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A CUT IN RELATIONALITY

art at the end of the world

Relationality might at first appear to be an exemplary posthuman and postmodern term. Rather than think of distinct essences and fixed beings, we now acknowledge that nothing is an island; we – and the things around us – become what we are through encounters, with encounters and relations generating an openness, fluidity, and dynamism of life and the world. What I want to explore in the essay that follows is the implicit moralism of this supposedly posthuman relationality, a moralism that is embedded in a complex metaphysical, aesthetic, and theological history that privileges becoming and relations over the horror of something that simply is, bearing no relation to anything. In theological terms one might think of the Christian doctrine of creation and incarnation: God flows forth from himself, generating a world capable of singing, expressing, praying, and reflecting an existence that is all the greater for its ongoing fecundity. Imagine God, who is simply God, existing in eternity, a completely perfect being with no becoming. He is absolute in his existence and does not have to reflect upon himself, because – as God – he is already all-knowing and self-present. It is not this perfection of stillness that has governed the Western tradition. Better than a God who is simply All in All is the God who flows forth from himself in a creative and expansive history of reflection and relation. God is not pure ipseity but is creative of beings who freely sing the wonder and majesty of creation in its generative richness. Imagine a God who created the world once and for all, as though he were nothing more than a divine watchmaker, allowing the world to go through time and remain simply as it is. This would be the terrifying God of William Blake's "The Tyger," a distant and tyrannical mechanic working with a hammer and anvil to connect bits and pieces of dead matter:

> What the hammer? what the chain,
> In what furnace was thy brain?
> What the anvil? what dread grasp,
> Dare its deadly terrors clasp! (Lines 13–16)

Contrast this with a God who allows freedom, becoming, and open creativity in the world. This God of productive and fruitful relationality would allow humanity to go through time gradually gaining more of a sense of itself; this God would become incarnate, allowing his being in the world to lead to redemption and recognition,

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where the end of history and time is all the better for having undertaken the journey and fall.

Significantly, this historical becoming, in which life comes to reflect upon itself and becomes aware of itself in its reflective glory, is not confined to theology but also functions as a privileged term or idea in Western philosophy. Gilles Deleuze, in his book on Leibniz, describes this transition of expressive relationality from theological to empirical conceptions of the world as follows:

> satisfaction as a final phase, as self-enjoyment, marks the way by which the subject is filled with itself and attains a richer and richer private life, when prehension is filled with its own data. This is a biblical – and, too, a neo-Platonic – notion that English empiricism carried to its highest degree (notably with Samuel Butler). The plant sings of the glory of God, and while being filled all the more with itself it contemplates and intensely contracts the elements whence it proceeds. It feels in this prehension the self-enjoyment of its own becoming. (*The Fold* 89)

One might think of any number of major philosophical paradigms in which life and history go through time in order to arrive at self-understanding. Enlightenment, liberalism, and most versions of postmodernism depict a normative and transformative history in which a self of passive acceptance is redeemed by taking up a relation to self-formation. From Plato's cave allegory to the contemporary zombie, being is worthy only in a mode of self-relationality. This self-relationality occurs – always – in relation to an other; the otherness that allows the self to know itself is always the medium through which proper subjectivity comes into being. Proper life flourishes in relation to what is not itself; what cannot be admitted is an "in itself" that is not "for itself." Imagine something like pure existence, a being that does not possess the concept of being, a "world" that has no sense that it is a world. Such a thought experiment brings us to pure presence, which is also death: stillness, no difference, no relationality. Perhaps the closest one might get to this notion of the horrors of the non-relational is Martin Heidegger's claim that the stone is "without world" (176). The stone does not know it is a stone, and whatever one might say about or to the stone, nothing will make the stone any different from what it is (pet rocks notwithstanding). In its abstract metaphysical form, the commitment to relationality is tied deeply to the very possibility of thought. To think is to take up a relation. This is especially so in Kant and post-Kantian thought, where the relationality of thought precludes any possibility of knowing things in themselves (and, as post-Kantians have argued, there is still a relation to the non-relational that takes the thought of pure thinking: we cannot know God, freedom, or the infinite, but we can act as if such ideas had practical force).

There is, then, a contradictory force at the heart of a long history of normative relationality. One must at one and the same time always be oriented to what is other than oneself, and yet that orientation must be recuperated by the self. What cannot be admitted is a relationality without recognition and return. History would properly be progress towards recognising divinity, whether that progression be thought of in religious terms, such that we grow towards the reason that is God's inner light, or in terms of secular reason, such that we eventually recognise – as with liberalism – that there is no truth to the world other than the political formations we generate in order to achieve mutual recognition, with the horizon of open recognition being the goal of political becoming (Taylor 73). To be a political subject is not to be an isolated unit subjected to the rules of the polity; ideally, the polity is a constant negotiation amongst citizens who have no ground of legitimation other than their ongoing relation to each other (Habermas) and their imaginative capacity to imagine the world as it would be or might be for others (Rawls). Such progress towards recognition – that is also progress towards the inclusivity of relations – can also be described in historically materialist terms: it is by way of late capitalism that we come to recognise the ways in which

human existence emerges from relations of economic production. True humanity is achieved not when we are beings among beings but when we come to know, understand, and master the system of relations from which we emerge. In *The Order of Things* Michel Foucault refers to this structure of recuperated relationality as the modern "empirico-transcendental doublet" (312). There is a force of life from which we are distanced and determined, and yet we are capable of turning back and understanding ourselves through a relation to the transcendental. This is as true of Marxism, where the task of history is to become aware of the ways in which consciousness is created through a productive process that becomes increasingly recognisable, as it is of more recent theories of emergence and living systems. In Alexandre Kojève's reading of Hegel – a reading that would be highly influential for twentieth-century French thought and its aftermath – it is only Hegel who closes the circle of the Absolute (105). Hegel does not simply give an account of the Absolute but understands the importance of a history where the Absolute negates itself, turns back to recognise itself, generating a rich and dynamic history of dialectical relations. Today this Hegelianism is sustained in work as diverse as Judith Butler's theory of performativity (*Gender Trouble*; *Subjects of Desire*), where the task of theory is to recognise the ways in which one's subjectivity is formed through relations of recognition, and Slavoj Žižek's political theory of tarrying with the negative. Traditional Marxism renders dialectical relativity fully human and immanent by returning relations to labour, while later posthuman Marxisms (such as Althusser's) free life from any of its fixed terms and allow subjects to be nothing more than effects of relations, without even the economy providing a stable foundation. Relations are rendered fully immanent in theories of emergence, where there is no foundation to the world – no Absolute, no humanity – other than an ongoing complexity arising from relations among less complex terms. If in Hegel or Plato the Absolute or eternal had to enter into relation in order to know itself, in theories of emergence and immanence there is nothing other than what comes into being through relations. In the beginning is the relation. However complex a ramified system might be, it is nevertheless the outcome of the potentiality for the encounter among forces to create new modes and levels of relation. When twenty-first-century theories of emergence and living systems stress the dynamism of relations over the simple existence of bounded beings, they are intensifying an already normative stress on life as relation rather than overturning a metaphysics of isolated beings. Indeed, the war against metaphysics – against simply positing a foundation – relies on the primacy of relations. Manuel Delanda's *Assemblage Theory* insists on the ways in which emergence can account for all forms of complexity without assuming any metaphysical exteriority. Life and history no longer have their *raison d'être* in the completion of divinity and reason, as though life ought to be oriented to some transcendent point beyond itself; life now arrives at its own flourishing by way of relationality and must remain open, in relation, and ever more complex in its production of future relations:

> the fears of the early emergentists, that clockwork mechanisms could not possibly account for the irreducible properties of a whole, were misplaced. There is nothing in the notion of a holistic property that emerges from the interactions between components that limits the potential complexity of those interactions. On the other hand, the concept of emergent property does place limits on the kinds of wholes that can be legitimately accepted. In particular, it militates against the idea of a totality the parts of which are so inextricably related that their very identity is constituted by their relations within the whole. (Delanda 184)

Even though Delanda's work emphasises emergence, openness, and the dynamism of relations and is anything but apocalyptic, it is his post-metaphysical insistence on the open-ended and creative force of relations that precludes any sense of the insistent rigidity of the non-

relational. Once the word "metaphysical" becomes a theoretical pejorative, and once the maturity of theory and reason relies on recognising that all we have is relationality, any form of life that has *not* achieved this immanent liberation is deemed to be barely human.

Nowhere is this privileging of relationality more evident than when we appear to be contemplating the end of the world. Invariably "end of world" scenarios are "end of relationality" dystopias, where global media, the archive, and a modern imperialist capacity to overview the planet have given way to dispersed and disconnected, nomadic, or zombie-like bodies. Today when we talk of "saving the planet" or "saving the world," we are really talking of saving a certain form of humanity that allows the planet to know it is a planet or that – to use Heideggerian language – is "rich in world." To be rich in world is not only to have a sense of the here and now but to have a sense of other possible worlds. One might consider three concepts in this respect: the Anthropocene, the polity, and the art gallery. The reason I choose these three terms is that I want to render parochial what appears to be the very opposite, the movement of expansive inclusiveness. Understanding the way in which these terms are intertwined allows us to rethink the prima facie value accorded to relationality. When we think about the "end of the world," we rarely think about the end of the planet or even of the mass extinctions heading our way; the "end of the world" is usually figured as the end of social fabric, of the forms of globalism and connection that have allowed the world to be figured as one interwoven, self-reflexive, and dynamic whole. This world-purveying attitude is both crucial to the artworld and requires the comportment of the artworld: it becomes possible to gaze upon the fragments of many less self-aware worlds and allow them to enrich a sense of the whole. It is this world of humanity as a whole that becomes intensified in the Anthropocene, where *anthropos* is not the species in the simple biological sense but rather a unity that is marked by its capacity to have geological impact.

the anthropocene

On the one hand, the Anthropocene is a concept articulated within the discipline of geology, making a claim regarding the readability of the earth: if consecrated, the Anthropocene will mark a threshold at which the human species will have altered the earth as a living system to the point that a new stratum will be discernible. On the other hand, the Anthropocene has become a meta-disciplinary force, allowing everything to be brought into relation with everything else, creating a kind of "negative universal history" (Chakrabarty 222). It might once have been possible to think of disparate and disconnected human histories, but now that we all face a common predicament, we can (and ought to) see those multiple histories in terms of the current state of the whole. The violence of history has only been possible because of the planet's potentials: relations of domination among humans have been made possible by fossil fuels. The capacity for some land masses to enable intensive agriculture has, in turn, opened up the possibility for slavery, colonisation, and the ongoing theft of and from other humans. At the same time, those intra-human relations of power have altered the composition of the planet, with climate change probably taking its greatest toll on those who contributed least to the forces of alteration.

It is in light of such a "negative universal history" that one might imagine something truly utopian in non-relationality – namely, the possibility of not being bound up with this Anthropocenic present – and yet what has been called for is ever more recognition of connectedness. Despite its ostensibly posthuman scale, this intensified relationality nevertheless brings the theology and morality of relationality to the fore. Far from the catastrophic capture of forces of the Anthropocene generating a scepticism or disenchantment regarding a relationality that issues forth from itself in order to find itself, the Anthropocene has generated both popular and high-theoretical forms of theodicy. We have now reached the point where those who have caused the destruction can turn back, recognise the error of their Promethean over-

reaching, and become more attuned to a world and life that had for so long been disregarded (Hamilton). The history of hyper-consumption, slavery, imperialism, and resource depletion has enabled a form of global awareness that will now generate a humanity fully aware of its self-constituting power. Either humanity emerges – finally and against capitalism – to achieve justice for all (Klein), or there can be a good Anthropocene, because the "man" who altered the planet can obviously act with the same power and will to sustain his own existence (Ellis). It is only at the end of the history of science that we can recognise science's destructive potential; we should no longer be "earth-masters" but become consciously earthbound (Latour).

Despite the mournful tenor of discourses of the Anthropocene, where we regret having thought of ourselves as separate from nature for so long, the era of the Anthropocene has more often than not figured the end of the world as what must be avoided; we must not fall back into a nomadism that would bear no profound relationship to the globe. There is very little sense, however, that – despite the common recognition that the Anthropocene has a violent, destructive, and barbarous human history as its cause – other (less robustly global and relational) forms of existence might be viable, desirable, or recognisable. Those other forms of human existence, which were erased in order to achieve the state-centred history of humanity that recognises itself as "Anthropos," are deemed to be the "end of the world" – primarily because of their impoverished conception of relationality. Think here of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, where all humanity has left is itself; hell is humanity that no longer has the means to recognise itself as humanity, that is no longer capable of establishing a traffic in goods and services through which the whole might be lived. McCarthy here correctly diagnoses that what had declared itself to be "humanity" as the condition and horizon of the world was already the end of the world, was already consuming nothing other than itself. When post-apocalyptic culture depicts the "end of the world," the first feature is often the collapse of relationality: media technologies break down; bodies become nomadic and decentred; and rather than sustaining any relation to the globe, futurity, or humanity in general, humans either become once again subjected to a general despotism of nomadic life (as in *The Road*) or are tyrannised by elites who seize hold of the state of emergency (as in *The Hunger Games*, *Mad Max: Fury Rd*, or *Elysium*). Post-apocalyptic dystopias depict the masses once again in a state of dispersed nomadism, implying that the path to a proper futurity is through a genuine recapture of global forms of relation.

Dreams of a global, immanent, and self-constituting humanity achieved through immaterial labour that enables a virtual collectivity (Hardt and Negri) or aspirations for a united humanity that would overthrow capitalism for the sake of *the climate* (Klein) are all reiterations of the unquestioned prima facie value of a global and simultaneous relationality: I imagine every other as somewhat like myself; therefore I am. In both popular cinema and in political theory, this narcissistic mode of relationality is what ensures the survival of the world (for without some sense of humanity in general we are mere life). Proper relationality is not imposed from above but emerges organically when life itself recognises itself as coming into being through time. This is as true of liberalism in its popular and high-theoretical modes as it is of late Marxism and post-apocalyptic culture. The Anthropocene is a geological term that captures and intensifies what had long been assumed to be the moral logic of modern history: through time, what appears to be isolated comes to know itself as a fragment of a living system, and once this knowledge arrives, it becomes the task of relational life to save and sustain itself. It is through this highly humanised conception of relationality, where *anthropos* is the form of self-recognition that both has defined the long history of man as a political animal and enables the current conception of the Anthropocene, that species-awareness takes on geological import.

the polity

From Aristotle onwards, to be human means not simply to exist biologically but to orient oneself to how one *would be* for others. One must have a sense of oneself not simply as one who is but as one who appears for others. As Giorgio Agamben has argued (following a tradition that includes Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault), *zoe* is the life of plants, animals, and humans, but *bios* is politically formed life, where I live *as one who unfolds a world in common* – not as simple life in itself but as life with an orientation towards political relationality. So accepted is this normativity of the formed life, a life bearing relations beyond itself forged from itself, that its opposite has come to define the horror of biopolitics. What must not happen is that we be mere flesh or matter. The horror of modern biopolitics is that we have been reduced to living matter that can be managed according to some external rubric or expertise. In its first critical formulation, Foucault commented that there had once been political being – the decisions, norms, practices, and modes of social relation that defined who we were – and then a generally irrelevant bodily being (*History*, *Volume 1* 141). With the eighteenth century and the formation of the concept of *life*, those two domains (of politics and bodies) not only became intertwined, but an inescapable political relationality became insistently normalising: rather than questioning the value of the state and how the polity comes into being, it is now life that becomes essential to the state's value and operations, with the state normalising itself as nothing more than the efficient management of life. What Foucault was immediately critical of was the shift of political relations from an ethical domain of negotiated decisions and norms, where selves were ongoing formations, to a rigid conception of the living body, where *life* provided rules in advance. Foucault was prescient in noting the extent to which biopolitical imperatives would generate a political managerialism. How "we" manage the future becomes a question of focusing on (and managing) the eco-systems, resources, populations, and planet that have sustained human living. It is *life* – ongoing, future-oriented, reproductive, and flourishing life – that provides normalising imperatives for bodies.

One of the possibilities suggested by Foucault and some of those who took up the challenge of his work was a counter-relationality. A body that says "no" to life in its flourishing relationality, a body or thing that breaks with coherence, is how we might make sense of Foucault's interest in other spaces, criminal bodies, and nineteenth-century literature, and it is also how we might think of his counter-memory – where what is in the present is not necessarily (or at all) a coming-into-recognition and relation of the past. Perhaps the clearest figure is Foucault's invocation, in his work on the history of the human sciences, of the table across which various objects are spread; rather than a method of bringing things into relation, what needs to be thought is their non-relation. Rather than thinking of some force that generates relations, forms a polity, and then allows that same polity to recognise its living vitality in order to save itself, Foucault imagined an ungrounded art of existence – a desire that was not necessarily in the service of life, a language that did not promote communication, spaces that did not generate recognition. The self might be oriented towards pleasures that would not, as in today's neoliberalism, be ways of furthering one's existence or maximising one's power (*History*, *Volume 3* 3).

One might think of Foucault's resistance to biopolitics as a typically late modernist form of aestheticism. The problem with *life* as the ground for politics is that it determines everything in advance, allowing for any decision to be based on the maximisation of the forces of living bodies. As Deleuze noted in his commentary on Foucault, it was nineteenth-century literature that captured Foucault's imagination as a way of thinking about how *life* might become something other than a plane of self-constituting, self-furthering, and self-recognising humanity, where being human would be tied essentially to recognition of the foundational relations through which one comes into being (Deleuze, *Foucault*). Foucault had

looked at the way language had been normalised, seen as one of the ways in which human life furthers itself and appears to itself, and he suggested that language could break from life – in the sense of no longer being explicable in terms of the needs of communication and self-flourishing. In nineteenth-century literature, language was not that which allowed man to express himself, recognise his social and collective being, and further his existence, nor was language grounded in life – with life functioning as the reason for language's emergence and with language holding the power to turn back and disclose life's truth. Language would break from life and take on a force of its own, or what Foucault would refer to as a "shining" of language, as though something – anything – might be liberated from the all-encompassing relationality of a life that could explain and normalise everything (Foucault, *Order*). If Foucault turns to a certain mode of art object to think something other than a theological and vitalist conception of relational life, this is still, however, a predominantly recuperative gesture, allowing the high-modernist notion of the autonomous artwork to redeem an existence that has fallen into the same dull round of managerial relationality. The art object as lifeless thing would break with the tyranny of an existence bound up with survival. Set apart and standing alone, the artwork could rupture the ways in which everything in the world had been moralised, always explained away in terms of an ongoing journey of self-knowledge, growth, and recognition. When Foucault imagines the self as a work of art, it is not the narrative life of Aristotelian theory, where a sense of one's life as a whole allows for coherent political being and communitarian forms of ethics; instead, the art of the self takes up the forces of life in order to break with function.[1]

The Foucauldian gesture towards non-relational aesthetics alerts us to the ways in which aesthetic norms are inextricably bound up with the ongoing politics of relationality. This is so much so that by the time the project of relational aesthetics is stated explicitly in manifesto form – in Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) – it is anything but a revolutionary manoeuvre. Instead, as Claire Bishop has argued, relational aesthetics allows the experience of coming into relation to take over any sense of *what* might be related and allows the gallery space to confine relationality to a single and isolated collective self-affectivity. Bishop's criticism is directed against the quite specific and self-avowed form of relational aesthetics championed by Bourriaud. What I would add to Bishop's criticism is two-fold. First, what Bishop finds lacking in Bourriaud is symptomatic of a much broader valorisation of the relational: the privileging of relationality *as politics* (without asking about the type and form of relations) goes well beyond Bourriaud's work and twenty-first-century installation art. Second, rather than, as Bishop suggests, thinking about genuinely political relations that are antagonistic (and therefore open out beyond the gallery space), we should intensify her critique to consider the non-relational and not just the antagonistic.

Aesthetics has invariably tended towards a moralism of relational aesthetics, always directed against a passive and disengaged receptivity. Prior to Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, there had been centuries of defending poetics in so far as it enlivens the imagination, allowing subjects to become active and critical citizens who understand the connectedness of the world. In the standard account of the history of philosophy, Plato casts the poets out of the republic because their production of simulations distracts from the true task of reason: instead of turning us away from images, back towards the source from which images emerge, poetic forms allow images to proliferate. It was for this very reason that Foucault turned back to the moment of the expulsion of sophistry, a moment in history when speech was not yet grounded in a force other than itself. In the background of Foucault's criticism of Platonic reason is his privileging of the aesthetic. The sophists were masters of rhetoric and were capable of dazzling with the "potent and just" act:

> The day dawned when truth moved over from the ritualised act – potent and just –

> of enunciation to settle on what was enunciated itself: its meaning, its form, its object and its relation to what it referred to. A division emerged between Hesiod and Plato, separating true discourse from false; it was a new division for, henceforth, true discourse was no longer considered precious and desirable, since it had ceased to be discourse linked to the exercise of power. And so the Sophists were routed. (*Archaeology* 218)

But Foucault is not alone in seeing the history of Western thought as one of increasing rationalisation – to the point that one arrives properly at life as a single, self-organising, and immanent whole with no relation to anything other than its own self-maintenance. What is lost is the untethered or ungrounded speech act, an event of saying that creates a rupture in the same dull round of communicative reason. Foucault's narration of the routing of the sophists follows Nietzsche in seeing a fall from the pure force of saying to the grounded reason of philosophy. In this respect Foucault's early account of the routing of the sophists resonates with his later lectures on neoliberalism and his ongoing criticism of political normalisation. As long as we privilege life and the polity as self-organising forms of relationality that further themselves through recognising their emergent conditions, we preclude modes of existence that are set outside the proper functioning of the whole. Art is not a break or cut in the very normality of life but becomes increasingly interpreted as just one more way in which political life manages and stabilises itself. Biopolitics allows everything to be explained as one more event in a living whole that acts only to turn back, recognise, and maintain itself. It is in this respect that we might counter Francis Fukuyama's last man and the end of history (where we have nothing other than reason's self-recognition) with Foucault's high-modernist attempt to free the power of poetics from the will to truth. For Fukuyama, "there is a fundamental process at work that dictates a common evolutionary pattern for *all* human societies – in short, something like a Universal History of mankind in the direction of liberal democracy" (60). In the era of the Anthropocene, this Enlightenment teleology that Fukuyama had located in the liberal public sphere has been naturalised – the assumption being that, once we recognise the harm we have done to the planet and look at human life as a part of a living system, we can save ourselves and the planet for the future. We move from anthropocentrism – where human reason recognises itself as coming into being through history – to anthropocenism, where our capacity to read the earth unites the species in the predicament of a common future. What such anthropocenic narratives preclude is the viability of non-contributing, non-expressive, and non-relational life. Consider the ways in which post-apocalyptic dramas present the end of the world as the falling back into nomadic existence, as though the destruction of global capitalism and neoliberal surveillance systems were the end of the world. Alternatively, consider the ways in which contemporary art and research funding must always be tied back to "impact" (Babich). What cannot be admitted as viable is a non-globalising mode of existence that does not rely on a conception of humanity in general, that does not recognise itself as "anthropos." When more nomadic or non-state forms of existence are contemplated, it is more often than not in terms of what such cultures can contribute to "us" (Nkomwa et al.; Makondo and Thomas). Whatever is must be understood and justified by its relation to the flourishing whole. From Plato's turning of the soul towards the origin of light and reason to liberalism's Enlightenment journey of reflection and neoliberalism's sense of oneself as a fruitful investment that should not burden the whole, a good life is a relational life.

In this standard account we see the ways in which a centripetal relationality is aligned with the good: rather than being dispersed, with proliferating and ungrounded images continuing to capture attention, reason must turn back upon itself, recognising the light and centredness through which all experience becomes possible. If there is a politics and poetics of emanation, it is always relational; what is created not only is expressive of the ground but turns back and recognises itself as having emerged from a life

that it takes up as its own. Where Foucault, after Nietzsche, had set the force of art *against* the recuperative motor of reason, art has become increasingly identified *not* as that which breaks with life but as one of the many ways in which life furthers and sustains itself. One might think here of the turn towards evolutionary psychology and the explanation of art as yet one more way in which the complex system of human culture sustains itself. Perhaps the clearest and most popular example of this trend is Ramachandran and Hirstein's rules for art, all of which explain the ways in which art hones the capacities that allow the brain to make its way in the world. Such supposedly revolutionary work confirms centuries of aesthetic normativity, where good art and good subjects are defined through an affective relationality. Modern aesthetics – the capacity to feel oneself feeling – becomes increasingly one of enclosed relationality; this is what Jean-François Lyotard referred to as "tautegorical" (4–6).

relational aesthetics

Prior to its direct concern with art objects, aesthetics had to do with the capacity for minds to be affected. It is with Kant that the discourse of aesthetics became explicitly intertwined with reflective judgement, and the capacity of minds to become aware of the power of synthesis or of the ways in which the experienced world is formed through transcendental subjectivity. The aesthetic premise is stated most clearly in Kant but is intensified in the centuries of art theory and theorised practice that follow. As an example we could cite Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's account of "the refrain" in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the history of art is summarised as a passage from classicism's sense of the relation between forms and matter, to Romanticism's attempt to capture the earth's forming power:

> Form itself became a great form in continuous development, a gathering of the forces of the earth taking all the parts up into a sheaf. Matter itself was no longer a chaos to subjugate and organize but rather the moving matter of a continuous variation. The universal had become a relation, variation. (340)

This plateau ends with a triumphant celebration of modernism's freeing of relations from the earth:

> The essential relation is no longer matters-forms (or substances-attributes); neither is it the continuous development of form and the continuous variation of matter. It is now a direct relation material-forces. A material is a molecularized matter, which must accordingly "harness" forces; these forces are necessarily forces of the Cosmos. (342)

From Kant to modernism, the exemplary art object would be reflective of the conditions of its own creation, capable of generating an elevated self-understanding whereby consumption becomes transformation and where transformation is achieved through the intuition of relations. One might think here of Kant's aesthetics, where an object is judged to be beautiful *not* because of what it represents but because the relations of composition are in harmony with the same forms of synthesis through which subjectivity brings the world into being. Correct aesthetic judging recognises that what is perceived as beauty is not in the object itself but results from the harmonious powers of relation between subject and what is intuited.

This transcendental conception of aesthetics, where the object is an occasion for the perceiving subject to be brought back to their own compositional powers, is both problematised and intensified in high modernism. Like Kant, modernism is opposed to a notion of the art object as pleasurable commodity; what is good in the art object is its capacity to bring to the fore the very truth of relationality that is occluded in the everyday world of dispersed things. Kant's reflective judgement was set alongside an insistence that we should think and act *as if* the world were in accord with the synthesising power of the imagination, separating the world as it is from the ways in which we know it. Post-Kantian phenomenology and modernism saw the artwork less as an occasion to draw us

back to our powers of forging relations than as a relational entity in its own right. It is as though the artwork were part of an artworld, where every poem communicates with every other. Think here of T.S. Eliot's conception of tradition, where the great artwork is in conversation with the entire history of poetry, transforming the whole with every articulation, and where poetic judgement is similarly attuned to the whole from which each particular poem emerges. Like Deleuze and Guattari after him, who will argue that art allows affects and percepts to stand alone, as if they were for all time (*What is Philosophy?*), Eliot insists that emotion in poetry is *not* feeling (or what occurs in an isolated individual) but a capturing and rendering objective of that which could be felt by any subject whatever. The affect stands apart from the day-to-day differences and dispersal of bodily feelings, and instead is there to be seized upon and re-lived in every reading or viewing of the artwork. Deleuze will argue, in *Francis Bacon*, that every painting transforms the history of painting. In stark contrast to the bourgeois consumer who does not know much about art but knows what they like, the ideal recipient of modernist art is not motivated by a pleasurable relation between body and object but instead perceives the particular with a sense of the whole. That subject, in turn, is no longer the isolated individual but perceives what is given as if for all time.

In a more contemporary articulation, Bernard Stiegler will argue for the pharmacological nature of relationality: there is no such thing as the autonomous rational subject for whom art is merely a means to a reflective and self-recuperative end. Humans are epiphylogenetic beings: each individual emerges from a history of relations to the body's outside. If the first humans became who they were in relation to the arche-cinema of cave painting, contemporary humans emerge as the consequence of the history of music, literature, science, philosophy, and popular culture. The eye and ear that consume contemporary art can either be drawn into long circuits, where watching a Godard film allows me to imagine the entire history of cinema and all the other auteurs and amateurs who compose collective desire, *or* I can simply consume, where pleasure is manufactured by others without my having any sense of its production – what Stiegler refers to as "proletarianization of the senses." From Kant through to Stiegler, what is rejected is a transcendent or non-relational rupture of human self-composition. The relations from which the polity emerges must ultimately be one's own: not dictated by biological life but given to one's self from one's self. It becomes the task of reflection to recall the original relationality from which all forms emerge; one must recognise that there is no law other than the law one gives oneself, no historical reason other than that which unfolds from active and self-constituting life, even if that life – as Stiegler argues – has the capacity to become pacified by the very forms it brings into being and even if there is something mystagogic or never fully explicable in the art object.

It might seem that Stiegler's recent work has not taken sufficient heed of Foucault's critique of the normalising power of life and that Stiegler has fallen back on a grounding of art in the interests of life. Yet even though Foucault seeks to detach writing from the normalising efficiency of everyday life, he maintains that art and the arts of the self ought ultimately – like Stiegler's conception of trans-individuation – to be oriented towards achieving a higher relationality. This, as I have suggested, is what ties a long theorisation of the art object to the end of the world: art is either a form of world-disclosing poetics or – as with Foucault – an elevated experience of forces no longer bound to mundanity that allows us to break free from the weight of the world. In either case, the art object is possible and desirable in so far as it draws those who view it into a sense of world formation or – at its height – an artworld's sense of a culture aware of itself as a fragment of an open self-forming whole. To lose this aesthetic reflexivity would be to lose the world. Stiegler's lament that we are turning into infantilised and short-circuited beings with no sense of a complex future that would be enabled by the long circuits of art history is *almost* compatible with Foucault's celebration of those

modernist artworks that break with the enjoyment of everyday consumption for the sake of seeing language itself. In all these writers there is a wafer-thin difference between a valorisation of the art object that allows us to form a world and art objects that cut into reflexive relationality.

Indeed, Foucault's, Stiegler's, and Deleuze and Guattari's writings on art harbour a profound ambivalence towards relationality. Those artworks that disrupt the everyday world of connectedness and disturb the functioning of the sensory motor apparatus are valorised, but the hoped-for consequence of the destruction of everyday relations is a connectedness to the cosmos (Deleuze and Guattari) or the creation of longer circuits of trans-individual memory (Stiegler). Foucault's conception of nineteenth-century literature as disruptive of language is at once an attempt to break with a moralising stress on the relationality of life *and* a recuperative gesture that elevates the modern artwork as a privileged mode of thinking. What might at first appear to be radically non-relational ultimately restores a relationality at a higher level. If the loss of art amounts to the end of the world, this is in a desperately apocalyptic sense where a world without global reflexivity is no world at all. This is nowhere more obvious than in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of "higher deterritorialization." Bodies come into being through encounters with forces, but forces have capacities that are never exhausted in the relations they form. There are – prior to assemblages and territories – pure forces, potentials, or expressive matters that get taken up in the organised bodies we know as life. Deterritorialisation occurs when some fragment of an assemblage generates a new layer and mode of relations. When the mouth or paw shift from being organs of consumption to become organs of expression in language and gesture, new modes of relation are forged (*Thousand* 61). *Higher* deterritorialisation is best exemplified in modernist art, when the colours that compose the canvas are not expressive of the earth or the artist but can be perceived as a cosmic and eternal force, as the forces from which life and the earth have emerged (326). This higher deterritorialisation or cosmic dimension of art is akin to what Foucault referred to as the "shining" of language in nineteenth-century writing:

> At the moment when language, as spoken and scattered words, becomes an object of knowledge, we see it reappearing in a strictly opposite modality: a silent, cautious deposition of the word upon the whiteness of a piece of paper, where it can possess neither sound nor interlocutor, where it has nothing to say but itself, nothing to do but shine in the brightness of its being. (*Order* 327)

Expressive matters are liberated from the world, capable of being perceived in themselves.

What deterritorialisation and higher deterritorialisation occlude, however, as concepts and theoretical orientations, is what remains only hinted at in Deleuze's corpus, namely, a radical cut or refusal of relationality – such as would come about through decolonisation. If the art object has been increasingly valorised for its relationally extensive and intensive force, to the point where the end of the world is depicted as the mere dispersal of bodies without global aesthetic reflexivity, the world that cuts itself off from the globe would need to be defined against deterritorialisation's recuperation of cosmic surveillance. This is what decolonisation offers and demands. What might it mean to embrace the end of the world, including the artworld? Frantz Fanon takes up Aimé Césaire's call for the "end of the world" and does so in the context of decolonisation and relationality (76). Rather than each individual forming themselves in terms of one self-constituting humanity, ending the world would amount to an end of the forms of individuating colonisation that allow us to be human only in so far as we have an orientation to the world.

deterritorialisation and decolonisation

The word *decolonisation* has recently both come into vogue *and* been criticised for just that degree of fashionability. Universities,

public spaces, and galleries have been called upon to decolonise. This has more often than not amounted to removing statues, adding non-white authors to the canon, or acknowledging the history of violence that is intertwined with the supposed civilising mission. If we accept the inescapably and desirably relational nature of all life, then it may follow that decolonisation would amount to a movement akin to deterritorialisation: all that one might hope for is a mutation and reconfiguration. Decolonisation might, however, offer something other than a mutation of relations and instead open the thought of a cut in relationality. In their article "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue for "an ethic of incommensurability" (36), suggesting that one cannot simply adjust or supplement the canon or the gallery, nor open its terms to the cosmos: "To fully enact an ethic of incommensurability means relinquishing settler futurity, abandoning the hope that settlers may one day be commensurable to Native peoples" (ibid.). What makes their conclusion radically unsettling is that, rather than ask for inclusion or adjustment, it is the space of settlement itself that is deemed to be worthy of and open to destruction. In quite concrete terms this would mean giving land back to native peoples; more generally, it would require that we replace rather than reform the institutions we inhabit, including those of the gallery and the broader institution of art as such.

Far too often conceptions of "decolonisation" are tied to vague notions of deterritorialisation, where the latter seems simply to refer to an extension and intensification of relations. Against that conflation, I would like to seize upon the ambivalence of deterritorialisation. On the one hand, one could see decolonisation as the exemplary movement of relational life: life is nothing other than the coming into relation of forces, with increased complexity of relations generating further forms and relations. In this reading, the problem with colonisation would be its stopping short of relationality. One of the many liberal objections to the stringent migration policies of twenty-first-century politics has been to argue that "we are all migrants." This is especially so in the idea of America as the great melting pot, with the end-point of world migration being the recognition of a single family of man. Deterritorialisation would be a movement of increasing and opening relations, with immigration policy and our reading and curatorial practices becoming ever more inclusive. On the other hand, one might think of deterritorialisation in this sense as the very opposite of decolonisation. Rather than proliferating and intensifying migratory movements, one would recognise that migration has always been an oscillation between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. From John Locke's conception that "in the beginning all the world was *America*" (29), to Deleuze and Guattari's claim that "everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside" (*Thousand* 19), America is at one and the same time a smooth space open for movement while also being the place where movement turns back on itself and recognises itself as properly American. It is America that can declare itself to be composed from all the colours of the world, able to comprehend every other nation as a variant of the one great humanity of which it is exemplary. On this account, decolonisation would find its fitting home in institutions like the art gallery and the university, where the sense of a single, self-forming, self-differentiating, and self-reflexive humanity opens itself up to all the points of view, voices, and perspectives that make up the whole. There is, however, a sense of decolonisation that is at odds with the simple valorisation of deterritorialisation. Rather than grounding ethics in the proliferation of relations and movements and aiming for an intuition of an ever-varying dynamic whole, one might think of a severed and disruptive elsewhere. Cutting into the space of the gallery, rather than transforming the gallery, would be genuinely nomadic. That is, rather than dismiss Deleuze and Guattari for deploying nomadism as a metaphor, when the lives of nomadic peoples have always been threatened by colonisation, one would

accept that a life without the transcendental relation to the globe and without institutions and states that make such relations possible would be worth the end of the world. One would no longer begin from one ever-expanding humanity or life but instead acknowledge the divergent lines from which relations emerge and are unsettled. One would have to question, most of all, the formation of an artworld that has become synonymous with the lifeworld. Is the only viable life one in which an individuated body has a rich and complex sense of itself in relation to some transcendental horizon, where every other culture is a variation of a life one recognises through one's sense of the whole?

Foucault's counter-relational conception of literary writing and Deleuze and Guattari's modernism of the cosmos rely upon a higher aesthetics of relationality which, in turn, allows the valorisation of deterritorialisation to trump any possibility of decolonisation. To make this clear one might draw an opposition between two modes of simultaneity and relationality enabled by the concept of the art object. The modern art object is possible when a thing is set in a space alongside other things, all from different times and worlds, and then viewed as not of this world. In post-Kantian aesthetics the landscape (for example) is not a picture of a particular place that would be viewed as depicting a part of the earth that is particularly pleasant; instead, what one appreciates is the way colour, paint, canvas, line, shape, and framing transform a representation into a presentation. One views the thing not as part of a world but as a world unto itself, and this is made possible by the artworld, which the gallery brings into being. The comportment that is made possible by the gallery is one of worldly deterritorialisation: things no longer simply exist in relation to each other but are now capable of being viewed on this separate plane where everything is brought into relation with everything else. The modern art gallery begins with the museum that gathers the world, continues with the modernist gesture (such as Duchamp's) that attempts to break the aura of the gallery, and finally reaches its pitch in the curatorial practices of relational aesthetics, where the gallery-goer is taken out of the dull round of the corporate world and brought into a generation of a more vital, more engaged, more connected space of life. The line that runs from the museum to the modern gallery is the line of deterritorialisation: the art object eventually generates relations in and from itself. From the Vatican Museums and the Louvre, to Tate Modern and the Guggenheim, gallery spaces exist as both the outcome and alibi of colonisation, where the world was plundered for its riches, all of which could be taken from their day-to-day existence and then set into relation through the aesthetic attitude.

When Foucault makes a case for literary language as that which might liberate existence from *life*, he seeks to break with the overarching humanist gaze of the nineteenth century that could create a space of culture and anthropology across which all things could be compared; however, in doing so he also generates a grander virtual plane of aesthetic comportment or simultaneity. His stated task in *The Order of Things* poses the problem of humanist and posthumanist forms of relationality and simultaneity. If we think about the table upon which our objects of study are arrayed, we will turn our attention away from things and their relations towards the possibility of the presupposed horizon:

> I use that word "table" in two superimposed senses: the nickel-plated, rubbery table swathed in white, glittering beneath a glass sun devouring all shadow – the table where, for an instant, perhaps forever, the umbrella encounters the sewing-machine; and also a table, a tabula, that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and their differences – the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space. (*Order* xix)

For Foucault, this comparative horizon had, from the eighteenth century, been that of life. Relations emerge from, sustain, and can be

explained by reference back to life, allowing both for the biopolitics that will manage populations and a later neoliberalism that will focus on every aspect of individual life as a maximisation of one's potential. For Foucault, nineteenth-century literary language broke with communication and opened out to a force no longer bound up with life. Deleuze poses an important question with regard to this break: why did Foucault only find such a radical force in literary language? Deleuze, in response, suggests that life, too, might be liberated from its own self-furtherance, in the non-carbon life-forms of silicon: "The forces within man enter into a relation with forces from the outside, those of silicon which supersedes carbon, or genetic components which supersede the organism, or agrammaticalities which supersede the signifier" (*Foucault* 131). Such a detachment from life would count as *higher deterritorialisation*, where the movements that created new forms of relation reach a threshold and open up an elsewhere. I want to suggest that we take Deleuze's critique of Foucault and turn it back upon Deleuze: just as Deleuze asked why Foucault only sought to deterritorialise language through literature, we might ask why Deleuze thought that life was the privileged locus of breaking open relations. If we think of decolonisation *not* as the intensification of differences to the point where new thresholds are opened but as a mode of existence that does not begin with the fetishisation of relationality, we might open a new nomadism. Rather than opening out to a new cosmos, one might think of those forms of movement that have not covered the globe for the sake of an ever-expansive humanity. What might happen if, rather than an expansion of relations for the sake of becoming proximate to the cosmos, one pursued the destruction of relations for the sake of something *less* than the whole?

art that ends the world

From Plato, through Christian neo-Platonism, post-Kantian liberalism, Heideggerian phenomenology, and quite explicitly in the work of Bernard Stiegler, techne has been negotiated through an ethics of proximity: any repeatable system that emerges from life ought to remain in relation to the life it originally extended. If writing and other forms of externalised memory extend life (or, in Stiegler's case, make human life possible and worth living), then the original desire for life enhancement ought to remain as the criterion through which techne is managed. If technology takes on a life of its own and ceases to maintain any relation to the bodies from which it emerged, it becomes demonic. In Stiegler's work this proximity of technological relationality – where who we are is an effect of what we have read, with others, allowing us to be individuated the more we consume in relation to others – is bound up with a simultaneity of proximity. I can either be passive and simply consume what has been produced elsewhere, having no sense of its creative history, having no investment in the desire from which it emerged, *or* I can resist this proletarianisation of the senses and take up the history of technology from which my desires have emerged. One might think of this ethics of relationality as bringing into virtual form the simultaneity of the modern art gallery: across a single space one gathers diverse objects from various worlds, and, unlike the immediately consumed commodity, one looks at the art object as at once a fragment of a world and as composing a higher world of a humanity to come.

Why is this rarefied institution of the art gallery and the accompanying morality of relationality and simultaneity important? If we think about the present and the sense of the end of the world, what is mostly feared is not the end of the planet, the end of life, or the end of the human species but rather a specific portion of humanity that imagines itself, properly, as creating a virtual simultaneity in which my life and existence would be an expression of an entire history of texts and artefacts, all of which lead up to a self-aware present. What *cannot* be imagined, tolerated, or thought of as human is what Deleuze and Guattari thought of as nomadism. Perhaps one of the most interesting things about their rich corpus of work is the extent to which they

forge a politics that is both radically non-relational and runs counter to the moralities of emergence. Emergence posits that complexity emerges from disorder, disconnection, and relative simplicity; the continuing trajectory of emergence and complexity is frequently and explicitly a moral and political imperative. We must not fall back into dispersed chaos. But Deleuze and Guattari argue that chaos is richer in difference than the stable wholes that occur through processes of selection. They also suggest that nomadism and dispersal are (at the very least) not to be dismissed as unviable or unworthy modes of existence. Rather than suggest that complex systems come into being through the relation of already existing forces, theirs is a theory of higher deterritorialisation. They see the history of the human species from the point of human capital as one of increasing and all-encompassing relationality and simultaneity. Once late modernity and late capitalism have arrived, it is possible to look back and write a universal history, where every moment, including the present, can be read as having emerged from exchange. And in Deleuze's own writings, as I have already suggested, he appears to view art (especially cinema) as having a history that arrives, finally, at a form of self-realisation: the camera is no longer used to capture movements of the world but starts to create syntheses of images that are no longer copies, simulations, or doubles of anything other than their own movement (Deleuze, *Cinema 2*). And yet even here there is a counter-ethics quite directly opposed to the morality of emergence. If the cinematic eye originally emerges from and extends the eye and brain of the human body, it is also capable of taking on a relationality of its own: images are cut and combined *as if* they were ungrounded from any sensory motor apparatus, releasing the colours, sensations, and lines from this world, opening to the cosmos: what might it mean to look at matters *not* as if they composed one great whole but as if they were thought of as forces beyond this world?

Here, we might think more directly of the ways in which the norms of simultaneity and relationality have shored up a quite specific Western, European, rationalist morality of the world: humanity is, properly, that which can recognise itself in all the rich cultural variants that make up one interconnected and self-aware whole. To lose *that* form of humanity would be the end of the world. A form of human existence that resided in its own place, without a strong sense of filiation, a nomadic humanity that traversed space rather than comprehending and elevating itself above space, is both the way the end of the world has been imagined *and* the way many humans have existed *and* the way we might imagine a future not bound up with a fetishised conception of global simultaneity and relationality.

In order to illustrate this idea, I will conclude by looking at a contemporary artwork directly concerned with a posthuman mode of simultaneity and then turn to Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* to reflect upon the racial politics embedded in forms of political relationality. Butler's two novels are prescient in their depictions of what have now become "end of world" landscapes; with cities destroyed and infrastructural collapse, individuals are reduced to a state of precarious wandering only to have to build localised and state-wary communities. Butler at once demonstrates the viability of these "end of world" possibilities and depicts a new world, at the same time as she demonstrates that such fragile worlds are always at risk of being subsumed back into a grand narrative of relationality. I want to conclude, then, by seeing Butler and contemporary LA artist Beatriz Cortez as creating work that cuts into relationality both for the sake of ending the world and to demonstrate that a world without relationality is a possibility for multiple worlds.

To move towards this conclusion, we might turn to Edouard Glissant's contrast between two forms of nomadism that he ties directly to two forms of relationality. The first is a circular nomadism that occurs across space, while the second is an arrow nomadism that traverses space to create a grand transparent whole. In the first form of nomadism and relationality, relations to the outside are opaque and disruptive; the world of the other is apprehended not

as a variant of one's own but as a relation to what bears its own mode of relationality. Rather than an anthropologist who sees every other as an instance of culture (a concept the other does not possess), one would relate to other modes of relation: what the anthropologist explains in terms of culture, another culture would explain in quite different terms – of other spirits or origins or modes of personhood. Arrow nomadism, by contrast, moves towards all-inclusive comprehension, such that everything is in relation to everything else and simultaneity is comprehensive rather than disruptive. Any individual's existence in the present is, ideally, in harmony with any other's, with the single concept of a filiative humanity generating one world:

> At the moment that the West projected into the world for the first time, this [idea of filiation] began to be realized. This project of discovery and ascendancy was taken to be an absolute value. It was even asserted that both geographical discoveries and the conquests of science were driven by the same audacity and the same capacity for generalization. Territorial conquest and scientific discovery (the terms are interchangeable) were reputed to have equal worth. The absolute of ancient filiation and conquering linearity, the project of knowledge and arrowlike nomadism, each used the other in its growth. But I maintain that, right from the first shock of conquest, this movement contained the embryo (no matter how deferred its realization might have seemed) that would transcend the duality that started it. (Glissant 56)

There is one world that imagines itself as constituted by a sense of culture and human self-definition, generalising all others as variants of the same. There are other cultures in which others are not various forms of one's own self but different modalities of relationality. It is along these lines that Deleuze sets his notion of incompossibility against Leibniz's notion of the compossible (*The Fold* 59). The incompossible is a divergent line where (for example) there is a world in which everything is coming to an end and there is no future, set alongside a world in which there is finally the possibility of a future. These forking paths depict a radically non-relational monadology; every aspect of the world opens to the infinite, but these infinites do not harmonise. Rather than the gaze of the anthropologist in which every other expresses a variant of culture, the gaze of cultural relativity is set alongside worlds that have no concept of *the human*. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, expanding on the implications of Deleuze's conception of multiplicities, argues for a destruction of anthropological relationality:

> To compare multiplicities is different than making particularities converge around generalities, as is the habit of those anthropological analyses that perceive substantial similarity underneath every "accidental" difference: "in every human society […]" This refers us to an observation of Albert Lautmann (Deleuze's author of choice as far as mathematics is concerned):
>
> > The constitution, by Gauss and Riemann, of a differential geometry that studies the intrinsic properties of a variety, independent of any space into which this variety would be plunged, eliminates any reference to a universal container or to a center of privileged coordinates.
>
> Substitute anthropology for geometry here, and the consequences become evident. How such variety could be of service to anthropology is not very difficult to imagine, as everything ordinarily denounced in the discipline as scandalous contradiction suddenly becomes conceivable: how variations can be described or compared without presupposing an invariable ground, where the universals lie, and what then happens to the biological constitution of the species, symbolic laws, and the principles of political economy, not to speak of the famed "external reality" (all of which, rest assured, were previously supposed to have been readily conceivable in potentia but not in act). (113–14)

In this multiple relationality there is not a single gaze that purveys various forms of otherness, but multiple gazes or aspects are all opening to their own disparate and

incompossible sense of the infinite. There has been a violent and all-encompassing generalisation in Western epic thought, in which movement and migration are always thought of as occurring *across* a global space rather than being productive of multiple spaces. The production of *a world* and a single humanity is the result of a generality that can only imagine relations from the single point of view of a single history. Think of how Western post-apocalyptic cinema imagines the end of urban affluence as the end of the world and – in turn – how that same humanity imagines a condition of dispersed nomadism as the loss of humanity, as the absence of any futurity whatsoever. This is so much so that Oxford's Future of Humanity Institute is tasked with thinking of all the ways *we* can avoid failing to arrive at technological maturity (Bostrom). Such "end of world" imaginaries are not at all the end of the world but might be thought of as the opportunity for other worlds *or* might be lived *not* as fear of technological immaturity and existential risk but as the immediate pressure of local annihilations that take the form of famine, genocide, or any of the other catastrophes that have always taken place within the world. Rather than an apocalypse at the end of time that discloses eternity, there are – to think of just one example – indigenous cultures where the human time of the present is set alongside a non-human eternity, a world of animal spirits bound up with place. In indigenous Australian culture the Dreaming is not a fulfilment of human time but an elsewhere that precludes any form of human chauvinism; one's individuation is achieved through a relation to a time incommensurable with the present (Povinelli).

This notion of an incommensurable simultaneity is materialised in Beatriz Cortez's work *Tzolk'in*, two free-standing sculptures, one placed in the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, while the other faces the LA River.

The sculptures both explore and generate a radically destructive and nomadic simultaneity. First, as I have already suggested, the modern museum is more than a metaphor for modern relationality: the very imaginary that allows the collection of works from different worlds, all expressing their own world, is only possible because of a Western epic tradition in which space is traversed in order to produce a synthesis of relations and a global simultaneity. Cortez's sculptures reverse this comprehension;

Fig. 1. Beatriz Cortez, *Tzolk'in*, The Bowtie Project, Los Angeles. Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber, courtesy of Clockshop.

Fig. 2. Beatriz Cortez, installation view, *Made in L.A. 2018* exhibition, 3 June–2 September 2018, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Brian Forrest, courtesy of the Hammer Museum.

the viewer of the Hammer Museum sculpture can also view the LA River sculpture, which has been created to capture video movement of any visitors. In July 2018, visitors included a curious bird and a human vandal. Rather than the gallery being the centred locus opening out to the world, the gallery houses a sculpture that refers to a seemingly identical model at a locus that is anything but the enclosed space of leisured and elevated viewing. Opening onto the river, with the river itself being a monument to LA's own violent historical relation between concrete and water and also being the landscape across which people from different cultures merged and were divided, the sculpture also refers back to various other locales and times. The sculpture is at once static and dynamic, its solid structure occupying two places at once but also housing moving parts that follow hypocycloidal movement – movement that is at once circular and linear. The Mayan calendar, to cite just one example of hypocycloidal movement, was capable of imagining the flow of time *not* as a progression towards a present that overcomes the past but as a forward movement always in communication with an eternal elsewhere. Rather than a comprehensive notion of emergence, where time and life generate further layers of complexity, the circular motion that exists alongside linear motion allows for the radical disruption of the present by an inhuman elsewhere.

Cortez's *Tzolk'in*, for all its reference to hypocycloidal motion, simultaneity, and the inhuman, is nevertheless directly forceful in its politics. From the elevated point of view of contemporary art and the gallery, it opens out onto a discontinuous yet simultaneous space that has always been the condition for the gallery and that has its own movements, temporalities, and worlds – how would LA exist as high urbanity without the stolen resources and labour (typified by the LA River) that enabled its construction? Cortez's work, I want to suggest, is exemplary of a counter-tradition of art that takes place quite avowedly within the space of high urbanity, aware of the cannibalisation of Western art and its capacity to capture all other temporalities in its own mesh of all-inclusive relationality. It forges a relation to that which is destructive of *the world*, if one thinks of the world as the horizon in which all things cohere and make sense. In this respect it is a powerful political antidote to post-apocalyptic culture, where there is no other time, no

other place than *this world* with its all-encompassing relationality. For the post-apocalyptic imaginary, to exist dispersed across space, with one's values no longer oriented towards technological maturity and a transparency of the whole, would amount to the end of humanity. Such dispersal and nomadism in Cortez's work is apocalyptic, not by being revelatory, but by being destructive of the poetics of revelation.

Decades ago a similar criticism of the post-apocalyptic imaginary that is fully embedded in Western relationality was given form in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. In *Parable of the Sower* a world changed utterly by climate chaos and resource depletion has, predictably, ushered in a state of emergency, where holding on to mere life takes precedence over any conception of a flourishing whole. The central character, Lauren Olamina, is an empath who directly feels the affects of others and who writes a "book of the living" (because there have been so many books of the dead). In this new theology of Earthseed, everything is connected to everything else, and God is change. It becomes the duty of those created to steer change towards its proper historical path. Appearing initially as redemptive and as a way beyond a landscape of violence, plundering, rape, and the return of slavery, Earthseed progressively gains in scope to become a unifying force against a Christian fundamentalism that seeks to "make America great again." In *Parable of the Talents* the narrative splits into two, between the mythic beliefs of Lauren Olamina and her daughter, who experiences Earthseed and its dreams of space-colonisation *not* as redemption but as a continuation of the violence of all-encompassing relationality. Not only do the voices of Butler's parables create a dispersed simultaneity, with the eco-fundamentalism of the all-relational Earthseed set against the voice of an abandoned daughter whose mother was so concerned with life, futurity, and humanity that she was left orphaned, but there is also a liberating freedom in being without relation. One way to read the novel would be to see it as a tragic conflict, between the global task of saving humanity and remaining dutiful to one's own kind, and if one takes Lauren Olamina's voice as definitive, *Parable of the Talents* would be prescient of this now common post-apocalyptic motif. But the novel is equally composed of a voice set outside Lauren Olamina's all-encompassing vitalism; the novel opens with her daughter's critical and disenchanted quotation of Earthseed lore, with the suggestion that those who forge a future for "humanity" are ultimately cannibalising the future for their own self-monumentalisation, and yet such grand, world-saving efforts are nevertheless always surpassed by worlds to which they remain blind, worlds not-yet in relation:

> Here we are –
> Energy,
> Mass,
> Life,
> Shaping Life, Mind,
> Shaping Mind, God,
> Shaping God.
> Consider –
> We are born
> Not with a purpose,
> But with potential
>
> THEY'LL MAKE A GOD of her.
> I think that would please her, if she could know about it. (Butler, *Talents* 1)

Oddly poised between, on the one hand, a prophetic voice that manages to save the world and God by invoking a change that takes command of itself and, on the other, a dispossessed voice of an undutiful daughter, Butler's novel is stunningly prescient. One can either make a God of change and thereby make a God of oneself – sustaining a history that has been unable to live without self-deification – or, faced with end times, one might abandon the divinity of the whole for the sake of the fragile and the proximate.

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note

1 Deleuze and Guattari undertake a similar move when they locate an art of animality that *precedes* function; in the beginning are sensuous qualities or expressive matters *from which* relations may be forged but which may also – and should also – be intuited as liberated from any function or world (*What is Philosophy?*).

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