

Absolute Xenogenesis: Speculations on an Unnatural History of Life

Eckardt Lindner

It must not be supposed that atoms of every sort can be linked in every variety of combination. If that were so, you would see monsters coming into being everywhere. Hybrid growths of man and beast would arise. Lofty branches would spread here and there from a living body. Limbs of land-beast and sea-beast would often be conjoined. Chimeras breathing flame from hideous jaws would be reared by nature throughout the all-generating earth.

— Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*¹

1. Dreams of the Noumenal Horror of Life

When Kant was still a young man he was haunted by nightmares, not of reason and its unrestrained (mis-)adventures but of a more existential nature. His *Anthropology* contains some of the most private moments in his oeuvre, in which he recounts a

¹ Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R.E. Latham (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 80.

dream that he “had fallen into the water and was being turned around, coming close to drowning.”² However petrifying, Kant finds the homeostatic function even in such terror, insofar as it serves to animate the flow of blood, putting even the *incubus* in the service of the proliferation of life—dreaming prevents the identity of sleep and death. Dreams are first and foremost a shock to the system. While vital, potentially even a condition for corporeal being, dreams have no place in critical philosophy—how would one conceive of sleep as transcendental? Though dreams are constituted by spatiotemporal collapses and categorial breakdowns—“we are [...] transported back to long vanished time,” we “speak with people long since dead”—the *Anthropology* rejects dreams not due to the possible confusion on grounds of judgment, subjective or objective, as the *Critique of Pure Reason* has it but for the privacy of their contents. There is no intersubjective dream-space.³ We can assume that the *Anthropology*’s argument cements the first *Critique*’s one.

With the *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, the discussion of the philosophical merit of dreams encounters the question of life as after-life, as claimed by Swedenborg, who indeed claimed to be in contact with the dead. To communicate with the deceased, we would have to assume a “primitive force” which animates the body while living and exists independently of this body as a separate entity after death, while still being able to interact with the living through communication. Kant’s text is not so much concerned with the claim of the existence of these entities but is rather concerned with finding a method for legitimizing or disposing of them. We should acknowledge Kant’s outright rejection of the psychological solutions, either the Spirit-Seers are simply liars or plainly insane, as a genuine philosophical gesture, a gesture of trying to ensure the unity of his own account of experience by viewing these deceptions as irregular cases of

2 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from the Pragmatic Point of View*, ed. and trans. Robert B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 83.

3 *Ibid.*

the regular operations of a faculty. The problem of seeing spirits is first and foremost a spatial one. Our perception involves the apperception of the location of objects, real or imaginary.⁴ While in the case of the sensation of external objects, the lines of our impression meet outside the brain, fantasies are produced by the lines of impression meeting inside it. Therefore, we perceive the location of the object more or less clearly as a *focus imaginarius*. Being deceived by the illusion of seeing spirits could consequently be explained by a failure in registering the *focus imaginarius* correctly and mistaking a fantasy as an external object. Most likely such a mistake could be explained by a disturbance in the functional apparatus of the brain, Kant assumes.⁵ However, such an explanation does not yet touch on the problem *de jure*. Even if the insanity of Swedenborg is conceived as a physical dysfunction, observing the “vibrations” within the brain does not give any indication of the legitimacy of the claims they supposedly prove or, in other words, no difference in kind (sane/insane) can be inferred from the differences in degree (vibration₁, vibration₂, vibration_n). The Spirit-Seers are however not the only ones dreaming up the existence of immaterial entities; eighteenth century philosophy is haunted by “souls,” “obscure qualities,” or “spirits” — metaphysical specters.

But rather than locating the *focus imaginarius* incorrectly, the metaphysician lets the lines of reason and experience “run alongside each other into infinity without ever meeting.”⁶ So, the problem “of beginning I don’t know where, and of coming I don’t know whither” seems to involve a peculiar kind of kinship between the two types of dreams.⁷ In fact, Kant is not sure what the difference is, though he maintains that one cannot deduce the origin of one kind of dream from the other. But even more than that, they might be complementary, insofar as Kant’s accusation against the Spirit-Seers changes in the course

4 Immanuel Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, ed. Frank Sewall, trans. Emmanuel F. Goerwitz (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1900), 78.

5 *Ibid.*, 80.

6 *Ibid.*, 90.

7 *Ibid.*

of the text, to an illusion being an invention of reason, which subsequently gets substantiated by false impressions. If, on the one hand, Swedenborg becomes a philosopher by proposing an intelligibility of the soul on the basis of his experiences, then philosophers can become Spirit-Seers when they furnish their concepts based on reason with experiences by virtue of their academic craft. Both, in their own way, seem haunted as well as vitalized by an internal relation of reason to madness.⁸ In Swedenborg, Kant discovers a *doppelgänger*, a “twin.”⁹ The affliction that seems to produce false images, both in the “Reason-dreamer” and the “Sensation-dreamer,” is therefore not located in the senses themselves, but in the inability to make them an object to a judgment that would allow for a distinction between sensation proper and fantasy. The principles of such a judgment can neither be supplied by the understanding, nor by reason. The understanding has no principles a priori with which to supply the faculty of judgment. And reason cannot remedy the cause of the illusion — the misinterpretation of the *focus imaginarius* — since it is not the result of a logical mistake. One cannot reason away an impression.

Faced with the dreams of the metaphysician, Kant returns to his own definition of life as the “inner capacity to determine one’s self by one’s own will power.”¹⁰ If, however, the matter that fills space is incapable of such autonomy, life must be immaterial. The consequence of such a characterization is that we have no “data” to classify this principle positively and must therefore resort to categorizing it negatively. But even these negations cannot be grounded in experience, or conclusions, but can only be constructed “upon invention, to which a reason deprived of all other expedients finally resorts.”¹¹ Life, it seems, insofar

8 Cf. Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure: Kant lecture de Swedenborg* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J.Vrin, 1990), 84.

9 Friedemann Stengel, “Kant — ‘Zwillingsbruder’ Schwedenborgs?” in *Kant und Swedenborg: Zugänge zu Einem Umstrittenen Verhältnis*, ed. Friedemann Stengel (Tübingen: May Niemayer, 2008), 35.

10 Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, 53.

11 *Ibid.*, 89.

as it can be thought, cannot be experienced, and thereby the thought itself becomes an invention or fabrication of reason. Life becomes a problem not only within philosophy, but for philosophy itself, insofar as life is a condition for thought. It indeed becomes Kant's pre-critical threshold, as it introduces the asymmetry between what can be thought and what can be known.

The *aporia* presented can, according to Kant, only be resolved by resorting to a "trick." In the same way that the transgressions against civil law by a merchant can only be detected by switching the places of weights and goods, we too must change the weighting on the "scales of reason [*Verstandeswage*]." ¹² Thus, any judgment should not be judged by one's own reason by itself, but as if the reason of another would do it. Therefore, we have to use the inventions of reason as "*fictio heuristica*," ¹³ to then be judged (or treated as if they were judged) by another member of the "community of spirits." ¹⁴

The split between the sensible and the intelligible as the main methodological operation of the Dissertation functions as a transformation of the scale, with reason as the ultimate counterbalance to its own misadventures, without having to rely on private evidence only. All concepts of life trying to establish continuity between the material and the formal, such as hylozoism, must thereby be expelled *a priori*, since claiming that matter possesses the capacity to organize itself or give itself a unified form is tantamount to proposing that it gives itself its own law. Without the universality of the law as a generalizable counterweight, nothing would legitimize the distinction between the knowable and the thinkable in such a hylozoic cosmos. If being and thinking were identical, there would be nothing, *absolutely* nothing, shielding one from the allure of leaving the shores of reason and venturing into the sea of speculation, only to lose one's mind over the impossibility of navigation.

¹² Ibid., 85.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, "Brief an Moses Mendelssohn 8. April," in *Briefwechsel* (Berlin: Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1922), 71.

¹⁴ Kant, *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*, 53.

The *Critique of the Power of Judgment* returns to the question of life, relating it to purposiveness to determine it positively. In aesthetic and teleological common sense, the harmony of man and nature is given externally and internally, respectively. As such, we can only understand the purposiveness of organized beings in analogy to our purposes, by ultimately relating both to the whole of nature, whose teleological organization implies a divine creator, although a non-existent one.¹⁵ This is true both for the speculative interest, insofar as the solution of the antinomy of the teleological judgment relies on the assumption of an intuitive understanding, and for practical reason, since the ends of nature can only be understood as the self-realization of freedom in nature. In Kant's genetic, or quasi-genetic, account of the striving for reason's unity towards organicity in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, such a conation legitimizes itself through the *life*, liveliness, or animation of the mind (*Gemüt*) in the reflective judgment in aesthetics. To understand the role of the "feeling of life" (*Lebensgefühl*), which is a feeling of "the powers of the mind reciprocally promoting each other," we first have to consider the role of the feeling of pleasure and displeasure in the systematic approach of the third *Critique*.¹⁶ Reflective judgment should be understood as performing a function or action by "means of which it strives to rise from intuitions to concepts in general."¹⁷ It operates, since it lacks the "directions" commonly provided in determinative judgments by the understanding, by obtaining or creating its directions based on the dynamic interplay of the faculties. Since the unity of the systematic whole of nature and freedom must present itself as finality, the register of the faculty of reflective judgment is that of ends, while for reason it is freedom, and for understanding, the cognition of the object. Such an animating principle is able

15 Cf. Peter McLaughlin, *Kant's Critique of Teleology in Biological Explanation: Antinomy and Teleology* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 170.

16 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 230–31.

17 *Ibid.*, 249.

to give credence to Kant's introduction of "spirit" as mind's animating principle in §49. If one only understands the function of reflective judgment in its schematic role as the manufacturing of accord in determinative knowledge, its motivation *and* spirit's introduction would not be plausible. Rather, reason has the inner drive to attain a "maximum," meaning unity or the unconditioned. In the reflective judgment then, imagination strives to emulate or mimic the "precedent of reason in attaining to a maximum."¹⁸ The endeavor of organic unity in reflective judgment must be understood as a (almost Spinozist) conatus to obtain more being by striving, gesturing, or grasping towards the unconditioned. Neither such a striving nor the emulation of the imagination could be understood without the function of pleasure as elaborated above. The pre-logical function of reflective judgment therefore functions as a "metabolic filter of the psychic system," converting everything heterogenous into digestible elements, while simultaneously affirming and recreating the homeostasis of cognition.¹⁹ The form of judgment thus serves as the uniting copula of freedom and nature; it becomes the Judgment of God.

The relation of God to His judgment changes in Kant's turn to the categorical as the essence of the *Critiques*, as Beaufret notes.²⁰ Rather than the Law following from the Good, in Kant, the Good follows from the Law as "a pure form that has no object, whether sensible or intelligible. It does not tell us what we must do, but what subjective rules we must obey no matter what our action."²¹ As such, the final verdict is infinitely deferred and replaced with preliminary judgments only referring to ends; or,

18 Ibid., 314.

19 Louis Schreel, "Idea and Animation: A Study of the Immanent Sublime in Deleuze's *Metaphysics*," PhD diss., University of Antwerp, 2017, 404.

20 Jean Beaufret, "Précédé de Hölderlin et Sophocle," in *Remarques sur Oedipe/Remarques sur Antigone*, ed. Jean Beaufret, trans. François Fédier (Paris: Union générale éditions, 1965), 16.

21 Gilles Deleuze, "On Four Formulas," in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 32.

equally, since there is no final verdict, every day is judgment day in the infinite application of the Law. This inverts the divine immortality, since “it distills a ‘slow death,’ and continuously *defers the judgment of the Law*.”²² As in Kafka, one is always before the Law. Nietzsche has already described the genealogy of judgment in his “doctrine of judgment” in the *Antichrist*, beginning with the creditor/debtor relation without the use of judgment expressed in the painful extraction of debt in tribal rites. Debt, however, shifts to the gods as creators and rulers, so that “the gods give lots to men, and that men, depending on their lots, are fit for some particular form, for some particular organic *end*.”²³ In a last twist, Christianity again dispenses with the prefigured lots for men, save for our judgment itself, and hence transfigures the individual into a self-judge, which in turn, as Foucault has shown, becomes the principle for the individuation of the sinful subject. Such infinite deference is the form of the judgment in Kant.

This uniting function of judgment is operative in Kant’s judgment of God as a disjunctive syllogism. The reality of a thing is produced by the limitation of possibilities and, hence, the negation of all others. The disjunctive syllogism, “either-or,” works exclusively, producing everything as what it is and excluding from it what it is not, subjecting everything to the identity in and of the concept. God restricts disjunction only to a “*negative and limitative use*,”²⁴ which in turn relies on the integrity and self-identity of the body as an internally organized being, realizing and reproducing only what it is. It is, however, not the assumption of God as “the sum total of all possibilities” that makes the restricted use of the disjunctive syllogism necessary but the form of the judgment that instates God as such a modal totality.

22 Ibid., 33.

23 Gilles Deleuze, “To Have Done with Judgment,” in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 128.

24 Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 296.

Thinking life through the divine, Kant follows the *vestigium* of God, as Bonaventure has it, His “mark” in creation. The reading of the *liber creature* then depends on the interpretation of the relation of creator and creature, either as continuous or as radical discontinuity, either as pure relation or as no relation, univocal or equivocal. While the former is riddled with indissoluble darkness (Meister Eckhart, Henry of Ghent), the latter levels all differences between nature and God (Duns Scotus). Either there is no possible knowledge of the divine or everything is divine: neither constitute proper knowledge. Considering the problems of these solutions in regard to the question of the name of the divine, Aquinas mediates between them through analogy. Hence, as Thacker writes, “[t]he creature is the life that is less-than-divine, the Creator is the life that is more-than-the-living.”²⁵ The relation of Life and the living can therefore only be determined through the living, or, by the given. Since Kant’s model of judgment establishes an analogical relation between the transcendental and the empirical, while the former conditions the latter, the former becomes a copy of what it conditions. For Kant, the transcendental life can only be determined through the empirical, establishing the transcendental-empirical double.

The deference of the final judgment of God, through which everything is integrated retroactively, leaves a space of indetermination, while the middle position of the analogy again invites the problems of univocity and equivocality when considering the equally analogous relation of the phenomenal and the noumenal. Together, they do not only indicate but create the horror of anonymity.

Whether one subscribes to the two-worlds or two-aspects interpretation of transcendental philosophy’s phenomenal/noumenal split hardly matters for exploring the sphere that the split as such opens. One should be keenly aware of the horror of the noumenal, which prompts Kant’s anti-Spinozism. As the *Critique of Practical Reason* has it, if man had full access to the

25 Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy, Volume I* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2001), 119.

Ding-an-sich, then he would lose all autonomy and spontaneity and hence, “[t]he conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it is now, would be changed into mere mechanism, where, as in a puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures.”²⁶ The possibility of diverging from the real causes is the positive condition of freedom. At the same time, duty exerts an uncanny violence in demanding from us the overcoming of *all* pathological subjective grounds of desire (*Triebfedern*), which includes our desire to survive. Such a command does not call for self-destruction, but for the suspension of life and death altogether as a possible horizon for moral action. Insofar as such a suspension must be made to will itself, the care for life must be introduced artificially later on. As such, duty — the call of the noumenal — presents itself as an unconditional command beyond life and death, beyond any possible negation. In short, it presents itself as the death drive, denaturalizing life, understood as surviving. The God of the judgment as disjunctive syllogism is not only the God of synthesis, but also of boundaries. Therefore, analogy serves as the paradoxical instance of a mediator between reality and appearance. At the same time, it must separate them, for in their identity transcendental freedom would be impossible. In insomnia, boredom, or loneliness, however, the anonymous real presents itself as pure, impersonal existence; a “there is,” leveling the boundaries. And, as Levinas remarks, “[t]he rustling of the there is [...] is horror.”²⁷ The terrifying thing is not that we might be wrong about what we think about the world, but that we might be right. For Kant, to be alive, man must be protected from the cosmos, the absolute of reality, and this turn away from infinity must be turned into a constitutive condition of finite subjectivity. Speculation is the name of the danger of plunging man back into the madness of the Real, which is not life, but death.

26 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1956), 153.

27 Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), 55.

2. Being a Puppet

While both ghosts and dreams haunt eighteenth century philosophy, the “forced, artful, contrived, and violent study of depths” has its roots in the emerging fields of anatomy and dissection.²⁸ The *écorchés*, flayed skeletons, were used by anatomists as well as artists to ensure the resemblance of the artifice (e.g., a replica, drawing, or statue) to the original structure, and to create a liveliness not achievable through imagination. As such, they were usually displayed in poses imitating autonomous motion. Contrary to the “natural anatomy” of the early modern era, in which cadavers were used as primary objects of study, the “artificial anatomies” common since the Renaissance, but which blossomed during the eighteenth century, used mostly wax models, yielding several didactic advantages. This allowed for a selective and distorting gaze, idealizing bodies for display and categorization, as well as enlarging certain parts for better visibility. As the anatomist Vicq d’Azyr noticed, such replicas, imitating life, have an aesthetic benefit as well, since anatomy is concerned with bodies “devoid of the charm that attracts, but in addition it is accompanied by circumstances that repulse: Torn and bloody members, infections and unhealthy odors, the ghastly machinery of death,” whose immediate impact can be minimized.²⁹ Prioritizing movement, not simply structure, as the decisive criterion for the representation of life, mechanical displays like Jacques de Vaucanson’s *The Flute Player*, a musical automaton, or his *Duck*, designed to demonstrate the digestive system three-dimensionally in real time, followed a sentiment uttered by Vico, but repeated by Kant: “[h]e who would know the world must first manufacture it.”³⁰ The study of cadavers was

28 Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 47.

29 Félix Vicq d’Azyr, *Discours sur l’anatomie et de physiologie avec des planches coloriées, représentant au naturel les divers organes de l’homme et des animaux* (Paris: l’Imprimerie de France, F.A. Didot l’aîné, 1786).

30 Immanuel Kant, *Opus Postumum*, ed. Eckart Förster, trans. Förster and Michael Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41.

therefore not enough to gain adequate anatomical knowledge; they had to be seen in simulated, manufactured action. Life becomes a matter of engineering, “Nature = Industry.”³¹ The aim of the mechanical is not to supplant the order of the living, but to match it, to appear as lively as the original it seeks to imitate through exposing the living to an exorbitant light that drags life to the surface. It makes life visible and encases it within its possibilities. As such, the mechanical has to grow skin. The wooden fingers of Vaucanson’s flute playing automaton, pressing on a metal flute, produced an unnervingly artificial sound. “Pure mechanics were not enough, and Vaucason had to import organic matter into his dead creation,” so he covered the fingers in (animal) skin (*peau*).³² In representing life, the anatomists faced a problem akin to the “uncanny valley” roboticists face nowadays, as the effective resemblance is not only a matter of artistic or technological mastery, nor merely a matter of pure accuracy nor the reproduction of universal structures but rather one of their dynamic interplay producing a singularity. As such, the tension between the general and the particular in judging “liveliness,” which Kant sought to resolve through analogy, returns as the affect of the uncanny (*unheimlich*).

This is a horror based on an analogy between an excessive object and a finite subject through mediating representation. The failure of the latter to establish a successful communication, and community, of the two halves of the analogy leaves a remainder, a not-nothing, which inscribes itself into experience like a background noise, suddenly shifting into the foreground. This is the depth from which such objects rise — an abyss, stemming from a primordial dis-communication, antecedent to all relations. As such, the depth is created as it rises to the surface as a crack in it, but at the same time it presents itself as prior to the formation of the surface. It is an absolute indifference, ap-

31 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000), 25.

32 Gaby Wood, *Edison’s Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life* (New York: Anchor, 2002), 26.

pearing as the in-difference of a human and non-human vitality. At the core, such a difference is still about resemblance and its failure to operate or establish itself in the analogical judgment.

The failure of the judgment, the dis-communication in the analogy, entails a two-fold negation: the object is excessive and displays a non-human vitality that is in-different to ours. Such a non-human vitality subjects us to the gaze of the object; it objectifies us. While the zombie is pure and empty subjectivity, mindless but unstoppable drive incarnate, puppets evoke an inert terror. The former is restless and always actualized movement, but the latter is potential activity, which is most effective if not realized. One leaves the room and upon returning, one is not sure if the hand of the doll was already in that position a minute ago. For Ligotti, whose work is filled with puppets, such unease, however, is just the prelude to the real terror that a puppet poses. These puppets are a symbol of what he calls “malignant uselessness.” Their empty expressions, with their painted-on faces, are indicative of the horror of consciousness, bringing suffering into this world by being able to perceive the cosmic uselessness, forming an integral part of a (self-)universalized pessimism. The symbolic value that puppets embody as excessive imitations of the human form harbors the secret threat of subverting the hierarchies we thought to be foundational and/or constitutive for consciousness. This is the moment

when a human being becomes objectified as a puppet and enters a world that he or she thought was just a creepy place inside of ours. What a jolt to find oneself a prisoner in this sinister sphere, reduced to a composite mechanism looking out on the land of the human, or that which we believe to be human by any definition of it, and yet be exiled from it.³³

The horror is not in the sudden appearance of sentience, a particular organic consciousness in an otherwise dead, inorganic,

³³ Thomas Ligotti, *Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror* (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2010), 206.

and universal machine. On the contrary, the anonymous machine presents itself as the heart of the personal consciousness. The analogy is broken and, through its failure, reversed. Suddenly, a non-human life stares back at us with a thousand eyes—a ubiquitous gaze. This is the horror of the anatomical lineage of artificial life.

One becomes a meat-puppet in the eyes of the noumenal gaze. Such horror is not only ideal, but the failure of analogical judgment removes the boundaries between the sensible and the intelligible. It dismembers and (re-)connects the body at the same time, since its integrity relies on the judgment of God. It establishes a continuum between the human body, the animal body, plants, and objects, which blend into each other. Opening and exposing to the light of knowledge what was formerly concealed within the depths of the body creates the “natural” objects of anatomy through dissection, and also exhibits the “abjective” elements, constantly threatening the identity of the natural. The creations of Jean-Honoré Fragonard elevate such a continuity of body and world to art. In his plastinations, that is, *Fetus Dancing the Gigue* or *Man with a Mandible*, he prevented the decomposition of the body by injecting various aromatic spices and alcohol into the arteries, followed by the removal of the skin. Using injections of colored wax, he was able to preserve muscles, vessels, and even nerves, to display the prepared bodies in elaborate poses, and, more remarkable still, he was able to do so in interaction with other plastinated bodies. Alongside the praise of his skill, protestations of his contemporaries focused on the playful perversion of “natural” science, on the lack of his addition to serious knowledge. Much like the more recent discussion of the exhibition *Body Worlds (Körperwelten)* (2009) by Gunther von Hagens, the discussion centered on the aspect of spectacle and the repulsion such grotesque displays invoke through the superposition of the organism as simultaneously unified and fragmented. It is as if “[t]he body’s inside [...] shows up [...] It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one’s ‘own and clean self’ but [...] gave way before the dejec-

tion of its contents.”³⁴ The vitalization of corpses, on the other hand, implies a subversion of the categories of dead and living matter. Thacker notes that the two meanings of nekros in classical culture harbor the tension of denoting the departed as the life of the body but also as the thingness of the corpse which “retains something residual of that life.”³⁵ A second death is necessary, according to de Sade, in order to eliminate a person properly. Not only the person, but the corpse as a mark of the living, must be destroyed. According to the anatomist Ruysch, and also echoed by the more contemporary developers of the “humanoid robot” Cog, it is the liveliness of the eyes that betray the uncanny sentience hidden behind them.³⁶ Fontenelle recounts that Peter the Great, upon seeing a small child’s body prepared by Ruysch, was so enchanted by its lifelike eyes and friendly smile that he walked over and kissed the cadaver.³⁷

3. Empty Worlds (Interlude)

While Kant insists on the difference between being and thinking, he establishes a necessary “correlation” between them, disabling either their identity or radical difference, since, by virtue of the mediation function of our perception, the world is always for-us and never conceivable as in-itself. The reversal of such a *finitist* reduction to the empirical, or phenomenal, has led Speculative Realism to a renewed interest in the absolute as non-correlative, hence superseding Kant’s limitation to the given. This reaction to the contemporary crisis of the notion of the absolute is “German Idealism redux,” including the return of its reevaluation of

34 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 53.

35 Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet*, 108.

36 Evelyn Fox Keller, “Booting Up Baby,” in *Genesis Redux: Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life*, ed. Jessica Riskin (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 335.

37 Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Éloges des académiciens avec l’histoire de l’Académie royale des sciences en MDCXCIX* (The Hague: Isaac van der Kloot, 1740), 1:438.

madness. Meillassoux therefore formulates “correlationism” as: “No X without givenness of X, and no theory about X without a positing of X,”³⁸ and *After Finitude* starts its analysis perplexed by the assertion of the Kantian idea, viz., that the “world is only meaningful” insofar as it is “given-to-a-living (or thinking)-being,” which is still operative in contemporary, philosophical discourse.³⁹ There was always only one consequence appropriate to such a bind: getting rid of all sentient life, emptying out the planet. Meillassoux’s arche-fossil, Thacker’s planet, and Brassier’s stellar catastrophe have thus introduced a barren planet before us, and the cosmic void after us, back into philosophy, with distinct anti-vitalist, rationalist sentiments.

After introducing the arche-fossil as a mark of a time before sentience, posing a problem for transcendental philosophies’ framework of representation, Meillassoux derives from the facticity of the correlation between thinking and being that no reason can be given, that such a correlation is what it is, and therefore, that such a contingency must be itself necessary or absolute, because it, itself, is non-correlative. Hence, “only contingency necessarily exists.”⁴⁰ This necessary contingency is conflated by Meillassoux with the real, enabling him to conceive of a sense of being that is absolute and thus escapes the correlation; Meillassoux thus introduces a radical asynchronicity between thinking and being. Life, paradoxically, or more specifically, vitalism, impedes the scope of contingency insofar as becoming introduces contradictory entities which are necessarily what and how they are, since they cannot be otherwise, having already violated the principle of non-contradiction. Consequently, Meillassoux specifically accuses the Bergsonian-Deleuzian lineage of a “vitalist hypostatization” by declaring everything as

38 Ray Brassier et al., “Speculative Realism,” in *Collapse III: Unknown Deleuze and Symposium on Speculative Realism*, ed. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2007), 409.

39 Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 15.

40 Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 67.

a correlate of (a) Life, absolutizing the correlation itself.⁴¹ Life becomes the new Principle of Sufficient Reason — in the case of Deleuze, Meillassoux is undoubtedly correct.

Also wishing to dissolve the correlative bind, like Meillassoux, Brassier introduces the (inevitable) stellar extinction, the cosmic thanatropic vector, as a “real yet not empirical” event.⁴² The subjective trauma inflicted by the objective reality of extinction is an “adequation without correspondence” whose resulting “truth” forces philosophy to admit that it is “neither a medium of affirmation nor a source of justification, but rather the organon of extinction.”⁴³ The corollary of such an asynchronicity of thinking and being, in introducing a mind-independent reality, is a strict materialism, or even a transcendental nihilism, exposing the human desire to drape values and meaning over an indifferent cosmos, the desire to escape the traumatic reality of “human narcissism.”⁴⁴ Transfiguring nature into a monster of energy, Lyotard writes that “[m]atter asks no questions, expects no answer of us. It ignores us.”⁴⁵ Aimed at unbinding the vitalist “double genesis of thinking and being” in which “ideality and sensibility ultimately converge,” such a transcendental nihilism provides the antidote to what Brassier perceives as the pathological drive to affirm life, evident in the tendency toward pansychism.⁴⁶

Both Meillassoux and Brassier attempt to remove life or the organism as the orphic guardian of the depths of thought. However, ultimately, both are still beholden to the conservative economy of the organism. What allows Meillassoux to project the logical lack of reason into material being is his use of logic and matter interchangeably, reducing the latter to the same in-

41 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 64.

42 Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 237.

43 *Ibid.*, 239.

44 *Ibid.*, xi.

45 François Lyotard, “Thought without a Body?” in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 11.

46 Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 171.

effective formalism, the “empty and indeterminate postulate.”⁴⁷ Even if we accept the reasoning leading up to the concept of hyper-chaos, the real genesis of the given from a mind-independent reality cannot necessarily be explained. This becomes evident in the irrational leaps Meillassoux must introduce to make the emergence of different worlds (matter, life, thought, justice) plausible. As such, Meillassoux’s contingency rests on the same logical concept of matter that is characteristic of Kant’s philosophy of nature: localizing life “naturally” in the organism. The “exorbitant death” of the cosmic thanatropic vector in Brassier’s nihilism firstly necessitates the transcription of the form of dissipation of interiority into an exteriority, specific to the organism, onto the cosmos. Such a transition from “who is death?” to the objectivity of death, to the “truth of extinction,” can only register in and for the conservative economy of the organism, which binds it as trauma. Nihilistic disenchantment as non-conceptual negativity is bound to a thinking able to sustain such a shock, according to its affordance. The apocalyptic desire of Meillassoux and Brassier, paradoxically, leaves the human and the organism conceptually intact, in order to subvert their central position by eliminating them. Thacker’s planet — being neither the world-for-us (the World), the space derived from our hermeneutic access to it, nor the world-in-itself (the Earth) as the opposite of and the point of resistance to such attempts at domestication, but a world-without-us, radically devoid of anything human — might denote the asymptotic approximation of such speculative devastation. It reflects the fundamental phantasm of subjectivity and its positionality as such, gazing upon an innocent world which is yet undisturbed by the subject’s existence.

The question is not whether we would either revel in the idea of the earth as a Heideggerian “home” for humans, and other organisms, or rather face the horror of the possibility of a sterile

47 Peter Hallward, “Anything is Possible: A Reading of *After Finitude*,” in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 138.

and dead world-without-us. This question is still premised on the idea that without us, or organisms in general, there would be no life. Instead, we should rather ask through what kind of indifferent speculative wasteland we are wandering. Because it might well be Hegel's desert of the Absolute in the *Phenomenology*, the "vacuity" of "the night in which [...] all cows are black."⁴⁸ Hegel can only see devastation in groundlessness, the horror of a world stripped of life, because he lacks the "chemical sensibility"⁴⁹ to register "the differences swarming behind us."⁵⁰ The true horror of philosophy lies not in the satisfaction of our apocalyptic desires but in philosophy's relentless demonstration that these compulsions to escape are pointless. *This* will never end, because it is not even something.

4. Dysteleological Life

The Tadmurians believe, Negarestani reports, that headless nature produces a *bolus barathuma*, a cursed beast, when it stares longer into itself than usual, in order to realize itself.⁵¹ The *Critique of Judgment*, in an attempt to attain the highest systematic unity of nature and freedom, again straddles the line between the architectonics of critical philosophy and speculation with the discovery of reflective judgment and the sublime. Aesthetic judgment is reflective and not legislative for an object but is only for itself in the form of free harmony of the faculties in a reflected object. One must not forget that the analysis of the sublime is a "mere appendix" to the beautiful and the discovery of aesthetic common sense, an attempt to map it on to the existing structure. In the discussion of the mathematical and

48 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 9.

49 Iain Hamilton Grant, "The Chemistry of Darkness," *Pli* 9 (2000): 38.

50 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press 1995), 277.

51 Reza Negarestani, "Bolus Barathuma (Homo Sapiens †)," in *Abyssus Intellectualis: Speculative Horror*, eds. Armen Avanessian and Björn Quiring (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 2013), 117.

dynamical sublime in paragraphs 26 to 29 in the third *Critique*, Kant attempts to tame the sublime by splitting each mode into a moral and central side, and an illegal and fringe side. The sublime inspires religious sentiments, which supersedes superstition, which invokes fear, through feelings of reverence. The abolishment of the mind's freedom must be rejected in favor of passion and enthusiasm, the animation of imagination; it must avoid slipping into fanaticism, the becoming anomalous of imagination. In Kant's mention of the negative parts of the sublime and their subsequent dismissal as abnormalities, their difference is always one of degree. However, it is the border between the colossal, "[t]he mere presentation of a concept [...] which is almost too great for all presentation," and the monstrous, which "by its magnitude [...] annihilates the end which its concept constitutes," that appears most fragile.⁵² Since "crude nature" cannot present the monstrous itself—nature does not contain anything "horrid"—its function is merely negative and serves to render the edges of the colossal clearer. Alas, this "frame doesn't fit," as Derrida remarks, because the demarcation used in order "to stop the category of the almost-too-much," that is, the colossal, from degenerating into the excessive magnitude of the too-much already relies on the determination of the monstrous.⁵³ The colossal seems to appear on the edges of the monstrous, as an experience of a limit, a threshold not yet crossed, constituted by the outside of representation. This *aporia*, that the monstrous is unrepresentable but must be determined to negatively constitute the colossal, is instructive for the whole third *Critique*. In this mere appendix, not only the very possibility of the sublime is at stake, but the systematic unity of Kant's project as such. Considering that, for Kant, the ultimate symbol of the good is the beautiful, the sublime complicates such a connection of vision and truth, or vision in regard to its ability to give a reliable index of the true. While "[t]he beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in limitation; the

52 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 253.

53 Jacques Derrida, "The Parergon," *October* 9 (1979): 30.

sublime, by contrast, is to be found in a formless object insofar as limitlessness is represented in it, or at its instance, and yet it is also thought as a totality.”⁵⁴ For the limitless to be represented at all, the multiplicity of it must be bound; this must be the case in order to think and experience an object at all. Hence, the sublime is never fully formless, and this allows for judgment to take hold. If the size were to increase just a little more, if the magnitude were just the smallest quantum bigger, unified experience would disintegrate. A purely quantitative difference between the almost-too-much and the too-much would therefore give varying results, and an object could be legitimately judged as sublime one moment but “appear” as monstrous the next — it would fall in and out of representation. Kant thus adds a qualitative distinction. The “negative pleasure” the sublime proper invokes is itself a “vibration [...] a rapidly alternating repulsion from and attraction to one and the same object,” while the monstrous is the cessation of this movement.⁵⁵ The repulsion is not followed by any joy and what one is left with instead are the affections of pure aversion, terror, horror, and disgust. Instating these feelings as arbiters between the colossal and the monstrous, however, does not provide a strict enough line of demarcation. The *Anthropology*, aware of this threat, revokes their proximity by collapsing the two registers of the *Analytic*. The sublime and all its mental representations, as well as its artistic representations, must be beautiful, so as not to invoke fear or revulsion. One should be wary of such a retreat. To maintain the judgment of God is to stave off the threat of formlessness, the boundlessness inherent in the unnatural and illegitimate sublime. Hence, every representation of the monstrous must necessarily fail. All of the words become meaningless, all of the narratives become tangled and contradictory, and all depictions miss their subject when faced with the too-much.

This unavoidable failure to describe the monstrous, in conjunction with a manic rigor of literary description, animates the

54 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 244.

55 Ibid., 245, 258.

works of Lovecraft. The meteorite, which crashes near Arkham into the Gardners's land, brings a monstrous shimmer with it, a "colour out of space." Although the rock itself is destroyed by lightning, the color spreads like a disease. While it cannot be categorized by any means relating to anything known within the visible spectrum, it infects not only the soil and the animals, but also the minds of the Gardners, driving them to madness. Something monstrous takes hold through its presence alone, without this monstrosity being bound to an object. Life appears as impersonal and anonymous contagion and ultimately consumes the living. Lovecraft is not, however, at least in this case, a writer of the supernatural, but rather of the *hyper*natural. After examining the meteor, the three professors, while able to determine its properties accurately, are still unable to "place" it. Since "[i]t was nothing of this earth, but a piece of the great outside; and as such dowered with outside properties and obedient to outside laws,"⁵⁶ it does not register "as" something. Such a horror is not noumenal, but, as Harman shows, "phenomenological."⁵⁷ The color, as well as all of the entities in Lovecraft's cosmos, are strictly material. When asking himself, "What is the Great Cthulhu?" Houellebecq answers that it is "[a]n arrangement of electrons, like ourselves. The terror of Lovecraft is rigorously materialist."⁵⁸ There is in fact no noumenon left in Lovecraft. There is only the play of anonymous forces, assembling and disassembling, a life of pure affectivity. The formless ground rises up, without coming from another world but just from "out of space," like a background noise slowly seeping into consciousness. The noumenal and the phenomenal collapse into each other. The transcendental cannot be represented, not even by analogy; hence, the transcendental-empirical double fails. Monstrosity itself becomes transcendental. Rather than

56 H.P. Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space," in *Tales* (New York: Library of America Literary Classics of the United States, 2005), 345.

57 Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2012), 340.

58 Michel Houellebecq, *H.P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life* (San Francisco: McSweeney's Publishing, 2005), 32.

being confronted with possible experience, the understanding is faced with real experience, legislated only by its own existence. It is faced with the being of the sensible. The feeling that the sublime is supposed to invoke, of the mind's "superiority over nature itself even in its immeasurability," is subverted and turned around.⁵⁹ Rather than space being internal to us, we are spatial constructs within a vast and indifferent cosmos. Rather than time being within us, we are temporal and as such confronted with a history, stretching far beyond our consciousness, knowledges, civilizations, and organic lives altogether. As such, Lovecraft cannot conform to the usual horror cliché of portraying a harmonious state — a peaceful and quiet little town — which is uprooted and disturbed by something un- or supernatural that unravels the idyll. In his universe, everything is "weird" from the outset. Nothing subverts nature from the outside, but the natural order is itself a quite perplexing anomaly within an *a priori* crooked but univocal universe.

The beginning of *The Color Out of Space*, with the surveyor traversing a landscape marked by "a touch of the unreal and the grotesque, as if some vital element of perspective or chiaroscuro were awry," introduces this reversal to the foundations of perception.⁶⁰ One cannot simply shake the unnaturalness of such a scene but rather begins to ask the question of how normalcy was ever possible in the first place; one is like someone losing the threat of everyday thought, unable to piece it back together, wondering if it was there in the first place. It is the question Kant not only failed to answer but sought to suspend *a priori* through the *a priori*. In other words, such awryness implies the question of a genesis of the common sense and good will of thought on the one hand, and the production of unity in nature on the other.

Alas, however far the "archaeologist of nature" ventures into the remains of the "oldest revolutions," the world is always already captured by the auto-assembling forces of organic at-

59 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 261.

60 Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space," 341.

tractors, trapping it in perpetual actualism; the earth was never formed, only the world is produced now.⁶¹ From the present, the formative drive extends itself across all of time and space, assimilating them to “propagate itself,” warding off the demonical threat of the productive surplus of the real over the possible. Devoid of any will-to-sanity or -health, the thought of transcendental monstrosity penetrates through the covers of societal normalcy and convention, only to be redirected by ethico-teleological diversions: the transcendental illusions of the Idea integrating all of the world by reproducing it in its image—the world, the cosmos, as an organism. Such a limitation is, however, only an auto-immunological reaction to the seemingly destructive forces of the simmering depth, which have not yet been recognized as the continuous genesis of reality, sometimes even wearing the mask of a judgmental God, sometimes subverting Him. While Deleuze and Guattari claim that “[i]f everything is alive, it is not because everything is organic or organized, but, on the contrary, because the organism is a perversion [*détournement*] of life. The life in question is inorganic, germinal and intensive, a powerful life without organs [...] Metal is neither a thing nor an organism, but a *body* without organs [...] matter-flow as pure productivity,” how does thinking avoid being itself recalibrated by organic despotism, and reach beyond judgment?⁶²

As Heidegger remarks, the Greek *theōrein*, from which “theory” is derived, is an amalgam of *thea*, the visible part of things, and *horān*, meaning “to look at something with attention.” The exclusion of the monstrous from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which set in motion a whole philosophical history of stigmatizing the abnormal, is thereby conceivable as a reaction to the complication of the relation of visibility and truth inherent to it. The Latin *monstrum*, meaning “a divine omen or warning,” reflected in

61 Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 419.

62 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987), 411.

the nowadays uncommon use of “monster” in English to mean something that is enormous and threatening, can be short-circuited with the archaic use of “monster” in English, meaning “to demonstrate” or “to exhibit,” in order to form a new notion of theory. If the monstrous is characterized by its boundlessness, destroying the concepts determining it due to its excessive magnitude, can thinking be characterized by the same tendency to devour the boundaries that academia, societal discourse, history, or even the given anatomy of the thinking apparatus have erected? Such thinking is what Kant attempted to exclude from philosophy in the *Spirit-Seers*. It is the madness of speculation. The emancipatory value of speculation is therefore most evident in its ability to question and reject any “natural order,” that is, to expose it as contingently produced while at the same time enacting a transgression against the conservative economy of thinking every such order would impose. Thinking, as a material reconfiguration of forces, is, if accelerated to an infinite speed, fast enough to avoid the judgment of God; it is an unnatural act. As such, it destroys “nature,” understood as given necessity. The animation of the mind is in excess of the organic limits of the living — or, as Brassier writes, “[t]hinking has interests that do not coincide with those of living; indeed, they can and have been pitted against the latter.”⁶³

Freud’s presentation of an energetic model of the nervous system in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has been widely discussed in regard to its claims about the compulsion for thanatropic regression, the inevitable dissolution of the organism into inorganic exteriority. Focusing on the organism’s desire to return to a state of inanimation conceals the speculative and energetic aspect of the model in the critique of the conservative economic order of the organism, especially revealed in its binding of death. Freud writes:

If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons — becomes inor-

63 Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, xi.

ganic once again — then we shall be compelled to say that “the aim of life is death” and, looking backwards, that “inanimate things existed before living ones” [...] For a long time, perhaps, living substance was thus being constantly created afresh and easily dying, till decisive external influences altered in such a way as to oblige the still surviving substance to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated detours before reaching its aim of death.⁶⁴

In Freud’s anti-Spinozist twist, while the organic interiority hives off from its inorganic origins in a dynamic interplay of constantly binding death as exteriority, e.g. constant contraction, its dissolution follows an internal “instinct.” Since the state towards which the organism is regressing is, at the same, the irretrievable past, older than any organic life, and also the unpredictable future, coming rather than being and hence indifferent to the organism, such a state cannot register as a point in time *for* the organism at all. The traumatic origin of life itself, therefore, is not accessible to transcendental subjectivity, to which it nevertheless gives rise.

In the instinct towards death, thanatropic regression presents itself to the organism as an objective truth which instates itself *a posteriori*, but is nevertheless *a priori* for the organic subject; or, as Levinas put it in regard to the Other, as an “anterior posteriority.”⁶⁵ Precisely as such an impossible condition, the death-instinct is transcendental, but not determinable by the empirical through analogy or resemblance. Neither transcendental apperception nor the existential “being-towards-death” can assimilate it. Death does not appear as the teleological endpoint of life, but rather life is a temporary anomaly in the order of dysteleological death, or, “[t]he living is only a form of what

64 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 32.

65 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 170.

is dead — and a very rare form.”⁶⁶ Not beholden to regulative principles, the original state of the inorganic is bound by the organism in that its course of decontraction is guided by the conservative economy of the organism due to it being the medium of dissipation. Rather than the derivative tendency towards economic assimilation of the pleasure principle, or the survivalism of the reality principle which make death appear as an inflection of life, the death instinct reverses this order. In other words, life does not consist in the overcoming or resistance of death, but in its individual modes of binding inorganic exteriority according to the specific economic affordability of the organism by reducing the tendency towards dissolution qualitatively and quantitatively; this is in order that life may die in the way immanent to it. Life is a detour [*Umweg*] towards death and “[d]eath needs time for what it kills to grow in [it].”⁶⁷

In this sense, affordability in the organism as an open system is determined by the incongruity of the exorbitant demand of exteriority and the logic of sustenance as a demand of interiority, or, the projection of life towards ends (interiority) and the destruction of such ends by the very condition of making them in the first place. As such, the death instinct is “monstrous” but also conditioned, since it is only possible through the organic economy. This is the tendency of organisms to exhibit complexity, for example, to temporally postpone such dissolution, but also to ultimately merely represent the detour of this specific dynamic system — and, as could be said with an inversion of August Weismann, such complexity might accelerate the course towards dissipation.⁶⁸ Even if it is supposed that the binding of

66 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckoff and Adrian Del Caro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 110.

67 William Burroughs, “Ah Pook the Destroyer,” *Dead City Radio* (London: Island, 1990), CD.

68 Weismann poses a challenge to Freud, insofar as he argues that death, from the standpoint of evolutionary life, is a rather late acquisition, questioning its primordial status. Freud however retorts, that “his assertion that death is a late acquisition would apply only to its manifest phenomena and would not make impossible the assumption of processes tending

the inevitable truth of extinction is always unsuccessful, the organism still imposes a “partial” natural order upon the dysteleological tendency of the death drive. Rather than the economic order being shaped by its immanent way of dying, in Freud’s model, the latter is determined by the former. The organism is that which rules the economy of dying, or, more precisely, it is this conservative tendency. The aim of such a binding of the death drive is to determine the relation between the conservative drives and the seemingly unilateral conditioning of them by inorganic exteriority as ultimately bilateral, resulting in a metaphysical dualism of drives. Freud’s death drive is not yet considered transcendental.

In the end of the second chapter of *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze attempts to retrieve the possible monism abandoned by Freud by unbinding death from the conservative economy of the organism. Taking up the characterization of the death drive as a positive compulsion for repetition operating as a non-empirical principle, it is the latter that Freud ultimately betrays. By presupposing a dialectical model of the drives, characterized by negation, as well as a dialectical model of organic (interiority) and inorganic (exteriority) matter, he repeats the Kantian movement of the tracing of the transcendental from the empirical. The inorganic exteriority is only unanimated if conceived as empirical itself, namely, as the original trauma of the organism it attempts to bind in its immanent way. For Freud, the return to the state before the organism is synonymous with the repetition of a time without life, identifying life with the personal and empirical, binding death. Deleuze’s unbinding of death, then, entails thinking it not as a contradiction to personal life. It is not “the limitation imposed by matter upon mortal life, nor the opposition between matter and immortal life, which furnishes death with its prototype. Death is, rather, the last form of the

towards it.” Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 43. For a philosophical, in-depth discussion of Weismann and Freud, see Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze* (London: Routledge, 1999), 104f.

problematic, the source of all problems and questions, the sign of their persistence over and above every response, the “Where?” and “When?” which designate this (non)-being where every affirmation is nourished.”⁶⁹

Transcending any particular life, the “death instinct” in Deleuze capitalizes on the energetic aspect of Freud’s model, denoting the energy of an impersonal life. Without being bound to the conservative economy of the organism, matter itself appears as animated.

Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism capitalizes on such an opening, flattening the divide between the transcendental and the empirical insofar as the former is remodeled as a genetic process itself immanent to the latter. Although determining the empirical phenomena, the transcendental itself is a synthesis within the empirical field, itself contingently determined by the encounter of forces. There is an immanent logic to the sensible itself, or to the material, which cannot be anticipated or fully governed. On account of this immanence of the transcendental and the empirical, the transcendental is not determined by analogy to the empirical and is therefore not limited to what the limitative judgment of God — His disjunctive syllogism — has determined as possible. In the being of the sensible, as Deleuze remarks, we do not encounter the gods but demons. Such a reversal subverts the retrospective movement of organic thought to integrate what is real into what must have been possible and transmutes reality into a monstrous self-creation. While the notion of matter that Kant proposed was logical, Deleuze’s is synthetic and, hence, not yet beholden to the conservative economy of the organic image of thought.

Rather than merely being the intrusion of alterity, that is, inorganic exteriority presenting itself as anterior posterity, traumatically disrupting the empirical, and retrospectively transcendentalized, natural order, any such order is suspended *a priori*. The death drive does not denaturalize any specific empirical natural order, but transcendently denaturalizes the

69 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 112.

naturalization of any order as such. As is evident in Lovecraft, dissolution and destruction are coupled with, or enacted as, an emancipatory practice. This not only subverts the natural order but suspends it. It seems that *we are not condemned to be free but are free because we are condemned*. Without prefigured order, the only thing left is the violence of perception. For Deleuze, this is the “pain of childbirth” as Nietzsche had it, within which thinking ascends towards a “superior empiricism,” shedding the conditions of possibility of the human.⁷⁰ It is this violence as a new mode of communication that informs the transition from Kant’s conditioned to Deleuze’s absolute epigenesis: “each faculty communicates to the other only the violence which confronts it with its own difference and its divergence from the other.”⁷¹ This discordant accord, revealing the determination of sensation by a super-sensible Idea, “manifests and liberates a depth which remained hidden.”⁷² The depth-determining sensation, without the determination by a concept, becomes the model for the internal genesis.

This depth of Ideas, however, according to the critique of possibility seen above, must be one which is not preexistent to the experience, but expressed in it. However, since Ideas do not resemble the surface of the sensible, because they are not traced from its outline, they remain conditions irreducible to real experience. Hence, this super-sensible realm of Ideas cannot be actual, but is still real; or, as Deleuze characterizes the virtual, this realm is the ideal part of the real, “real but not actual, ideal but not abstract,” since Ideas follow from an encounter with the being of the sensible.⁷³

In the strictest sense, such a vital cosmos is a-cosmic, a-theological, and a-personal. The hylemorphic model of thought and determination which Kant employed is replaced in Deleuze

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷² Gilles Deleuze, *Kant’s Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1985), 60.

⁷³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 208.

with a hylozoic model of a material morphogenesis, which may involve the human mind but does not necessarily. Matter determines itself without anything above or beyond it, and it does so as process. Such is the formula of Deleuzian horror. With the failure of the boundaries between the sensible and the intelligible, the madness Kant sought to banish then returns. By subverting the question of the intelligible *de jure* in the *de facto* transcendental genesis of the sensible, one ventures into the infinity of absolute xenogenesis.

5. Creation in the Absence of God

As Nietzsche notes, judgment, since it must force itself upon people, appears first “in the form of the *false judgment* leading to delirium and madness, when man is mistaken about his lot, and in the form of the *judgment of God*, when the form imposes another lot.”⁷⁴ But now, no such prefigured lots are left. “Nature does not make mistakes” and “nature only makes mistakes” have become synonymous. Instead of stretching the bond between the order of creation and the order of redemption endlessly, it is cut in a Marcionite fashion. The integrity of the body, its boundary to the outside, relied on the judgment of God, which unified it and ascribed every organ its lot. Now, all organs move independently from their corporeal unity. This is the artificial life of the partial objects in Bosch’s paintings, which returns in the psychosis of Lacan, or the myriad of autonomous body parts within the horror genre. Such an “organ without a body,” an organ which “resists inclusion,”⁷⁵ is still created by a compulsion to repeat a state preceding “the dialectic of the prohibitory Law and its transgression” and Oedipal triangulation.⁷⁶ This repetition can only register as the experience of a body made up of disjointed pieces if indexed by a subject already constituted by

74 Deleuze, “To Have Done with Judgment,” 129.

75 Sean McQueen, *Deleuze and Baudrillard: From Cyberpunk to Biopunk* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 159.

76 Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2012), xi.

the symbolic order. Again, judgment is already in place, and we have not reached the continuous flow of desire as *asubjective*—impersonal and energetic flux which constitutes and characterizes the body-without-organs.

The distinction which Aristotle introduces in the *Physics* between *mimētai*, art's ability to imitate nature, and *epitelei*, its ability to take things further, is instructive for the alchemical lineage of artificial life from the inception of the *auftric* arts to the creation of *homunculi*. While the manipulation of materials into artworks which resemble nature's products is an imposition upon nature—mere “sophistical transmutations,” as Geber declares in the *Summa Perfectionis*—the alchemist's goal is the repetition of creation.⁷⁷ *De natura rerum*, written by physician Adam von Bodenstein, posing as the famous alchemist Paracelsus von Hohenheim, describes the process by which a bird can be transmuted into a flask by converting the burned up remains of an ordinary bird into phlegm and heating it up. The bird will not only regenerate, it will be “clarified,” that is, it will be better than before, better than natural.⁷⁸ The origin of such experiments, including the creation of a homunculus or a basilius in a flask, while being inspired by Arabic writings on early artificial life, might lie in the tradition of mandragoras (*Alraunen*). Peddlers would carve mandrake roots to resemble human features and sell them, with false promises attached, to superstitious men and women.⁷⁹ These minor crimes are harshly condemned by Paracelsus in *Liber de imaginibus*. He proceeds to demonstrate in *De vita longa* the way in which real mandrakes are actually homunculi, created by the sperm or urine of hanged criminals and therefore growing under gallows, hence the name “gallows-man” or “Galgenmann.” The superficial resemblance to liveliness is replaced by the non-phenomenal creation of life.

77 William Newman, *The Summa Perfectionis of Pseudo-Geber: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Study* (Leiden: Brill 1991), 753.

78 (Pseudo-)Paracelsus, *De natura rerum* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1922), 312.

79 Cf. Lynn Thorndike, ed., *A History of Magic and Experimental Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 8:11.

In Mary Douglas's canonical study, *Purity and Danger*, impurity is categorized by the violation of, and subsequent threat to, the schema ordering cultural categories.⁸⁰ The stigmatization of the alchemical lineage of artificial life as heresy points to another kind of fear of a nature ultimately neither controlled nor limited by any external force. This is a horror based on the univocity of all individuated beings via an impersonal genesis. The alchemist does not simulate vitality but rather realizes the genesis of life and therefore moves from human representation to inhuman creation, and maybe even improves upon nature's hitherto implemented methods. While the horror of the noumenal character of life was marked by the failure of analogical judgment, hence an *a posteriori* event disrupting the natural order, the transgression of the monstrous generation instates itself *a priori*. As such, alchemy implies a two-fold darkness: of life as materially withdrawn from view by virtue of being a synthetic process of forces necessarily below phenomenality and of the future of life, or of what might become of life. Therefore, alchemy is the proper predecessor to what is now known as chemistry, since "*chemistry* derives from the Egyptian word for "black," which is itself named for the black earth of Egypt."⁸¹ Langton, in his 1987 manifesto on and for artificial life, while conjuring the alchemists of old, already refrains from using "life" as a natural kind, instead proposing: "Only when we are able to view *life-as-we-know-it* in the larger context of *life-as-it-could-be* will we really understand the nature of the beast."⁸²

Not bound by prefigured metaphysical laws, monstrous creations exhibit dialethical biologies, being alive and dead, natural and artificial, formed and formless, all at the same time. For

80 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966).

81 Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent, "Lavoisier: Eine wissenschaftliche Revolution," in *Elemente einer Geschichte der Wissenschaften*, ed. Michel Serres (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 13.

82 Chris Langton, "Artificial Life," in *Artificial Life: The Proceedings of an Interdisciplinary Workshop on the Synthesis and Stimulation of Living Systems* (Redwood City: Addison-Wesley, 1989), 33.

the judgment of God, such life appears blasphemous, a “life that should not be living but that is living,”⁸³ brought about by a fusion of elements deemed incompatible with societal norms, or with the category of the natural, or else brought about by a fission of what is considered inseparable. As the art of generation by transcendental synthesis, alchemy subverts empirical distinctions of naturalness, creating amalgams of: formerly distinct ontological orders (e.g., inorganic materials and flesh, man and animals); spatio-temporal categories (e.g., two souls in one body); genera and species (e.g., mixtures of animals, such as the chimera); or splittings of ontological composites (creatures without souls), spatial wholes (one soul in two bodies, doppelgängers), or temporal continuities (two souls alternating in inhabiting one spatially continuous body).

Transgressing the conceptual category of “natural” that any given culture might champion, monstrous creatures not only pose a threat to an existing scheme, but also to the action of naturalizing any schematization. “Monsters are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening,”⁸⁴ not because they oppose common knowledge, as Carroll falsely believes, but because they pose a threat to the common sense and good will of thinking, to the conditions of common knowledge as such. Most of Lovecraft’s characters, upon looking at the monsters, end up deranged, but their insanity is not an empirical phenomenon. Rather, it is a transcendental madness, or better yet, it is their convergence with the madness that is the transcendental.

The horror of life is not that the category of the “natural” is fragile but that it is laughable.

83 Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet*, 104.

84 Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 34.

Bibliography

- Ansell-Pearson, Keith. *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Beaufret, Jean. "Précédé de Hölderlin et Sophocle." In *Remarques sur Oedipe/Remarques sur Antigone*, edited by Jean Beaufret, translated by François Fédier, 1–21. Paris: Union générale éditions, 1965.
- Bensaude-Vincent, Bernadette. "Lavoisier: Eine wissenschaftliche Revolution." In *Elemente einer Geschichte der Wissenschaften*, edited by Michel Serres, 645–85. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994.
- Brassier, Ray. *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Brassier, Ray, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux. "Speculative Realism." In *Collapse III: Unknown Deleuze and Symposium on Speculative Realism*, edited by Robin Mackay, 306–449. Falmouth: Urbanomic Press, 2007.
- Burroughs, William. "Ah Pook the Destroyer." *Dead City Radio*. London: Island, 1990. CD.
- Carroll, Noël. *The Philosophy of Horror*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- David-Ménard, Monique. *La folie dans la raison pure: Kant lecteur de Swedenborg*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J.Vrin, 1990.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- . *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barnara Habberjam. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1985.
- . *Logic of Sense*. Edited by Constantin V. Boundas. Translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.
- . "To Have Done with Judgment." In *Essays Critical and Clinical*, translated by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A.

- Greco, 126–35. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2000.
- . *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. “The Parergon.” *October* 9 (1979): 3–41.
- Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge, 1966.
- de Fontenelle, Bernard Le Bovier. *Éloges des académiciens avec l’histoire de l’Académie royale des sciences en MDCXCIX*, Vol. 1. The Hague: Isaac van der Kloot, 1740.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Edited by James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961.
- Grant, Iain Hamilton. “The Chemistry of Darkness.” *Pli* 9 (2000): 36–52. <https://plijournal.com/papers/iain-hamilton-grant-the-chemistry-of-darkness/>.
- Hallward, Peter. “Anything Is Possible: A Reading of *After Finitude*.” In *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, edited by Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, 130–41. Melbourne: re.press, 2011.
- Harman, Graham. *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Realism*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2012.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Houellebecq, Michel. *H.P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*. San Francisco: McSweeney’s Publishing, 2005.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Anthropology from the Pragmatic Point of View*. Edited and translated by Robert B. Loudon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- . “Brief an Moses Mendelssohn, 8. April, 1766.” In *Briefwechsel*, 69–71. Berlin: Preußische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1922.

- . *Critique of Practical Reason*. Translated by Lewis White Beck. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1956.
- . *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Edited by Paul Guyer. Translated by Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- . *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. Edited by Frank Sewall. Translated by Emmanuel F. Goerwitz. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1900.
- . *Opus Postumum*. Edited by Eckart Förster. Translated by Förster and Michael Rosen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Keller, Evelyn Fox. “Booting Up Baby.” In *Genesis Redux. Essays in the History and Philosophy of Artificial Life*, edited by Jessica Riskin, 334–44. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Langton, Chris. “Artificial Life.” In *Artificial Life: The Proceedings of an Interdisciplinary Workshop on the Synthesis and Simulation of Living Systems*, 1–48. Redwood City: Addison-Wesley Publishers, 1989.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Existence and Existents*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001.
- . *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969.
- Ligotti, Thomas. *Conspiracy Against the Human Race: A Contrivance of Horror*. New York: Hippocampus Press, 2010.
- Lovecraft, H.P. “The Colour Out of Space.” In *Tales*, 340–69. New York: Library of America Literary Classics of the United States, 2005.
- Lucretius. *On the Nature of the Universe*. Translated by R.E. Latham. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982.
- Lyotard, François. “Thought without a Body?” In *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington and

- Rachel Bowlby, 8–23. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.
- McLaughlin, Peter. *Kant's Critique of Teleology in Biological Explanation: Antinomy and Teleology*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.
- McQueen, Sean. *Deleuze and Baudrillard: From Cyberpunk to Biopunk*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.
- Meillassoux, Quentin. *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Translated by Ray Brassier. London: Continuum, 2008.
- Negarestani, Reza. "Bolus Barathuma (Homo Sapiens †)." In *Abyssus Intellectualis: Speculative Horror*, edited by Armen Avanesian and Björn Quiring, 117–24. Berlin: Merve Verlag, 2013.
- Newman, William R. *The Summa Perfectionis of Pseudo-Geber: A Critical Edition, Translation, and Study*. Leiden: Brill, 1991.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams. Translated by Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- (Pseudo-)Paracelsus. *De natura rerum*. Munich: Oldenbourg, 1922.
- Schreel, Louis. "Idea and Animation: A Study of the Immanent Sublime in Deleuze's Metaphysics." Ph.D. Diss., University of Antwerp, 2017. <http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-8581199>.
- Stafford, Barbara Maria. *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991.
- Stengel, Friedemann. "Kant — 'Zwillingsbruder' Schwedenborgs?" In *Kant und Swedenborg: Zugänge zu Einem Umstrittenen Verhältnis*, edited by Friedemann Stegel, 35–97. Tübingen: May Niemayer, 2008.
- Thacker, Eugene. *In the Dust of this Planet: Horror of Philosophy, Volume I*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2001.
- Thorndike, Lynn, ed. *A History of Magic and Experimental Science, Vol. 8: Seventeenth Century*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1958.

Vicq d'Azyr, Félix. *Discours sur l'anatomie et de physiologie avec des planches coloriées, représentant au naturel les divers organes de l'homme et des animaux*. Paris: l'Imprimerie de France, F.A. Didot l'aîné, 1786.

Wood, Gaby. *Edison's Eve: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*. New York: Anchor, 2002.

Žižek, Slavoj. *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. London: Routledge, 2012.