

## TIME WITHOUT BECOMING<sup>1</sup>

I would like, first of all, to say that I'm very happy to have the opportunity to discuss my work here at Middlesex University, and I'd like to express my thanks to the organizers of this conference, especially to Peter Hallward and Ray Brassier.

I am going to expound and set out the fundamental decisions of *After Finitude*, specifically concerning the two fundamental notions I tried to elaborate in this book: that of "correlationism" and that of "the principle of factiality".

### 1. *Correlationism*

I call "correlationism" the contemporary opponent of any realism. Correlationism takes many contemporary forms, but particularly those of transcendental philosophy, the varieties of phenomenology, and post-modernism. But although these currents are all extraordinarily varied in themselves, they all share, according to me, a more or less explicit decision: that there are no objects, no events, no laws, no beings which are not always already correlated with a point of view, with a subjective access. Anyone maintaining the contrary, i.e. that it is possible to attain something like a reality in itself, existing absolutely independently of his viewpoint, or his categories, or his epoch, or his culture, or his language, etc., this person would be exemplarily naïve, or if you prefer: a realist,

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<sup>1</sup> "Time without becoming" is the text of the talk that Quentin Meillassoux gave at the Middlesex University, London, 8 May 2008.

a metaphysician, a quaintly dogmatic philosopher. With the term of "correlationism", I wanted to set out the basic argument of these "philosophies of access" – to use Graham Harman's expression – but also – and I insist on this point – the exceptional strength of its antirealist argumentation, which is apparently so desperately implacable. Correlationism rests on an argument as simple as powerful, and which can be formulated in this way: there can be no X without a givenness of X, and no theory about X without a positing of X. If you speak about something, the correlationist will say, you speak about something that is given to you, and posited by you. The argument for this thesis is as simple to formulate as it is difficult to refute: it can be called the "argument from the circle", and consists in remarking that every objection against correlationism is an objection produced by your thinking, and so dependent upon it. When you speak against correlation, you forget that you speak against correlation, hence from the viewpoint of your own mind, or culture, or epoch, etc. The circle means that there is a vicious circle in any naïve realism, a performative contradiction through which you refute what you say or think by your very act of saying it or thinking it.

I think there are two principal versions of correlationism: a transcendental one, which claims that there are some universal forms of the subjective knowledge of things, and the post-modern one, which denies the existence of any such subjective universality. But in both cases there is a denial of an absolute knowledge – I mean a knowledge of the thing in itself independently of our subjective access to it. Consequently, for correlationists the sentence "X is", means "X is the correlate of thinking" – thinking in the Cartesian sense – that is: X is the correlate of an affection, or a perception, or a conception, or of any other subjective or intersubjective act. To be is to be a correlate, the term of a correlation. And when you claim to think any specific X, you must posit this X, which you cannot separate from this specific act of positing. This is why it is impossible to conceive an absolute X, i.e.

an X which would be essentially separate from a subject. We can't know what reality is in itself because we can't distinguish between those properties which are supposed to belong to the object, and those properties belonging to the subjective access to the object. Of course concrete correlationisms are far more complex than my model: but I maintain that this model is the minimal decision of any anti-realism. And because this is the very decision I want to contest, I don't need here to go into the details of specific and historical philosophies. Of course, it would take too long to examine here the precise relations between correlationism, considered as the contemporary model of anti-realism, and the complex history of the critiques of dogmatism in modern philosophy. But we can say that the "argument from the circle" means not only that the thing in itself is unknowable, as in Kant, but that the in itself is radically unthinkable. Kant, as you know, said that it was impossible to know the thing in itself, but he granted to theoretical reason – leaving practical reason aside here – the capacity to access four determinations of the in itself. According to Kant, I know 1) that the thing in itself effectively exists outside of consciousness (there are not only phenomena); 2) we know that it affects our sensibility and produces in us representations (that's why our sensibility is passive, finite, and not spontaneous); 3) the thing in itself is not contradictory – the principle of non-contradiction is an absolute principle, not one that is merely relative to our consciousness; 4) and, lastly, we know that the thing in itself can't be spatiotemporal because space and time can only be forms of subjective sensibility and not properties of the in itself: in other words, we don't know what the thing in itself is, but we know absolutely what it is not. So, as you can see, Kant is rather "loquacious" about the thing in itself, and as you know, post-Kantian speculation had destroyed such claims by denying even the possibility of an in itself outside the self. But contemporary correlationism is not a speculative idealism: it doesn't say dogmatically that there is no in itself, but only that we can't say anything about it, not even that it

exists – and that's precisely why, according to me, the term "in itself" has disappeared from these discourses. Thought only has to deal with a world correlated with itself, and with the inconceivable fact of the being of such a correlation. That there is a thought-world correlation thought is the supreme enigma which gives by contrast the possibility of an utterly different situation. The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*<sup>2</sup> is a good example of such a discourse, when it designates as "mystical" the mere fact that there is a consistent world; a logical, non-contradictory world.

## 2. The problem of the arche-fossil

My goal is very simple: I attempt to refute every form of correlationism – which is to say that I try to demonstrate that thinking, under very special conditions, can access reality as it is in itself, independently of any act of subjectivity. In other words, I maintain that an absolute, i.e. a reality absolutely separate from the subject, can be thought by the subject. This is apparently a contradiction, and, at first glance, exactly what a naïve realist would maintain. My challenge is to demonstrate that it can be a non-contradictory proposition, and one that is non-naïve, but speculative. So I must explain two things about this assertion: first, why do I think it is imperative that we break with correlationism? In order to explain this point, I will set out a specific problem that I call the "problem of *ancestrality*". Secondly, I must explain how we can refute the supposedly implacable argument of the correlational circle. For this purpose, I will expound a speculative principle that I call the *principle of factuality* ("principe de factuelité" en français).

Let's begin with the first point. Correlationism, according to me, comes up against a serious problem, which I call the

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, London: Routledge 1974.

"problem of the *arche-fossil*", or the "problem of *ancestrality*". A fossil is a material bearing traces of pre-historic life: but what I call an "arche-fossil" is a material indicating traces of "ancestral" phenomena anterior even to the emergence of life. I call "ancestral" a reality – a thing or an event – which existed before life on earth. Science is now able to produce statements (let's say: "ancestral statements") describing ancestral realities thanks to the radioactive isotope, whose rate of decay provides an index of the age of rock samples, or thanks to the starlight whose luminescence provides an index of the age of distant stars. Science can, in this way, produce statements, such as: that the universe is roughly 14 billion years old, or that the Earth formed roughly 4.5 billion years ago. So my question is very straightforward. I simply ask: what are the conditions of possibility of ancestral statements? This is a question formulated in a transcendental style, it has transcendental allure, so to speak, but my point is that it is impossible to answer this question by means of Critical philosophy. My question, indeed, is more precise: I ask if correlationism – in any of its versions – is able to give a sense, or a meaning to ancestral statements. And what I try to show is that it is impossible for correlationism, in spite of all the various forms of subtle argumentations it is able to invent, it is impossible, I maintain, for correlationism to give sense to natural science's capacity to produce ancestral statements thanks to the arche-fossils (radioactive isotope, stellar luminescence). How could one give sense to the idea of a time preceding the subject, or consciousness or *Dasein*, a time within which subjectivity or *being-in-the-world* itself emerged, and which perhaps will disappear along with humanity and terrestrial life, if one makes of time, and space, and the visible world, the strict correlates of this subjectivity? If time is a correlate of the subject, then nothing can actually precede the subject – as individual or more radically as human species – inside time. Because what existed before the subject existed before the subject *for* the subject. Appeals to intersubjectivity are of no account here, since the time in question is not the time preceding such or such an individual – this time is still social,

made up of the subjective temporality of ancestors – but a time preceding all life, and so every human community. I maintain that there are an infinity of ways in which the different versions of correlationism can try to deny or mask this *aporia* and I tried to deconstruct some of these in *After Finitude*<sup>3</sup>. But this denial follows from a certitude: that there can be no realist or materialist solution to the problem of ancestrality. But I maintain that such a solution exists: that's why I'm able to see and state the obvious: correlationism can't give any sense to ancestral statements and, consequently, to a science which is able to produce such statements. Science is reduced to an explanation of the world given-to-a-subject. Of course, I also know that transcendental philosophy or phenomenology is always said to be essentially distinct from crude idealism of the Berkeleyian variety. But what I try to demonstrate in *After Finitude* is that every correlationism collapses into this crude idealism when it has to think the significance of ancestrality.

Why did I choose the term "correlationism" rather than a well known term like "idealism" to designate my intellectual adversary? Because I wanted to disqualify the usual retort used by transcendental philosophy and phenomenology against the accusation of idealism, responses such as "Kantian critique is not a subjective idealism since there is a refutation of idealism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*", or "Phenomenology is not a dogmatic idealism, since intentionality is oriented towards a radical exteriority, and it is not a solipsism since the givenness of the object implies according to Husserl the reference to an intersubjective community". And the same could be said of *Dasein* as the originary "being-in-the world". Even though these positions claim that they are not subjective idealisms, they can't deny, at the risk of self-refutation, that the exteriority which they elaborated is essentially relative: relative to a consciousness, a language, a *Dasein*, etc. Consequently all that correlationism can say about ancestrality is that it is

<sup>3</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, London: Continuum 2008.

a subjective representation of such a past, but that this past couldn't really have existed in itself with all its objects and events. Correlationism will generally maintain – because it is subtle – that ancestral statements are true in a way, i.e. as universal statements, bearing on some present experiences about specific materials (starlight, isotope), or at least as a statement accepted by the present community of scientists. But if it is consistent, correlationism will have to deny that the referents of these statements really existed as described prior to any human or living species. For the correlationist, ancestrality cannot be a reality prior to the subjects, but a reality said and thought *by* the subject as prior to the subject. It is a past for humanity which has no more effectiveness than that of a past of humanity that is strictly correlated with actual humans. But this assertion is, of course, a catastrophe, because it destroys the sense of scientific statements, which, I insist, just mean what they mean. An ancestral and scientific statement doesn't say that something existed before subjectivity *for* subjectivity, but that something existed before subjectivity, and nothing more than this: the ancestral statement has a realistic meaning, or it has no meaning at all. Because to say that something existed before you just for you, just on condition that you exist to be conscious of this past, it is to say that nothing existed before you. It is to say the contrary of what ancestrality means: that reality in itself existed independently of your perception of it as your own past. Your past is your past, only if it has effectively been a present without you, not only a present thought presently as a past. Such a past is not a past, whatever you can say, but an illusion produced by a sort of retrojection, a past produced now as a past absolutely preceding the present.

As you know, Kant, following Diderot<sup>4</sup>, considered it a scandal for philosophy that a proof of the existence of things

<sup>4</sup> D. Diderot, "Letter on the Blind For the Use of Those Who See", in *Diderot's early philosophical works*, London and Chicago: Open Court 1916, p. 68.

outside the subject had not yet been established<sup>5</sup>. Couldn't I be accused of resurrecting this old problem, which is generally considered as outdated? Heidegger, in *Sein und Zeit*, famously inverted the Kantian proposition saying that the scandal was rather that this sort of proof was still attempted and awaited<sup>6</sup>. This assertion is explained by the very structure of phenomenological subjectivity: in Husserl's intentionality, in Heidegger's *being-in-the-world*, or in Sartre's "éclatement" towards the "chose même", far from being a superfluously added element of an intrinsically solipsistic subject, the outside is an originary structure of the subject, rendering any attempted proof of an external reality obsolete and rather ridiculous. Still, I said, the question persists, even after phenomenology, and even within phenomenology. Although phenomenologists can say that consciousness is originally correlated and open to a world, what can they say about a pre-human and pre-animal reality, about ancestrality, this domain of non-correlation as lacking any subject? How are the sciences able to speak so precisely about this domain, if this domain is no more than a retrospective illusion? What would nature without us be? What would remain in it if we were not there anymore? This question is so far from obsolete for phenomenology, that it became a great question for Heidegger himself in the thirties. He wrote to Elisabeth Blochmann on 11th October 1931: "I often ask myself – this has for a long time been a fundamental question for me – what nature would be without man, must it not resonate through him (*hindurschwingen*) in order to attain its own most potency?". In this letter we discover that Heidegger himself is unable to renounce to this question and that his own attempt at answering it, is both enigmatic and probably inspired of Schellingian metaphysics, as suggests the term "potency" (*Macht, oder Potenz*). We see here how

5 I. Kant, *The Critic of Pure Reason*, Introduction to the second edition, B XXXIX.

6 M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, London: SCM Press, 1962, §43.

far Heidegger was from being able to disqualify or resolve the question of ancestrality: what is nature without man, and how can we think the time in which nature has produced the subject, or *Dasein*?

But you must understand the exact significance of this problem of ancestrality in my strategy.

What is very important for me is that I don't pretend to refute correlationism by means of ancestrality: the problem of ancestrality is not – at all – intended as a refutation of correlationism, this would be naïve. In fact, in the first chapter of *After Finitude*, I simply try to lay out an *aporia*, rather than a refutation. That is, on the one hand it seems impossible to think via correlationism the ability of natural sciences to produce ancestral statements; but on the other hand, it seems impossible to refute the correlationist position, because it seems impossible to maintain that we could be able to know what there is when we are not. How could we imagine the existence of color without an eye to see it or the existence of a sound without an ear to hear it? How can we think the meaning of time or space without a subject being conscious of past, present and future, or being conscious of the difference between left and right? And first of all, how could we know this, since we are unable to see what the world looks like when there is nobody to perceive it?

On one hand, it seems impossible to refute the argument of the correlational circle, in other words, to forget that when we think something, it is we who do think something; on the other hand, it seems impossible to have a correlationist understanding of the natural sciences. Through this apparently simple, indeed even naïve problem, I pose in fact the question of philosophical naïvety: that is, the question of what exactly means "to be naïve" in philosophy. Naïvety in philosophy nowadays assumes a favored form: the belief in the possible correspondence between thinking and being – but a being that is posited precisely as independent of thinking. The entire effort of modern philosophy was to do without the concept of truth, or, according to me, and more inter-



estingly, to fundamentally redefine this concept, replacing truth as adequation with truth considered as legality (Kant), or intersubjectivity (Husserl), or interpretation (hermeneutics). But what I try to show in *After Finitude* is that there is in ancestrality a strange resistance to every anti-adequation model. Yet this resistance doesn't directly concern the truth of scientific theories, but rather their meaning.

Let's explain this point. We certainly can't believe ingenuously that a scientific theory, I mean in the field of natural sciences, could be something like "true". Not because of some radical skepticism towards the sciences, but rather by virtue of the very process of science. In the course of its history, this process showed an extraordinary inventiveness in ceaselessly destroying its own theories, including the most fundamental ones, replacing them with paradigms whose novelty was so extreme that nobody could anticipate the beginning of their configuration. The same of course holds for current theories, and especially cosmological ones: we just can't say what future theories of cosmology, future theories of ancestrality, will be – the past, as one say, in unpredictable. But even if we can't positively assert that an ancestral theory is effectively true, we must maintain, I insist, that it could be true: we can't know if these theories will retain their truth in the future, but it is a possibility we can't exclude, because it is a condition of the meaning of such theories. Truth, and truth considered as something like a correspondance with reality, is a condition of meaning of theories, as hypotheses one can prefer to other ones. If one tries to dispense with the notion of truth and correspondence in attempting to understand these theories, one quickly generates entertaining absurdities. For example, if you say that ancestral truth must be defined by intersubjectivity rather than by the restitution of a pre-human reality, you must say something like: there has never existed anything like a universe preceding humanity with such and such determinations that we could effectively know – this is just nonsense – but only an agreement between scientists which legitimates the theory in question.

One maintains in the same sentence that scientists have solid reasons for accepting a theory, and that this theory describes an object – the field of pre-terrestrial life – which can't exist as described, because it is a nonsense. We have here a sort of return of the Lacanian real: the impossible for the contemporary philosopher is the realism, or correspondence. But realism seems to be the condition of sense for ancestral theories (in fact, I believe it is the condition for every scientific theory, but I can't demonstrate this here). That's why the idea of naïvety has changed: we can no longer be sure that the rejection of correspondence is not itself a naïve notion. The dogmatism of anti-adequation has become as problematic as the old pre-Kantian dogmatism. But the real difficulty is that it is also impossible, according to me, to go back to the old metaphysical concept of adequation, or to the naïve realism that analytical philosophy sometimes seems to perpetuate. We need to redefine correspondence, to find a very different concept of adequation, if we are serious about rejecting correlationism in all its power. Because, as we shall see, what we will discover outside the correlation is very different from the naïve concepts of things, properties and relations. It is a reality very different from given reality. That's why, ultimately, I prefer to describe my philosophy as a speculative materialism, rather than as a realism: because I remember the sentence of Foucault, who once said: "I am materialist, because I don't believe in reality".

So what we have here, according to me, is a powerful *aporia*: the *aporia* of the correlation versus the arche-fossil. It is this *aporia* I try to resolve in *After Finitude*: and my strategy for resolving it consists in effectively refuting correlationism and elaborating a new sort of scientific materialism grounded on a principle that I call the "principle of factuality". So let's now see what this principle means, and why it is able, according to me, to do what correlationism says is impossible: to know what there is when we are not.

### 3. The principle of factuality

The main problem I try to confront in *After Finitude* consists precisely in developing a materialism capable of decisively refuting the correlational circle, in its simplest form, which is also the form that is most difficult to rebut: that is, the argument which demonstrates we can't speak against correlation except from within correlation. Here is my strategy: the weakness of correlationism consists in the duality of what it opposes. Strictly speaking, correlationism, as I define it, is not an anti-realism but an anti-absolutism. Correlationism is the modern way of rejecting all possible knowledge of an absolute: it is the claim that we are locked up in our representations – conscious, linguistic, historical ones – without any sure means of access to an eternal reality independent of our specific point of view. But there are two main forms of the absolute: the realist one, which is that of a non-thinking reality independent of our access to it, and the idealist one, which consists on the contrary in the absolutisation of the correlation itself. Therefore, correlationism must also refute speculative idealism – or any form of vitalism or panpsychism – if it wants to reject all modalities of the absolute. But for this second refutation, the argument of the circle is useless, because idealism and vitalism consist precisely in claiming that it is the subjective circle itself which is the absolute.

Let's examine briefly these idealist and vitalist arguments. I call subjectivist metaphysics any absolutisation of a determinate human access to the world – and I call "subjectivist" (for short) the supporter of any form of subjective metaphysics. The correlation between thought and being takes many different forms: the subjectivist claims that some of these relations – or indeed all – are determinations not only of humans or of the living, but of Being itself. The subjectivist projects a correlation into the things themselves – it may take the form of perception, intellection, wanting, etc. – and turns it into the absolute. Of course, this process is far more elabo-

rate than I can show here, especially with Hegel. But the basic principle of subjectivism is always the same. It consists in refuting realism and correlationism through the following reasoning: since we cannot conceive of a being which would not be constituted by our relation to the world, since we cannot escape from the circle of correlation, the whole of these relations, or an eminent part of this whole, represents the very essence of any reality. According to the subjectivist, it is absurd to suppose, as the correlationist does, that there could be an in itself different from any human correlations with the world. The subjectivist thereby turns the argument of the circle against the correlationist himself: since we can't think any reality independent of human correlations, this means, according to him, that the supposition of such a reality existing outside the circle is non-sense. Thus the absolute is the circle itself, or at least a part of it. The absolute is thinking, or perception, or wanting, etc.: *idea*, *logos*, *Geist* (Mind), *Wille zur Macht* (Will to Power), the Bergsonian intuition of duration, etc.

This second form of absolutism reveals why it is necessary for correlationism to produce a second argument capable of responding to the idealist absolute. This necessity for a second argument is extremely important, since, as we shall see, it will become the weak-spot in the circle-fortress. This second argument is what I described in *After Finitude* as the argument from facticity, and I must now explain what it means more precisely.

I call "facticity" the absence of reason for any reality; in other words, the impossibility of providing an ultimate ground for the existence of any being. We can only attain conditional necessity, never absolute necessity. If definite causes and physical laws are posited, then we can claim that a determined effect must follow. But we shall never find a ground for these laws and causes, except eventually other ungrounded causes and laws: there is no ultimate cause, nor ultimate law, that is to say, a cause or a law including the ground of its own existence. But this facticity is also proper

to thought. The Cartesian Cogito clearly shows this point. What is necessary, in the Cogito, is a conditional necessity: if I think, then I must be. But it is not an absolute necessity: it is not necessary that I should think. From the inside of the subjective correlation, I accede to my own facticity, and so to the facticity of the world correlated with my subjective access to it. I do it by attaining the lack of an ultimate reason, of a *causa sui*, able to ground my existence.

Facticity so defined is according to me the fundamental answer to any absolutisation of the correlation: for if correlation is factual, we can no longer maintain, as does the subjectivist, that it is a necessary component of every reality. Of course, an idealist might object that any attempt to conceive of the non-being of a subjective correlation results in a performative contradiction, since the very conception of it proves is that we effectively exist as a subject. But the correlationist replies that there can be no dogmatic proof that the correlation must exist rather than not, hence, this absence of necessity suffices to reject the idealist's claim of its absolute necessity. And the fact that I can't imagine the non-existence of subjectivity, since to imagine is to exist as a subject, does not prove it is impossible: I can't imagine what it is like to be dead, since to imagine it means we are still alive, but, unfortunately, this fact does not prove that death is impossible. The limits of my imagination are not the index of my immortality. But we must be careful. The correlationist doesn't claim that subjectivity must perish: maybe it is eternal as an absolute, as *Geist* or *Wille*, if not as an individual. The correlationist simply claims that we can't decide one way or the other about this hypothesis: we can't reach any eternal truth, whether realistic or idealistic. We don't know anything about the outside of the circle, not even if there is one – against realism – just as we don't know whether the circle itself is either necessary or contingent – against subjectivism. Correlationism is then composed of two arguments: the argument from the circle of correlation against naïve realism (let's use this term to describe any realism that is unable to refute the

circle); and the argument from facticity, against speculative idealism. The subjectivist claimed erroneously that he could defeat the correlationist by the absolutizing correlation; I believe that we can only defeat the latter by absolutizing facticity. Let's see why.

The correlationist must maintain, against the subjectivist, that we can conceive the contingency of the correlation: that is, its possible disappearance for example, with the extinction of humanity. But, by doing so, and this is the essential point, the correlationist must admit that we can positively think of a possibility which is essentially independent of the correlation, since this is precisely the possibility of the correlation's non-being. To understand this point, we can once more consider the analogy with death: to think of myself as a mortal, I must admit that death doesn't depend on my own thinking about death. Otherwise, I would be able to disappear only on one condition: that I remain alive to think of my disappearance, and turn this event into a correlate of my access to it. In other words, I could be dying indefinitely, but I could never pass away. If the facticity of the correlation can be conceived of, if it is a notion that we can effectively conceive of – and, as we saw, this must be the case for the correlationist if he wants to refute the subjectivist – then it is a notion that we can think as an absolute: the absolute absence of reason for any reality, in other words, the effective ability for every determined entity, whether it is an event, a thing, or a law, to appear and disappear with no reason for its being or non-being. Unreason becomes the attribute of an absolute time capable of destroying or creating any determinate entity without any reason for its creation or destruction.

Through this thesis, I try to reveal the condition for the thinkability of the fundamental opposition in correlationism, even when this opposition is not stated or is denied: this is the opposition of the in itself and the for-us. The thesis of the correlationist, whether explicitly stated or not, is that I can't know what reality would be without me. According to him, if I remove myself from the world, I can't know the residue.



But this reasoning assumes that we enjoy positive access to an absolute possibility: the possibility that the in itself could be different from the for-us. And this absolute possibility is grounded in turn upon the absolute facticity of the correlation. It is because I can conceive of the non-being of the correlation, that I can conceive the possibility of the in it-self being essentially different from the world correlated with human subjectivity. It is because I can conceive of the absolute facticity of everything, that I can be skeptical towards every other kind of absolute. Consequently, according to me, it is possible to refute the correlationist refutation of realism – which is based upon the accusation of performative contradiction – as I discover a performative contradiction in the correlationist's reasoning. In fact, its fundamental notions, the for-us and the in it-self, are grounded on an implicit absolutization: the absolutization of facticity. Everything can be conceived of as contingent, depending on human tropism, everything except contingency itself. Contingency, and only contingency, is absolutely necessary: facticity, and only facticity, is not factual, but eternal. Facticity is not a fact, it is not one more fact in the world. And this is based upon a precise argument: I can't be skeptical towards the operator for every skepticism. This necessity of facticity, this non-facticity of the facticity, I call in French the "factualité" – that is, in Ray Brassier's translation, "factiality". Factiality is not facticity, but the necessity of facticity, the essence of facticity. And the principle which enounces the factiality, I simply call "the principle of factiality". Finally, I call "spéculation factuale", "factial speculation", the speculation grounded on the principle of factiality. Through the principle of factiality, I maintain that I can attain a speculative materialism which clearly refutes correlationism. I can think an X independent of any thinking: and I know this, thanks to the correlationist himself and his fight against the absolute. The principle of factiality unveils the ontological truth hidden beneath the radical skepticism of modern philosophy, to be is not to be

a correlate, but to be a fact, to be is to be factual, and this is not a fact.

#### 4. The principle of contradiction

Now, what can we say about this absolute which is identified with facticity? What is facticity once it is considered as an absolute rather than as a limit? The answer is *time*. Facticity as absolute must be considered as time, *but a very special time*, that I called in *After Finitude* "hyper-chaos". What do I mean by this term? To say that the absolute is time, or chaos, seems very trite, very banal. But the time we discover here is, as I said, a very special time: not a physical time, not an ordinary chaos. Hyper-chaos is very different from what we call usually "chaos". By chaos we usually mean disorder, randomness, the eternal becoming of everything. But these properties are not properties of Hyper-Chaos: its contingency is so radical that even becoming, disorder, or randomness can be destroyed by it, and replaced by order, determinism, and fixity. Things are so contingent in Hyper-chaos, that time is able to destroy even the becoming of things. If facticity is the absolute, contingency no longer means the necessity of destruction or disorder, but rather the equal contingency of order and disorder, of becoming and sempiternity. That's why I now prefer to use the terms "surcontingence", "supercontingency", rather than contingency. We must understand that this thesis about time is very different from Heraclitus' philosophy: Heraclitus, according to me, is a terrible fixist. His becoming must become, and persist eternally as becoming. Why? This is, according to me, a dogmatic assessment, without any justification: because, according to me becoming is just a fact – as well as fixity – and so becoming and fixity must both have the eternal possibility to appear and disappear. But Heraclitean becoming is also, like all physical time, governed by specific laws, laws of transformation which never change. But there is no reason why a physical

law endures, or persists, one more day, one more minute. Because these laws are just facts: you can't demonstrate their necessity. Hume demonstrated this point very clearly. But this impossibility of demonstrating the necessity of physical laws is not, according to me, due to the limits of reason, as Hume believed, but rather due to the fact that it is just *false*. I'm a rationalist, and reason clearly demonstrates that you can't demonstrate necessity of laws. Thus we should just believe reason and accept this point: laws are not necessary, they are facts, and facts are contingent, they can change without reason. Time is not governed by physical laws because it is the laws themselves which are governed by a mad time.

Here, I'd like to emphasize the type of rupture which I try to introduce with regard to both principal modalities of metaphysics: "the metaphysics of substance" and "the metaphysics of becoming". I believe that the opposition between being (conceived as substrate) and becoming is included in the principle of reason, which is the operator of every metaphysics. This is the sense of the initial opposition in the Presocratics, between Thales – who is a thinker of the *archè* conceived of as substrate, i.e. water – and Anaximander – who is a thinker of the *archè* as *apeiron*, which is to say the necessary becoming and destruction of every entity. Thinkers of becoming such as Heraclitus, Nietzsche, or Deleuze, are often considered as antimetaphysicians, as metaphysics is considered as the philosophy of fixed principles, such as substances and Ideas. But metaphysics is in fact defined by its belief in the determinate necessity of entities or of processes: things must be what they are, or must become what they become because there is a reason for this (for example the Idea, or the Creativity of Universe). That is why metaphysics of becoming believe in two metaphysical necessities: the necessity of becoming, rather than of fixity; and the necessity of such and such a becoming, rather than of others that are equally thinkable. On the contrary, the notion of Hyper-Chaos is the idea of a time so completely liberated from metaphysical necessity that nothing constrains it: nei-

ther becoming, nor the substratum. This hyper-chaotic time is able to create and destroy even becoming, producing without reason fixity or movement, repetition or creation. That's why I think that ultimately the matter of philosophy is not being or becoming, representation or reality, but a very special possibility, which is not a formal possible, but a real and dense possible, which I call the "peut-être", the "may-be". In French, I would say: "l'affaire de la philosophie n'est pas l'être, mais le peut-être". Philosophy's main concern is not with being but with the may-be. This *peut-être*, I believe, but it would be too complex to demonstrate this here, is very close to the final *peut-être* of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*.

If facticity is the absolute, then facticity must be thought as hyper-chaos, a rationalist chaos that is paradoxically more chaotic than any antirationalist chaos. But even if we accept this point, it seems we have a serious problem: how can we hope to resolve the problem of ancestrality with such a notion? This problem, indeed, consisted in discovering an absolute capable of founding the legitimacy of a scientific knowledge of the reality in itself. We now have an absolute that is, I believe, able to resist correlationism, but this absolute seems to be the contrary of a rational structure of being: it is the destruction of the principle of reason, through which we try to explain the reason for facts. Now, it seems, there are only facts, and no more reason. How can we hope to ground the sciences with such a result? I think there is a way to resolve this new problem. How could we do it? My thesis is that there are specific conditions of facticity, which I call "figures": I mean, facticity is for me the only necessity of things but to be factual implies not to be just anything. To be factual is not given just to any sort of thing. Some things, if they existed, wouldn't obey the strict and necessary conditions for being a factual entity. That's why these things can't exist: they can't exist, because if they existed, they would be necessary, and to be necessary, according to the principle of factuality, is impossible. Let's give an example. I try to show, in *After Finitude*, that non-contradiction is a condition

of contingency, for a contradictory reality couldn't change since it would already be what it is not. More precisely, imagine or rather try to conceive of what a being able to support any contradiction would be: it has the property a, and at the same time, and in exactly the same conditions it has the property not-a. The object is only red, and not only red but also non-red. And it is the same for any property you can conceive of: b and not-b, c and not-c, etc. Now, try to conceive that this entity has to change, to become something it is not, would it be conceivable? Of course not, it is already everything and its contrary. A contradictory being is perfectly necessary. That is why the Christian God is at once what he is – the Father, infinite, eternal – and what he is not – the Son, human, and mortal. If you want to think something necessary, you have to think it as contradictory, without any alterity, with nothing outside the absolute that the absolute could become. This is also ultimately why the Hegelian absolute is effectively contradictory: because Hegel understood that a being that is really necessary, such as an absolute, would have to be what it is and what it is not, it would have to have already inside itself what is outside of it. Such an absolute would have no alterity, and hence would be eternal (but this of course would be a contradictory eternity which doesn't have becoming outside itself, which has within itself an eternal becoming eternally passing in to eternity).

On the contrary, I maintain that contradiction is impossible – that's why I'm a rationalist – but I maintain that it is impossible because non-contradiction is the condition of a radical Chaos, that is, a Hyper-Chaos. Notice that I don't claim that a contradictory being is impossible, because it is absurd, or because it is non-sense. On the contrary, I think that a contradictory being is not meaningless: you can define it rigorously, and you can reason about it. You can rationally demonstrate that a real contradiction is impossible because it would be a necessary being. In others words, it is because the metaphysical principle of reason is absolutely false, that the logical principle of non-contradiction is absolutely true. The

perfect "logicity" of everything is a strict condition of the absolute absence of reason for anything. That's why I don't believe in metaphysics in general: because a metaphysics always believes, in one way or the other, in the principle of reason. A metaphysician is a philosopher who believes it is possible to explain why things must be what they are, or why things must necessarily change, and perish, or why things must change as they do change. I believe on the contrary that reason has to explain why things and why becoming itself can always become what they are not, and why there is no ultimate reason for this game. In this way, "factual speculation" is still a form of rationalism, but a paradoxical one: it is a rationalism which explains why things must be without reason, and how precisely they can be without reason. Figures are such necessary modalities of facticity, and non-contradiction is the first figure I deduce from the principle of factuality. This demonstrates that one can reason about the absence of reason, if the very idea of reason is subjected to a profound transformation, if it becomes a reason liberated from the principle of reason, or, more exactly, if it is a reason which liberates us from principle of reason.

Now, my project is to solve a problem that I did not resolve in *After Finitude*, it is a very difficult problem, one that I can't rigorously set out here, but that I can sum up in this simple question: would it be possible to derive, to draw from the principle of factuality, the ability of the natural sciences to know, by way of mathematical discourse, reality in itself, by which I mean our world, the factual world as it is actually produced by Hyper-chaos, and which exists independently of our subjectivity? To answer this very difficult problem is a condition for a real resolution of the problem of ancestrality, and this constitutes the theoretical finality of my present work.