designing the apocalypse

a sketch of a new ecological aesthetics

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Abstract

While the old model of objectivity acknowledges sensibility as the source of understanding the outside world, its emphasis on cognizability places the aesthetic accent on the primacy of the sensible in an inferior position vis-à-vis understanding the external world. Objects in the old model must be given to cognition in advance, for something like 'experience' to set off. But with objects now assuming a hyper-active role in shaping the physical determination of the planet, the return to sensibility via an aesthetic form of mediation has never been more relevant and timely.

Keywords

actor-network theory, anthropocene, climate entropy, flat ontology, interobjectivity, hyperobjects

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Introduction

"Here life finishes, and survival begins."

-- From Bernardo Bertolucci's Film *Before the Revolution*

In this paper,[1] we will try to work out a paradigm of apocalypse that encourages a radical mode of accommodating extinction through the arts.[2] Let us try to situate this paradigm of apocalypse in its proper context, the context being that extinction is inevitable. It is inevitable as far as climate science is concerned.[3] In general, this is the most radical assumption ever made by science since the revolution of Copernicus. As Kant declared, in behalf of this intellectual upheaval, what used to be the old paradigm—that knowledge should conform to things themselves—had to be superseded by a new approach to reality. This approach is christened by Kant as the reverse of the old paradigm, such that this time "things should conform to reason."[4]

This model of objectivity distinguishes the modernity that the Copernican revolution ushers in philosophy from pre-critical or pre-modern metaphysics, namely, the privilege of thinking accorded to humans. We mean 'thinking' here as a certain capacity to direct the course of knowledge, which in principle is not solely a human attribute. Objects can also direct the course as well as the process of acquiring knowledge. But, in Kant, objects have subterranean realities (their in-themselves structures) that do not lend themselves easily to cognition such that a superposition is called forth. It is cognition, as it were, that superposes itself on objects.

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[1] Full paper version of a short talk (title modified) delivered during the annual conference of the Philosophical Association of the Philippines (PAP, Inc.) with the theme "Philosophy and the K-12 Curriculum" held on April 1 to 4, 2014 at San Pablo Seminary, Baguio City.

[2] See Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (Macmillan: Palgrave, 2007). Ray Brassier's work sets the over-all background of this paper, though we are more inclined to index our discussions to climate science. We agree with the naturalistic approach to ecological change but must be complemented by the assumption that ecological transformation is best approached through aesthetics. Naturalism is not replaced by aesthetics; rather the two are complementary approaches (though Brassier is less inclined to consider aesthetics as a crucial point of intervention)

[3] In fact, climate science would extend the statement to as far as claiming that extinction is already taking place. See Andrew Glickson, *Evolution of the Atmosphere, Fire and the Anthropocene Climate Event Horizon* (Heidelberg, New York and London: Springer, Dordrecht, 2014), x.

[4] Immanuel Kant, "Preface B," in *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Marcus Weigelt (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 16-17.

In his account of the noumenon, Kant describes the thing-in-itself as "permanent in existence" which means that the noumenon does not exhibit spatio-temporal characteristics. This obviously justifies the explanation why the representation of something permanent (the thing itself) is not the same as the thing itself. Kant tries to resolve the dilemma, but without actually resolving it: "How this should be possible admits here of as little explanation as something that is at rest in time, the simultaneity of which with what is variable produces the concept of alteration."[5]

What Kant missed is that objects impose a limit to cognition not because cognition is finite (which no doubt it is); rather it is the case of objects shaping cognition in analogy to what thinking does with objects in terms of their local expressions. But it is not on account of the finitude of cognition that objects reveal their partial thing-ness: rather it is what objects are in the first place—they withdraw not only from cognition but also from one another. This point is underscored recently by Graham Harman (2005) in his reformulation of Heidegger's concept of withdrawal:

> Objects withdraw absolutely from all interaction with both humans and nonhumans. . . . And along with this split between objects and relations, objects are also split in themselves between their sheer unity as one object and their multiplicity of traits.[6]

In other words, there is no mysterious thing-in-itself behind objects which Kant thought otherwise. For him cognition is too finite to penetrate to the noumena. Cognition dictates that there has to be noumena, thinkable but unknowable. We claim instead that the thing-in-itself is both thinkable and knowable. For Kant, *All* there is to know is indexed to unknowability. But in light of climate change, we can claim that *All* there is to know can be indexed to climate, which is not an unknowable, and basically not one that requires suspending climate science. Climate change is an indication that objects in the atmosphere, in the ocean, on land and what lies underneath withdraw from cognition as they now react against anthropocentric framing. If objects still conform to cognition, as Kant thought, we simply have to dismiss that climate change is happening. But there is more.

Climate change is also an indication that climate objects withdraw from one another, Anthropocentrism has fashioned climate objects to such an extent that they must conform to human purposes in the manner of forcing artificial connections, for instance, between toxic materials emitted by industries and the air above, the ocean surrounding lands and the substrata below. These connections are now disentangling, withdrawing from human designs in the manner of forging new assemblages in the atmosphere, on land and on the sea. When

[5] Ibid.

[6] See Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2005), 5.

humanly inspired connections are challenged, we see different assemblages in climate exceeding anthropocentric models. But as these happen objects also withdraw far more intensely from one another, for instance, between the planet and human life. It has come this far owing to the high level of anthropocentric framing of the last three hundred years.

Enter the Anthropocene

Paul Crutzen, winner of the Nobel Prize for science, has come out recently to challenge the standard model of geological classification that is not independent of climate science models. He coined the term *anthropocene* to refer to a period in the geological history of the planet in which humans are now manipulating the substrata of earthly life. The standard model states that the planet is still covered by a period known as the Holocene which began roughly at a time when massive ice of north and south poles melted away, altering the continental landscape of the planet by enormous flooding into modern continents we know today.[7]

The anthropocene claims so far that evolution is no longer *strictu sensu* run by natural mechanisms, but also by human activities. The introduction of human factor into what was alleged to be a pure natural process is not revolutionary by any means, if we mean 'revolutionary' according to the standard humanistic framework as an event that gives wider latitude to optimism. Ironically, when humans are becoming aggressive in steering the course of evolution, a counter-proof to our privilege is also rising on the other side of the spectrum. Humanity can now claim to have directed the course of planetary life but at the cost of provoking Nature to harness its tendency towards disequilibrium and entropy. Entropy means the tendency of a closed system like the planet to plunge into chaos either as a consequence of exhausting its mortal life span or introducing complex patterns of change.

The most crucial aspect of this change has something to do with the increasing potential of entropy manifested in climate change. It is in this sense that climate change is challenging the principle of human privilege in the same manner as the era of the anthropocene beckons the emergence of what Timothy Morton describes as *hyperobjects*, or the threatening dominance of objects in their physical, molecular and subatomic realities over anything touched or socially constituted by humans.[8] Climate objects such as those which produce enormous flooding, more deadly hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural

[7] See Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse (eds.), *Making the Geologic Now: Responses to Materials Conditions of Contemporary Life* (Brooklyn, New York: Punctum Books, 2013), 29.

[8] See Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2007). Morton has recently enhanced this concept. See also Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

disasters are hyperobjects in the sense that they demonstrate excessive activity. Before, we would like to think that this excess of thermal activity is part of Nature's positive self-healing process. This time, however, the excess indicates that Nature does not think for us. Nature can heal itself with humans as collateral. That is how Nature allowed the extinction of many other species as it underwent changes in vegetation in the past.

If Nature has a self-healing process, as Margulis and Lovelock argue,[9] it can only proceed from Nature leaving its parts, the assemblages of life that it has created. Nature will heal itself by abandoning us in terms of the depletion of energy supply that sustains our species. The supply will deplete as Nature needs energy to give birth to a new geological era that may or may no longer include us. Part of the process will therefore depend on how we relate to this self-healing process. Unlike in previous aeons there are humans witnessing this event.

But to survive extinction, the ultimate challenge is to do away with our organic nature.[10] The saturation of everyday structures of social life by smart machines and artificial intelligence is a telling indication that we are heading towards that direction.[11] It is a prognosis about the turn of the post-human, an android by any definition, capable of surviving a post-apocalyptic era when the planet ceases to work favourably for organic substances as we are in our present composition. This does not mean that we no longer have 'ecology' to be optimistic about. It is rather the case of 'ecology' without Nature and a kind of optimism oriented towards a post-human scenario.

A New Ecology

An 'ecology without Nature' is a network of material assemblages that do not constitute nature as we know it. The Nature we know is anthropocentric. Its modern origin is Copernican with enormous implications as to how philosophy through the initiative of Kant

[9] See James Lovelock, *Gaia. A New Look at Life on Earth* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); also John Brockman, *Thinking Culture: Beyond the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), and Stephen Schneider, James Miller, Eillen Crist, and Penelope Boston (eds.), *Scientists Debate Gaia: The Next Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2004).

[10] See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 64.

[11] For N. Katherine Hayes (1999) this scenario should rather occasion a new consciousness and way of life that embraces and welcomes posthumanism with the view to formulating new ways of embodiment that proposes, as Hayes argues, "long-range survival of humans and other life-forms" (N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* [Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999]).

has led the human pack to champion the idea that reality can only make sense if it is given to cognition in advance. A world that lies outside of the jurisdiction of human cognition does not make sense. Cognition is always already in the world but this world does not of its own making give itself to cognition; rather, it is cognition that makes this world give itself to cognizability.[12] The world cannot of its own making give itself to cognition for, as Kant tells us, the world is permanently at rest in time and therefore unresponsive. We therefore mean an 'ecology without Nature' as an ecology devoid of humanistic assumptions about what the outside world is, such as Nature and its material manifestation. The 'without Nature' points to an understanding of ecology that is not mediated by ideological construction or in the Kantian sense by strictly cognitive models. Timothy Morton summarizes this point:

> [No] one likes it when you mention unconscious, not because you are saying taboo things, but because you are depriving the ego of its necessary fantasy support. Ecology, if it means anything at all, means being without nature. When we drag it in front and center, against our ideological interests, it stops being a world in which we can immerse ourselves.[13]

An anthropocentric assumption such as Kant's Copernican paradigm would belie that climate change is real (something that exceeds or independent of the correlation between cognizability and the world) because it can be argued that it belongs to a dimension incapable of giving itself away. If at all we experience climate change it is because it is given in advance to cognizable experience by cognition itself. Climate change does not make itself known to us because it does not have the capacity to make itself known. So, when the planet is suffocating from entrapped heat we do not experience global warming because climate change does not make itself known to experience. Rather, we experience global warming because cognition makes this world cognizable on the level of phenomena as undergoing global warming. This reduces climate change to the realm of value, precisely as Nietzsche saw in Kant's configuration of critical reason.[14]

But not all worlds, things or objects satisfy the Kantian paaradigm. One such world is climate change which happens outside of the correlation between cognizability and the world

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[12] This framework of knowing has been "obligatory for all modern thought" (See Alain Badiou, "Preface," in Quentin Meillasoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier [London: Continuum, 2008], 3).

[13] Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 204.

[14] Nietzsche's sustained critique of Kant informs his writing of *On the Genealogy of Morals*. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*: *A Polemic*. *By way of clarification and supplement to my last book Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

itself, outside of cognizable nature that is the kind of Nature we believe there is.[15] Climate change is also telling us that things are not unresponsive or inert. Things rather allow themselves to reveal their nature outside of the predictive tools of humanistic science (still largely influenced by the Copernican paradigm) and even philosophical cognition (remarkably, even today dependent on the legacy of Kant) in terms of showing their essence to non-cognitive models, such as the arts. Our conception of aesthetics here should be radical enough to escape the Kantian conception of sensibility for which aesthetics occupies a critical role in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[16] At this point, suffice it to say that our conception of aesthetics is an autonomous one, a challenge to the rationalistic structure of the *Critique*. Our main criticism of Kant runs as follows: We agree with Kant that there are objects of experience but they are not restricted to metaphysical postulates such as freedom, soul and God which exhibit anthropological values. Hyperobjects are also objects of experience yet irreducible to anthropological valuation, and as such they are not metaphysical. What applies as metaphysical for Kant is ultimately imbued with human values.

The goal of the new aesthetics is to release these objects from their imprisonment in the architecture of correlationist reasoning which has been "obligatory for all modern thought," as Badiou also stressed.[17] Once released, these objects lose their character as metaphysical. Once released from the correlationism of reason climate objects unfold their character as real in the sense that they persist outside of known correlationism which is responsible for suppressing a realistic conception of the apocalypse. The apocalypse works here as a trope for anti-correlationism. This directly opposes the Kantian conception of a world that has to be given in advance to reason.

This is demonstrated by Timothy Morton in his book *Hyperobjects* in which he saw in Einstein's relativity theory the beginnings of the radical conception of time and space in the sense that time and space are no less "emergent properties of objects."[18] It is in this context where Morton deploys Einstein to give objects their due:

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[15] Meillasoux describes the problem of ancestrality in the same way he rejects the Kantian correlation between cognition and object of cognizability. He identifies ancestrality as a problem of diachronicity by which Meillasoux means "a general characterization of all such statements about events that are anterior or ulterior to every terrestrial-relation-to-the-world" (*After Finitude*, 99).

[16] We are referring to Part One of the Doctrine of Elements, namely, the Transcendental Aesthetics.

[17] Cf. n. 12.

[18] Morton, *Hyperobjects* 68. For emphasis, gravity as hyperobject can bend space. Space cannot bend itself, only an object could.

> Around 1900 Einstein discovered something strange about objects. The speed of light was constant, and this meant that objects couldn't be thought of as rigid, extended bodies that maintained their shape. . . . [If] you were moving close to the speed of light, objects would appear to become translucent and strangely compressed until they finally disappeared altogether. Space-time appeared, rippling and curved like Monet's water lilies paintings.[19]

The Case of Interobjectivity

Ironically, there is optimism in the idea of ecology without Nature in which humans would no longer have to assume a privileged standpoint. We mean humans as a principle not as living constituents of the planet. Yet, as a principle humans have claimed with devastating effects a superior place in an otherwise flat ontological structure of existence.[20] In a flat ontology of things, no being, human or non-human, organic or not, is ontologically privileged. Each however is capable of building a world of its own, what Wittgenstein would call a network of family resemblances.[21] To be more precise, in flat ontology there is no single world. There is no single world that can offer itself to cognition. There are only multiple worlds corresponding to multiple assemblages.

The planet is simply a host that accommodates different worlds, different modes of occurrences and persistence. As a host the planet is not a world in its own, but a result of superposition of different worlds within. In the same manner that there can be no coherent interpretation of reality, the planet is a result of different interpretations. On a more physical

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[19], Ibid., 36.

[20] One of the first contemporary expositors of this new ontology, Manuel Delanda summarizes this concept as follows: "[While] an ontology based on relations between general types and particular instances is *hierarchical*, each level representing a different ontological category (organism, species, genera), an approach in terms of interacting parts and emergent wholes lead to a *flat ontology*, one made of exclusively unique, singular individuals, differing in spatio-temporal scale but not ontological status (Manuel Delanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* [New York: Continuum, 2002), 41)..

[21] Chantal Bax (2011) summarizes this important concept of Wittgenstein: "Just as Wittgenstein argues that the different things we call games do not have some one thing in common but hang together through a 'complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' (PI 66), he can be said to show that the frame of reference fellow subjects share does not make for a clear and distinct whole. The certainties of one person resemble those of the other subjects but possibly resemble them in a different way each time" (Chantal Bax, *Subjectivity after Wittgenstein: The Post-Cartesian Subject and the 'Death of Man'* [London: Continuum, 2011], 139). See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

level, the planet is not whole in itself but a result of interacting properties that cohere only as emergent ones rather than as constitutive of those properties. It pays to relate this to Karen Barad (2012) emphasizing a similar point, for instance, in terms of how we should understand the standard interpretation of quantum theory as specified in the Copenhagen interpretation:

> The physicists who contributed to the Copenhagen interpretation displayed significant theoretical and interpretative differences in their specific contributions, so that what is taken to be *the* Copenhagen interpretation is a superposition of disparate views of a group of physicists who include Bohr (complementarity), Heisenberg (uncertainty), Born (probability), and von Neumann (projection postulate) to name a few of the key players.[22]

The planet is also an interpreted reality, a compromise between and among different interpretations. Yet the act of compromise is not only a human trait. Humans are not the sole contributors to a coherent (in the sense of emergent reality) called the planet. As Eugene Thacker observes, "what is important in the concept of the Planet is that it remains a negative concept, simply that which remains 'after' the human. The Planet can thus be described as impersonal and anonymous.[23] In terms of its spatial character, the planet is a meeting place of material assemblages that have settled into a location favorable to their emergence.[24] As a meeting place the planet is therefore not Nature that we normally conceive to be contained in us. A meeting place is an external dimension; hence, real Nature is external to us. As Barad emphasized:

> [What] is at issue is actually not a particular property of nature but the very nature of nature. The sense in which this discontinuity is an 'essential' one is not that nature has a fixed essence, but that nature's lack of a fixed essence is essential to what it is. [Nature] is an intra-active becoming (where intra-action is not the classically comforting concept of 'interaction' but rather entails the very disruption of the metaphysics of individualism that holds that there are discrete objects with inherent characteristics).[25]

It is in the above light that Kant misconceived the dilemma. We cannot elect our present standpoint as that which necessarily allows us to bend the objects of understanding in conformity to our cognitive plans. This is not to mention the fact that the world-for-us is

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[22] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 414-415, footnote 48.

[23] See Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of this Planet* (United Kingdom: Zero Books, 2011), 16.

[24] See Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 141.

[25] Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 422, footnote 15.

not the only world there is. Cognition is an emergent event that does not retro-activate the formation of worlds-before-us. As an event, cognition or that which we can experience through cognitive models divides us from Nature's diachronicity, its anteriority, that is, as an event without us (such as the time of dinosaurs), but also from the ulterior or the future that divides presence (the present) and extinction (the future).[26]

The idea that we are a part of Nature, or the non-externality of Nature, is not only anthropocentric but pathological. This is the case of the *parallax* that Slavoj Žižek illustrates—we cannot understand reality because we simply extend ourselves to the reality we wish to understand. We are part of the object we wish to unpack. Žižek argues:

> The standard definition of parallax is: the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against the background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. . . Or—to put it in Lacanese—the subject's gaze is always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its "blind spot," that which is "in the object more than the object itself," the point from which the object returns the gaze. . . [The reality] I see is never "whole"—not because a large part of it eludes me, but because it contains a stain, a blind spot, which indicates my inclusion in it.[27]

The last resort would be something like self-emptying, but even that has to deal with the steely necessity of self-preservation. For a living organism governed by the desire to reproduce and possibly become immortal, the thought of extinction is absurd. We always see in reality our own extended constructions. A flat ontology is a more realistic assumption which climate change is already forcing us to accept. Things are now forcing us, and in light of climate change, they are forcing us to change our outlook on things, a far cry from the previous model of things which treats them as incapable of their own to influence human behaviour in a more robust sense. If at all they could, the power of their influence was formerly perceived to be weak. As Bruno Latour describes, flat ontology is a theory of interobjectivity in which objects "serve as comrades, colleagues, accomplices and associates in the weaving of social life."[28] In this changed perspective, the human is only just an actor or actant among many other actants.

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[26] Meillasoux, "Ptolemy's Revenge," in *After Finitude*, 99.

[27] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2006), 17.

[28] Bruno Latour, "On Interobjectivity," in *Mind, Culture and Activity: An International Journal*, Vol. 3, 4 (1996), 235.

Learning to Live in the Anthropocene

The structure of human sensibility gives us a real starting point in understanding how when things impose themselves on us they are not only expressing their capacities, as Deleuze would have described a typhoon,[29] but also forcing us to assume a standpoint outside of the 'subject' which requires a different principle of construction and organization of subjectivity relative to a given historical time. Take note that the subject is a construct and by all means plastic and exchangeable in the sense Catherine Malabou (2008) describes an unnatural subject, exchangeable with the object. Commenting on Malabou's concept of exchangeability, Ian James (2012) emphasizes Malabou's formulation of the subject as a "cerebral subject" (both object and subject) which is:

> [A] product of the aleatory events and sense of the shared historical world in which it is placed as it is a product of genetic and biochemical processes. Indeed, the opposition between the two, between 'nature' and 'nurture', becomes more or less redundant in this context since the formative influences of both worldly sense and biochemical determination are functions of the same plasticity, that is to say, susceptibility of material life to the giving and receiving of form. There is no source or origin here, no fixed essence, only an unending process of transformation and differentiation, of formation and deformation, in which essences and accidents are exchangeable in a metamorphic economy of material existence.[30]

This ontological interchangeability applies also between human and animal or non-human. This explains why there is no such thing as a pure natural standpoint.[31] Something has to be exchanged for something. Yet the conditions for exchange are not arbitrarily given, nor are they fixed. Rather they are emergent conditions which correspond to the historical or

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[29] The following translation is from Leopold Lambert: ". . . I don't know any power (*puissance*) that is malicious. The typhoon is a power, it enjoys itself in its very soul . . . but it does not enjoy because it destroys houses, it enjoys because it exists" (Leopold Lambert [ed.], *Funambulist Pamphlet, Vol. 3, Spinoza* [Brooklyn, New York: The Funambulist + CTM Documents Initiative, an imprint of Punctum Books, 2013], 70).

[30] Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 107. See also Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain*?, trans. S. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) and Adrian Johnston and Catherine Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[31] Morton observes along similar lines: ""We humans are objects. The thing called a 'substance' is an object. Sentient beings are objects. . . . When we are conscious of something, we are on a continuum with rock strata and plankton that apprehend oil in their own way" (*Hyperobject*, 273-74).

temporal character of the actual process, intensity, quality, and intelligibility of exchange in a given period of time. We are claiming here that the subject as construct confronts a temporal situation in which the actual process of exchange or interchangeability demands a different principle of construction and organization in the sense we mentioned. In the ancient, the process generally required that the object exchange with subject—Nature, for instance, was made to mimic human attributes. Here, our concept of 'Nature mimicking human attributes' accords with Simondon's (2011) exposition of the Platonic model of "putting man before natural beings."[32] In one of his public lectures Simondon states:

> [Plato], in the *Timaeus*, envisions a theory of the creation of animal species coming from man. At the source was man, which is the most perfect and which manifests in himself all the elements . . . (a reverse evolution) of the different species. For example, man has fingernails. But fingernails are of no use for man. They are feeble armour. . . . But by progressive degradation, we see little by little the role of the claw. . . . [We] head towards the felines for which the use of claws is of an incontestable interest and for which the claw is much more developed . . . which is to say, they naturally know how to use it. The manner in which they leap is already correlated to the placement of the claws to grasp, to constrict their prey. . . . Consequently, the existence of certain anatomical details which in man appear as being mostly useless make sense in an organizing plan of the world from which all other species emerge directly from man, via simplification and degradation.[33]

In medieval times, the process of exchangeability/interchangeability concerning subject-object relations acquired a theological underpinning in which Nature unveiled a more universal dimension of divine intelligence. St. Anselm's words in *Cur Deus Homo* on the theory of Incarnation are instructive in this light: "[The] assumption of a human nature into unity of a divine person will be done only wisely by Supreme Wisdom. And so Supreme Wisdom will not assume into its human nature what is not useful . . ."[34]

In the modern period, interchangeability becomes more plastic and obvious such that the concept of difference has to be strictly formulated in order to secure the interchangeability of terms, subject and object, even more, the consistency of the process itself which requires an instrumental approach to the construction and organization of existence. Instrumentation guarantees that the subject can interchange with object only in

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[32] See Gilbert Simondon, *Two Lessons on Animal and Man*, trans. Drew Burk (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2011), 38.

[33] Ibid., 39-40.

[34] Quoted by Marilyn McCord Adams in Marilyn McCord Adams, *What Sort of Nature? Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999), 12.

precise locations and appropriations. From then on, interchangeability is fixed by instrumentation that regulates the entire process. Until the era of hyperobjects the increasing sophistication of instrumental reason has eclipsed the emergent character of interchangeability. To go back to our point, today's hyperobjects superimpose on sensibility in such a manner that they stress out the use of pure reason. It is in this sense that pure reason is forced to fall back on sensibility, the originary clearing between intuition and conception. In a nutshell, this means a turn to aesthetics as first philosophy.[35]

But this sensibility is now confronting an excessive influx of materials from the outside world (biochemical, toxic elements, climate objects, etc.) which challenge the principles of construction and organization of life known to reason. The challenge is indicative of how the rational subject is no match to hyperobjects. In order to deal with this challenge the subject *must* exit from itself.

Here, we have a choice. Regress to the old model which is obviously a contributing factor to climate change or move forward (outside of the comfort of humanity or the care of its principles). The process of moving forward requires that we relinquish our narcissism and begin to embrace a new model of existence or interobjectivity, as the present state of things demands. As Latour argued, in spite of appearances, we have failed to become modern according to the demands of modernity's founding axiomatic principle or the imperative to continue the tradition of Copernicanism as it actually started.[36] As Kant admitted but failed to radicalize, the Copernican revolution started as a non-scientific gesture.

On the part of Copernicus the heliocentric model is simply a working fiction, an attempt to save the appearance of a harmonious universe which to his mind Ptolemy failed to demonstrate in his geocentric model.[37] Copernicus believed that the universe must be in harmony with creation; it was Ptolemy's model he rejected which also argued that the universe is a handiwork of the divine. It was this belief that inspired Copernicus to make a paradigm shift. What compelled him to make the shift, in other words, was beyond any science could offer. But it was also beyond any religion that could make him comfortable. It was to be more precise the state of the order of things at about the time he was mulling a revolution that compelled Copernicus to change, not the structure of reality, but the structure of our experience with the world. But the state of the order of things, beneath which

[35] See, Graham Harman, "Aesthetics as First Philosophy: Levinas and the Non-human," in *Naked Punch* 9, (Summer/Fall 2007), 21-30.

[36] See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[37] See Maurice Finocchiaro, *Defending Copernicus and Galileo* (Nevada: Springer, 2010), xiii. Finocchiaro rightly captures the debate: "[Copernicus] accomplishment was really to give a new argument in support of an old idea that had been considered and almost universally rejected for two millennia" (ibid.).

Copernicus was about to spark an upheaval, could only allow him to make a perspectival shift that would still be consistent with the humanistic paradigm of the church. Suffice it to say, the state of things was not in its proper assemblage and degree of intensity yet to compel Copernicus to give things their proper due (such as what a hyperobject can do). Clearly, the state of things in Copernicus' time was still very much freely constituted by human values which Kant extended to 18th century Enlightenment.

We have never been modern precisely because we always tend to ignore that which exceeds the pure intellectual or theoretical aim of reason which gives reason the actuality it overwhelmingly assumes. Latour's famous jargon (*we have never been modern*) is directed against the post-Kantian bias of science and philosophical knowledge that despite the overwhelming evidence of things defying cognizability still clings to the old model of objectivity organized around human privilege. Hence, the proper realization of modernity is to release objects or things from their anthropological enframing, a step beyond Husserl's phenomenology, despite his philosophical petition to return to things themselves, in which things are still organized around cognizability, and ultimately, around the centrality of the human. This is only possible, as we contend, if we assume a standpoint outside of ourselves without the guarantee of returning, hence, a post-human, 'interobjectivity' scenario.

Aesthetically wise, interobjectivity refers to a transitional process that takes place initially as a return to primary sensibility, or to a new awareness of primary aesthetics.[38] In more practical terms, it would rather occasion a *metic* approach to the apocalypse, which the Greeks were the first to utilize in confronting the apocalypse of their own time. *Metis* is

> An intelligence which, instead of contemplating unchanging essences, is directly involved in the difficulties of practical life with all its risks, confronted with a world of hostile forces which are disturbing because they are always changing and ambiguous. Metis—intelligence which operates in the world of becoming, in circumstances of conflict—takes the form of an ability to deal with whatever comes up, drawing on certain intellectual qualities: forethought perspicacity, quickness and acuteness of understanding, trickery and even deceit. A being of metis . . . is so supple as to be polymorphic; like a trap, it is the opposite of what it seems to be. It is ambiguous, inverted, and operates through a process of reversal.[39]

This conception of interobjectivity which operates in a relationship of complementary (between subject and object) also resonates in what is currently gaining traction in art theory today known as accelerationist aesthetics:

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[38] See James, *The New French Philosophy*, 119.

[39] Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 44.

> The . . . eclipse of Anthropocenic systems doesn't suppose that they are necessarily actually erased, but that they become bound within other hosts (perhaps many layers deep, parasites within parasites within parasites . . . Through this, "polities" emerge.[40]

Or: new democracies in a post-anthropocenic world in which governance is bound up with the apocalyptic interplay of subject and object, cognizant of the singularity of the point of no return. A change of perspective is thus required, a new Copernican revolution perhaps, yet this time a revolution that will end all forms of Copernican revolution; more radical than quantum physics, which is supposed to be more radical than Einstein's and Newton's. Overall, it has to be more radical than science. It has to be of the sort that belongs to aesthetics which must supervise the new science that is willing to shed the influence of humanistic paradigms.[41].

If we place Latour's theory of actants alongside this apocalyptic awareness, we can obtain the following insight: democracy owes its staying power to actants, humans and nonhumans. We can in fact radicalize this insight into a declaration that democracy cannot function except through the network of relations of actors that are not *strictu sensu* confined to human networks, but nonhumans also play a role, like the environment, the stone, the clothes we wear, the fantasies that play out in our minds, dreams, air molecules, subatomic particles, bacteria and viruses, sinister intentions, etc. This brings us to the science of complexity or the self-organizing capacity of things without a central executive.

As Latour would enjoin us, we need a parliament of things.[42] By changing our relations to things we can deprive the old model of objectivity of its power to hold us hostage. In this way we can release the apocalypse from its currently suppressed state which, since Kant, has been the obligation of thought to sustain in favor of the fantasy of indexical privileging, that is, of the necessity that objects conform to reason.

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[40] Benjamin Bratton, "Some Trace Effects of the Post-Anthropocene: On Accelerationist Geopolitical Aesthetics," in *e-flux*, vol. 46, June (2013). See also www.e-fluc.com/journal/.

[41] This is the argument of Morton, most recently in *Hyperobjects*. But Harman, the pioneer of object-oriented philosophy, was the first to highlight the role of aesthetics in clarifying ontological questions. His most representative essay so far on this aspect is on his reformulation of Levinas' ethics as first philosophy into aesthetics as first philosophy. See Graham Harman, "Aesthetics and First Philosophy: Levinas and the Non-humans," in *Naked Punch*, 9 (2007), 21-30.

[42] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*, trans. Catherine Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 250.

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