VOMIT APOCALYPSE;OR, QUENTIN MEILLASSOUX'S *AFTER FINITUDE*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently Anglophone Continental philosophy has been marked by an emergent trend which goes under a variety of names, but which is perhaps best known as "speculative realism" (SR) (alongside such fellow-travellers as "object oriented ontology"). Its proponents now include—and exclude—such personages as Ian Bogost, Ray Brassier, Levi Bryant, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux, and Timothy Morton, among others.[1] The rapid success of SR and object oriented ontology has been remarkable but also controversial: the trend has been accompanied and prosecuted by often-scathing polemics from all sides. Notably, much of the discussion has taken place online—which perhaps makes SR the first philosophical movement of the post-convergent digital media environment.[2]

Despite the many differences separating its putative adherents, there are nonetheless certain shared convictions within this general approach. The approach—broad and diverse as it is—is explicitly and recurrently marked by three key features. The first is a thoroughgoing hostility to the Kantian critical heritage, at every level, and especially the latter's alleged anthropomorphism, subject-centeredness, and representationalism. The second is a concomitant conviction that there must be a return to objects, to things-in-themselves, or what Meillassoux himself designates as "the Great Outdoors," outside any subjective relation. The third concerns the necessity for the development of new means of thought itself, on the basis that an active priority must be given to renovating philosophy as such, independent of any existing practices.

In this article I turn to Meillassoux's work in particular—not least because it seems to offer the strongest arguments yet presented in SR—and re-examine it according to these features. I will, first, give a brief account of some of Meillassoux's central claims and arguments, focussing on his treatment of these aspects; second, summarize some of the major criticisms that have been levelled at it, in order to; third, suggest how such

criticisms might themselves be supplemented by a further critique of Meillassoux's presuppositions about logic; fourth, show how his recently-elaborated doctrine of the material sign at once attempts to answer these logical difficulties yet ends by repeating the difficulties, before; fifth, concluding with some summary polemical remarks about SR's approach more generally. It is with this conclusion that I suggest that Jacques Derrida's analysis of the non-vicariousness of vomit in Kantian aesthetics returns as a kind of disavowed master-trope of the "objects" of SR itself.

2. SOME KEY MOMENTS IN *AFTER FINITUDE*

In his extraordinary text *After Finitude*, Meillassoux makes the strong claim that all post-Kantian philosophy has been dominated by what he calls "correlationism," that is, the fundamental thesis that there is no possible access to things-in-themselves except by way of a correlation (however that correlation is conceived).[3] Correlationism maintains that objects cannot be thought of without subjects, and vice-versa. In Meillassoux's words:

> by "correlation" we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other. We will henceforth call *correlationism* any current which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined.[4]

There are two, apparently opposed consequences that flow from the correlationist impasse: first, what Meillassoux calls "weak correlationism," which deabsolutizes all thought of being by referring to the necessity of correlation (e.g., nothing can be said of Things-in-themselves, since anything that might be said has to pass through representations that always-already bind it); second, "strong correlationism," which reabsolutizes the correlation itself (e.g., intentionality is irreducible in any philosophical account of reality to the extent that it must itself become a fundamental element of any ontology).

Against this allegedly deleterious capture by critical philosophy, Meillassoux proposes a return to a classical, pre-critical philosophy, one of whose models is Descartes. To this end, Meillassoux revivifies and radicalises a series of old-school arguments: that mathematics is capable of thinking the thing-in-itself (*qua* the "primary qualities" that are absolutely independent of us); that all thought is governed by the principle of non-contradiction (the sole discriminator of any possible consistency); that the only necessity is contingency itself (that there is no reason whatsoever for anything to take place). In the course of his demonstration, Meillassoux revises David Hume's famous argument against causal necessity as challenging even the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason: "rather than affirming like Hume that reason is incapable of proving a priori the *necessity* of laws, I propose to show that, quite on the contrary, reason proves to us a priori the *contingency* of laws."[5] This principle of unreason will be renamed in turn as the "principle of factiality," that is, the presentation of the "non-factual essence of fact as such."[6]

Having effected a kind of destruction of correlationism to his own satisfaction, Meillassoux proceeds to reconstruct a classical ontology, but now of a post-Kantian kind. For if, as Meillassoux says, he wishes to return to the classics, he nonetheless recognises that it remains necessary and desirable that an overturning of correlationism must retain certain correlationist elements. The key distinction here is between "metaphysical realism," which sustains by means of a principle of sufficient reason the necessity of a substance of some kind (e.g., "God"); and "speculative realism," the maintenance of absolutist thinking without recourse to any necessary substance whatsoever. Only the latter can simultaneously take into account the force of the correlationist arguments *and* turn these arguments against the necessity of correlation itself. Rather than a necessity of a certain being (metaphysical realism) or of any correlation (correlationism, weak or strong), the speculative realist will affirm the absolute necessity of contingency alone.

Such contingency is to be considered truly absolute. Meillassoux therefore argues against all probabilistic reasoning regarding the regularity or stability of all and any physical laws. The universe could utterly change at any moment; so that, in the words of W.B. Yeats, "a terrible beauty is born." Yet the incontrovertibility of such annihilation does not simply mean that nothingness becomes the *fons et origo* of existence. Meillassoux's project is, quite to the contrary, to make it impossible that some thing not exist. Yet how can this be? From what he calls the two "anhypothetical principles," those of unreason (the absolute non-existence of any principle of sufficient reason), and the principle of non-contradiction (the absolute impossibility of thinking the existence of a contradictory being), he draws the conclusion that the only absolute necessity is the absolute impossibility of a necessary being. Why? Because the principle of unreason guarantees what Meillassoux here calls "a hyper-Chaos," irreducibly omnipotent and capable of producing anything at all at any time, from eternal stasis to the unutterably unthinkable. This hyper-Chaos comes with one cool, incontrovertible guarantee, however: that "a necessary entity" "is absolutely impossible."[7]

Two remarks. First, on Meillassoux's account, "*a contradictory entity is absolutely impossible, because if an entity was contradictory, it would be necessary*."[8] A contradictory entity would not be able to *become* other than it is, because it would precisely always already *be* other than it is; if that was the case, then it would destroy any possibility of determination of entities and change. Unable not to be other to itself, this being would be necessary. Yet a necessary being contravenes the principle of unreason. Despite this argument, however, it is not the principle of non-contradiction per se upon which Meillassoux relies—he sees non-contradiction as an anhypothetical principle, that is non-derivable but rationally demonstrable, but one bearing only on the possibility of the thinkable—but the principle of unreason upon which, Meillassoux claims, it is possible to verify the principle of non-contradiction itself. Second, Meillassoux wants to uphold a strong version of this principle of unreason: "it is necessary that there be something rather than nothing because it is necessarily contingent that there is something rather than something else."[9] It therefore becomes necessary that at any time, at least one contingent being exists, given that this reinscription of modal categories means that Meillassoux's claims must hinge on actuality, not upon pure possibility in general. Yet the ontological status of this contingent existent remains uncertain, for reasons I will return to below.

The striking and rigorously counter-intuitive nature of Meillassoux's program should not blind us, however, to his various sleights-of-thought. I am tempted to suggest that the success of his work is founded on a double appeal: on the one hand, and despite his adverting to Galileo and modern science, Meillassoux returns a sovereignty to philosophical reasoning as such, and to pure reason's independent powers to think the real; on the other, the apparent rigour of this program is in fact nothing of the kind, but the effect of an assemblage of assertions that insist on their own consistency without being able to argue for it. Meillassoux's work at once purports to free philosophers in general of their dependence on any other discourse, returning them to a classical position of sovereign thought-power, at the same time that its own weaknesses enable them not to feel compromised by any existing mode of philosophy in particular. Meillassoux's position also thereby enables interventions into science, literature, theology, what-have-you, from a position of intimate exteriority.

It is surely for these and other reasons that *After Finitude* rapidly attracted a great deal of criticism from a variety of positions.[10] Lorenzo Chiesa argues that Meillassoux's insistence on "non-totalization" can only be ensured by covertly introducing "a supreme form of totalization."[11] Simon Critchley worries that the return to the distinction between primary and secondary qualities might induce an ethics that obliterates all cultural differences.[12] Alexander Galloway believes that Meillassoux relies on mathematics as ahistorical, but today mathematics can only be understood in its historicity: "The mode of production today is math."[13] Martin Hägglund confronts Meillassoux with the allegedly superior theory of time provided by Derrida.[14] Peter Hallward claims that "Meillassoux's rationalist critique of causality and necessity seems to depend on an equivocation between metaphysical and physical or natural necessity."[15] Graham Harman thinks that "Meillassoux gives us a frankly dualistic ontology when it comes to contingency."[16] Adrian Johnston thinks that Meillassoux's rationalist claims are unable to be scientifically supported, at the same time that he relies on their epistemological superiority.[17] Jon Roffe has argued that Meillassoux cannot coherently think ontological

change: "Meillassoux's hyper-chaos cannot destroy time; it *cannot* even coherently be thought as the ground of time, since it is in fact time, taken in this minimal differential sense, that grounds the possibility of any otherwise, and any identity."[18] Christian Thorne targets Meillassoux's "worse" than "almost illiterate" history of philosophy as essentially relying on disavowed paranomasia in fudging distinctions between epistemology and ontology.[19] Alberto Toscano holds that "Meillassoux's attack on the idealist parameters of correlationism is ultimately idealist in form."[20] For Christopher Watkin, "it is rationally illegitimate, according to the contingent norms of rationality that prevail at the moment, to disqualify a non-rational discourse on the absolute on pretext of its irrationality."[21] Alenka Zupancic maintains "the great Outside is the fantasy that covers up the Real that is already right here."[22]

Whatever one might make of such critiques, Friedrich Nietzsche himself would undoubtedly add that part of the difficulties with most—not all!—of these responses is that, at the very moment that they offer strong propositions countering this or that aspect of Meillassoux's work, they literally cannot allow themselves to go all the way with their destruction: for real demolition inevitably undermines its own rationale. What I would therefore like to propose here takes a slightly different angle, proceeding by a kind of "deconstruction" of the rhetorical assemblage of Meillassoux's text, unpicking the seams in his style of argumentation. I do this by focussing on Meillassoux's self-confessed general principles, as well as the status of the articulations he attempts to forge between them.

First, let's pinpoint Meillassoux's general tendency to select from *particular* logical and mathematical enterprises the principles or axioms that suit him, without his always acknowledging that: i) these do not necessarily have the same import outside their self-restricting frame of operations (this is especially the case with his use of set-theory axioms which are, precisely, a *set*), nor are they necessarily compatible with each other outside such frames (of course, they may well be, but this is *assumed* by Meillassoux, never *demonstrated*); ii) the legitimacy of scientific discourse can only be prioritised by the downgrading or abandonment of all other forms of thought, whose symptom in Meillassoux's text is the constant shifting between the names of "science," "logic" and "mathematics," without their differences ever going beyond the invocation of various received syntagms (e.g., at points, Meillassoux suddenly starts to speak about "mathematized science"); iii) that these metastatic shifts find an attempted resolution in Meillassoux by an ambiguous recourse to the literary.[23] Even in more recent work, in which Meillassoux has clearly recognized these problems and offers some arguments to deal with them, I believe his response fails on its own terms.[24] The errors are constitutional, not cosmetic; they emerge whenever a philosophy takes itself as immediately being able to take other discourses outside their own terms.

Such sleights-of-thought have immediate consequences for the consistency of Meillassoux's theses. Precisely to the extent that he has to consider mathematics as essentially a non-discourse of pure reference in order to evade the correlationist critique, Meillassoux ends up unable to sustain *or* abandon the distinction between existence and reference without implicitly reintroducing totality on the one hand, or the paradoxes of self-reference on the other. One upshot of this is that Meillassoux's deployment of the principle of non-contradiction is in fact *arbitrary*. It has no demonstrable privileged status, either "externally" or "internally," according to his own arguments. To his credit, Meillassoux does everything he can not to accept this, even going so far as to give a little non-analysis of a rival logical innovation, paraconsistent theory, for which true contradictions are sometimes possible and conceptually acceptable. Here is Meillassoux:

> We claimed to have established the necessity of non-contradiction because a contradictory being would be a necessary being. But it could be objected that we have conflated *contradiction* and *inconsistency*.... for contemporary logicians, it is not non-contradiction that provides the criterion for what is thinkable, but rather inconsistency.[25]

In his own defence, Meillassoux proceeds to propose something quite dissatisfactory:

> We would need to point out that paraconsistent logics were not developed in order to account for actual contradictory facts, but only in order to prevent computers, such as expert medical systems, from deducing anything whatsoever from contradictory *data* (for instance, conflicting diagnoses about a single case), because of the principle of *ex falso quodlibet*. Thus, it would be a matter of ascertaining whether contradiction, which can be conceived in terms of incoherent data about the world, can still be conceived in terms of non-linguistic occurrences. We would then have to try to demonstrate that dialectics and paraconsistent logics are only ever dealing with contradictions inherent in *statements* about the world, never with *real* contradictions in the world—in other words, they deal with contradictory theses about a single reality, rather than with a contradictory reality.[26]

This is unconvincing. The situation is worsened further by Meillassoux purporting to gesture towards possible criticisms of his theses so as to strengthen their grounds. Yet he finishes this subsection with a significant dismissal: "we will not pursue this investigation any further here..."[27] But why not? This is palming off the impossible as if it were merely a tactical consideration.

First, what possible import can the empirical circumstances of the development of paraconsistent logics have on the sorts of abstract argumentation Meillassoux delights in? In short, none—otherwise one could immediately turn this around and assert that the veracity of Meillassoux's own arguments might themselves also depend on a *particular* contingency. To even mention this as a possible argument, then, is highly suspicious. Note his use of the word "only"; note, too, the implicit treatment of "data" as if data were essentially equivalent to a "statement." Yet this must be precisely *not* the case—otherwise there would presumably be no need to develop a radical new logic to handle it. Meillassoux, moreover, knows this; otherwise there would be no need to raise it at all (even if only to then, preposterously, claim that the problems he is identifying strengthen his argument although he doesn't actually need to confront them really at all....). If Meillassoux wants to render data equivalent to, if not a subset of, other linguistic phenomena, then he has a great deal more work to do. Perhaps inevitably, then, without such work, the question concerning technology raises its Medusa Head in a symptomatic form. The claim that paraconsistency develops "*only in order to prevent computers from…*" means that Meillassoux can only recoil from the appalling image of *Techné* he sees reflected in the shining Aegis of Philosophy, waving his unscabbarded principles in the air.

For it is not simply the case that paraconsistency deals only with "statements" and not "real contradictions." Quite to the contrary, as I have already been suggesting, "data" must be irreducible to a linguistic phenomenon, as is not only evident from the remarks above, but because data is itself a term with more than a simple onto-technological bearing. In a universe that can itself be considered essentially informatic, data is as real as it gets, indissociably material and mathematised at once. Such data is irreducible to contemporary computing issues, as is evident from contemporary computational ontologies, such as those of Gregory Chaitin, Edward Fredkin or Stephen Wolfram, which tend to render the "real" universe as essentially operating according to differences-without-substance-or-subject.[28] Once again, this is not to affirm the viability of such theories, only to suggest that Meillassoux's claims regarding his own *preference* for non-contradiction are too weak to exclude the possibility of the separation of contradiction from inconsistency.[29]

Against Meillassoux's assertions, there is an immediate, stringent and powerful ontological interpretation of an extremely simple version of paraconsistency, which, in lieu of Meillassoux's philosophical propositions regarding the primacy of the principle of non-contradiction, affirms the primacy of the law of excluded middle. If one takes even a basic comprehension of the "laws of logic" as in principle able to be understood and applied independently of each other, as Meillassoux *de facto* does, then affirming the primacy of excluded middle immediately gives us a bizarre but sustainable ontology: *real differences prior to identity or contradiction*.[30] Moreover, and in line with a wide range of paraconsistent theses, such an "ontology" falsifies the ancient proposition concerning contradictions *ex falso quodlibet*: under such paraconsistent conditions, not all *real*

contradictions are necessarily "explosive"; nor do they necessarily entail, as Meillassoux declares, any kind of necessary being (rather, they bear upon constrained local determinations and not on any totality).[31] Then again, one might also suggest that such logics at least reintroduce the possibility of necessary beings that are anything but God. Whether or not one would wish to establish and defend such an ontology is a moot point. The upshot in the current context is simply that we can now also say this means that there is always a philosophical *decision* to be taken regarding *means*, and this decision cannot be grounded logically, as the choice of logic is itself integral to such a decision.

Even in the famous ur-example that Meillassoux denominates as the "arche-fossil," an ancestral remnant that science confirms as anterior-to-any-possible-givenness-whatsoever, his own grand gestures deceive him. Let's put it like this: the example is reliant on results generated by radioactive dating, that is, a scientific theory, as rigorous as it gets, which depends upon measuring the decay of isotopes. One can hardly fault Meillassoux's desire to affirm that "There is contingent being independent of us, and this contingent being has no reason to be of a subjective nature,"[32] but the example he proposes has the actuality of modern particle physics in the background: one can't make the machines to generate these dates without such an actuality. But certain dominant interpretations of physics seem to contest the application of non-contradiction at the sub-atomic level. However one wishes to interpret this situation (is it contradiction only at the level of the pre-scientific everyday or real contradiction at the level of being or a mere *façon de parler*, etc.), it turns Meillassoux's program into something a little weird: the existence of the arche-fossil can only be presented on the basis of technologies that function according to physical theories that certain strong interpretations suggest contradict the laws of non-contradiction. At the very moment that Meillassoux wishes to align himself with mathematized physics—or, more precisely, to draw essential lessons from its procedures and results that affront every possible correlationist response—he departs from it with the very concept that was supposed to exemplify it.

But to say this is also to say that Meillassoux is *assertoric* where he should be *argumentative*, or that he draws on contingencies as proofs. In Meillassoux's own terms, it is this: once it becomes clear that there is no particular philosophical priority that has to be given to the principle of non-contradiction, and that the question of means is non-derivable, then *the condemnation of "correlationism" cannot be maintained*. Or, rather, it reveals that the accusation of "correlationism" itself conflates two quite different issues, the question of the irreducibility of the thought-being distinction and the question of the means of philosophy itself. To put this another way, speculative realism is not a post- or pre-Kantianism, but a *hyper-Kantianism*, one which effects a critical reduction of the subject-object distinction but which, in doing so, mistakes the status of philosophical means *as* means. In doing so, it succumbs to rhetoric without, for that, being able to conceal the affiliations it denies; worse still, it conceals the contingency of its own presuppositions in purporting to announce them; last, it fails entirely to think *the real of means*.

Ray Brassier has analysed the consequences of this failing in the strongest critique of Meillassoux to date, which precisely targets the consequences of treating mathematics as giving a description of the primary qualities of real objects. If Meillassoux is clearly relying on Alain Badiou's own prior arguments here, it is in a manner that is perhaps characteristic of speculative realism more generally: the thinkers they invoke to license their own projects provide arguments that entail conclusions antithetical to their own. In this particular case, Brassier shows that, whereas Badiou's theses about the ontology of set theory function "subtractively," that is, as essentially non-empirical claims about the place in which thought and being can meet in the void, Meillassoux covertly reintroduces a form of Pythagoreanism-that-he-must-deny. For "Meillassoux is forced into the difficult position of attempting to reconcile the claim that being is not inherently mathematical with the claim that being is intrinsically accessible to intellectual intuition…. The problem lies in trying to square the Galilean-Cartesian hypothesis that being is mathematizable with an insistence on the speculative disjunction whereby being is held to subsist independently of its mathematical intuitability."[33] This situation must pose serious problems for Meillassoux. On the one hand, being cannot be mathematical, which would be simple Pythagoreanism; on the other, mathematics is the only means by which being can be coherently be thought, which requires a fuller account of the privileges of means. The emergence of a thought that considers its own

emergence as contingent reintroduces a temporal schematism that contravenes its own thought of time.

Meillassoux has presumably taken Brassier's critique seriously, because he has recently attempted to treat the problem with a supplementary theory, that of the "meaningless sign."[34] Unfortunately—and decisively—precisely the same problems and misunderstandings recur in the putative solutions proffered here. Hence Meillassoux, in his attempt to give a speculative grounding to the claims of modern mathematized science, asserts: "Against all reduction of the meaningless sign to its material basis (sound or mark) we must maintain *that there exists in the very sign itself a stratum of immateriality* that not only *has nothing to do with meaning* but that precedes it, conditions it, and can exist independently of it." The demonstration (which symptomatically has recourse to a little "Fable of the Contented Paleographer") purports: "to exhibit a minimal condition, modest yet fundamental, of various contemporary formal languages—logical as well as mathematical. This minimal condition, as we shall see, has to do with our capacity to think a meaningless sign. I will then derive this capacity to think a meaningless sign from the principle of factuality, by showing that there is an essential link between this sort of sign and absolutized contingency." I believe that Meillassoux does not show such "an essential link."

How does Meillassoux proceed? First, he makes a distinction between the *primo-absolutizing* (properties necessary for every being) and the *deutero-absolutizing* (the absolute property of independence from the human). Second, he proffers a criterion for differentiating natural from formal languages. In Euclid, definition precedes postulates and axioms, whereas in set theory, there is no such initial definition of terms (here, Meillassoux is drawing again on Badiou); hence the set is understood by him as a sign without meaning or reference, whereas it is operator-signs that give meaning (that is, properties). Meillassoux identifies the crucial differentiator between primo- and deutero- as determined by the function that meaningless signs (henceforth: MS) play within their respective levels. Formal languages give a *structural* role at the level of *syntax* to the MS, which is therefore supposedly alone capable of giving us access to deutero-absolute truths. Against both formalism and Badiou, then, Meillassoux constructs "*an ontology of the empty sign*," which derives from thinking the consequences of the form of the pure MS itself. "Formal meaning," says Meillassoux, "is the rule-governed use of meaningless (or non-signifying) syntactical units." A familiar position, it is true, but one that Meillassoux wishes to radicalise.

The level of immateriality of the MS which allegedly "precedes, conditions and is independent of it" draws on the type/token distinction, whereby the deposition of three 'a's constitutes an instance of the *type* 'a'. (By the way, linear logic might here contest the "illimitable reproducibility" Meillassoux assigns to this situation.) Apparently this distinction is not conformable to the distinction material/concept. Unlike Saussurian "arbitrariness" which is "arbitrary" vis-à-vis the relation between the material (signifier) and its meaning (signified), there is here an arbitrariness of what Meillassoux calls the "kenotype" itself (from the Greek, *kenos*, empty). Such a kenotype could materially be anything ("it is infinitely variable in principle with regard to its form, and this form has no necessity in itself"), which gives, within each sign a sameness of sensible similarity (so to speak) *and* a sameness of iterative identity. We should therefore attend to the constitution of the sign before any link to any signified whatsoever.

Meillassoux proceeds to some further distinctions. In a little interlude, "The Fable of the Contented Paleographer," he provides two superposed lines of marks, about which he remarks: every *reproduction* of the same mark is also a *recurrence*, which can be thought as: i) sensible non-dissimilar difference, that is, as *repetition* or monotony; ii) as *iteration*, i.e., as the non-differential, unlimited recurrence of marks, whereby the latter escapes the effect of the former, i.e., as intemporal and nonspatialized, which leads to: iii) *reiteration* as differential and unlimited, qua possibility opened by the thinking of differences outside any sensible repetition. According to Meillassoux, it is through this thought of reiteration that we can think the pure absence of necessity. But, strictly speaking, Meillassoux's demonstration entails something quite different, that is, *the absolute necessity of materiality*. Even if we accepted the description of the meaningless sign and the kenotype, we still have to say if we wish to remain consistent (i.e., non-contradictory) that the kenotypic

potentiality is only *potentiality* insofar *as it is and is not* the material sign that indexes it.[35] Note how this—strangely enough — repeats one of Meillassoux's own arguments from *After Finitude* (the demonstration of the necessary existence of a contingent being) against him, at the very moment that he himself has begun to operate at the level of the very "statements" (here the principle of the infinite reproducibility of letters) to which he condemned paraconsistent logics.

Three further remarks: 1) the "reduction" of which Meillassoux speaks harbours a multiplicity of possible interpretations, all of which he essentially ignores, apart from the most negative; 2) the "stratum of immateriality" he designates simply cannot be said outside its material signs, because *materiality is irreducible no matter what its actual material is or how this material presents itself*; 3) his position now comes a cropper of Derrida's critique of presupposition (of which more below). The key here is that the "stratum of immateriality" of which Meillassoux speaks is itself precisely *void*; and that the various kinds of repetition he invokes beg the *question of the possibility of repetition itself*. Indeed, this is precisely the point at which we can return to the problematic of hyper-Kantianism as providing the disavowed key to speculative realism and object oriented philosophy, with a little help from Derrida. As Hägglund has quite rightly suggested, "Although Meillassoux rarely mentions him by name, Derrida is clearly one of the intended targets for his attack on the idea of a 'wholly other' beyond the grasp of reason."[36] But we can go further: it is Derrida's work, particularly his deconstruction of the sign, to which speculative realism is indebted in a fashion that is embarrassing and unacceptable for it.

In an extraordinary but lamentably-underquoted essay, Derrida deconstructs Immanuel Kant's *Third Critique* in an unprecedented fashion.[37] It is not an exaggeration to say that "Economimesis" is probably unique in the entire tradition of commentary on Kant, for at least three reasons:

> 1. the *literality* of Kant's text is foregrounded throughout (e.g., "Is it merely an accident of construction, a chance of composition that the whole Kantian theory of mimesis is set forth between these two remarks on salary?")
>
> 2. the "logic" of strict contradictions that begin to show up in Kant's text is not an occasion for its dismissal by Derrida, but a demonstration that it is impossible not to incarnate such contradictions, which are articulated on the basis of the aforementioned literality;
>
> 3. a new anti-Kantian-Kantian figure is drawn from this investigation, whose name is "vomit" insofar as vomit names the impossibility of vicariousness, that is, the non-supplantability of utterly non-subjective being.

Let's listen to Derrida himself on the issue:

> What is absolutely foreclosed is not vomit, but the possibility of a vicariousness of vomit, of its replacement by anything else—by some other unrepresentable, unnameable, unintelligible, insensible, unassimilable, obscene other which forces enjoyment and whose irrepressible violence would undo the hierarchizing authority of logocentric analogy—its power of identification…. The word vomit arrests the vicariousness of disgust; it puts the thing in the mouth; it substitutes, but only for example, oral for anal. It is determined by the system of the beautiful, "the symbol of morality," as its other; it is then for philosophy, still, an elixir, even in the very quintessence of its bad taste.[38]

My thesis is therefore as follows: it is this vomit that is the disavowed paradigm of the speculative realist utopia: precisely not subject nor subjectivisable, precisely not conformable to the phenomena-noumenon distinction; precisely the name for the factality of matter without any possible representation and without any possible meaning. Vomit is the paradigm of SR's Great Outside, of its allegedly-levelled objects. More cruelly, then, SR would be a fundamental *name for a recoiling from and repetition of the factality of Kant's vomit as the paradigm of thought within thought itself*. To put it differently: the spew is here a truly real contradictory thing.

To summarize: SR would have, despite itself, the virtue of enabling a distinction to be drawn *within* the Kantian-phenomenological heritage between *intentionality* and *means*, so that the latter category can take on its full import as indispensable to the practices of *contemporary* philosophy, whereas the former takes on a properly regional or derivative aspect. Yet SR, to the extent that it is concerned with battling correlationism or, at a lesser level, with affirming the rights of the Great Outside, becomes a symptom of an unthought within "method" insofar as it simultaneously proclaims the total independence of being, yet cannot give any arguments for such an assertion without falling into contradictions that must be sutured by a self-corroding rhetoric. In the penumbra of Kant's vomit's splatter, the objects of the great outside, and perhaps even the Mallarméan "*Perhaps*," start to look and smell again like the most delightful, sub-philosophical, idealist elixirs.

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NOTES

1. See, *inter alia*, I. Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology; or What It's Like to Be a Thing*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012; R. Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*. Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; L. Bryant, *A Democracy of Objects*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2011; L. Bryant *et al*. (eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Melbourne: Re.press, 2011; G. Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. Melbourne: re.press, 2009; T. Morton, *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2012. I would also like to thank A.J. Bartlett, C. Gelder and J. Roffe here for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

2. This feature has led Brassier to comment that: "The 'speculative realist movement' exists only in the imaginations of a group of bloggers promoting an agenda for which I have no sympathy whatsoever: actor network theory spiced with panpsychist metaphysics and morsels of process philosophy. I don't believe the internet is an appropriate medium for serious philosophical debate; nor do I believe it is acceptable to try to concoct a philosophical movement online by using blogs to exploit the misguided enthusiasm of impressionable graduate students. I agree with Deleuze's remark that ultimately the most basic task of philosophy is to impede stupidity, so I see little philosophical merit in a 'movement' whose most signal achievement thus far is to have generated an online orgy of stupidity." See R. Brassier and M. Rychter, "I am a nihilist because I still believe in truth," *Kronos*, 4 March 2011, http://www.kronos.org.pl/index.php?23151,896, downloaded 29 October 2012.

3. Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*. Trans. R. Brassier. London: Continuum, 2009.

4. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 5.

5. Q. Meillassoux, "The contingency of the laws of nature." *Society and Space* 30:2 (2012): 325.

6. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 79.

7. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 65.

8. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 67. Italics Meillassoux's.

9. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 76. Italics Meillassoux's.

10. I was unfortunately not able to incorporate here the work by L. Braver, Bryant, Harman, E. Joy, A. Kotsko, C. Norris, J. Roffe, et al., which appeared at the time of completing this essay in *Speculations* IV (2013), <http://www.speculations-journal.org/current-issue/>.

11. See L. Chiesa, "Hyperstructuralism's Necessity of Contingency." *S* 3 (2010): 159-177.

12. S. Critchley, "Back to the Great Outdoors." *TLS* (28 February 2009): 28.

13. A. Galloway, *French Theory Today: An Introduction to Possible Futures, No. 4: Quentin Meillassoux, or The Great Outdoors*. New York: TPSNY, 2011, 11.

14. M. Hägglund, "Radical Atheist Materialism: A Critique of Quentin Meillassoux," *The Speculative Turn*. Melbourne: re.press, 2011, 114-129.

15. P. Hallward, "Anything is possible." *Radical Philosophy* 152 (November/December 2008): 51-57.

16. G. Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011, 142.

17. See A. Johnston, "Hume's Revenge: A Dieu, Meillassoux?" in *The Speculative Turn*, 92-113.

18. J. Roffe, "Time and Ground: A Critique of Meillassoux's Speculative Realism." *Angelaki* 17:1 (2012): 65.

19. C. Thorne, "Outward Bound: On Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*." *Speculations* III, 273-289.

20. A. Toscano, "Against Speculation, or, A Critique of the Critique of Critique: A Remark on Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude* (After Colletti)," in *The Speculative Turn*, 87.

21. C. Watkin, *Difficult Atheism: Post-Theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011, 151.

22. A. Zupancic, "Realism in Psychoanalysis." *JEP: European Journal of Psychoanalysis* 32 (2011): 33.

23. Christian Gelder has studied this phenomenon in an unparalleled form, in an as-yet unpublished manuscript which shows how the matrix of Meillassoux's thought is a kind of Derridean Mallarméanism; I owe this point to his ongoing work, which I hope will soon be in print.

24. See Q. Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign." Lecture Transcript, Freie Universitat Berlin, 20 April 2012. No page numbers.

25. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 78.

26. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 79.

27. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 79.

28. See for example Fredkin's website with accompanying papers <http://www.digitalphilosophy.org/Home/Papers/TOC/tabid/63/Default.aspx>, or G. Chaitin, "Epistemology as Information Theory: From Leibniz to Ω," *Collapse* 1 (2006): 27-51.

29. Indeed, Meillassoux's claims don't conform to or confront any of the recent accounts of the subject. See, for example, G. Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, for Priest's own account of "dialetheism," i.e., that there can be true contradictions.

30. Here is Alain Badiou's summary of the situation: "it seems that the two great Aristotelian principles (non-contradiction and the excluded middle), as forwarded in *Metaphysics* G, condition three logical types (and not two, as it was long believed).

In effect, one can universally validate both principles (classical logic), or the principle of contradiction alone (intuitionist logic), or the excluded middle alone (para-consistent logics)." Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*. Trans. A. Toscano. London: Continuum, 2009, 532.

31. For an extraordinary recent account of critiques of the principle of non-contradiction, see B. Cassin, *Jacques le Sophiste*, Paris: EPEL, 2012, in which she confronts such an Aristotelian principle with the scabrous inventions of Lacan and the sophists. From another tradition entirely, with utterly different methods and references, one might also look at the work of Greg Restall, e.g., "We have seen that considering a logic as a consequence relation makes the parallels between laws of non-contradiction and laws of the excluded middle striking. In classical logic, the laws are strong. Contradictions are at the bottom of the entailment ordering, and excluded middles are at the top. In logics such as R the situation is more subtle. Contradictions need not entail everything, and excluded middles need not be entailed by everything. Yet, just as it is natural to accept excluded middles, on the basis of R-reasoning, it is natural to reject contradictions on the basis of the very same reasoning. A paraconsistent logic such as R makes the way open for the acceptance of contradictions, and controls the consequences of such acceptances, but it does not make them mandatory. There are many different laws of non-contradiction, and, and some are present, even paraconsistent logics such as R." Greg Restall, "Laws of Non-Contradiction, Laws of the Excluded Middle and Logics," in Eds. G. Priest, J.C. Beall, B. Armour-Garb, *The Law of Non-Contradiction; New Philosophical Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 84.

32. R. Dolphijn and I. van der Tuin, *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*. Ann Arbor: OH Press, 2012, 71.

33. R. Brassier, "The Enigma of Realism: On Quentin Meillasoux's *After Finitude*." *Collapse* II (2007): 43. One can see how Harman's ignorance of logic renders such insights impossible for him. Hence, in *Quentin Meillassoux*, Harman's "hyperbolic method" declares that Meillassoux's "critique of 'correlationism,' in my view, will be remembered as the death blow to the mainstream continental philosophy that ran from 1900 (Husserl's *Logical Investigations*) to 2005 (the year before *After Finitude* was published)" (p. 124).

34. Meillassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition": np. All further references will be to this paper.

35. It is at this point that a real confrontation with Meillassoux's incredible tract on Mallarmé, *The Number and the Siren*, trans. R. Mackay (Sequence/Urbanomic, 2012) would be necessary, precisely around its brilliant account of the virtuality of the *peut-être*, the *perhaps*, of *Un coup de dés*. See also his critique of Badiou in "Badiou and Mallarmé: The Event and the Perhaps," trans. A. Edlebi, *Parrhesia* 16 (2013): 35-47, where the "PERHAPS" "silently resists its eventalization" "because it is not so much a promise as a pure actuality," (p. 38). My thesis, briefly put, is this: Meillassoux deliberately contradicts himself between *After Finitude*, where non-contradiction plays a foundational role, and *The Number*, wherein an impossible virtuality takes command of the deliberately vacillating precision of the actual (the "707" or "706"or "708" or whatever of the hermetic cipher); Meillassoux himself is therefore seeking to create, to construct his own work as *an object that is by its own arguments contradictory*....and therefore, as he claims in *After Finitude*, would be a *necessary being*. Meillassoux's work would thereby become the Realist God that he claims Kant destroyed, that is, an absolutely necessary substance. To which one can only whistle admiringly: What subtlety! What ambition! What inconsistency!

36. Hägglund, "Radical Atheist Materialism," 115.

37. J. Derrida, "Economimesis," *Diacritics* 11:2 (1981): 2-25.

38. Derrida, "Economimesis," 25.