mechanics, aren't usually naïve realists. Thus Werner Heisenberg, as one prominent example, in his *Physics and Philosophy* writes that in research in atomic physics "the measuring device has been constructed by the observer, and we have to remember that what we observe is not nature itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning" (Heisenberg 2000: 25). A more recent and equally prominent example would be Stephen Hawking, who in *The Grand Design*, despite declaring philosophy to be dead on its opening page, proceeds to reinvent Kantianism under the name of "model-dependent realism" (see Hawking and Mlodinow 2010: 39-59). Even if Alan Sokal made a valid point with his famous hoax, showing how it is all too easy for pretentious anti-realists to convince themselves or each other that they have science on their side by showing that science itself generates uncertainty, wave-particle duality, quantum entanglement etc., it is just as easy for someone who is simply not interested in metaphysics to dismiss the very idea that, for example, the variety of interpretations of the paradoxes of quantum mechanics bears interesting similarities to the variety of possible metaphysical positions. That the paradoxes of physics have nothing to do with those of metaphysics is a thesis that can be upheld as long as it is recognized that this thesis itself must have metaphysical implications. Although Meillassoux's argument against correlationism does not logically depend on it, his invocation of the common-sensical realist scientist does seem to play the role of endowing his case with a prima facie plausibility that it doesn't have.

<sup>iv</sup> This being Meillassoux's lecture from the now famous Speculative Realism conference held at Goldsmiths College on April 27<sup>th</sup> 2007. The term 'speculative realism' was coined by Ray Brassier as a designation of what, at the time, seemed to be the feature held in common by his work and that of Quentin Meillassoux as well as Iain Hamilton Grant

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and Graham Harman. Brassier has since distanced himself from the term and various developments associated with it.

<sup>v</sup> See Moshe, 2011.

<sup>vi</sup> Meillassoux, being a pupil of Badiou, is a thinker of the 'matheme': in the very opening lines of *After Finitude*, he announces his intention to rehabilitate the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and to conceive the former in terms of mathematizability. If the mathematizable Real is to be material, the problem becomes how to avoid Pythagoreanism. Badiou, it seems, has solved the problem by declaring his philosophy to be a "Platonism of the multiple". He therefore displays appropriate consistency when, asked about "the general relation between [his] mathematical ontology and the nature of material reality in general," he answers in part as follows:

To the extent that we abstract the 'that which is presented' in the diversity of situations, to consider the presentation of presentation itself – that is to say, in the end, pure multiplicity – then the real and the possible are rendered necessarily indistinct. What I call ontology is the generic form of presentation as such, considered independently of the question as to whether what is presented is real or possible. It is the reason why people have always debated the status of mathematical idealities, the status of their reality. Are they real, do they exist somewhere, are they merely possible, are they linguistic products...? I think we have to abandon these questions, simply because it is of the essence of ontology, as I conceive it, to be beneath the distinction between the real and the possible. (Badiou 2002: 127-128)

But in the same interview Badiou rather slyly reclaims matter for his variant of Platonism by stating:

...I am a materialist in the sense that I think any presentation is material. If we consider the word 'matter', the content of the word 'matter', matter comes immediately after being. It is the degree of generality immediately co-present to ontology. The physical situation will then be a very powerfully mathematized situation, and in a certain sense, more and more so the closer it comes to apprehending the smallest, most primordial elements of reality. (Badiou 2002: 130-131)

Such an asymptotic corpuscularism – if we may coin a term to describe Badiou's position here – is not a philosophical materialism, since it still implies that, at the unreachable limit, matter itself would dissolve into pure mathematics, pure ideality, hence presumably into pure *necessity*, whereas matter is the agent of contingency. The question of the legitimacy of Meillassoux's claim to 'materialism', then, hinges on whether his own mathematization of the Real breaks loose from Badiou's mathematical ontology. To the extent that it does, Fabio Gironi's concise formulation of Meillassoux's relation to Badiou is quite accurate: "Meillassoux's mathematical ontology replaces Badiou's still too axiomatically necessitarian Void with the anarchic capriciousness of hyper-Chaos" (Gironi 2011: 39).

<sup>vii</sup> "If we maintain that becoming is not only capable of bringing forth cases on the basis of a pre-given universe of cases, we must then understand that it follows that such cases erupt, properly speaking, *from nothing*, since no structure contains them as eternal potentialities before their emergence: *we thus make irruption ex nihilo the very concept of a temporality delivered to its pure immanence*." (Meillassoux 2007a: 72) Meillassoux distinguishes four cases of 'advent' ['surgissement'] ex nihilo: the advent of Matter, that of Life, that of Thought, and finally the advent yet to come, that of Justice. For a discussion of the notion of 'advent', see Harman 2011: 92-97.

<sup>viii</sup> According to Meillassoux, Žižek and Badiou are in the same boat. In an interview with Graham Harman he states that he is opposed to the point of view "of Žižek, and perhaps also that of Badiou, which would consist at bottom in making of materialism a 'misfired correlationism'," noting that "in fact, such misfires are only further correlations among others: it is always *for* a subject that there is an undecidable event or a failure of signification" (Meillassoux 2011: 166). Asked specifically about his relation to Badiou, Meillassoux interestingly – especially so in the light of Badiou's Preface to *After Finitude* – reports as follows: "Badiou sent me a letter in which he clearly distinguished our major point of divergence: I believe in a necessity of contingency, while he upholds a contingency of necessity" (Meillassoux 2011: 169).

<sup>ix</sup> "In one sense, yes, the correlationist will reply, because the scientific statements pointing to such an event are objective, in other words, intersubjectively verifiable. But in another sense, no, he will go on, because the referent of such statements cannot have existed in the way in which it is naively described, i.e. as non-correlated with a consciousness." (Meillassoux 2008: 16)

<sup>x</sup> Given its outlandish consequences, however, especially the *theological* consequences that Meillassoux himself wants to attach to this view, we may be forgiven for suspecting that the same consideration applies to Meillassoux's non-probabilistic conclusion as the one that Gabriel imparts to us in relation to the premise of the arche-fossil:

Scientism requires an inconsistent, because indeterminate view from nowhere. This is why Thomas Nagel's classic diagnosis still holds: to be human is to oscillate between the subjective and the objective, between the world *sub specie humanitatis* and the world in so far as it is not of our own making. But there is no straightforward way of transcending discourse. In other words: the domain we refer to as the objective is itself the objective *sub specie humanitatis*. Ancestral statements are no exception. They serve the goal of designing a world without mythology. Yet, the recourse to ancestry is only appealing because it responds to the mythological consciousness. As Cavell notes, 'myths generally deal with origins that no one can have been present at,' that is, with ancestral statements. Hence, ancestry is downright mythological. (Gabriel 2009: 88-89)

<sup>xi</sup> As Badiou writes in *The definition of philosophy*:

Every philosophical process is polarized by a specific adversary, the sophist. The sophist is externally (or discursively) indiscernible from the philosopher, since his operation also combines fictions of knowledge and fictions of art. Subjectively, the two are opposed, because the sophist's linguistic strategy aims at doing without any positive assertion concerning truths. In this sense, we can also define philosophy as the act by which indiscernible discourses are nevertheless opposed, or rather as what separates itself from its double. Philosophy is always the breaking of a mirror. This mirror is the surface of language, upon which the sophist

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places everything which philosophy deals with in its act. If the philosopher would contemplate himself upon this surface alone, then he will see his double, the sophist, emerge there, and thereby he could take the latter for himself. (Badiou 2005: 125-126)

It seems obvious that, for Meillassoux, it is the 'correlationist' who is in fact the modern incarnation of the sophist, placing everything upon the surface of language as he does, thereby absolving himself of the properly *philosophical* task of making a positive assertion concerning the absolute. Meillassoux glosses Badiou's insight in *After Finitude* – "Philosophy is the invention of strange forms of argumentation, necessarily bordering on sophistry, which remains its dark structural double" (Meillassoux 2008: 76) – but does not realize that the mirror in his own philosophical edifice is hidden precisely where nihilism and idealism overlap, and that the breaking of this mirror, in which the speculative materialist sees the correlationist, would require a crack to appear between the image of the nihilist and that of the idealist. In other words, it seems that Meillassoux wants desperately to differentiate his materialist position from nihilism, and that therefore he has had to find a way of associating nihilism with idealism rather than with materialism; but this association is itself the result of a sophism, so that, with this move, Meillassoux approaches his mirror image – the correlationist – most closely. Meillassoux's rationalism, consistently pursued, should lead to nihilism.

<sup>xii</sup> "[A]n absolute can only be given in an *intuition*, while all the rest has to do with *analysis*. We call intuition here the *sympathy* by which one is transposed into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it." (Bergson 2007: 135)

<sup>xiii</sup> A certain romanticization (which tends to lead to mythologization) of indifference is evident in passages such as these: "Everything could actually collapse: from trees to stars, from stars to laws, from physical laws to logical laws; and this not by virtue of some superior law whereby everything is destined to perish, but by virtue of the absence of any superior law capable of preserving anything, no matter what, from perishing" (Meillassoux 2008: 53). With the perishing star as its emblem, speculative materialism would seem to find its natural anthem in W.H. Auden's poem "The More Loving One," the final stanza of which reads:

Were all stars to disappear or die,  
I should learn to look at an empty sky  
And feel its total dark sublime,  
Though this might take me a little time.

(Auden 1960: unpaginated)

It is also possible, however, to discern this sublime darkness in the here-and-now, at the heart of *objects*. This is the aim of Graham Harman's version of speculative realism, 'object-oriented philosophy', which posits 'weirdness' as an irreducible and inexhaustible core particular to 'objects' in the widest possible sense. Unlike Meillassoux, Harman does not shrink back from affirming the mythological dimension of rational inquiry. In fact, he embraces the mythology created by weird fiction author H.P. Lovecraft as a suitable imaginative framework for philosophy, going as far as to claim that "Great Cthulhu should replace Minerva as patron spirit of philosophers" (Harman 2008: 336). Unsurprisingly, the dead star reappears in Michel Houellebecq's description of Lovecraft's own 'philosophy' that is often identified as 'cosmicism':

The universe is nothing but a furtive arrangement of elementary particles. A figure in transition toward chaos. That is what will finally prevail. The human race will disappear. Other races in turn will appear and disappear. The skies will be glacial and empty, traversed by the feeble light of half-dead stars. These too will disappear. Everything will disappear. And human actions are as free and as stripped of meaning as the unfettered movements of the elementary particles. (Houellebecq 2005: 32)

One might say that Ray Brassier, in his *Nihil Unbound*, manages to reappropriate the cosmicist mythology for philosophy in the strict sense by dragging it out into the open, transforming the emblem from a dark mytheme into the fatal *and* mortal source of the light of reason. Drawing inspiration from Nietzsche and Lyotard, Brassier seeks to replace Meillassoux's 'anteriority' with a 'posteriority' undermining every possibility of giving death the vital significance it has for correlationism:

[I]f the extinction of the sun is catastrophic, this is because it *disarticulates* the correlation. Unlike the model of death which, at least since Hegel, has functioned as the motor of philosophical speculation, it does not constitute an internal limit for thought, providing the necessary spur for thought to overstep its own bounds and thereby incorporating what was supposed to be exterior to it. Thought is perfectly capable of transcending the limits it has posited for itself. But the extinction of the sun is not a limit *of* or *for* thought. In this regard, it annuls the relationship to death from which philosophical thought drew sustenance. (Brassier 2007: 224-225)

Brassier pits nihilism against vitalism in a way that shifts from a horizontal opposition between two philosophies, each with its own mythology, to a vertical opposition between philosophy and mythology as such, the first finding its inevitable expression in the very undoing of expression that is nihilism, the second being the form of life that comes to expression in every vitalism.

It's no wonder that the most elusive figure associated with speculative realism, Iain Hamilton Grant, seems not to fit the pattern. His form of realism, to start with, is an idealism:

I think basically there are grounds to assume that idealism is realism about nature coupled with realism about an Idea. In terms of the situation in which we find ourselves today, my question really is: does this or does this not, as it seemed to at the turn of the nineteenth century, provide an exit from the strictures of Kantianism? Clearly, I think it does, and it does so by denying that interiority plays any role whatsoever. The Idea is external to the thought that has it, the thought is external to the thinker that has it, the thinker is

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external to the nature that produces both the thinker and the thought and the Idea. (Hamilton Grant 2007: 338-339)

In reviving Schelling's 'speculative physics' Hamilton Grant seems less preoccupied with the pertinence, mythological or otherwise, of the possibility of annihilation to thought than with re-envisioning autopoiesis as a "chemistry of darkness", subjecting the exhumed corpse of the star to new necromantic procedures, rerouting the creative flows of vitalism in the direction of a short-circuited transcendentalism. Although the abyss is never far, then, Hamilton Grant's work does do something to complicate the perhaps too simplistic dichotomy of the two myths, cosmic indifference vs. creative evolution.

<sup>xiv</sup> Which is not to say, of course, that Meillassoux is unaware of Bergson's unique contribution to philosophy – on the contrary; he acknowledges Bergson as a formative influence, stating that "[w]ith his intuition of *durée*, [Bergson] proposes the most powerful thought on creation that has ever been produced" (Meillassoux 2011: 171). Bergson's interest for Meillassoux is also on display in his 2007 essay 'Subtraction and Contraction: Deleuze's Remarks on *Matter and Memory*' (published in *Collapse III*: 63-108), much admired by Graham Harman, who has described its content as "compellingly strange" (Harman 2011: 66). In it, Meillassoux is apparently not concerned to expound his own views, but attempts, rather ingeniously, to reconstruct a Deleuzian philosophy of immanence from the first chapter of *Matter and Memory* starting from the fictive premise of a Deleuze whose work is lost to posterity but for a few enigmatic fragments, as in the case of the Presocratics.

<sup>xv</sup> This is a suggestion that, in another form, we find in Deleuze's reading of Bergson, although his concern is of course to distance the latter as far as possible from Hegel: "The originality of Bergson's conception resides in showing that internal difference does not go, and is not required to go as far as contradiction, alterity, and negativity, because these three notions are in fact less profound than itself, *or they are viewpoints only from the outside*. The real sense of Bergson's endeavor is thinking internal difference as such, as pure internal difference, and raising difference up to the absolute." (Deleuze 2004: 39, emphasis added)

<sup>xvi</sup> "[F]or the correlationist, in order to grasp the profound meaning of the fossil datum, one should not proceed from the ancestral past, but from the correlational present. This means that we have to carry out a *retrojection of the past on the basis of the present*. What is given to us, in effect, is not something that is anterior to givenness, but merely something that is given in the present but gives itself as anterior to givenness." (Meillassoux 2008: 16) As we have seen, the Bergsonian version of retrojection complicates this picture, since, firstly, it is a retrojection not of reality, but of possibility, and, secondly, the 'anteriority' of the past as virtuality (or possibility under its dynamic aspect) does not in reality 'lag behind' the present: what occurs is a bifurcation of the past and the present, such that the present is just as much always already past (as the maximally contracted past, the tip of the inverted cone in Bergson's famous diagram touching the plane) as the past is itself present. When Meillassoux demands that anteriority be thought 'literally', in accordance with a principle of bivalence that would make nonsense of the idea that the past is in some sense contemporaneous with the present, he clearly makes a choice to spatialize time. Although Meillassoux would certainly agree with Bergson that the concept of difference, or change, does not imply contradiction, Meillassoux's argument to the effect that it implies non-contradiction (for which see Meillassoux 2008: 69-71) would presumably be considered by Bergson to be just as external to time grasped intuitively as movement as dialectics is. In this regard, the Bergsonian view would seem to draw curiously near to Martin Hägglund's Derridean critique of Meillassoux (for which see Hägglund 2011), which focuses not only on the spatialization of time, but also on the temporalization of space, as equally necessary to the logic of the 'trace' – which, however, is of course inimical to Bergson's thinking in terms of duration as intuitable plenum.

<sup>xvii</sup> "The history of the evolution of life, incomplete as it yet is, already reveals to us how the intellect has been formed, by an uninterrupted progress, along a line which ascends through the vertebrate series up to man. It shows us in the faculty of understanding an appendage of the faculty of acting, a more and more precise, more and more complex and supple adaptation of the consciousness of living beings to the conditions of existence that are made for them." (Bergson 1998: ix)

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