

CLOSE: NEARING THE FUTURE BY MEANS OF SYMBIOGENESIS AND HYPEROBJECTIVITY

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ABSTRACT. *Close: Nearing the Future by Means of Symbiogenesis and Hyperobjectivity.*

At the beginning of the 21st century we find a call for philosophers to join a new alliance: with artists and architects rather than linguists or physicists. In order to see the ecosystem, we need to switch concepts, look away from “nature” and move towards ambiance and hyperobjects. Along with this rehabilitation of Aristotle (by speculative realism and, more specifically, object-oriented ontology) comes a call for a fresh start as post-humanistic symbionts. These are proposals for alternatives to the catastrophic end of the short-lived drama of the Anthropocene. All this aids the here introduction of near-future hyperobjectivity.

Keywords: *ambiance, Anthropocene, symbiogenesis, OOO / object-oriented ontology / flat ontology, nature, ecosophy, deep ecology, dark ecology, time and near future*

Thesis and introduction

Suspicion breeds confidence. It is a pleasurable slide from philosophical speculation to psychological realism. What is particularly of interest here has to do with the possibility of therapeutic applications of a near-future *telos*, in order to create an update to the therapeutic logos proposed by Viktor Frankl. My proposition is that we could work with a particular (novel) concept of time. What we could call fourth time, as different from past, future or present, will be referred to as *near future*. In this view, the discussion is brought about by the contemporary encounter with “the climate” as hyperobject. Classic notions of time can be addressed as intangible past, invented present and dreaming of deep futures. Near future would come into play as a signifier for what is already unfolding but not yet quite manifested. As

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hyperobjects are real but not yet graspable, the near future is lurking, like global warming behind the cool shadow of a summer cloud. Both *symbiogenesis* and *hyperobjects* will be treated as possible candidates for providing insight.

The author of this text relates to philosophy as a pharmacological approach to finding viable concepts. By viable concepts I mean innovations produced by the erosion of concepts through use, or their corrosion by contact with other concepts and/or events. The current urgency I try to address here has to do with not rushing things anymore (towards the future or past and neither any imagined “present”).

This article is projected around four key components (note: contemporary, arriving, their live articulation can be observed), each being allocated a special section, plus an intermezzo: “Nature”, Hyperobjects, OOO, (Intermezzo: *Human, cosmic time scales and our brief Anthropocene, numbers of beauty*), Symbiogenesis.

At this point, I need to propose a radical compression of the idea of nature through history in three main stages: monism, dualism, pluralism. What we encounter “now” as a species is the multitude. Around an elaboration of Badiou’s idea, “we” can only state that what is lurking is the lack of homogeneity that can save “us” only as trans-speciation. Us against nature, us against technology, us against unemployment, “us” might be left without an opposing identity, in the wake of a new hyperobject, ecology appears as hyper-objection to human singularity. Not just a play of words, but a real speculation on the possibility of survival as a planetary pack. Making kin is a way of terraforming the mind. And so, we move from *swallow (pop) ecology* to *deep ecology*, to *dark ecology*. Philosophy is presented with possibilities to look into the abyss, to inhabit the unconscious! Learn from the techno-ecology of living multitude. Symbiosis is a fact, language of translating genetic material. Autopoiesis appeals to *the mind* made possible after the partition with the post-modern experiment and deconstruction.

Along with these, a contributing factor will be inserted: the idea that historicism and futurism cannot be surpassed by presentism or new age styled *living in the moment*. The present is a radical abstraction. The past is a reference and the present a glitch of the imagination. As beings onto death, we can’t escape the gravity of this other abstraction called “the future” (ultimate source of procrastination and other, ideological, forms of alienation). What will be proposed through this text is the (rather inoffensive looking) idea of the *near future* as means (artful, as in the original *techne*) of escaping the pull of classical temporalism (future-past-present). The *near future* is the unfolding in which our participatory being can be manifested. Ecology and automation can play the role of opening this view.

Intrigued by Stiegler’s problematisation of total automation and going along the lines of some accelerationist and some more friendly (as in hopeful, systematic

positive political thinking) proposals to “demand automation!”,¹ approaches of post-work thinking and unworking,² lines of thought³ tend to take us through the (dull and somewhat cliché-like) dusty old binome of technology and nature. What we are quick to find, when investigating recent philosophical production is that (as in the arts) there is a tendency that suggests a low-voiced turning of the tides. On the one hand we get the idea of returning the *techne* to the arts; nothing new! we might be tempted to add, but along with what I will (throughout this article) designate as a speculative-realist rehabilitation of Aristotelian ontology that delivers an unexpected key for approaching the inevitable *oikos*, the other house of being. One great difficulty in approaching such subjects is not getting stuck on bitten paths, but how can one avoid Heidegger or Carl Schidt when talking about automation and technology as pharmakon.

Stiegler makes this jump gracefully, by addressing the problem on Kantian terms and shifting the problem of technology to the field of psychoanalysis. What we need, he argues is rather an unconscious pharmakon, a device for bouring our way out of total automation (that would comprise, most importantly the automation of desire) trough dreaming. The anti-psychiatric (R. D. Laing) and psychoanalytic lines already moved away from separating nature and technology as opposites. Even the machinic self is not just an object of critique as much as a key of unlocking unconscious structures. Machines and technology in general are not un-human, not against nature as such, but rather mirroring devices, canvases on which the unconscious is displayed. Now, given these neat alternatives, why keep the nature-culture or natural-technological distinction? First of all, and it might suffice for the short extension of this article, there is a link that might help us clear the way for understanding object-relations in the light of embracing the technological as hyper-human, rather than non-human or just plain post-humanistic.

We tend to think in terms of good or bad when approaching “technology” (at least in a social or industrial-economical context) because of inheritance, we are trained to link technology with the idea of the artificial, as opposed to the natural and, as we shall make clear in a few lines later, the natural is already embedded in

¹ I make direct reference to Nick Land, to Srnicek’s and Williams’ *Inventing the future*, Rutgers Bregman’s *Utopia for realists*, Paul Mason’s *Postcapitalism* and whole lot of other proposals that seem to make a move on to a new scene. I am intentionally avoiding direct references for this and other side-subjects in order to keep the main thread as clear as possible

² This refers to a concept proposed by Nancy for the re-planning or forgetting of philosophy and other societal dream-constructions

³ Paraphrasing Guattaris’ *lines of flight*, we might consider a careful generalization of philosophical investigation as blindly following threads (like lifelines in a flooded cave) for a telos to be constructed AND discovered.

a historical setting that transported the idea of nature from the bad, savage nature to the good, all luminous gaian-like nature of the art nouveau era and now awaiting its disassembly for a better, non-binary term, like *ambiance*, as Morton proposes. I choose⁴ this path for its aesthetic qualities. I will refer here to clear proposals of thinking for a *telos* is involved, a moving towards the future. In therapeutic terms, we might call it the shift from depression (historical, past oriented thinking) toward a near-future thinking. The anxiogenic⁵ deep future of progressive ideologies and what I call the (too often omitted) *case of the cosmist heresy* are surpassed by accelerationist (“the future is now!”) calls to mental action.⁶ What draws me, in the first place, to the subject of automated post-work society is an interest for what Viktor Frankl (as clinician and proponent of logotherapy, later to be coupled with Existential Analysis by Alfried Längle) indicated as the *weekend anxiety*. In this sense, the interest gravitates towards near future proposals that tend to sprout from post-humanistic techno-pharmakon thinking and *ecologies without nature*. In the following sections a possible near future scenario will be traced: from parting with the romantic idea of nature to post humanitarian rehabilitation of “us” in a fluid identity of symbiogenesis.

1. “Nature”

The partition with the vitalist line will not be discussed here, but must be taken into account as when we take a look at some main points in historical the development of the idea of Nature, we might get confused by apparent re-currencies.⁷ In late modernism, by habitus, we came to name things in generalities as if ever present. Contemporary social imaginary does not hold a clear account of how what we call “Nature” was not always there, more so, that “Nature” is actually a modern invention, fabricated in urban culture, during the emergence of Art Nouveau.

First, the old *physis* was to be buried under middle age grand separation narratives, where “nature” became the green “out there”, the ultimate threat, the mirror of man’s primary evil and uncontrollable instincts. The pre-Humboldtian imaginary, as Andrea Wulf in her meticulous study shows, constituted a perfect mental and/or

⁴ All due irony is intended, as a way of underlining the context

⁵ In clinical jargon, it is considered that depression thrives on a fixation on the past, while anxiety, or rather generalized anxiety is feeding on future-fixations. On the one side, fear of finitude as that which is forever lost and on the other, for what might never be (enough time).

⁶ Alluding to Morton’s serious joke: don-t just do something, sit there! (and think)”

⁷ I want to suggest that, whenever an idea re-appears, even in dramatically new forms, it tends to gain wait, in likens to the way monetary currencies tend to fluctuate (hopefully) in accordance with usage

cultural setting for colonial expansion. Wulf dedicates consistent chapters to illustrate how western thinking (along the tradition of a three level universe: natural, human, divine) moved from, (as for example) Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, that envisioned even The New World as inferior: plants, animals and people are smaller and people are not civilized.⁸ This were manifestations of a grander *manifest destiny* script, by which the world was split in two: the “us”, European, civilized Christians, and “it”/ “them”, the other, savage, uncivilized, “natural” world. In time it eroded, and late romantics as the Humboldt brothers had a lot to do with this.

From the Bolivarian constitution and Jeffersonian attitudes,⁹ small gestures grew into new ontologies and “national parks”. Conservationism was the greatest triumph of romantic dream. Still, dreams of separation from the now good, all harmonic nature. Alexander von Humboldt’s *Naturgemalde* grew from romantic inspirations to concrete urban styles meant for worshipping the perfection of nature through forms, in drawings by Ernst Haeckel and later Art Nouveau architecture. The condition of the modern citizen of the industrial economy polis was linked to alienation, from nature, from true self. Nature was to be visited on vacation and brought to life in cities through means of landscaping and architectural forms.¹⁰

As the romance of Natural Parks (more often “national parks”) did, in a short while created a sense of alienation. Walking a bitten path, nature as a museum, and escapism could not fulfill deep longings of city dwellers. Leading figure in the early ecological activism of the 70s, Professor Arne Naess, turns to Ecology as a means of assuring community, while arguing a shift from argumentation (logical or philosophical) to institutions developed over a long life spent in nature. *Friluftsliv*¹¹ was the concept presented as key to a new ecophilosophy and its two offspring: deep ecology (activism) and ecosophy (philosophical, peripatetic method of living with the environment). Ecosophy T he called it, as in the open possibility for any number of other ecologies (A, B, C, D., etc.). But we are soon to find that if we progress far enough, “environment,, is still shallow. One needs to be immersed, for deep ecology engages us in a continuous act of love.” In love one loses parts of one’s identity, gaining a new greater identity, something that in its truest sense cannot be spoken of¹²

But tree-hugging love-of-nature as self-improvement is itself becoming museal in later perspectives that call for “dark ecology,,. Timothy Morton, traces an ontology

⁸ Wulf, Andrea, *The Invention of Nature. The Adventures of Alexander von Humboldt, the Last Hero of Science*, p. 159

⁹ “the Scandinavian reindeer could walk under the belly of our moose”, *idem.*, p.160

¹⁰ *Idem.*, pp. 293-305

¹¹ Norwegian for life in open air or life in the mountains.

¹² Arne Naess, *Ecology, community and Lifestyle*, p. 11.

from God, to Nature, to matter and proposes the abyss; „ nature is not unlike *the subject*, a being who searches through the entire universe for its reflection, only to find none”.¹³ In assuming the blur between subject and object, nature becomes ambience. As in Badiou's truth process, a relentless and rigorous distillation of the subject from its identifications, “indeed, an ecological collective to come would not look like the nature-notion construct with its fascist-tending ideal of work and wholeness”¹⁴ In this pledge for ambience in dark ecology, “far from remaining natural, ecocriticism must admit that it is contingent and queer”.¹⁵ Appealing to the Heideggerian *Zerstreuung*, the environment becomes the subject of true apophatic practices¹⁶ and so we come to the paradox of hyperobjectivity.

2. Hyperobjects

If we follow Andrea Wolf, *nature* looks like the great entity that, until the expeditions and diplomatic interventions of Alexander von Humboldt, no one seemed to notice. The climate, though a hot topic, remains a secluded object. As Timothy Morton uses the example of the cool shadow of the cloud that hides the fact of global warming, the climate is something real, only graspable by speculation, or other non-direct observational instruments. Viscosity (*absolute proximity*, I would call it) hugeness or scales accessible only by *aprioric* intuition, and along with other qualities like *nonlocality*, *temporal undulation* and *phasing*, hyperobjects partake in a form of non-relationist *interobjectivity*. This kind of objects, they are closer than our perceptions would allow us to grasp. We are stuck with and to them. Zero degree of separation and we “capitalized nature precisely to denature it, as one would do to a protein by cooking it”¹⁷

Hyperobjects (like climate and the solar system or The Dutch East India company) are ontological units that cannot be accessed across a distance. This (viscosity) is their main attribute, for our short span of this article and it will do just fine. We are stuck to them (influenced, integrated), objects in the mirror that are closer than they appear, as the ontological slogan most appropriate for our times goes.

As to Victorian period discoveries (fuel-propulsion, evolution, capital, the unconscious) we must add *spacetime*, the nonlocality (in time and spatial dimensions) of hyperobjects is needed to undermine old (relationist) positions and find ways in

¹³ Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, p.15.

¹⁴ *Idem*, p. 141.

¹⁵ *Idem*, p. 143.

¹⁶ *Idem*, p. 175.

¹⁷ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*; p. 4.

which “we are poems about hyperobjects”.¹⁸ In all, what hyperobjectivity, including abstraction of action and from realism-activism, comes an *ecology without matter*, where appearance is the past, essence is the future and present-fixations are but cynical distancing methods typical to modernity, maintained by injunctions to act. In the field of hyperobjectivity, I found the idea that this fourth dimension of time (beside future, past and present), that what we address in philosophy is objects of partial analysis.

The present does not exist. We experience a crisscrossing set of force fields, the aesthetic = causal fields emanated by a host of objects. Time is not a series of now-points (Aristotle himself refuted this idea) but rather a sickening surge, like crosstown traffic, or a river without banks, like the title of a painting by Marc Chagall.”¹⁹

This has to be followed through, what Morton calls “Harman’s coral reef beneath Heidegger’s U-boat, that hyperobjects are not simply mental (or otherwise ideal) constructions, but real entities whose primordial reality is withdrawn from humans”.²⁰ An invitation to OOO, or flat ontology.

3. OOO

Ecology opens the discussion for a new ontology. Ethics, it seems, turns to urgency, in a context in which intellectual input might just save the day. At least this would be the main line of argument coming from an anti-Megarian (somewhat Aristotelian) school that wants to rehabilitate philosophy as a medium for art, architecture and aesthetics in a greater project of addressing potentialities of *speculative realism*.

Object Oriented Ontology, Triple O, OOO. This (given its intent to join forces with literary and architectural disciplines), this genre of speculative realism is somewhat born out of the discussions on hyperobjects. In his anti-Megarian approach, Graham Harman often uses two main illustrations of the idea. First, that potentialities can be re-asserted: a house builder is a house builder, even when asleep. Then, making use of an example coming from Islamic culture: fire burns cotton but fire and cotton never meet beyond their burning transaction. *Object Oriented Ontology* (OOO) operates a re-opening of the Aristotelian project by

¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 48.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 93.

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 15.

addressing the object-world along with the consideration that something (not magic, not outer-worldly), deeper in meaning and physicality, is always lurking along with the observed. OOO is an exercise in taking Socrates seriously:

“(...) the true danger to thought is not relativism but idealism, and hence the best remedy for what ails us is not the truth/knowledge pair, but *reality*. Reality is the rock against which our various ships always founder, and as such it must be acknowledged and received, however illusive it may be.”²¹

Objects, as presented by OOO are not identical to their properties, *real objects* exist whether or not they currently affect anything else. What we perceive is called *sensual objects*, and sensual objects come with sensual qualities, but it must be noted at all times that sensual objects exist only in relation to some real object. The sensual also constitute the means by which (real) objects relate to one another. Now the key idea that OOO brings to view a symbiogenetic quality to this new ontology is that “objects never make full contact with each other any more than they do with the human mind”.²² Harman identifies the presocratic period with undermining and overmining enterprises specific to the sciences. Physicalism, smallism, anti-fictionalism, or literalism are all just modes of the natural sciences, to which philosophy is urged to solve what they cant.²³ What OOO, as flat ontology (all objects must be treated with equal attention) is so an exercise in loving a unobtainable wisdom, and this is what no-matter, zero distance dark ecology asks for.

As the 2D map of the Earth, literal forms of cognition are unable to depict hyper structures, at least not as accurate as non-literal, metaphoric strategies. “If we give up the literal meaning of words as our privileged route to truth, then how do we save ourselves from a series of inevitable mystical claims?”²⁴ In this view the aesthetics of root for all philosophy is constituted, as “the metaphor (...) is not knowledge about pre-existing objects, but the production of a new object”.²⁵ As “two objects in the real world make contact not through direct impact, but only by way of the fictional images they present to each other”,²⁶ an invitation is presented to meet the world half way, on the grounds of inexact but unconsciously precise strategies. A new style of realism is sketched, as only through aesthetics can philosophy proclaim firm grounds in ethical domains and ontology. Addressing *ambiance* through metaphor.

²¹ Graham Harman, *Object Oriented Ontology*, p. 6.

²² *Idem.*, p. 12.

²³ *Idem.*, pp. 46-47.

²⁴ *Idem.*, p. 50.

²⁵ *Idem.*, pp. 88-89.

²⁶ *Idem.*, p.163.

We came to call *it*, the great unknown/unconscious, *the real* (as good Lacanians or some phenomenologists would not hesitate to agree), as the thing that is never there, the Being (Heideggerian) the opening and the exception, the surprise. Not *reality* as something accessible as a whole, but a side(dish) to perception that always withdraws and (paradoxically) also finds its way in, delivering material for the unconscious. OOO came to name it *real object* as something beyond and related to the perceived or *sensual object*. Along with qualities (again, real and perceived) OOO proposes a model that might just set the foundation for an architecture of a post-ecology or an *ecology without nature*, the "just right" kind of model for tackling hyperobjects such as (the) Ecosystem. By addressing the lines proposed by Timothy Morton (for hyperobjects and ecology after "Nature") and Graham Harman (for *speculative realisms* Object Oriented Ontology) we might find, or for the moment keep an open eye on, the possibility of finding at least two alternatives for a post-nature philosophy (also account as *post romantic* and *post humanistic*). One being the OOO and Hyperobject (parallax) view, the other comes from a *more* post-humanistic (the *post-human* and the *post-humanities*) perspective: the symbiogenetic proposal made by Donna Haraway's latest move.

4. Intermezzo: The human, cosmic time scales and our brief Anthropocene

E-missions / no mission, just exhaust. Professor Sloterdijk would invite readers to observe this innovative form of writing, typical of late modern industrial economy, as writing on air, writing in the atmosphere. Emissions are, right now depositing, in the higher stratum of the Earth, a chemical library as a planetary permanent memory of Humanity. What gained weight in the past two or three decades in the educated-popular imaginary is the idea of the Anthropocene. A layer of deposits is being created right now and the ongoing process is announced as the starting of the next great extinction. It is said to have been set in motion by the James Watts patent for the all-purpose steam propulsion engine. The second grand phase was opened by Oppenheimer. NOW we face the inevitable irretrievable trace of our existence. The half-life of plutonium extend to about 25.000 years and the reversal of global warming would take around 5000 years. These are time dimensions that create an awe-inspiring dizziness. The ISS travels around the Earth at about 7.66 km/s, while the Earth rotates around the Sun at about 30km/s. Meanwhile, our Solar System travels at about 220 km/s around the galactic center. At these speeds, accelerationism seems like an odd attempt at making the best of this existence by embracing technical advances as integrated or hyperintegrated object of our extended phenotype, a way of making the best of our brief anthropic adventure.

5. Symbiogenesis

In her proposal for a SF (speculative feminism) alternative to both techno-apocalypse and techno fixes, Donna Haraway sets the stage for a forthcoming possibility, a form of becoming by assuming a transformative symbiosis with what and who is, “with each other or not at all”.²⁷

“The children of compost. The human and animal symbionts keep the relays of mortal life going, both inheriting and inventing practices of recuperation, survival, and flourishing”²⁸

This *compost utopia*²⁹ proposes a way of, instead starting anew, learning to inherit without denial and stay with the trouble of damaged worlds. If we are already familiarized to her cyborg manifesto, it would appear “natural” to meet her at life-s end with a pledge for embracing decay and radioactive clouds. In this radical exercise for disaster hugging, we find meaning in this form of hyper Buddhism, of fusion without confusion. If plant do not produce language, but rather art, we are invited on a journey of becoming – *phytologists*.³⁰

The image of the ending of the Anthropocene is salvaged by means of constructing viable grounds for a Chthulucene. After collision, entanglement. Gaia, Pachamama, Tangaroa, Medusa. All mother figures, all earth made futures. The end of humanity is fertile, human becomes humus. All disasters, past, present *and to come* are delivering compost material for a myriad, intra-active assemblages. The more-than-human, the other-then-human, the inhuman and human-as-humus, all participate in a construction of inevitable future fusion. The trouble is that we are already entangled. We can fight, flight or join the fundamental transformations given by symbiogenesis. The idea is to stir things up, to make kin, to compose and negotiate composting and symbiotic possibilities. As expected, Haraway urges readers to think and imagine futures made up by not prolonging the end-of-the-Holocene (Anthropocene), but by accelerating its completion.

“I think our job is to make the Anthropocene as short / thin as possible and to cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge.”

²⁷ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the trouble*, p. 5.

²⁸ *Idem.*, p. 140.

²⁹ *Idem.*, p. 150.

³⁰ *Idem.*, p. 121.

(Instead of) Conclusions AND Remarks

Following Berardi on his approach to end-times by means of re-writing AND for endings, I tried to use conceptual elements for assembling a future oriented philosophy. The specific twist comes from the idea insert of *near future*. In this, I try to project the most unpleasant, abyssal, unconscious. The lurking object of fatality.

In the far future we can construct mental playgrounds for relaxation. The far future gives most valuable time for progress-fixations and, in turn, a constant alienation from the ongoing factuality. The present is the other trap, the quicksand of perceptual overmining. The present is either too great to be owned or to abstract to be addressed. The near future in turn is the forthcoming. Not foreseeable, because we are stuck to it like in a hyperobject reality. We can only speculate, investigate its continuations. Looking for margins, for endings and structures might prove fatal. Philosophical thought my get smashed against the inevitability of Being, of the real, of unconscious objects and real world hyperobjects. The invitation we are presented with has to do with perceiving textures, not structures and moving away from deep future-fixations to near futures in-the-making. With these we can make kin, overstand the entanglement and access the abyssal aspects of an ecology that we are ambionts to. The thought that we are the ambiance, that we are the medium, might just move mental objects in ways felt, not expected.³¹

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³¹ In this ending / ANDing remark I paraphrase Laurie Andersons: *Born, never asked*.

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