

CATHERINE KELLER

Drew University

KELLER, RESPONSE TO CAPUTO AND MURACA  
COSMOPOETIC ENTANGLEMENTS

Even in this millennium, philosophers do occasionally welcome some monumental specter of theology—Augustine, Aquinas or Kierkegaard—to the dialogue. Rarely however, do they engage merely living theologians. Conversely, we mere living ones are endlessly appealing to you lively bunch of philosophers. (Perhaps it is after all as Kierkegaard warned, with his embarrassing image of theology sitting “all rouged and powdered in the window,” offering “its charms to philosophy.”<sup>1</sup>) I mention this asymmetry not in accusation or confession but in gratitude for the present exchange. After all, cloudiness for philosophers may name the cardinal sin. And even among theologians, *Cloud of the Impossible* is marked by the dark mist of its entanglements. Besides, philosophers surely have good reason to suspect that beneath any theopoetic meme of mystery lurks just one more archaic game of mystification. Nonetheless John Caputo and Barbara Muraca have taken this obnubilating theology not only seriously but convivially. Indeed, they have situated it, by way of their altogether dissimilar responses, in a deep place of recognition.

Recognition itself deserves re-cognizing. We are accustomed to reflecting on the interactivity that makes any knowing of self and other possible. And Caputo’s “headless Hegelianism” works to intensify its political, indeed its politically theological, potential. However, I want to point to the prior relationality of cognition itself. It would seem at first glance to represent what we theologians most defend against in the modernity of philosophy: some version of a raw knowability, an objectifying gnosis, a slap-down of *thou* to *it*. But no, the cognitive itself is born as co-gnosis, a *knowing together*. Knowing itself then signals always already a collaboration, an ecopolitics, a possible *convivium*. Odd how that *co* morphed into the mere *cog* in the determinate Western wheels of cognition. Recognition however suggests the repetition that has at least a chance of exposing a constituent relation to consciousness.

It happens that *Cloud* opens with a riff on consciousness—*scientia* together—as a relational knowing that in Whitehead’s 1925 *Science and the Modern World* took form as a rapid response to the quantum discovery, articulated agrammatically for emphasis: “If anything out of relationship,

---

<sup>1</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 32.

then complete ignorance as to it.”<sup>2</sup> That does not mean that relationship enables complete knowledge. On the contrary, it prevents it. The interdependence of my knowing something now with you is wired right through the unpredictability of who you will have been in this very exchange. According to *Cloud*, it is precisely the complication of our relations that prevents categorical capture, indeed effects an indeterminate space of unknowing, and so hosts a deep—indeed darkly theological—place of recognition.

So, there you have the complication, with hints of cosmology, theology, and political ecology, that keeps driving me into the cloud—which is to say, into theology. And yet the impossibility that such theology contemplates turns increasingly *against theology*. As the mainline/liberal religious bodies fade and their academic supports falter, the very discipline of theology faces its own possible impossibility. If it mirrors the possible impossibility of God, so much the better. There is a cloudy opportunity here, amidst a stormy sky of multiple apocalypse narratives vying planetarily for enactment.

I resisted *Cloud of the Impossible* as title of this book for some time. I knew it would tangle me tightly both with Nicholas of Cusa, who coined it, and with Caputo, entwined as he is with the other Jacques, who pervades any current thinking of impossibility. I was after something inescapably different. Of course, the differences did not get clouded out, even as these very relations came to co-constitute the project. Indeed, in the present conversation, Muraca and Caputo have with their papers performed the very co-gnosis in difference that the book develops as “apophatic entanglement.” For of course there is no simple proximity of projects here; Barbara’s evolving corpus attends with much cannier analysis to the economics of ecology than I am capable of, as evidenced, for instance, in her scholarly and activist support of the “degrowth” movement.

I start with Caputo, with whom, as he generously and Cusanically allows, some *coincidentia oppositorum*—no mere unity—may be taking place. Perhaps. On this front, I was all ready to defend metaphysics from him, as he so consistently denounces “the black-or-white to-be-or-not-to-be of metaphysics,” or “the mighty armor of metaphysics.”<sup>3</sup> Then he made one of his turn-the-other-cheek Ninja moves. He has here defended metaphysics, at least a possible metaphysics, better than I ever could. First of all, he performs what *classical* metaphysics is designed to avoid; that is, he relativizes our positions to our irredeemably contextual and incomplete lives:

---

<sup>2</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1925), 25.

<sup>3</sup> See John D. Caputo, *The Insistence of God: A Theology of Perhaps* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 5, 7.

he begins with his early and emancipatory resistance to the ultraorthodoxy of Thomist metaphysics, and he symmetrically notes my early and opposite flight from a Protestant patriarchy of Reformation-based anti-metaphysical neoorthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> Mimicking the antique apophatic strategy with its double negations, he clarifies that metaphysics may not after all be so obnoxious: as *not* omnipotence, *not* top-down certitude, *not* epistemic unification.

Since my defensive posture has been sabotaged in this exchange, I admit that I am really glad not to have to defend metaphysics. How tiresome. (I did have one teacher—not John Cobb—who in the face of critique would aver with weary exasperation, “First we have to do the metaphysics.”) Yet a live link between metaphysics and the apophatic (which Whitehead never names) is offered in the introduction to *Process and Reality*: metaphysical first principles are nothing but “metaphors mutely appealing for an intuitive leap.”<sup>5</sup> It was not however the speculative metaphysics as such that appealed to me in Whitehead but what is in him its metonym and motive: cosmology. He was driven beyond mathematics and logic to stage a new philosophical *coincidentia* between the culturally dissociated opposites of science and religion, of materiality and valuation. With its “Eros of the universe,”<sup>6</sup> Whitehead’s writing opened for me a world of spirited embodiments, an unlimited universe of limited becomings, hospitable (in the ways Muraca captures exactly) to a becoming feminism that was already then by the 1980’s becoming ecofeminist theology.<sup>7</sup>

From Whitehead unfolds the immense ecocosm of interconnected becoming; the mutual immanence of the actual occasions, the events of becoming constitute the universe, precisely and only through their activities of mutual constitution. It is well that Caputo has here picked up on this

<sup>4</sup> Caputo, “If There Is Such a Thing,” 1: “I am not just trying to be clever when I say that our relationship is something of a *coincidentia oppositorum* and apophatic relational entanglement unto itself—Catholic and Protestant, male and female, philosopher and theologian, deconstructor of metaphysics and process theologian, just for starters. There have been wars over such things, blood spilled. As Catherine Keller says, a lot of our differences are explained by our biographies—I come from the Catholic tradition saturated with metaphysics, so when I heard about ‘overcoming metaphysics,’ and ‘deconstructing the metaphysics of presence’ that had the lure of liberation for me, of the rogue, the radical, the outsider. Catherine comes from an anti-metaphysical Protestantism which gave metaphysics the lure of the prohibited other, especially if it took the form of a non-scholastic panentheistic process metaphysics, which set the hair on fire of my Thomistic professors in college, from which they tried duly to inoculate me.”

<sup>5</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected edition, ed. by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press 1929, 1978), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1933, 1961) 11.

<sup>7</sup> And ecofeminist theology is, of course, unthinkable apart from the courageous and visionary work of the Roman Catholic theologian, Rosemary Radford Ruether, who rarely admits her proximity to process thought, and of course that radically Thomist sister, Elizabeth Johnson.

language of relationality, not usually or evidently resonant with an acosmic vocabulary of *différance*, of radical alterity, singularity, a language of language. But there were *traces*, and he has tracked his own third way, his headless *Aufhebung*, his becoming community without community of a radical theology in which a certain “cosmopoetics,” even a Deleuzian rhizomatics, begins to materialize, to tangle with entanglement itself. He does not need to lean far into the language of a relational ontology to signal a solidarity with its interlaced bodies.

This possible solidarity gets tested in Caputo’s return with me to old Nicholas of Cusa. (Caputo, erstwhile monk, first sees red when he sees a cardinal.) It is probably obvious that I did not fall into Cusa’s celibate arms because of, but more or less in spite of, his early Renaissance proclivity for a mathematicizing metaphysics – let alone his status in the magesterium. What I fell for was the stunning breakthrough in cosmology to a radical relationalism of “all in all and each in each.” Through it he already (in 1440) made clear that, as the universe is boundless and therefore has no center, therefore the earth cannot be its center, nor can any star. And he comes to this new knowledge, over a century ahead of Copernicus and Galileo, directly by way of his theological strategy of unknowing, or “learned ignorance.” In this way, Cusa offered himself to me as an ancestor for apophatic entanglement. Not many Christian theologians between Augustine and Kierkegaard have visited me. So, I remain hauntologically indebted.

Caputo elegantly rehearses the argument by which Cusa’s *possess*, itself a *coincidentia* opening into a cloud of contradictions, becomes in his writing shortly before his death the sheer *posse ipsum*.<sup>8</sup> He acknowledges the radicality of this final Cusanic shift from Thomism, for which this notion of God as sheer possibility would be indeed absolutely impossible. Of course, Cusa cannot count as a “radical theologian” in the Caputan canon (nor am I sure that I can either, given my endless entanglements in eco-cosmo-gyno-politico *theism*). But I cannot resist one minor clarification. Caputo emphasizes the divinity encoded in the *ipsum* of *posse*, the *itself* of the divine self-identity, which lets him say: “Cusa’s position is a classically theist Christian Neoplatonism,” which means that, for him, “the world is not possible without God but God is possibility itself, with or without the world.”<sup>9</sup> That asymmetry is indisputable in Cusa. But in its fifteenth-century context, the move proves rather more interesting than a reassertion of the dependence of the creation on the Creator, of immanence on transcendence, etc.

---

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, “On the Summit of Contemplation,” in *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. by Hugh Lawrence Bond (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Caputo, “If There Is Such a Thing,” 9.

Cusa writes that “posse itself is the what-ness and the hypostasis of all things.” In other words, “the various beings are only various modes of appearance of posse itself... their variousness is posse itself appearing variously.” The difference of different beings is posse itself, God, appearing differently—that does not sound like any classical theism I have ever met. God as difference, the God of difference as indiscernible in difference from the different creatures—this sounds intriguingly like Spinoza’s one substance with many modes. So, you can just as well accuse Cusa of heretical pantheism as of classical theism. (This was done of course by Wenck, but the Pope didn’t give him much airtime; things went quite differently however in the next century, in the paranoid atmosphere of the Counterreformation, with the radical Cusan Giordano Bruno.) In *Cloud*, Cusa appears as a *panentheist* with a smudged ‘en.’<sup>10</sup> At any rate, the possibility marked as divinity, with apophatically little use of the God-word, is performed in the “can” of, for instance, “the child can carry a stone”; indeed, Cusa says, of “everyone ‘who can’.”<sup>11</sup> So it seems “God” here names the creaturely agency of “can.”

Arguably there is an early deconstruction here of classical omnipotence. Of course, Cusa never directly assails the notion of an all-controlling deity in the way that process theology has done. But when divinity translates definitively into a creaturely “can,” the paradigm of top-down power has quietly been replaced by that of an inside-out empowerment.

Of course, such arguments do not find ready resonance among most progressive and protestant theology, as it remains anti-metaphysical, backed now by the postmodern allergy and an honorable political impatience. But the keynote of empowerment rather than control does alter the politics of theology and therefore its secularizations as political theology. So I find rhetorical value across several theologically invested publics in translating *omnipotentia* as “omnipotentiality” rather

<sup>10</sup> See Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 219: “These convergences of mystical theology with Whiteheadian thought animate a counterdiscourse of creation that we might call *apophatic panentheism*.... Let us mark the interstitial strategy of such a tehomic apophasis with the very ‘en’ of this panentheism. For this little ‘en,’ ‘in,’ does not as one might think designate some clearly lineated space of intersecting substances, let alone of mutual containment—as though the mutual immanence of divinity and world resembles Chinese boxes or intersecting circles. The ‘en’ designates an active indeterminacy, a commingling of unpredictable, and yet recapitulatory, self-organizing relations. The ‘en’ asserts the difference of divine and cosmic, but at the same time makes it impossible to draw the line. For is not the line always already smudged? The smudge, the flux, ‘is’ the en, the overlap, of divinity with the world, of world with divinity.”

<sup>11</sup> Cusa, “On the Summit of Contemplation,” 295: “What young boy or young girl, when asked if they could carry a stone and having answered that they could, when further asked if they could do this without posse [being able], would deny it emphatically? For the youth would consider th question absurd and superfluous.”

than as omnipotence. This is all to say that I remain in this whole manoeuvre allied with Caputo and his “weakness of God,” as he draws from Paul’s theology of the cross, the noncoercive force that is not the power of providence but the lure of possibility.

Possibility with Caputo always erupts from within the impossible. As we have recently been facing deep contradictions in our democracy, I was grateful for Caputo’s gesture in this response to the question of political theology. Schmitt’s legacy of the sovereign decisionmaker, modelled on the arbitrary power of an omnipotent Lord, has returned, fascist proclivities intact. I am finishing at present a little book, *Political Theology of the Earth*, which wrestles with the notion of sovereignty as framed by the exceptionalism of a Christocentric, anthropocentric, egocentric omnipotence. Of course, the present U.S. buffoonery lacks the dignity of the medieval Christian imaginary of power. But in its vociferous white masculinism, it manifests long-term potencies. And so it needs to be countered by another theopolitics, another secularization, another ecocosm: a divine “weakness” that leads with utter consequence to the divine “insistence,” that “God needs us in order to exist.” That, for Caputo, means to bring good news to the poor, the downtrodden, the oppressed. As *Cloud* puts it, God needs us to “do God.”

In his present comments, Caputo finally raises two unanswerable questions. The first pertains to nihilism. In his adventure into cosmopoetics, he is taken by the possibility of the heat death of the universe in some 10 billion years (if I counted the zeros correctly), and by how it would wipe out possibility itself, posse ipsum, and certainly any ipseity of the possibilizer. The heat death of the universe here fuses, in one final meltdown, with the death of God. I will just say, yes, of course it is possible, *peut-être*.

He permits himself his cosmopoetics in this case ironically only by granting the mathematics of the physics, the last word about last things. I surely will take mathematical over theological certitude any day. But I do not thus respect the capacity of the math to interpret itself. Cusa and Whitehead both were geniuses in math, but I learn from the latter especially, that math is made of “pure possibilities,” or “eternal objects,” abstractions that are real but nonexistent (yes, like Caputo’s God), and that to grant them ultimate authority over the world is to commit “the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.” That is, it is to confuse their abstraction for the concrete events which relate it to a world. If no relation, complete ignorance. Anyway, I do not see how you rule out the possibility of possibility, precisely in the eternity of its abstraction from materiality, even in the case of some final entropy. I don’t see how the quantum field, also known as the quantum void—which, as Karen Barad argues, is

anything but nothingness—relies on any particular universe.<sup>12</sup> But even if it does, Mary-Jane Rubenstein's account of multiverse theory (including a chapter on Cusa) is illuminating, especially of the serial multiverses that show marks—increasingly testing out—of mutual entanglement.<sup>13</sup> The death of the universe would be the death of our universe—and the birth of another.

Even for this one, however, I don't know that the heat death theory is trending authoritative. Here I deploy a former student of Caputo's, Clayton Crockett:

"Basically using Deleuze (*Difference and Repetition*) and non-equilibrium thermodynamics, I argue against Brassier's *Nihil Unbound* that while there is an apparent cancelling out of difference in entropy, there is also an underlying preservation of difference, a remainder of intensity for new possibilities. And this goes against the conventional 19<sup>th</sup>-century view of thermodynamics as tending necessarily to disorder and heat death. That view of heat death is based on outdated science in physical terms, not even taking into account biology or consciousness."<sup>14</sup>

Because I am forever pushing free of the *creatio ex nihilo* account of origins, I have little interest in the eschaton *ad nihilam*. (There is however an Australian black metal doom band with an album named *Ex Nihilo Ad Nihilam*.) I agree that if the heat death is absolute, it takes God with it—who is a meaningless construct apart from some world. The way I do find to respect nihilism runs instead through the Buddhist *sunyata*; its nothingness belongs to a practice of self-emptying and disciplined compassion, alien to the negative triumphalism of Western nihilism.

At any rate, wouldn't it be lovely if a cosmic apocalypse billions of years hence, were our big problem? Indeed, I should hope that in a century or so, instead of having killed off human civilization by global warming and its accompanying violence, humans will be worrying about the heat death of the universe. In the meantime, though, I worry that nihilism only makes our self-annihilation more probable. But to worry is not to censor. Besides, Caputo cannot rightly be called a nihilist. Only a possible one.

---

<sup>12</sup> Karen Barad, "What Flashes Up," in *Entangled Worlds: Religion, Science, and New Materialisms*, ed. by Catherine Keller and Mary-Jane Rubenstein, TTC Series (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Worlds without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), esp. chap. 3, "Navigating the Infinite."

<sup>14</sup> Clayton Crockett, "Entropy," in *The Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Clayton Crockett, Jeffrey Robbins, and B. Keith Putt, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

And in the face of all the candidates for apocalypse, among them looms the death not just of God but, *mon dieu*, of my very profession! The spooks of worlds that have been mingled with those that might have been and those that might become. And so, the French of *peut-être* does offer something that the translation *perhaps* does not deliver: *peut* means *may* or *can*: *peut-être* is *may-be*, and it has some power, some *pouvoir*, es *peut*, it can. It can be. Something that is not, yet has a chance. Indeed, through John it insists on coming, on coming on strong—oops, I mean weakly but welcomingly. I do not hear in Caputo's ever on-coming opus any melodrama of nihilism. I recognize, over and over, a great buoyancy of theopoetics. Its uncertainty takes away our excuses, not our hope; it haunts us with the *yet possible*.

And as *peut-être*—ambiguous between the may and the can—it does not in its Caputan unfolding set us up for the dangerous disappointments of that 'yes, we can' that Muraca warns about in the well-meaning attempts of Merkel, echoing the good intentions of Obama. So with this deadly heat and with this ghostly mimicry of a political can-do, we find ourselves already edging into Barbara Muraca's ecophilosophical thinking, her ecological economics.

I am greatly indebted to her passionate co-gnosis; her *Cloud*-commentary speaks not just for itself but for myself. That leaves me almost but not completely silent. Indeed she has made it difficult to reach silence, as she wisely emphasizes that unsaying must not have the last word. Right, how could it, except by failing to unsay itself, and so unsaying its own unsaying? Dionysius the Areopagite captured this in the seventh century: negative theology negates also itself.<sup>15</sup> Or else mysticism is mystification. And so, we keep talking.

From that deep place of recognition, Muraca affirms the Möbius strip of deconstructive negation and affirmative entanglement, which in theology means the dynamic chiasmus of mystical apophysis and prophetic kataphasis. She welcomes some rest from the continuous work of deconstruction. We could call it a sabbath; if so, it might only happen for one moment out of every seven. And is it not built in, constructed, as the unfolding of deconstruction itself, as, say, in the *Specters of Marx* and so in the undeconstructibility of justice itself? The unsaying offers its own rest, doesn't it, when deconstruction finds its own

---

<sup>15</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, "The Mystical Theology," in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. by Paul Rorem (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 141: "We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion...free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also *beyond every denial*." For a discussion of this Dionysian negative hermeneutics, of "the negation of the negation," see also Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible*, esp. 71-3.

silence, in a pause that recharges language. (Even amidst hazardous disappointments.)

The pause within language from language may also open fresh access to the soulful bodies of ourselves, our world. I therefore love Muraca's solicitation of Edith Stein and the concept of an empathy that is not an invasive 'feeling into' the other. Rather, it signals the "irreducible opacity, as forever non-knowable" of another body—even of a bee, she suggests—that takes unknowing as the condition for relations, multiplicity, difference.<sup>16</sup> At least, I presume, for responsible relation, as relations can be violent, based on deadened empathy. Is *empathos* then perhaps my feeling in myself of the other, not as my captive but as a constituent of myself, not transparent in myself but preventing my self-transparency as well? This is at least where Judith Butler goes, in the undoing, the dispossession, the recognized unknowing, of the subject, especially in grief.

That we compose ourselves out of our relations—mindfully or not—is the basis of a relational ontology, which Muraca has through all her works in German and English unfolded ecologically and economically. She brings her rich (and rare) Euro-Whiteheadianism to the project. But note that she doesn't just kick the ball from team deconstruction over to team relationalism. She notes precisely the challenge to Whiteheadians of the apophatic. Process theology has mostly been engaged in an exuberant kataphasis, never content to criticize classical theism but rather constructing its own alternative to the God of power and might, offering instead the Most Moved Mover (Harsthorne); here a cosmic empath takes the place of the dispassionate aseity of a sovereign changelessness. The divine enfolding of the world, moment by moment, in a responsive com/ passion that Whitehead finally called the "consequent nature of God," is I find, theopoetically invaluable in teaching, in activism, in launching alternative forcefields of political theology.

Muraca beautifully articulates how Whitehead risked metaphysics, in a fragile, fluid, and edgy version—so that silence itself does not have the last word. She points also to his overreach in the metaphor of the primordial nature of God, where all possibilities (eternal objects) co-exist in a mathematicized rationality that rules out the impossible. That is true for these pure possibilities, which are understood to be mere abstractions. But that does not make them all compossible for actualization.<sup>17</sup> For Whitehead, the process of actualization of the possible depends upon us, the vast public of creatures, human

---

<sup>16</sup> Muraca, "Theology as a Practice of (Radical) Alternatives," 5.

<sup>17</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. by Tom Conley (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 81: "[Even God] becomes Process, a process that at once affirms incompossibilities and passes through them."

and otherwise. That process signifies a perpetual *complicatio*, a folding together of possibilities and actualities in acute difference, by which contradiction may shift into “contrast.” For a different unfolding, an altered world. So though “the impossible” is not part of process jargon, it is constantly in play in the actual world of possibilities, which are possibilities *for* something, for materialization. God does not exist except through those materializations. For the pure possibility of divine “envisagement” is a lure to existence, to actualization, but is not an actuality. Only as consequent to creaturely creativity does the so-called creator get created: as “creativity’s first creature.” Which is why I did draw some lines of connection between the consequent nature of God and Cusa’s “creatable God.” So if we were going to geek out on Cusa, we might say that this primordial vision of pure possibilities resembles the glimpse of paradise obtained, he avers, by pushing—painfully—into the cloud of impossibility and indeed, he adds, crashing through the gateway guarded by an angel of reason, who strangely recalls ‘the angelic doctor.’ But these are just vision flashes, helpful only insofar as they recharge the struggle against the politicoeconomic establishments of imposed impossibility.

Otherwise we are, as Muraca warns, just hiding in the hut of melancholia, holding hands and saying apophasic or kataphatic, theological or philosophical, prayers to each other. To cut to the quick, it seems to me that Muraca takes us, with the grace of a deep passion—rooted in *pascho*, suffering, patience, em-pathy—where we who have patience for this sort of conversation in the first place do need, do want, to go to what matters, what materializes. If we cannot simply make it happen by some ideational magic, nor by ideological praxis, neither will it take shape through some fresh theological schematism, however poetic. Unless perhaps the poetic becomes *poiesis*, ‘making,’ in the constituent relations of the becoming God of “theopoiesis.” Might it, can it, appear as the sacred practice of what Muraca illuminates as opening and keeping open “the space of multi-possibilities”?<sup>18</sup> Then surprisingly new materializations may transpire among and through and beyond us, new embodiments, inceptions, intercarnations.<sup>19</sup> And first they must be recognized, co-gnosis, known together, here at the edge of knowing, where the unknown and unpredictable gives us more hope than any currently calculable scenario. For instance, she lightly ironizes the can-do Paris 1.5 degree centigrade limit, which, as *The Guardian* has reported since August 2017, climate science thinks is already impossible.

Annihilation, then, and nihilism? Or a struggle for what is yet possible in the face of these impossibles, not in denial? So

---

<sup>18</sup> Muraca, “Theology as a Practice of (Radical) Alternatives,” 16.

<sup>19</sup> Catherine Keller, *Intercarnations: Exercises in Theological Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

Barbara Muraca's impressive long-term work as a scholar-activist in the international "degrowth" movement, becomes crucial now, amidst the trumping of social and ecological regulations of the market. So does her all-too-apt reading of Karl Polanyi's prophetic 1944 analysis of the interplay between unconstrained capitalism and fascist reactions.<sup>20</sup> The eco of economy and ecology, from *oikos*, the planetary home, is at stake. *Oy.*

There may come the catastrophe of flat impossibility, the retro-apocalypse, eradicating a liveable planetary future: the mass death through atmospheric warming (falling short of the heat-death) has begun. Or that Anthropocene scenario might catalyze a counter-apocalypse, the dis/closure (*apokalypsis*) that breaks open that space of multi-possibilities. In that place of deep recognition there can, perhaps, push forth the democratizing socialities, the convivialities, of mindfully entangled difference. Of *bien vivir*. We always start again with our own collectives of discourse, like this, in which we might foment, in place of the auto-allergies of academic political purity, new pluralist alliances, multi-religious, multi-secular, generating ecopolitical fields of contagious hospitality. In such a cosmopoiesis, unafraid of its own nihilisms, unashamed of its own theisms, unabashed by its ancestral and future entanglements, we can—posse ipsum—engage the widest *coincidentia* of opposed views inasmuch as they are trying to coincide in the *poiesis*, the making, of a just and sustainable *oikos*. We may then never give the unsaying the last word, but nonetheless, are capable now and again of temporary silence.

**Catherine Keller**

---

<sup>20</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944, 1957, 2001).