

*Of the Thick and the Raw: cannibalizing the 21<sup>st</sup> century*  
[*Radical Matter: Art, Philosophy and the Wild Sciences* (Untimely Meditation no. 3)]<sup>1</sup>

‘Time is not universal and fixed; it is something which expands and shrinks according to the vicinity of mass.’

Carlo Rovelli, *Reality Is Not<sup>2</sup>*  
*What it Seems.*

thick

In the dewy decrepitude of science and of life, three overtly common-sense propositions must initially be acknowledged: First that reality is by far more elegant, confounding, mean-spirited, hilarious, erotic, and supple than any metaphysical re-presentation of it. Second, that there are (at least) two types of logics, sensuous and mathematical; and that these two logics, despite Kant, Russell, Badiou et al, can neither be separated from each other (except in abstract, purified contemplation), nor fully grasped in terms of universal, speculative or totalising systems, as is so frequently manifested by Agamben, Harman, Zizek, Butler et al, via the Hegelian move. Finally, that in a world dominated by the skewed global corporatism of an increasingly gluttonous petrol-technosphere, with its derivative futures markets and international debt exchanges, violent warfares, mass refugee migrations, and everyday, terrifying extinctions of whole swathes of fauna, flora, animals and the rule of law, one must take as a given the determination ‘to write poetry after Auschwitz’, despite guilt, terror or exhaustion.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, one must take as a given not only the determination to write poetry, make art, enable and grow imagination, but in so doing, re-remind those who need reminding of the critical importance to *know* that one *can* think (reason, imagine, dream, love); and that even in the midst of it all, that one learns *how* to do so, and once learned, must *not forget* to do so. Taken together, these three propositions enable a kind of practical imagination; perhaps and dare it be said, a kind of practical, ethico-political mattering: one that gives shape to the here, the now, the past and future; one that enables shape to take place, energy to intensify, community to electrify, politicize, gain speed and pace.

Nietzsche asks, ~~instead~~ – no, he demands – that the artist step forward, not just because (for better or for worse) an artist is seen to inhabit the personae of already boxing with skewed knowledge systems, but, in so boxing, is well placed to have the courage to dream of a reality as it is could / should / might (im)possibly be or become. More importantly, the demand is not just to dream – this would be to rehash old clichés to which Nietzsche would of course have had severe allergic reaction. It is to demand a certain kind of courage; that is, the courage *to know* that one *can* dream – to *dare* to dream – despite all that lies before us: the violent, the banal, the sometimes fascinating, confusing, shameful and often times cruel. This call to arms, as instead a *call to imagine*, laughs at the pale imitations of what is promised through instrumentalist, even dialectical logics - including the overrated logics of the Phallus, of Castration, of Excess and of Lack. For this is not just a ‘daring to dream’ in the face of rising inhumanity and genocide: it is the courage to have an unwavering hunger, faith, drive, (call it what you will) to *want* to dream – no matter what – and, in so wanting, to figure out the *that* and the *how* to make it happen, underlined by an unwavering focus, commitment, dedication, *will*, that it must happen. This is the beginning of a logic of sense.

‘The *real* world—unattainable?’ Nietzsche mocks, ‘Unattained at any rate by Reason! The “real world”/ the “reasoned” world / no longer of any use not even a duty any longer! An idea grown useless! superfluous!, consequently a refuted idea: let us abolish it! (Broad daylight; breakfast. Return of cheerfulness and *bons sens*; Plato blushes for shame; all free spirits run wild).’<sup>4</sup>

I have always had strong kinship with this passage, for in it marks the beginning of a break with dialectics, universal totalities and speculative realisms (pure or otherwise). Instead it opens the way towards the so-called genealogical method, a method, one might say, as the forerunner to discourse analysis (Foucault et al) and, as concomitant, the rhizomatic or minor form of method

(Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari), as well as the libidinal economy method (Lyotard, Lacoue-Labarthe) – serving a kind of ‘method-light’ nomadic cartography of mapping the process without enforcing the route. In one manner or another, contemporary (21<sup>st</sup> c) methodologies tend to rift off this genealogical move, under the banner of diffractive (Barad), cosmo-political (Stengers), tentacular (Haraway), entangled (Golding), queer (Rogers, Ajamu).<sup>5</sup> Foucault names this three-pronged volley, ‘the courage of truth [*parrhesia*]’.<sup>6</sup>

#### raw

The so-called ‘practical’ questions – the how or the what or the that of change – are always accompanied by fits of instability. With instability, grows a certain kind of certainty: one founded on sensuous reason/rationality, a certain kind of intelligence, let’s call it a *political* intelligence, a certain kind of logic (the logic of sense, perhaps). The ability to hear that embattled demand of David Ricardo’s ‘*Suppose it could be otherwise! What would that ‘otherwise’ be/become*’, and inhabit it with our bodies, our flesh, our wounds, our fears, our silences, boredoms, infightings and menacing games of play, always also ushers in unintended consequences, the so-called ‘collateral damage’, ‘friendly fire’ of circulation, intimacy and exchange. When the old is dying but the new cannot yet be born, what then of change; what then of risk and its (un)accompanying ‘safety net’. For if there is no map, no pre-set direction, no over-abiding Truth – and now, not even a universality to time, space, knowledge, identity, meaning, system, art, then, as the bombs obliterate lives in Riyadh (and Iran, and Palestine and Israel and... and... and... and...); as the gang-wars defy all sanity, and the age old scream once again lifts its ugly mouth in unison: “my God, my God! why have you abandoned me/us?” (and answer came there none), perhaps one should take pause to remember a little history: the history of the 1848 Paris Communes, the history of the Suffragettes, the history of civil rights movements, the history of resistance to fascism, the history of feminism; dadaism, pop, and indeed, the very queering of sense. These movements are not evolutions of culture; neither are the impoverished cruelties of everyday life devolutions of culture. They are assemblages, molecular, organic, molar, organized, imagined, built; and therewith can be differently assembled, imagined, built. To suggest that reality (any reality) is but a contemplative encounter with the material world, forgets that it is real / sentient beings and the knowledge-truth-power axes that make the world, our world, real. To quote the first and last remark by Marx from my well-thumbed version of his *Theses on Feuerbach*:

‘I

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism - that of Feuerbach included - is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism -- which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such.

Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. [...] Hence he does not grasp the significance of "revolutionary", of "practical-critical", activity.

XI

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.<sup>7</sup>

Of course there is only one small problem with this impassioned history lesson. While it is true that it is not enough to interpret the world; while it is also true that human/sentient/sensuous activity is required for revolutionary change; while it is also the case that without this political intelligence, this logic of sense, this courageous determination to inhabit thinking, dreaming, making, becoming; while it is true that ‘truth to power’ must be recognised (and re-recognised) not only beyond binaric and zero-sums games of Truth; it is also no less the case that new forms of matter / materialities have been spotted on the event-horizon of contemporary life. We are in the midst of a massive paradigm shift, with new forms of matter/materialities shape-shifting with new forms of intelligence, new forms of social agency, new forms of science, philosophy and art. Oddly entangled as dimensional singularities and inundated by realities augmented, artificial or something else yet to be invented, we have entered (or have been entered) into a wildly ascephalitic, derivatively engineered ‘common sense’ whose circulation and exchange, globally spores a series of plasticised playing fields, otherwise known as the petrol-technosphere.<sup>8</sup>

This marks a radical paradigm shift that takes sustenance from three seemingly odd environments: on the one side, big data, with its the circulation of information and the debt economy under the rubric of the so-called block-chain logics and the buying/selling of futures; on the other, quantum physics with an emphasis on superpositionality, non-locality, entanglement and diffraction; and on the third side, contemporary art (with a small 'a'), with its reliance on attunement, feed-back loops, fractal philosophy, erotic praxis and the queering of sense. The technosphere is both ephemeral and real; spurious and intensive, and manages to be in at least two places at the same time, defying not only Newtonian laws of space and time, but defying Einstein's basic presupposition that nothing is faster than the speed of light – except when it is; what Einstein called 'spooky action at a distance' – where two or more objects move at the same time in the same manner, irrespective of location.<sup>9</sup> (But here I am getting ahead of myself).

### plural

As far back as 1744, when "science" meant the fullness of a reasoned knowledge, which included magic, alchemy, philosophy, chemistry and the biological sciences, Giambattista Vico, in his *The New Science*, developed a pluralised sense of truth:

'338. [The New Science must] ... begin where its subject matter began, as we said in the Axions [314]. We must therefore go back with the philogians and fetch it from the stones of Deucalion and Pyrrha, from the rock of Amphion, from the men who sprang from the furrows of Cadmus or the hard oak of Virgil. With the philosophers, we must fetch it from the grogs of Epicurus, from the ciadas of Hobbes, from the simpletons of Grotius; from the men and women cast into this world without care or aid of God [...] (This is the science the philogians and philosophers have given us of the beginnings of humanity!).<sup>10</sup>

One of the important aspects of this form of argument was, of course, that it brought the human condition front and centre as a feature to Knowledge, heretofore regarded as only the providence of God. Change was to be rooted in human (free) will sutured on the grounds of this doubled headed-certainty. And while it may be true that this double-headed certainty could (and did) imply probability, and probability could (and did) imply error, and error could (and did) imply uncertainty, it did so on the basis of binaric contradiction: Natural Science v Human Science whose "deep cut" division [the "/" ] brought to bear an 'abyssal logic' – where change took place on either side of the divide; but never on or in or with the divide 'itself'.

Hannah Arendt was not the first to challenge this view, but she was one of the first to pose doubt with a different sort of character than that which might be linked to an abyssal (deep cut) logic. Unlike the doubting finger of Thomas who poked that finger into the side of Christ to check the status of the being who stood before his troubled eyes, "to doubt" for Arendt demarcated a kind of "unsayable something", a kind of unsutured *materiality* of logic, wherein stood the last bastion of apodictic proof.<sup>11</sup> One might doubt one's eyesight, one's hearing, one's very existence; but one could not doubt doubt itself. It was a clever move, wherein the core of one's being took the form of a newly devised intensity, a *cogito ergo sum* that translated to "I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am." To put this slightly differently, doubt was to become an a-materialised or ana-materialised plural surface (or ground) upon which – and the propeller for which – the being of human was conditioned. As Hannah Arendt was later to rephrase it, doubt was not (and is not) to be pitted 'against' thought: it *was/is* thought; the very condition of human existence.<sup>12</sup> Foucault would take it one step further: doubt was to be the very basis of imagination, creativity, and indeed, a stylistics of existence: I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I invent, therefore I am. Abyssal logic had nothing to do with it.

Apart from the many long-winded consequences filtering out of this age of reason and enlightenment through an acceptance of change brought about through human endeavor, came a shift in what the role of an external, Archimedean point (called: God) might now be. Within *The Gay Science* [read: *frivolous/happy/joyous/queer*], and as further developed in his *Will to Power*, Nietzsche neatly summarized the God problem with the unforgettable phrase: 'God is Dead.'<sup>13</sup> This, of course, was no ordinary death sentence, and it certainly did not mean what Hegel took it to mean when, some 80 years earlier he (Hegel) penned a similar decree, flatly condemning the new world order as being

enveloped by “the feeling that God himself is dead.”<sup>14</sup> For Hegel, the fear was precisely that people were turning away from God; but for Nietzsche, it was precisely the reverse, the fear that they were not turning away fast enough – not so much from God Himself, but from the need to find identity, meaning, indeed Spirit itself, in a totalizing, read: universal, sense of truth. What had died for Nietzsche was an entire moment not so much *in* history but *of* history – that is, the cultural condition which placed metaphysics as the new God-head of meaning, change, progress, prediction, man-made in all its mediocre glory. His ‘God is Dead!’ was not so much a lament; as it was a wake-up call attempting to remind all those who needed reminding that the time was nigh to rip sensuous knowledge, creativity, fearlessness from the mastiff of a resurrected eternally unfolding existence and be brave enough to look into the void, and deal with ‘it’ as it actually was/would be/might have been. It was time to get rid of this decrepitude empty shelter called Metaphysics and to embolden the ‘is’ with an ever-expanding intensity beyond that of doubt, daring, or even a stylistics of existence.

As is well known, the move, this ‘call to arms’ did not work; he was, as Nietzsche so woefully intoned, “writing before his time”:

“Whither is God?’ he cried. “I shall tell you. We have killed him – you and I. All of us are murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? [...] Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night [and more night] coming on all the while? [...] Do we not hear anything yet of the noise of gravediggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God’s decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us – for the sake of this deed he will be part of a higher history than all history hitherto.” Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they too were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke and went out. “I come too early,” he said then; “my time has not come yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering – it has not yet reached the ears of man.”<sup>15</sup>

It was not so much that one was too afraid to peer into the abyss, thought Nietzsche; it was rather, that people were not afraid *enough*. For Nietzsche, the intimate chemistry of change was always already connected with life-force; life-force with power, power with mastery, mastery with change; change with life-force—and then a repeat of the pattern – the chemistry of change as connected to life-force, life-force with power, power with mastery, mastery with change—and then a repeat of the pattern—the chemistry of change as connected to life-force, life-force with power, power with mastery, mastery with change and etc. *This* – and not transcendence, dialectics, deep cuts, abyssal logics or otherwise – was the Eternal return, always already returning an ‘intensity’, an erstwhile ‘will to power’, through a repeat performance that both copied itself and, in so doing, created anew: a kind of re-remembering complex ‘feedback loop’, a kind of fractalised mimetic repetition, a networked logic of the genus. Nietzsche named this materialized, slice of a return – a genealogy – one without predetermined cartographies – though creating cartographies nevertheless; one without ‘insides’ (or ‘outsides’) to the real, but initiating a strangely cathected materiality, a wild, bent, frivolous perhaps even joyful surface economies of not-quite-dead/but-not-quite-alive unsayable somethings.

### cannibalising.

Perhaps it is now worth considering something that may seem entirely obscure to the multiple dimensionalities and pluralised conundrums of entangled radical matter and materialisms just laid bare. For the moment, let us call it: “the problem of the Greek debt.”

In a small gathering over pizza and beer, a circle of freshly minted MBAs, all or most global CEOs in their respective fields, threw open the question “what is the most expensive item you have bought in your lifetime?” Around the wooden tables and saw-dusted floors came answers such as: a

house! A string of restaurants! A yacht! A masserati! A trip around the world! When almost all had responded in such-like terms, the last to speak took to the floor, raised a glass and flatly declared: “I bought the Greek debt.” Needless to say, he did not keep the Greek debt (for any meaningful length of time); he did not buy the Greek debt in order to lighten the load of those suffering due to austerity, homelessness, job loss, health issues. He bought the Greek debt as equity in a “futures market”; and summarily sold it (the Greek debt / future) for quite a tidy \$billion+ sum. This may tug on the ethical heartstrings of those appalled by this nonchalant gluttony (and it is appalling). But something else is at stake in the recapping of this story: The sticky cohesions of circulating ‘futures’ neither able to arrive nor leave, ‘futures’ that manage in their quick-flip circulation to solidify a global upper class, surfing over the collective heads of those still crippled with that debt, whilst creating pockets of the wildly wealthy, against the vast swathes of disenfranchised citizens, refugees, intellectuals, artists, educators and the dispossessed.

Of course, ever-expanding, wild disparities between the wealthy and the poor is not necessarily ‘new’. What is new is that this ascephalitic matter is neither an ‘empty’ form to be filled nor a fully positioned ideological mandate to be heralded. Instead it enables non-thought out, anti-intellectual strategies underpinning for example ‘the news’ (fake or otherwise) by cherry picking its own set of futures and block-chain derivatives, circulating ‘futures’ and then selling them on. And it is not simply limited to the news or the stock exchange or the circulation of debt. Here far right social movements employ the same language tropes as the socially conscious; there big data information engines click-bait, slice up and (re-)store 0’s and 1’s as fodder for disrupting national and local elections.

If ever there was a moment to start collectively imagining the ‘how’ in the famous clarion cry announced at the outset: ‘supposing it could be otherwise’, now is the time to do so.

Radical Matter: Untimely Meditation no. 3.

**Words: 4,318**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This published (3<sup>rd</sup>) meditation was developed over a two year period. Its first incarnation was given as Keynote at *Modus Operandi: Uncertainty*, International Conference at the invitation of María Angélica Madero, Directora Programa Artes Plásticas, Facultad de Artes Universidad El Bosque and Carolina Cerón Castilla, Departamento de Artes, Universidad de los Andes, Facultad de Artes y Humanidades, Bogotá, Colombia, 18-21 October 2016. It was introduced by the musical score/composition: *Red Right Hand* by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, and delivered with the film *Paris is Burning*. Dir. Jennie Livingstone, (NY: 1991) in the foreground. A second version was subsequently trialed at the *Lessons in Physics Conference*, mac Gallery, Birmingham, 18 Nov 2016, this time in complete blackness with no musical or visual accompaniment, and an emphasis, in the main on Einstein's 'spooky action at a distance'. Its debut at the Oxford University Philosophy Society and Ruskin School of Art, 10 May 2017 sought to highlight encounter, attunement, diffraction and the radical matter to which this kind of encounter, attunement, diffraction leads.

<sup>2</sup> Carlos Rovelli, *Reality is Not What it Seems: The Journey to Quantum*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 2017), np.

<sup>3</sup> For Adorno, this was a pain too great to bear; and yet too great to leave alone. 'Perennial suffering,' writes Adorno, 'has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living – especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living. His mere survival calls for the coldness, the basic principle of bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz; this is the drastic guilt of him who was spared. By way of atonement he will be plagued by dreams such as that he is no longer living at all, that he was sent to the ovens in 1944 and his whole existence since has been imaginary an emanation of the insane wish of a man killed twenty years earlier.' T. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E.B. Ashton, (London: Routledge, 1990, [1973]), 362-362. And yet for every woman, man, transgendered being, child who has been sexually assaulted, raped and/or tortured in their own private or community Auschwitz hell, re-remembering how to dream and indeed knowing that one *can* dream, is at the base of the third proposition outlined above.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche "How the Real World at last Became a Myth," in *Twilight of the Idols*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1990 [1895]), at <https://thefloatinglibrary.com/2010/03/08/how-the-real-world-at-last-became-a-myth/>. Accessed 11/06/2017.

<sup>5</sup> For the most obvious examples of each, see: M. Foucault *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (London: Routledge, (2002 [1966])); G. Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by S. Hand, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, (2006 [1986])); G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Vol II*, Translated by B. Massumi, (London: Continuum, (2004 [1980])); K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2007); Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Class, Race*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2011 [1983]), I. Stengers, *Comopolitics II (Posthumanities)*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); D. Haraway, *Staying with the trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (Experimental Futures)*, (Durham/London: Duke University, 2016); J. Golding, "Friendship" in L. Turner, U. Selbach, R. Broglio, *The Edinburgh Companion to Animal Studies*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); H. Rogers, *QueerTextuRealities*, (Birmingham: Article Press, 2014); Open Democracy (eds), *What is it To be Fierce: The Photography of Ajamu* <https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/zia-x/what-is-it-to-be-fierce-photography-of-ajamu>. Accessed 12/06/2017.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (The Government of Self and Other II), Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984*, translated by Graham Burchell, (Palgrave Macmillan: 2011 [2008]), especially "One: 1 February 1984: The First Hour," and "Five: 15 February 1984," 1-23; 73-95, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> K. Marx, *The Theses on Feuerbach*, translated from the German by W. Lough, *The Marx/Engels Reader*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, USSR, 1969, [1845]), pp. 13-15.

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted, in particular, to the arguments developed by Gerald Nestler, especially in his, "Derivative Logics," unpublished paper presented at the *Tokens Platform, 1948 Unbound: Unleashing the Technical Present, 30 Nov – 2 Dec 2017*, HKW, Berlin. [https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2017/1948/1948\\_start.php](https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2017/1948/1948_start.php) Accessed 7 Dec 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Einstein, B. Podolsky, and N. Rosen, "Can Quantum-Mechanical Description of Physiscal Reality Be Considered Complete?," *Physics Review*, 47, 777, (Princeton: American Physical Society, 1935).

<sup>10</sup> Giambattista Vico, "Book II: Poetic Wisdom: Corollaries Concerning the Principal Aspects of this Science, Chapter II," and "Book I: Section IV: Method," in his *The New Science*, translated from the third edition [1744] by T.G. Bergin and M.H. Fisch, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1948 [1744]), 88.

<sup>11</sup> Rene Descartes, *The Meditations*, as cited in Hannah Arendt, "The Vita Activa and the Modern Age," in *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 248-524, especially 293-303.

<sup>12</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 280-284.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Josefine Nauckhoff, edited by Bernard Williams, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007 [1877]), Section 125, 119-120.

<sup>14</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge* (1802), as quoted in “*The Word of Nietzsche*,” by Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and other Essays*, trans and with introduction by William Lovitt, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), pp. 58-59

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “*The Gay Science*,” as quoted in Martin Heidegger, “*The Word of Nietzsche*,” . 59-60.