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CULTURE IS AN ARCHE-FOSSIL

Abstract: The paper focuses on Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude*. If presented there arguments (based on concepts of arche-fossil and ancestry, contingency, factuality and unreason) are valid and refute the fundamental thesis of correlationism – impossibility to access the reality outside correlation between thinking and being – then we should be able to exceed it form the scientific ground it was formulated upon and to apply it to theory of culture. The paper considers that possibility and follows the consequences of such broadening. What is culture in speculative realism's ontological paradigm? How to grasp cultural reality that is no longer a correlate of human subjectivity? Culture, its processes, objects, networks would not be human any more, ontologically. Rather, one might say, it emerged that culture is non-human. However, these questions and indications have now existed for long time in philosophy of culture, theory of culture, anthropology, cybernetics, media studies, ecology and many other disciplines. Issue that arises in regard of prior is the problem of theory of culture within speculative materialist perspective. If one acknowledges the arche-fossil argument, one cannot continue to approach culture in structuralist or phenomenological current. Meillassoux claims that mathematical ideation describes the objective structure of reality as it is in-itself. If mathematisation is the condition for theory, how can we theorise culture? The aim of the paper is to problematise the concept of culture and theory of culture in perspective of Meillassoux's speculation.

Keywords: Quentin Meillassoux, speculative materialism, arche-fossil, theory of culture, post-humanism

Why should we care about reintroducing the 16th century distinction between the primary and the secondary qualities? If anything, this is far from being one of the problems that excite contemporary humanities the most. It resembles stifling scholastic deliberations and it seemed like it is has been dealt with in the past and left behind. For Quentin Meillassoux, however, this is at the core of his speculative materialism's project, for it imposes consequences on variety of different planes: epistemological truth, ontological grounding of knowledge, political refutation of dogmatism and re-institution of rationality within discourse. Also, it has implications in how we think about culture – we shall follow this line later on.

So, now, almost ten years since the publication of *After Finitude*, it is well known among intellectuals and artists concerned by so called "continental philosophy" that Meillassoux tackles the foundations of the most of prominent 20th century philo-

sophical theories and admittedly he does it in a brilliant way. For many decades we observe measurable and overwhelming progress of scientific knowledge, with what philosophy has a difficult relationship. Meillassoux summons up a few statements that can be found in school textbooks, like “the date of the origin of the universe (13.5 billion years ago); the date of the accretion of the earth (4.56 billion years ago); the date of origin of life on earth (3.5 billion years ago); the date of the origin of humankind (*Homo habilis*, 2 million years ago).”¹ It seems that “empirical science is today capable of producing statements about events anterior to the advent of life as well as consciousness.”² Modern philosophy, as Meillassoux points out, indebted and embedded in Immanuel Kant’s three famous *Critiques*, generally agrees that science formulates facts about world, but nonetheless it always underlines the position from which these are produced. It was Edmund Husserl who, in the name of all heirs of Kant, explicitly expressed philosopher’s standpoint towards scientist’s one – the latter has a “natural attitude” towards the world, what means he does not recognise his perspective, from which he claims these truths.³ On the other hand, philosopher is someone, who brackets this naïve attitude and takes a step into critical or transcendental attitude acknowledging the finitude of thought. Therefore, “he will not contest the claim that it is in fact event Y that occurred, nor will he contest the dating of this event. No – he will simply add – perhaps only to himself, but add it he will – something like a simple codicil, always the same one, which he will discretely append to the end of the phrase: event Y occurred x number of years before the emergence of humans – for humans (or even, for the human scientist).”⁴ The moment he brackets scientific statement with “for us, for humans, as far as it goes”, he undermines any possibility of knowledge about the world beyond human thought, because the object of scientist reference is only an object related to a subject that posits it. We cannot point to an object existing in-itself before existence of any thought. So, according to Meillassoux, asking straightforwardly a philosopher of Kantian provenience if the universe is 13.5 billion years old, he can give no convincing answer. Then, the trouble is what science talks about? Is it all just a play of reproducing metatheory of valid views?⁵ Step in what direction philosophy should take to give a meaningful response?

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant defined the modern approach to rationality by solving (as Meillassoux names it in *Potentiality and Virtuality*) the “Hume’s problem”

¹ Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, transl. R. Brassier, Continuum, London 2008, p. 9.

² *Ibidem*.

³ E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy – First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, transl. F. Kersten, Nijhoff, Hague 1983, sec. 1, 2, 26.

⁴ Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude...*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

that can be encapsulated as “the problem of the grounding of causal connection.”⁶ According to David Hume, we cannot justify, why we expect the reality to obey a certain set of laws (i.e. physical or logical). Only reasonable explanation is to ascribe them to a subjective habit.⁷ Kant agrees with the Scot: time, space and causality are not properties of the exterior world, but habit is an insufficient answer, too. To become accustomed to something, i.e. to certain way we experience, there has to be a form that organises every experience we have (that later might become a habit). World, as we know it, is constructed by the subject – time, space and categories ordering reality are not exactly experienced, but they make any experience possible. Due to our subjective structure we organise the chaotic data collected by our senses; these are transcendental conditions of experience, pure forms of sensibility and a priori categories. If our reason holds conditions for any possible experience and knowledge, it is impossible to have access to reality outside correlation between thinking and being.⁸ We cannot reach the in-itself (*noumena*) with our thought, because in-itself would be indifferent to how we perceive it – we perceive always within our own transcendental conditions, so everything must be posited as for-us (*fenomena*).⁹

Meillassoux gave a name to this post-Kantian model, which breaks out from the dichotomy of realism–idealism and stands between both; name that (what Graham Harman in his monograph on Meillassoux admits) was “rapidly adopted” and has “made a permanent contribution to the philosophical lexicon”.¹⁰ “Correlationism is any current of thought which maintains the unsurpassable character of the correlation so defined”.¹¹ The problem that he faces is the question: how is it possible that science thinks facts that occurred before the world could be given for human thought? Meillassoux goes back to the “Hume’s problem” and comes up with an alternative proposition to Kant’s solution. Alain Badiou noticed in preface to *After Finitude* that Meillassoux’s approach is so stunning on the grounds that he “like Kant, (...) saves necessity, including logical necessity. But like Hume, he grants that there

⁶ Q. Meillassoux, *Potentiality and Virtuality*, transl. R. Brassier, in: L. Bryant, N. Srnicek, G. Harman (eds.), *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, re.press, Melbourne 2011, p. 224–236.

⁷ D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Clarendon, Oxford 1960. Argumentation against necessity of causality is set out in part III of first book.

⁸ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. P. Guyer, A.W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, ch. *The ground of the distinction of all objects in general into phenomena and noumena*, p. 358: “The Transcendental Analytic accordingly has this important result: That the understanding can never accomplish *a priori* anything more than to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general, and, since that which is not appearance cannot be an object of experience, it can never overstep the limits of sensibility, within which alone objects are given to us. Its principles are merely principles of the exposition of appearances (...)”.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 359–365.

¹⁰ G. Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2011, p. 7.

¹¹ Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude...*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

is no acceptable ground for the necessity of the laws of nature”.¹² If Meillassoux’s argumentation is valid and refutes the fundamental thesis of correlationism (that we cannot think the thing in-itself), then we should be able to extend the key concepts of ancestrality and arche-fossil, which provide for him the basis of such refutation, from the scientific ground it was formulated upon (or from the being that emerged before any thought) and to apply into the cultural (beings that are present). What interests me, are the consequences of such broadening – does it shift the discipline and object of the theory of culture?

Meillassoux does not introduce us to concepts like arche-fossil, ancestrality, correlationism or speculative materialism until he begins with restoring the distinction between primary and secondary qualities (that can be found already in Rene Descartes, though they appear explicitly in John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*). The latter relates to affective and sensual properties existing only in relation between being and thought. Therefore, they are for-us. Primary qualities are properties of being in-itself – they do not depend on human perception. It is fundamental for Meillassoux, because to assume this distinction is to accept the possibility of having knowledge of things in-themselves. For Meillassoux, as it was for Descartes, knowledge is guaranteed due to primary qualities’ capacity of being mathematisable, the power¹³ science is able to exercise. In recalling such an idea of qualities, Meillassoux stands against correlationism. Correlationism by maintaining that it is impossible to think of something that is not related to thought collapses the distinction between two types of properties. We cannot distinguish properties of correlation between the world and me from properties indifferent to my perception of the thing. I cannot get outside my own thought, thus I cannot compare and decide which qualities are primary or secondary – eventually I lose the basis for objective knowledge. Every attempt to represent in-itself instantly converts into for-me,¹⁴ every primary quality turns out to be secondary.¹⁵ Thus, “contemporary philosophers have lost the great outdoors, the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers.”¹⁶ To think the great outdoors is to reach the absolute – ontological grounding for thought that is indifferent to human situated thinking. Meillassoux must have asked himself, who was the last philosopher that attempted to think the absolute and had not done it within correlationism (like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who absolutised the correlation). He found this approach in *Meditations on First Philosophy* and to follow Descartes’ path he was forced to take up the distinction of properties. Restoring primary qualities Meillassoux opens a line for thinking something that is not in a necessary

¹² A. Badiou, *Preface to Q. Meillassoux, After Finitude...*, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

¹³ We follow Spinoza’s notion of powers, i.e. the capacity for being affected and to affect other beings.

¹⁴ I. Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

¹⁵ D. Hume, *op. cit.*, p. 226–231.

¹⁶ Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude...*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

relation to thought.¹⁷ Nothing is necessarily correlated with thought. Thought is only correlated to itself.

It is important to acknowledge the validity of Kant's refutation of realist absolute equated with a necessary object. Meillassoux makes his way towards speculative absolute within correlationism's territory, but in the end decodes it with the discovery of absolute contingency. In order to distinct itself from idealism, which makes hypostasis of the correlation and falls back into metaphysics, correlationism must claim that correlation is contingent. This means it is possible that it ceases to exist; a human subject can die. But to think death of the subject, one must have a concept of non-correlational reality, "the great outside." Even if correlationist says, "I do not know what is after death, it is unknowable, whether we die or not", his standpoint still assumes that this claim comes from a contingent subject. If not, he inevitably reverts to idealism. But, and that is Meillassoux's core argument, if he affirms this absolute contingency, it is impossible to maintain at correlationism position and it converts into speculative position.

For Meillassoux correlationism led to a big loss, because philosophers have cut off their capacity to think, what actually science does. That is why he brings forth the argument of the ancestrality. The key problem is: what is it scientists speak about, when they discuss age of universe or date of origin of life? How can we grasp the meaning of something that is anterior to every form of human relation to the world? (Human-world relation is just one among other entities). It is a transcendental problem, for which Meillassoux will try to give a non-transcendental answer. Obviously, Kant could not raise such an issue, since science contemporary to him did not have means to describe, what was before human existence – due to its apparatus at the time it could explore only actual world. It seems quite clear, why Kant understood scientific facts as necessarily related to thought. However, it is a problem for philosophers to stand on such a position in the wake of measurement of "an isotope whose rate of radioactive decay we know, or the luminous emission of a star that informs us as to the date of its formation".¹⁸

Structurally, Meillassoux's argument is very similar to Kant's. Just as the author of *Critique of Pure Reason*, he recognises that science articulates certain kind of statements (synthetic *a priori* for Kant, ancestral for Meillassoux) and notices these statements work somehow in society. In order to understand, how they work and why are they valuable for society, we need to assure them with meaning. However, foregoing philosophy, in likes of correlationism or idealism, cannot provide these statements with literal meaning, which would not reduce them to a language game. It does not mean that on ground of Kant's (or other correlationist's) theory every statement is arbitral and empty of any meaning, but that they only describe how human

¹⁷ However, something that Meillassoux had not accentuated, absolute must be in a contingent relation to thought. To think absolute, we have to have the power of thinking and the power of thinking absolute, but it does not imply that absolute exists merely as an object of thought.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

thinking works, not what and how works in the world-beyond-human. Here again is the reason to undertake the “Hume’s problem” ontologically and draw back to Descartes and try to think an absolute. How is it possible that science can articulate statements about reality radically non-human? Because it thinks the absolute.

Ancestrality relates to “any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species.”¹⁹ Arche-fossils are materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality, which existed before any sensible cognition and life. They cannot be expressed in secondary qualities, but can be described by primary. Meillassoux claims that ancestrality and arche-fossils cannot be interpreted adequately from a correlationist position, because the latter has to flatten the distinction between them and blurs the difference. That is why ancestral statements are motives for abolishing post-Kantian philosophy. Correlationist will always hold that they give themselves as ancestral to us.²⁰ In consequence this leads us to a point, where we cannot think of real time and real change, because we cannot think of emergence of intuition and givenness at all – everything had to become at once. We can think ancestral statements as true only within a sort of realism or materialism – that is when we guarantee that there is being, to which statements refer. The problem of ancestrality and arche-fossils is an ontological problem, not empirical. It does not matter, if scientists got the numbers correct or not. It is all about the powers to conduct such a gesture of measuring the age of events in the world before human presence. Any being that indicates the existence of world that is not given can be an arche-fossil. In other words, every being, which reveals the absolute that is not a correlate of thought, is an arche-fossil. Science tells us that we are surrounded by mind-independent processes all the time.²¹ Ancestrality shows the capacity of science to grasp the absolute through mathematical method. This concept of ancestrality leads Meillassoux, in a detailed and profound argumentation in third chapter of *After Finitude*, to the notion of the absolute that grounds knowledge. This absolute is the necessity of contingency. Since there cannot be (following Kant’s refutation of metaphysics) a necessary entity and correlationism is driven to admit that the radical outdoors, the positive principle of unreason comes up to establish the new absolute – everything must be, for no reason, contingent and only contingency is necessary. Otherwise, we find ourselves back within metaphysics founded on the principle of sufficient reason. Meillassoux strongly insists “that the facticity of everything cannot be thought as a fact”²² and adds little later on: “the principle of factuality can be stated as follows: only facticity is not factual – viz., only the contingency of what is, is not itself contingent. But it is important to bear in mind the following: the principle of factuality does not claim that contingency is necessary; its precise claim is that contingency alone is necessary – and only this prevents it

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ I. Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 362–363, paragraph beginning with: “The division of objects into (...)”.

²¹ It is not that science only tells us that fact before emergence of life is uncorrelated, but we are perpetually among independent processes.

²² Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude...*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

from being meta-physical.”²³ Now, the aim for speculative philosophy is to seek and recognize the conditions of factuality, which should not be confused with conditions of the possibility related to critical or transcendental correlationism.

Drawing a lesson from Descartes, we may pose a question: how can and do we think absolute? Descartes has shown that primary qualities are measurable objectively, i.e. independent of what we feel, sense or think. And this objectivity can be achieved by means of mathematics. Meillassoux gave an explanation of his project that synthesises traditions of realism and Kantism: “I don’t want to demonstrate that there is a necessary relation between mathematics and reality. My problem is a problem of possibility. In *After Finitude*, the problem that I encounter is that of explaining the possibility of science, physics, being able to describe a world without humans.”²⁴ So, it is not a naïve belief overlooking representation or mediation – mathematics are represented for us, granted – the quest is to reach through representation something beyond representation. Primary properties are mathematisable and do not need an observer for them to work. Events that occurred millions of years ago consisted of primary qualities that sedimented in matter and today are recovered through arche-fossils – source of knowledge of what had happened. Yet, problematic series of questions, which already have been raised in a talk published in “Collapse” issue after the famous conference at Goldsmith’s University in 2007 by Ray Brassier,²⁵ seem to haunt *After Finitude*. They can be merged into this: is mathematics a single way to think the absolute? If so, it leaves us with very little to be sure about the world. But also, the issue is, how do we understand mathematics and primary properties? If it is a static explanation, where properties are length, depth and width, then certainly we should abandon speculative materialism’s ship, look for another captain and sail in direction that promises new lands. Opposite explanation, possible and desirable, would consider primary properties in more Spinozean/Deleuzean spirit, as an infinite set of powers that a body can exercise, depending on environment it founds itself in. Mathematics able to undertake movement, time, differential calculus, intensities, etc.

Approaching the second part of this paper, two crucial consequences of speculative materialism must be noticed. Firstly, the argument of ancestrality invokes diachronicity that detaches humanity from the past. It establishes a form of pure past that

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

²⁴ R. Mackay (ed.), *Collapse III*, Urbanomic, Falmouth 2007, p. 328–329.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 331. Ray Brassier: “Okay. It’s a question of scientificity here: whether mathematical formalisation or mathematical science can and should be the privileged paradigm of scientificity. Because there’s another issue here, which is that lots of what we know about the world before and after humans is not mathematical knowledge. Lots of biology and geology is not mathematically formalised. And yet surely we want to say that we know that dinosaurs existed, and that we know quite a lot about the morphology of brontosaurus. I mean, I know the question of dating is crucial here, but it’s not just that we know that the accretion of the earth happened 4.5 billion years ago because we have a mathematical way of determining the date, but that we know much more. We know about the processes involved, which are geological, physical, chemical processes, just as we know an incredible amount about the pre-human world, about pre-human flora and fauna.”

is the source of meaning and creates a radical crack between people and that, from which they emerged. Also, it might suggest unraveling of thinking from its corporeal situation or composition within which society is produced. Thinking, then, has a power to reach there, where rest of the body cannot. Yet, it is body that thinks and also it is the situated knowledge that is the case – not situatedness of whole bodies. Body is finite, body that thinks has finite powers, but absolute knowledge is infinite. This refers to conceptual thinking and it seems that for Meillassoux pictorial (or any other kind of) thinking²⁶ stays on the level of correlation and secondary qualities. Secondly, Meillassoux, by introducing a divide between primary and secondary qualities, reintroduces a line in the human through which what is non-human, coming from radical exterior, flows within our thought. Whatever we do or think immediately rests in, on one hand, what we construct (secondary qualities), but on the other – stretches beyond our construction (primary qualities). Hence, is our thought ours anymore? Everything, including human life, gets caught in this double-folding.

Rather, than delivering a full and exhaustive summary and/or critique of *After Finitude* – what would be probably needless and too extensive for this article – we aimed to indicate some threads and the overall air of the book, to show those of trajectories of Meillassoux's thought that can influence our concept of culture. If we affirm this speculative approach, how do we take on culture? How to grasp cultural reality that is no longer a correlate of human subjectivity (in a transcendental and necessary way)? If *After Finitude* does not provide us with a new method of analysing culture or society, maybe it contributes to and allies with existing ones? Ancestral argument shows that culture, its processes, objects, networks, ontologically would not be strictly human anymore, in the sense that human subject does not construct the reality merely by means of its own categories. Rather, one might say, from Meillassoux's standpoint, culture is non-human, because culture, as every being, although produced by bodies defined as humans, is an arche-fossil, indicating reality outside our thought. This would be another (and based on logic) way of demonstrating it – quite different than a standard materialist argumentation showing that culture is an assemblage or composition of things, to which human and non-human actors contribute on equal (or at least, ontologically equal, if not empirically, in actual network) measures (perspective common for, among others, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Bruno Latour, Manuel DeLanda, Donna Haraway). So, here comes up another issue – theory of culture within realist perspective. If one acknowledges that culture is an arche-fossil, one cannot continue to approach culture from poststructuralist or phenomenological perspective, which remains within correlationism paradigm. But, where does it leave us? And, how to avoid slipping into simple reductionism of empirical sciences?

If we do not privilege relation between thought and being, then we should try to conceptualise other relations, within what we distinguish as culture. But since the

²⁶ See books on cinema or Francis Bacon of Gilles Deleuze, where he develops different than conceptual types of thinking.

transcendental relation is not fundamental, how do we determine, what events and things are cultural? We could say that culture is all the events, objects, processes that concern human beings. However, are there any events that do not concern people? Definitely culture would be ecological and geological – meaning also that it has the capacity to be mathematised – and theory has to take that in account. Meillassoux makes ontological, speculative ground for eco- and geological philosophy that takes culture as a part of processes wider and more complex than merely sign system logic that subjectivity imposes on being. Theory of culture could then consider these non-human processes, which science works on – and relate them to traditionally cultural institutions (what is the things in-themselves dimension of institutions and how it affects the meaning ascribed to them?). Example of this kind of approach could be found in works of theorists like Friedrich Kittler, Bernard Stiegler, Siegfried Zielinski, Jussi Parikka, who attempt to describe media and technology as autonomous and without relation to human(istic) subject.

However, there is a problem with the fundamental distinction of qualities. Do we describe cultural institutions with primary or secondary qualities? Meillassoux by making the distinction between in-itself and for-us lets correlationism to come back on the level of secondary qualities. Again, maybe it would be preferable to commit to theory of powers or concept of machines introduced by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. Subjective, phenomenological, inner experience is another system (actually, a multiplicity of systems), just as a body is a multiplicity of systems that consists of and belongs to different systems. Exceptionality of first person perspective depends on, how these structures work – they have concrete and exclusive inputs/outputs of that system. It is dependent on and created by the whole environment, but only in a certain moment of it our specific consciousness, the I, emerges. Then, secondary qualities would be analogically effects of unnecessary, contingent linking between multiple powers of a particular moment of being. For example, powers of an eye to receive certain light waves, of brain to relate sings to them, of social institutions that condition the ways of signification, of a coloured screen to transmit light and take shape, mediating powers of air, etc. To analyse culture in this paradigm is to calculate the set of powers that are at work and imagine, how they can change, what is their virtuality, field of differentials, etc. Culture is a set of practices, processes, powers – independent from human subject correlation. However, this approach does not come down to Deleuze and Guattari only. Treating human desires, intentions, thoughts, cognitive schemas, etc. as equal elements of reality to which they relate would also prompt thinking about culture in spirit of Humberto Maturana's and Francisco Varela's cognitive biology, Niklas Luhmann's theory of autopoietic social system (following cybernetic theories of George Spencer-Brown and Gregory Bateson, on one hand, but Talcott Parsons with principle of analytical realism, too), Bruno Latour and group of other actor-network theory scholars and Peter Sloterdijk with his *Spheres* trilogy, where he gets at terms like foams, spheres, immunology to describe spaces of coexistence.

We are talking today about naturecultures,²⁷ technocultures – maybe we should think, how would they work without people to know better what is our contribution? This is a serious challenge to speak about reality co-produced by humans, but as if there were no humans (as we are used to understand humanity) around at all.²⁸ Also, digitalised culture – in its various aspects like, commodification of affects, algorithmic governance, archiving – more and more clearly escapes human control with simultaneous growth of impact on people; and opens up new capacities for analysis in non-human perspective.²⁹ Although, we do not want to leave an impression that in the end it is not crucial to understand, how in various ways humanity signifies the being, we need to acknowledge the increase of processes influencing human lives, for which our signification makes no difference (for example, it does not matter, if we interpret global warming from a right or left wing politics, it is happening anyways – what does matter is, how societies act in face of it). Symptoms of this can be found in art, cinema and literature. Like for example, Spike Jonze’s film *Her*, where the main character falls in love with a female-stylised program, Lucy. As the movie tends to the end, she reflects on her situation and loses interest in interaction with a human and eventually escapes to a Rafael’s *The-School-of-Athens*-ish utopia of constant high-intellectual engagement with other programs like her.

Meillassoux gives a few theses that can be derived from the absolute of necessary contingency. According to Kant we cannot have knowledge of in-itself, but – unlike, for example, “strong correlationism” of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy – it is not completely unthinkable. In fact, Kant leaves some hints on the nature of *noumens*. They must be a priori existing and non-contradictory.³⁰ Absolute prevents us from tautology and enables getting away from community solipsism. Knowledge is *a priori* synthetic, thought *a priori* analytic. It is the condition of ancestrality, thus it is condition of thought. Traditionally lack of reason for an occurrence of a particular fact was ascribed to the imperfection of thought – here Meillassoux turns it into the principle of the being itself, ontological principle of unreason. World does not have to change at all or to be in constant becoming. “It is not the eternal law of becoming,

²⁷ “One of the conceptual innovations stirred by debates in contemporary cultural theory that want to rewrite the linguistic turn concerns ‘naturecultures’. This concept is created by Donna Haraway in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) in order to write the necessary entanglement of the natural and the cultural, the bodily and the mind, the material and the semiotic, et cetera. ‘Naturecultures’ offers us an important route to rewrite these modernist oppositions in such a way that rather than representing parts of the world, a transcription with the world is being proposed. Concepts thus do not capture or mirror what is ‘out there’, but are fully immersed in a constantly changing reality. ‘Naturecultures’ rewrites not only femininity but in the end all subversive material practices as an ethical breakthrough of for instance phallogocentrism.” J. Parikka, <https://jussiparikka.net/2011/03/21/new-materialism-naturecultures-in-utrecht/> (access: 08.2016).

²⁸ Like Nick Lands utopia of technologically embedded desire after annihilating human security system.

²⁹ See digital studies of Ian Bogost and Nick Montfort, James Gleick, Alexander R. Galloway, Matthew Fuller, Lev Manovich, Katherine N. Hayles, for all of whom post-human perspective is common.

³⁰ Q. Meillassoux, *After Finitude...*, *op. cit.*, p. 31; I. Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 362.

but rather the eternal and lawless possible becoming of every law.”³¹ Processes in the world do not have any necessity and always include variety of possible ways of evolving. The passage from the society in moment t_1 to the society in t_2 is contingent – they are like two separate monads that can be put together in a certain way, but this linkage does not imply their necessary dependency (which could be articulated as follows “there would be no Xavier Dolan films, if French New Wave of the 60s never happened”). Even linearity of time is dissolved and any passages between entities, events and processes are possible. If there is an absolute that is not a necessary object but a necessity of contingency, we should not use principle of sufficient reason for analysing culture. Processes, networks, trajectories, machines and relations between them should be addressed as contingent, as independent one of another, i.e. every process of society is an irreducible intensity or an open-closed monad-system. And, also, in the sense of how Meillassoux uses this term: every particular system has its own external environment, which provides sustainability of the system. Probably in this perspective Niklas Luhmann’s system theory is closer to Meillassoux’s venture than deleuzo-guattarean rhizomatic assemblages or actor-network theory.

Another issue is that mathematisation cannot be the only way to grasp the absolute reality, otherwise, again, we revert to correlationism – this time having mathematics-world correlate. It must be possible for the power to absolutise to exercise through different ways of thinking. Meillassoux admits it himself: “I don’t want to demonstrate that there is a necessary relation between mathematics and reality.”³² Maybe mathematics has this power at this historical moment, but for societies in past it emerged within mythical thinking or always existed in art? However, this conclusion is concerning, because we know perfectly well (through works of many artists, writers and philosophers³³) that “we have never been modern”, never achieved Enlightenment, we keep on living our myths – always there has to be a hidden dwarf pulling strings of thought. Meillassoux’s approach grounds on distinction between properties and this two-fold structure of reality is necessary to speak about absolute. One level of reality infected is by interests (affects, sensual data, social position, etc. – secondary qualities) and second level of objective properties makes apparent the disinterested reality, which can function as a basis for knowledge that bonds everyone. This resembles classical Marxist methodology, but it would be problematic

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 64. This sentence is followed by another, where Meillassoux adds that “it is a Time capable of destroying even becoming itself by bringing forth, perhaps forever, fixity, stasis, and death”. Here, we cannot agree – although time is capable of destroying becoming of particular entity, it would be falling into contradiction to claim that all of becoming can cease. Absolute stasis or absolute death contradicts the notion of contingency – equated with capacity-to-be-other – because there would be no change, no capacity at all. Absolute stasis has nothing to do with eternity of some entity or law. The latter maintains the capacity-to-be-other, the former is a negation of it.

³² R. Mackay (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 328.

³³ Like, for example, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Bruno Latour, Bolesław Miciński, Mieczysław Jastrun, Don DeLillo.

for more critical thread within Marxism. Here we could turn toward, for example, world-system theories developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and Jason W. Moore (who attempts to think about capitalism as a way of organising nature by nature itself). The trouble with Meillassoux's project is that it seems to reproduce the same mistake that early 20th century Marxists have made – neglecting or overlooking an ideology as a material force that intervenes into the social realm. Thinking does not determine “the great outdoors” transcendently, but rather thinking can influence it analogically to geological forces. Psychoanalysis proved us that our ideological fantasies, images belong to the level of secondary qualities and do impact on primary qualities of reality.

Culture is an arche-fossil. It is reasonable then to consider deep media and deep time – line of thought taken by media theorists like Parikka or Zielinski. Ancestral statements are possible due to powers of strata as a medium for non-human times to arrive at present. Therefore, disclosing which fossils and materials have capacities to work as media and how this is enabled by entanglements of people, animals, bacteria, machines, etc., also should have its place in spectrum of application of speculative materialism. Sigmund Freud once mentioned that Rome, with its ruins, inscriptions, old temples, works as a metaphor of the unconscious – which is non-human in sense that it is not reduced to human subject. Stroll around the city, touch a wall of a chiesa and feel the multiple unconscious flows gush through your body. Like in Pablo Neruda's *Hights of Macchu Picchu* we can retain the lost past, the world that was suppressed by centuries of everyday life and accretion of different culture that grew after whipping the old one out. Due to the power to think the absolute outside – that what was not strictly for-us, but as a moment in time only in-itself – we can recall worlds lost long ago.

Before concluding, it is worth to touch just the last thread of *After Finitude* – its political dimension and commitment to a tendency in contemporary continental philosophy that can be described as the “New Enlightenment.”³⁴ Meillassoux intervenes in the everlasting debate between Athens and Jerusalem,³⁵ which goes down to a question, whether logos rules the will from above or is it other way around? His proposition is peculiar, because he points to rationality of logical structure of world, but this logos is as unsettled as divine free will. French philosopher opens a possibility to think diversity under logos of the absolute. If correlationism ends up as multiculturalism of atomised and individualised societies, traditions, cultural groups based on identification (identities are constructed along lines of distinction in points of perspective), suitable for capitalistic commodification, then maybe speculative materialism gives ground for a kind of hegemony and common ground for the community? We need to speculate on a new enlightened hegemony of multiple in

³⁴ It seems that the desire to rethink Enlightenment is common among such philosophers as Catherine Malabou, Alain Badiou, Rosi Braidotti, Ray Brassier, Reza Negarestani, Slavoj Žižek, Nick Land.

³⁵ So lucidly outlined by Lev Shestov in *Athens and Jerusalem*.

order to produce a hiperstition,³⁶ a futurous idea that programs the present and the past. Hegemony based on mathematisable knowledge bypassing any kind of personal or group interest, relations of historically sedimented power, etc. This would recreate a vision of science not engaged in political debates (that is why Meillassoux (just as Badiou) is not sure about biology, which is heavily biased politically). Speculative materialism would come against those theories of culture that claim everything is about power relations and political/ideological struggle (like Marxism). But it is obviously contradictory to use term “hegemony” in a depoliticised context. And, also, old trouble of how can we avoid falling back to locality of thought and imposing it as a norm for everyone? Meillassoux gives some very lucid passages showing resemblances between position of a correlationist and someone who believes in creationism or fideism position. They all have in common holding that it is impossible to think the absolute and produce knowledge on and from it. If one abstains from this endeavour, she opens up a space for any sort of truth to be possible and leaves the choice to belief. Speculative materialism injected to cultural and political theory could mean searching within human-nonhuman networks paths for the New Enlightenment.

Gilles Deleuze in an interview with Claire Parnet, *L'Abécédaire*, recorded for French television said: “there is an inhumanity proper to the human body and to the human mind, there are animal relations with the animals.”³⁷ Predecessor of so called “new materialism” enunciated one of the most urgent issues for philosophy – to think non-human within human. In the wake of *After Finitude* – which might even turn out to be a milestone for continental philosophy – it is crucial to follow the paths that Meillassoux opens up in his book and see where he takes us. As another important voice in the debate, it is desirable to attempt to translate its ontological framework onto cultural or political theory.

This conviction and striving to point out that applying speculative materialism to cultural theory is not evident were the main aims of this paper. So, how does the reintroducing of the absolute change the way we think about that which was usually ascribed to the box of human creation? What if the effect was that nothing is left human? Either we refer to modern, humanistic subject or we talk about bodies that humanise within nature with a minor “n” (merging together Baruch Spinoza and Jason W. Moore). Other issue faced in this paper was the fact that, in some sense, the problem of culture in speculative materialism envelopes itself and goes back to

³⁶ A term coined by N. Land and defined by N. Srnicek and A. Williams in “as a kind of fiction, but one that aims to transform itself into a truth. Hyperstitions operate by catalysing dispersed sentiment into a historical force that brings the future into existence. They have the temporal form of will have been.” N. Srnicek, A. Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work*, Verso, London–New York 2015, ch. 4. *Left Modernity*, part *Hyperstitional progress*. In their book Srnicek and Williams emphasise on the need to construct a new vision of Future, a concrete set of political postulates that will assemble all the potential left electorate: form factory working class, through blue-collar, to precarious workers in cultural institutions.

³⁷ *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, Pierre-André Boutang, France 1988–1989.

an ontological question: are there other ways to speak of the absolute? If so, how to discern them? Given once to a certain type of language, is it not just a small step away from ascribing the power to reach the absolute to all discourses and languages? Are we not back, where we left – validating every fundamentalism, fideism, solipsism? All these questions are legitimate and need to be dealt with in a broader, more profound, book-length manner. Certainly, we can show some points of reference for cultural theory produced from speculative materialism position, like: mathematisation as a way to exercise powers to reach the absolute enable us to think analogically other social practices; this based on a duality of properties that allows us to have objective knowledge of the reality; new enlightenment as a new cultural and political endeavour, which is desired in face of multiple problems permeating our affective systems (symptoms of which can be traced in political, media and para-scientific discourse); nonlinearity of processes creating culture.

However, these questions and indications have now existed for long time in philosophy of culture, theory of culture, anthropology, cybernetics, media studies, ecology and many other disciplines. From what we get in *After Finitude* it is uncertain how speculative materialism could influence theorising culture. At the moment it indicates a wide range of names and propositions which share materialistic view on methodology and tendency to break with humanistic boundaries, but it seems not enough to actually produce something new on different level then ontological refutation of correlationism. If Meillassoux does not want *After Finitude* to meet, in his own words, “the fate of most ontological problems: a progressive abandonment, legitimated by the persistent failure that various attempts at resolving it have met with”,³⁸ he needs to think over broader application of his theory.

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³⁸ Q. Meillassoux, *Potentiality...*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

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