BARBARA MURACA

Oregon State University

THEOLOGY AS THE PRACTICE OF (RADICAL)
ALTERNATIVES: A CHOREOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTER WITH
CLOUD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

1. Incipit

It is a great pleasure and an honor to offer some reflections on "Cloud of the Impossible" by Catherine Keller, one of the most brilliant and inspiring theologian of our times.

Catherine Keller's books are always challenging and transforming in the most wonderful way. From her very first book on, she has balanced on the thin line between the pressing need to deconstruct power, truths, and foundations and the equally pressing need for a place to stay, to rest from the continuous work of deconstruction, where relations – fundamental, constitutive relations – can be lived, can flourish, and can construct possible (or im-possible) futures. That place – never simply located, [1] never 'just' somewhere, but always cloudly and crowdly complicated, is the provisional ground or non-ground for responding to the challenges of our time – for new forms of respons-abilities.

This very tension is alive in all of Catherine Keller's books and becomes ever more explicit in Cloud of the Impossible. On the one hand we are faced with a continuous, careful, almost obsessive (how could it be otherwise?), attention to the deconstructive movements that break, reveal, and unmask violence, whether it manifests itself in the epistemological shape of metaphysical truths or as the firm ground of normative claims that neglect their own normalizing and thus oppressing shadow. Here we encounter the fatiguing task of *unsaying* or – in a more Hedeggerian move – of reminding us of all of the unsaid that lurks behind the horizon of what is said; however never by actually *saying* it, but by a gesture of 'and yet'. On the other side - *and yet* indeed - Catherine Keller never lets the unsaying and the

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[1] The term 'simple location' is used by Whitehead to indicate the fallacy of considering entities or objects as simply located in space and time, i.e. not dependent on any relation to other spatiotemporal regions for their constitution. Against this Whitehead writes: „The volumes of space have no independent existence. They are only entities as within the totality; you cannot extract them from their environment without destruction of their very essence" (Whitehead, A.N. (1967): Science and the Modern World (SMW). 1925. New York: Free Press, p. 65).

deconstructive exercise have the last word, which would be just as violent and oppressing as any other ultimate step. In this movement where unsaying also means to collect mindfully both the said and the unsaid, and to let them inter-act and interweave, what emerges is relations: the movement of a relationalism that does neither end its movement into the indifference of relativism[2] nor into the safe ground floor of a somehow less threatening way of saying just with a little more circumspection, while quickly dismissing with *suffisance* the deconstructive protest. This corresponds to what Catherine Keller herself writes in a passage engaging with Derrida - the attempt at reconfiguring the coincidentia oppositorum between "deconstructive negation and affirmative interrelation".[3] Not in the mode of a dialectical relation in which both ends are superseded in a higher, complicated unity. Rather, the complication is ongoing in a pattern that is reminiscent of a fractal, a hologram, but one in fieri, in a movement of becoming. I had almost written 'in continuous movement', but this would have been wrong: because the movement is not continuous, not just one big flow, but a discontinuity kept together by the actualization of events that combine incompatibilities into rich contrasts - as we can learn from Alfred North Whitehead, another important voice in the book. Not "one" flow because the grid against which the movement might unfold is not yet there, but is generated by the movement itself through gaps, fractures, and interruptions.

The book, *Cloud of the Impossible,* is like a contemporary dance (I am thinking here of Pina Bausch) that in the steps, back-weaves elegant figures in the air through the discontinuity of repetition.

I dare say that Catherine Keller here moves into a kind of hyperdeconstruction. It is precisely *because* we have to remain faithful to the awareness of violence that we cannot let the unsaying have the last word. And this is where Cusa's negative theology of the cloud and Whitehead's process philosophy might come to help, only to be transformed by the encounter as well.

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[2] See Keller elsewhere: "The play of difference as such does not take account of the objectifications of the other in us and of us in the other. It may find itself in a new kind of closure, enmeshed in network, however fluidly enunciated, of mutually exclusive impermeabilities, of opaque incommensurabilities strictly bounded by human language. This is where relativism and relationalism part company – there where relativism freezes into a deconstructive undecidability." (Keller, C. (2002): *Process and Chaosmos: The Whiteheadian Fold in the Discourse of Difference*. In: Keller, C. and Daniell, A. (eds): Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernism. New York: State U of New York P, p. 65).

[3] Keller, C. (2015): Cloud of the Impossible (CoI). New York: Columbia University Press, p. 48.

The Cloud of the Impossible embraces and follows different entry points into im-possible paths. And this is precisely why we have to adventure into them. For, if they were simply possible, potentially probable, there would be no pressing need to enter the labyrinth. And she says this with Derrida at the very opening of the book: "to go where it is possible, is to be already there and to paralyze oneself in the in-decision of the non-event".[4]

The impossibility of this task trembles throughout the book, haunts the narrative where a provisional, possibly safe shore has been reached, a knot where the movement seems to flow well and to maintain a stable composition. These are the points where her readers - trained to questioning, remembering possible exclusions, articulating more intuitive objections - become skeptical and timidly start advancing an 'and yet' clause, by highlighting a point that does not seem to work in the impossible design of the cloud, something that has been forgotten, a place where the tension has been abandoned. It is almost like a game, trying to find the blind spots, to use the ongoing deconstructive move against her.

And yet, just by turning the page, we do find that very place articulated right there, where we thought it was missing. We find that doubt, the questioning. That voice that seemed backgrounded is now articulated without mercy towards the whole labor just accomplished. More work to do. More perspectives to be implicated. More folds to adventure into.

Now I could conclude here and invite you to read the book. It seems utterly impossible to comment on such an incredible piece of work. And yet, let me try to offer my reflections in two intertwining ways.

First, with a broad scholarly recapitulation of its dance movement - the different figures and choreographies that alternate in it - just to give you a sense of the encyclopedic pantheon of voices invited to inspire, question, investigate, perform. All kept together by the beautiful gesture of a skilled choreograph.

Second, instead of a comment, I will try here and there an intertextual intervention, echoing some of the thoughts expressed in the book and lingering a little longer on their figures.

And finally, I will mention some challenges that this book poses to all of us - no matter where we are - and to others who are not

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[4] Derrida quoted in Keller: CoI, 2.

here, but work on the streets and fields of the world for a transformation towards a more convivial dwelling on this one, multifolding Earth.

2. An im-possible intra-view

The book is divided in three movements, embraced by a preface (pre-capitulation) and a conclusion that instead of con-cluding, i.e. closing up, recapitulates and opens yet again the movement of new folds to come.

2.1 First Movement

The first movement, that of *complicatio*, folding together, sets up the stage in three steps:

2.1.1 Overture

The overture articulates the doubling of tensions between deconstructive *apophasis* on the one hand and on the other prophetic relationalism. [5] However, each tension is in itself already doubled, as the apophasis already inhabits a tension between the negative epistemology of deconstruction and the tradition of negative theology that - at least in the magnificent version of Cusa - leads via a dynamic and multifaceted perspectivism towards a relational cosmology. On the other horn of the double tension, which already looks like an old, knotty tree, we find the relational ontology of process philosophy and - again - Cusa's own dynamically relational panentheism. Ontology and epistemology are inextricably continuous - like a Moebius strip - when Catherine Keller writes with reference both to process philosophy and to Cusa: 'to know something is to participate in its actualization'. [6] This is inescapable, just as inescapable as the togetherness (*co-implication*?) of non-separability and difference. In fact, difference is only conceivable - as Catherine Keller makes clear - *as* non-separability,[7] where non-separability should not be confused with a fusional totality, a melting pot that renders the very concept of difference impossible.

2.1.2 Second Figure of the First Movement

In the second chapter the figure of the cloud is embedded in its own complicated history, a genealogy of an image that has

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[5] CoI, 9.
[6] CoI, 21.
[7] i.a. CoI 22.

haunted the European tradition of thought, accompanying in the background each step into the light of reason and positive theology or, for that matter, epistemology. We travel from Exodus through Gregory of Nissa, the wonderfully cloudy figure of the so-called Pseudo-Dionisius who plays at hiding in the genealogy itself. The unknowability of the cloud does not stand for a 'no trespassing,'[8] for an even more inaccessible truth that lays beyond our grasping as the silent and silencing ground of being. That would be a cemented, dogmatic, or - as Whitehead would call it - quite obscurantistic,[9] i.e. literally darkness-projecting cloud. Nothing like this: the unknowability of the cloud does not block relations out; rather, it enables them in the first place, precisely through its welcoming nebulosity. I will come back to this later.

2.1.3 Third Figure of the First Movement

The third part is dedicated to the master of the cloud, incredible Cusa. It starts with Rogier van der Weyden's portrait that Cusa sends to his brothers as a way of making the unsayable somehow within grasp. From the painting, everyone in any position in the room is looked at and looks back into the gaze of the portrayed figure, moving with the observers. In Catherine Keller's words: "its eyes move with your movement. The viewer is gazing upon *its* painted gaze: the observer is being observed by the observed".[10] Phenomenology might in the end not be so original… A knowing that is impossible as knowing of an *object*. But how is the knowing of a 'subject', the seeing of a seeing and being seen possible?

I am reminded here of Edith Stein's original version of the empathic encounter,[11] which does not mean fellow-feeling nor *en-pathein*, entering the other's feeling. In the encounter with another 'seer', another gaze, a double movement takes place simultaneously and inseparably: as my own living body, my *Leib*, is the zero point of orientation of a world, the point behind which 'I' cannot go, the blind spot where the 'I', whatever that is, is rooted and from which it gazes the world - so is the foreign *Leib*, the other's living body, looking at me. It orients the world around itself as a zero point of orientation. Accordingly, in one and the same movement, 'I' sense the other as another seer, or a self, precisely because of its intrasparency, irreducible opacity, as

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[8] CoI, 61.

[9] Whitehead, A.N. (1971): Function of Reason. 1929. Boston: Beacon Press.

[10] CoI, 88.

[11] Stein, E. (1964): ON the Problem of Empathy. Translated by Waltraut Stein. Dordrecht: Springer. I am grateful to my student Lauren Lovestone and her brilliant Master Thesis on Edith Stein for reminding me of this.

for ever non-knowable. And this, for Stein, is true beyond the human dimension. With a little leap of thought we can imagine that even a bee is a zero point of orientation that orients the world around itself. Non-knowability is the ultimate condition of possibility for relations, manifoldness, and difference.

Precisely because we cannot *know* the other, but only bump into its opacity, this is the condition of all knowing. In other words: the inaccessibility and irreducible opacity of the other means at the same time its interiority, its being another *Leib*, a living body that sends me back to my own primordial experience of myself as living body. [12] Empathy becomes thus the condition of possibility for the constitution of our selves simultaneously as individuals and as inhabitants of what Whitehead would call a *buzzing world*[13] full of other selves. Bumping into the opacity of another living body, I am no longer alone, no longer the solipsistic, Cartesian ego-cogito standing before a world of objects. Non-knowability is the condition for a dynamic plurality of relations, for an irreducible difference rooted in inseparability.

In the same vein, and back to the book and to Cusa, the impossibility of knowing God, the cloud, is not a closure for relating to God, but the only possible mode of relation: the negative theology that, with an almost paternalistic look, restrains epistemology from its positive urge to let reason enter the cloud (reason has to be overpowered),[14] is complemented or – better – entangled inseparably with a positive theology from below or, as activists would say, a *grassroot* theology: here the multiple names of God are only in relation to the creatures and are not just names, but encounters or folds, as we will see later. It is a practice, not a theory. In another chapter Catherine Keller writes that cloud-thinking is not to be understood as "an alternative to practice, but as the practice of an alternative".[15] With Cusa we understand why. The cloud remains unspeakable just as lived and practiced loving relations cannot be transposed into words. Love – as we learn from the book can take different forms. Imagine asking grass-root activists (not the professional activist who has learned the language of the media attention and of marketing) what they do and why. The answer is often mixed with surprise, because there is no gap between vision and action. The activist practice is just the place to be, the knot where one *cannot not* stand and resist.

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[12] See here also Muraca, B (2010): Denken im Grenzgebiet. Prozessphilosophische Grundlagen einer Theorie starker Nachhaltigkeit. Freiburg: Karl Alber Verlag.

[13] Whitehead, A. N. (1978): Process and Reality (PR). An Essay in Cosmology. 1929. Corrected Edition, Ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne. New York: Free Press, p. 50.

[14] CoI, 101.

[15] CoI, 27.

And this is of course for love: for the land ripped apart by mining companies,[16] for the sounds and smells of a common life, a *convivium* with all its contradictions, for the thousands of different seeds replaced by a poisonous and powerful one that requires human sacrifice to be obtained. [17]

The unknowability of the cloud does not lead to a stoic impenetrability or a kind of silencing truth beyond reason. Just the opposite is the case here: the cloud is interpenetrable. Thus, says Cusa, God is the most moved mover - and this resonates with Whitehead's God as the fellow sufferer. [18] Indeed the passivity of the suffering, the *pathein* is crucial here; as the ability to be affected, receptive: the creator - we learn from Cusa - is creatable.[19] An impossible figure. And because it is impossible, Catherine Keller asks us: what does it make possible? So much! And so much liberation from the omnipotent complex of an all-pervasive patriarch!
Whitehead resonates here again with the wonderful figure of the double nature of God, primordial & consequent. The primordial nature (not because it is outside time or the world, but simply preceding each actualization) is desire for richness of contrast, beauty, intense experience, i.e. rich in difference. And the consequent nature is the following basin, where all that has been actualized is being welcomed as it is, collected (not fused or merged!), and loved.[20] The term God seems almost out of place here. Anyway, as Catherine Keller reminds us, for Whitehead the process God does not create the world, but saves it.[21] Saving is here not an omnipotent act, but an act of welcoming. Elsewhere we find this expressed in a beautifully ecological metaphor. She writes: "Whitehead's poet God 'saves whatever can be saved' - not by intervening but by receiving and recycling 'what in the temporal world is mere wreckage'"[22] - a figure of love. Recycling the wreckage. Folding it back into new life, via persuasion, desire for new actualizations. The two natures come full cycle and fold into each other.

To be honest, Whitehead does not completely give in to the impossibility beyond reason. Too dear to him is the logical coherence of mathematics to give it away. In the primordial nature, the impossible is ruled out by a logical world,[23] in which

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[16] See the incredible documentary 'La Buena Vida' about the desperate struggles of indigenous people in Colombia for their dignity and love to the land: http://www.thegoodlife-film.com/start_en/
[17] See the Navdanya movement in India:
http://www.navdanya.org/site/
[18] Whitehead, PR 351.
[19] CoI, 102ff.
[20] Whitehead, PR 346ff.
[21] See also: Faber, R. (2008): God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies. Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press
[22] CoI, 11.
[23] Whitehead, SMW, p. 157ff.

all abstract possibilities are entailed, but not necessarily paradoxes or *coincidentia oppositorum*. This is - maybe - a challenge for process philosophy and an important lesson from the cloud.

2.2 Second Movement

The second movement unfolds - it is called *explications* and is dedicated to some modes of articulating the folds and the folding into a dynamic, relational ontology.

2.2.1 First Figure of the Second Movement

It starts with an unbelievable presentation of the intricate conversations around quantum theories and stresses the way in which non-separability and, or better *as*, difference can be grasped when studying electrons, photons and more in-visible and yet efficacious actualization events. Here, again epistemology (observation) folds into ontology and the other way around. Agency is scattered throughout the universe. With Bell, we encounter an intriguing way to think of the universe as a hologram. However, in compliance to process philosophy and quantum theory, not as a status, some 'thing' called panentheistic entanglement, but as holomovement.[24]

2.2.2 Second Figure of the Second Movement

It is quite obvious then that the next step of the second movement invites Deleuze to the table - dear to Catherine Keller, we have encountered the French philosopher in her book on creatio ex profundis, *Face of the Deep*, and earlier on. Difference is embodied in the dynamic of unfolding and enfolding, inscribed in the repetition of patterns (to use a Whiteheadian term). Repetition never means the same (what repetition would it be otherwise?). Novelty as difference always inhabits repetition. Deleuze' origami image of the universe is nudged into the dynamic movement of process - here Catherine Keller appeals to Whitehead in order to push Deleuze further into an ontology of desire: Novelty is triggered, attracted by the lure to feeling, the non-indifferent movement of desire embodied by God as process - a Cusan echo here as well. Desire lures through im-possibilities and novel figures.

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[24] CoI, 158ff.

2.2.3 Third Figure of the Second Movement

Talking of desire and in order to break the scary Hegelian symmetry of triads, a whole chapter is dedicated to Walt Whitman and the apophatic sex of the Earth. It is too beautiful to touch it with comments that may run the risk of disassembling its flowing. I will then move forward to the forth figure.

2.2.4 Fourth Figure of the Second Movement

The last chapter of the second movement is what the critical reader was longing for and lamenting about: all good, all too good. An unsayable and unsaid God beyond any fixing or grasping, lure for novelty beyond the impossible, entangled in and with the world in a dynamic, pan-en-theistic relationality. But, how about the pain? How about the loss? How about the betrayal that every relation inescapably embodies? Any room for this in the cloud? And there it comes, a wonderful dialogue with Judith Butler who takes the movement where it had stopped between repetition and novelty and breaks it open, suspending the flow without solidifying the dynamics. It is in Butler's voice that we are reminded that repetition oscillates between provisional stabilities and constant destabilization. Repetition might thus coagulate, congeal, into sameness, and deceive some of us too easily into believing in a stable grounding. The place to rest risks then becoming a platform where not everyone is welcome, because every provisional stability fixes norms and betrays the anomalies. Repetition, however, can embed and unfold difference in the form of subversive re-signification (the 're' is the same of *re*petition, but the term also entails the creation of novelty, the performative making of meaning, *signi-fication*). And this process is paved with losses, betrayals, and grief. It is precisely in the experience of grief that the constitutive relationality of the self, constantly undone in the movement, becomes somehow 'self'-aware: Through grief, 'I' realize that I am composited by the others, as Catherine Keller writes. She then pushes Butler one step further into a relational ontology, not from the bird's eye view (as normally ontology is intended), but from the worm's eye view (a worm indeed moves by folding together and unfolding!): from the points of view of the experience of grief and fracture that undo the self.

Let me here interject with a reflection in open dialogue with the book. I think that Butler has more to offer to the cloud than what Catherine invited her to say. Judith Butler is a master when it comes to practices that perform alternative im-possibilities. By shifting, dis- and reassembling, or parodizing established meanings and oppressing norms, a space is disturbingly created for the im-possibility of existing and living a livable life as a non-

intelligible variation of the (accepted and recognizable) possibilities of being. [25] Living an impossible life by making space – *and yet* – in the folds. The dance becomes queer. But there is more we can learn from Butler beyond her critique of gender normativity! Does capitalism in our times not operate in a very similar way to the heteronormative matrix, when it comes to be intelligible individuals with a right and place to live? Can we be intelligible, i.e. be at all, if we stop longing for more, faster, bigger, and yes, also better? If we try to evade the social norm of behaving like self-entrepreneurs, [26] who invest in health, education, and friendship in order to maintain our subject-position and to be recognized as (intelligible) selves? Even alternative 'possible' narratives repeat the mantra of 'not more, but better', quality in and of life instead of more stuff.[27] As we learn from Foucault, investing in the self-enhancement and improvement of one's own potentials is the peculiar mode of subjection/subjectification of neoliberal, late capitalism. How radical instead does the im-possible narrative of 'good' or 'good enough' sound? The cosmo-anthropo-vision[28] of the indigenous people of the Andes in terms of *Buen Vivir* or *Sumak Kawsay* (so much already betrayed in the languages of the colonizers) is not about living better. It is about - as Butler would say indeed - *livability*. The right to live together and to decide autonomously and collectively about *how* to live. *Together* here refers to a complicated collective or assemblage that encompasses not only what we would call humans, but also other living forms, including gods, ancestors, animals, forces of earth and sky, and more.[29] This is an im-possible narrative (so impossible that it had to be crashed or assimilated). And yet, it is embodied in existing practices. A narrative that can only be performed in subversive ways to 'undo' neoliberal capitalism just as we can/not undo gender normativity. I will come back to this later.

2.3 Third Movement

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[25] See i.a. Butler, J., 2004. Undoing Gender. Routledge, New York/London

[26] Foucault, M. (2008): The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978--1979. Picador, Palgrave Macmillan UK

[27] See for example the critique of the logic of 'more stuff' embodied by the *Story of Stuff* team: the short movie 'The Story of Solution' depicts very well the radical move from 'more' to 'better' without acknowledging that the narrative of 'better' is embedded in the same investment logic (http://storyofstuff.org/movies/the-story-of-solutions/ (accessed on Sept. 8th 2017))

[28] Escobar, A (2008) Territories of difference : place, movements, life, redes. Duke University Press, Durham

[29] Descola, P (2011) Human Natures. Quaderns de l'institut Català d'Antropologia 27: 11-16

The third movement challenges us to engage in the practice of an alternative and invites us to a radical critique of the Western world from within, from the cracks that cloud-thinking keeps open in the folds: this movement is called *implications.*

2.3.1 First Figure of the Third Movement

With this figure we come back to the ground of power relations, the historical background in which Cusa developed his work. In the first section we are led back to the Crusades to discover that there, we can find the origin/non-origin of the West in search of an identity not as non-separable difference, but as distinction, separation from, and opposition to the *other*. Another to be wiped out, no matter whether it knocks at the doors of the Occident from the outer East or inhabits it from within in different rituals and faiths, or rather dwells in countries yet to be discovered and invaded. We learn that that very same Cusa of the cloud intended the nonseparability of difference and the constitutive relationality of a panentheistic entanglement not just as a cosmological figure, but as a political promise. [30] In *De Pace Fidei* Cusa envisions a complex cohabitation of all rituals, not as indifferent pluralism, but as a multiperspectival inclusivism. Not so much in the sense that you are 'mine' in a soft missionary and accommodating gesture, but in the sense that we belong together in the nonseparability of our differences, entangled in spite of any forced laceration. This is where relations turn from ontological conditions into a normative prefiguration of a more convivial dwelling on Earth - again from the worm's eye view perspective: mindful relations rooted in the awareness of interdependency, interagency, and co-constitutivity.

The mindless entanglements of global capitalism instead are imbued with the denial of dependency and the oppression of the otherized others. So many echoes from feminist literature come to mind that I can only briefly mention here. Feminist economists for example, denounce and unmask the devaluation of so-called (re)productive processes that constitute, protect, and heal social and ecological relations, and that are pushed by Capitalism into the background of non-productivity and therefore exploited and oppressed. [31] Ecofeminists like Val Plumwood outline how the process of otherizing, rooted in the Western binary logic of domination, aims at reversing the dependency, creating a periphery-center dichotomy, and

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[30] CoI, 240ff.

[31] See inter alia Biesecker, A. and S. Hofmeister. 2010. Focus:(re)productivity: Sustainable relations both between society and nature and between the genders. Ecological Economics 69, no. 8: 1703-11.

transforming difference into deviation and anomaly.[32] Via the inversion, the other is backgrounded, rendered inessential, while the neediness for care of what is constructed as the center is denied. The denial of continuity is essential to eliminate identification and sympathy between members of the dominating class and the dominated. How subversive the idea of inseparable difference indeed! And yet, it is precisely because of the constitutive entanglements of our relations that constructing the other as separate requires an active intervention, an act of violence and oppression.

2.3.2 Second Figure of the Third Movement

In the next chapter of the third movement, we are reminded that this does not only work with other human otherized others, but also with all other dynamic entanglements that constitute 'us'. We are thus invited to travel back to the great battle of Pergamon, magisterially represented in the sculptures exhibited in Berlin.[33] There, indeed, we find the *chiffre* of what Catherine Keller calls ecophobia, the denial and oppression of the other, in this case the unmeasurable (the Titans) presence of the past, on which we stand. Gaia screaming in pain faced with the new humanity that needs no mother, like Athena, the goddess born from Zeus, father alone. For sure there is no place for *Pachamama*, as the Andine indigenous people call mother earth. Pachamama is not so much a divine entity as the dynamic principle of generation and regeneration of all life. It is not the earth as a globe seen from outer space, the one that inspired Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis and to which Catherine refers in the chapter.[34] Not that earth, visible from a nowhere-point in space as a living organism struggling to maintain its dynamic self-organization. Gaia of the Pergamon or Pachamama embody rather the earth as the soil on which we all walk, dwell, from which we are born and go when we die. Again, not the earth seen from the bird's view perspective, but from the worm's view. In his beautiful Gifford lectures, Bruno Latour is very explicit in distinguishing between the two paradigms and is somehow critical of Lovelock.[35] There he refers to the table of translation to compare gods in different theological systems, as polytheistic people used to do, in which not the name counts, but their agency, what they actually do and how they interlink with the practices and the life of the people. In an analogous way, Latour challenges us to move beyond the truths of science as an epistemological view OF the world into a different mode of dwelling IN the world, where the practices of scientists, struggling with the recalcitrance

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[32] Plumwood, V. (1993): Feminism and the Mastery of Nature. London: Routledge.
[33] CoI, 270ff.
[34] CoI, 272.
[35] Latour, B. (2017): Facing Gaia. Cambridge: Polity Press.

of different acting processes or actants, can join an alliance with *earthlings*, inhabitants of this place, not the planet as the globe, but the place, the home, the territory, the *Oikos*, the Land – as indigenous people call it in their struggles to safeguard the conditions for livability.

Of course, Latour appears in the chapter as a crucial ally to the project of a different con-vivium, animated by inseparable differences. I know that the book had to come to a provisional end, but so much more had Latour to offer here. Especially in his elegant critique of Gaia as a new divinity hypostatized by so many environmental activists worldwide, understandably led by the urge of giving the cloud a new name, scared by the nebulosity of uncertainty when facing the threatening warming of the planet. But, as I will mention at the end, it is not the planet that is threatened nor it is the "planetary boundaries" that we have to worry about as if someone had drawn them from outer space on our little earth (this is how the representation of planetary boundaries is currently depicted).[36] It is the home, the oikos, the buzzing world that we share with fellow creatures that is   at   stake.
Even without Latour, however, the book clearly shows how an apophatic ecotheology can help joining uncertainty and activism against the double-edged positivism of - on the one side - a faith in science as ultimate and indisputable truth that mistrusts its struggling with the opacity and recalcitrance of a dynamic and entangled world. And on the other, a dogmatic occupation of the space of the cloud with a likewise indisputable vociferation of God's will and nature, strangely compatible with the anthropology of neoliberal subjects held together by the market of life.

2.3.3 Third Figure of the Third Movement

The last chapter of this movement is, again, a message of love as the mindfulness of relationality. And again, here, I will let the readers discover its beauty without adding disturbing comments.

3. Echoes and challenges

I have tried to give a sense of the incredible complexity - *complicatio* - of different voices and movements entangled in this incredible book. Let me now just pick up two themes, just two of the multiple threads woven into marvelous patterns and pull

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[36] See: http://stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html

them out a little, hopefully without destroying the pattern, in order to imagine possible echoes and alternative recombinations.

3.1. Possible/Impossible

It is easy to encourage people by saying that something is possible against all odds, to repeat a 'yes we can' that the German Chancellor Angela Merkel has tried to re-enact in Germany when trying to challenge 'her' people to open their doors to the unexpected, the challenging flow of refugees mainly from the Syrian War that desperately tried to flee to Europe in 2015. In doing so, Merkel constructed a 'we' that completely dismissed all differences, neglecting yet again the fears of the subaltern classes of a new downwards spiral of competition among the poor - classes that she has been solidifying for years. In doing so, she repeated the mantra of the omnipotent (German) will that can achieve anything just by the force of the will. But welcoming the refugees is an im-possible task and only as such can it be framed and addressed. It is impossible under the political and economic conditions that shape the way people live in the European fortress, and under the cultural settings, the mental infrastructures that legitimize them. It is impossible because implementing Obama's or Merkel's 'yes we can' would have (and indeed, it has!) required not only to posit the 'we' into question and renegotiate its terms of reference, but also to radically transform the deep tissues of the societal fabric, to renegotiate social justice not only across gender, race, and the long list that usually follows, but also in terms of class and inequalities. Naming the impossibility of the task means to acknowledge that it radically questions the logic under which conditions of possibility can be negotiated. Within the logic of the possible it should not surprise that conservative or - as in Germany or France - even right-wing populism find a voice against the absurdity of an impossible path felt as a closure, a catastrophe.

In case you think I am drifting away from Catherine Keller's book, let me remark that the practice of alternatives that the cloud of the impossible opens is close to this train of thoughts. The global logic of what she calls in the book a *pax economica* (the new imperial face)[37] is rooted in elite or market cosmopolitanism (how much of Merkel is embodied in this vision!!). So many decades ago Karl Polanyi brilliantly showed that an unleashed market, which never existed of its own but had to be created and enacted by Governmental action, induces a double movement in societies to defend themselves and protect somehow livability.

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[37] CoI, 253. In the book this is presented with reference to Namsoon Kang.

In most cases this ends (and has ended in the past) in a more or less dramatic protectionist totalitarianism or even fascism.

Here is where I see the power of the cloud of the impossible: it breaks the logic of the possible at the roots so that radical novelty might occur. Precisely because it is impossible we have to do it. And the 'we' is here a tentative invitation, an open, uncertain process full of deviations, interruptions, and tensions. Subversive, dispersed, intertwined actions of impossible acts of creativity and re-signification. Radical novelty is not a transformation coming from no-where, but enfolding from the hidden folds, the meanders of a multilayered and complex, complicated, reality. Catherine Keller uses the metaphor of homeopathic remedies to address the need for a cure against Islamophobia, a cure that has to come from the 'historical vicinity of the destruction'. Homeopathic remedies are highly diluted, almost non-present (think here of the wave-particle image), they leave an invisible trace that affects the form of the water. The more they are diluted the more efficacious they are. Impossible, as the mainstream medicine tells us. Pushing further the metaphor and applying it to social transformation, it is because they are impossible that they are efficacious and intrude into the folds, in which the louder frames of reality become manifest. If you think I am just talking about ideas, I invite you to read Gibson-Graham's incredible work[38] on post-capitalistic communities that exist now, all over the world, embodying impossible alternatives in their daily practices of a different mode of common living, of what Catherine Keller calls a new convivium, a new conviviality of the Earth. Not idyllic communities, not at all. Places and spaces of strenuous resistance, sometimes visible, sometimes rather subversive, silent, powerful, and always threatened. Places in which the 'we' or 'wes' are continuously re-negotiated, re-opened, revised. This is happening now, homeopathically, everywhere.

3.2. Limits and No Trespassing

"What a constructive apophaticism (…) must avoid is both foreclosure by knowledge or by the knowledge of unknowledge: the fixing of mystical 'no trespassing' signs on the boundary of the unknowable".[39] I love this passage that Catherine Keller uses in the section on Gregory of Nyssa. Just as well it could be written as a commentary after the Climate negotiation in Paris during the last COP 21.[40] Or as a reformulation of Rockström's

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[38] Gibson-Graham, J.K., 2006. A Postcapitalist Politics. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

[39] CoI, 61.

[40] See: http://www.cop21paris.org/about/cop21 (accessed on Sept.8th 2017).

planetary boundaries,[41] within which - the scientists inform us - we would move in a *safe* operating space for humanity. Given the uncertainty of climate science, at least some clear no-trespassing signs are firmly set into the ground. Within these signs we are told that we are *safe*. Thank God! How cynical however, is this perspective, this view from nowhere, in which the 'we' is not put into question and the unacceptable inequalities and injustice, both social and environmental, are simply wiped away within the boundaries? When indigenous people are evicted from their land to make room for huge dams to produce renewable energies and reduce CO_2 or to create a no-trespassing wilderness sanctuary for biodiversity, is acceptable as long as it preserves the boundaries and is located within the safe operation space? But safe for whom? At whose costs? Whose voices are being silenced within the boundaries? The chant of antagonistic movements repeating that "another world is possible" (and this is an 'and yet', a resistance against the definition of what is possible, a claim of impossibility indeed!) runs again the claim, rooted in the big negotiations among the ones in power, that instead *this very same world* is still possible, just a little cooler, below 2 degree Celsius. It is here that the cloud of the impossible can reveal its teeth, its magnificent potential for radical transformations.

Should we rejoice in the outcome of the COP 21 negotiation in Paris about a clearer limit set to anthropogenic climate change? Not even 2 Celsius, 1.5 is the new limit. Finally, everyone has embraced the need to act and move within the boundaries of that space of uncertainty!

But what are the implications? Now, in the name and face of that same urgency, geo-engineering, large scale climate technologies are our only hope, as we are told: the only feasible, *possible*, path within that urgency calls for immediate, large-scale, intervention to cool down the planet. It calls for the creation of clouds up in the atmosphere on the ground of the new certainty of climate science ratified by politics. Diabolical clouds indeed - made of sulphate (what a nice metaphor!) to veil the sun and allow our business as usual to keep going, undisturbed. The impossible is sealed: there is no alternative to climate manipulation, now that we finally know what the safe operation space looks like.

Against this closure, climate activists are fighting to keep open the space of the impossible - crack it open again beyond BAU (Business-As-Usual) scenarios and TINA (There-Is-No-Alternative) narratives. Let me quote, again from the book, a theme that is dear to Catherine Keller: "Each impatient

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[41] See Rockström et al. (2009): A safe operating space for humanity. In: Nature 461, 472-475

apocalypse, always revolutionary, risks further paralyzing those already faltering in the uncertainties of complexity, empathy, vulnerability".[42]

How welcome to them indeed the cloud of the impossible, the uncertainty that keeps open the flow of creativity, manifold actions that respond to diversified needs and stories, alternative modes of understanding time and space. How welcome indeed the impossible contradiction of urgency that instead of calling for apocalyptic intervention, buys time, slows down, interrupts, breaks free other ways of relations and actions, dedicates time to different voices, in their own right. Inseparable differences.[43]

Faced with climate change, slowing down is an impossible path, widening the circle of voices listening to each other a fatal delay, hosting manifold modes of action, rituals, dances, struggles, prayers, is it not like the ridiculous wooden hut built to protect us from the planet collision in Lars-von-Trier's Melancholia? It says, yes, let's sit down here and hold hands with closed eyes. Latour is right in stressing the naivety of the gesture.[44]

And yet … This is not the same, holding onto the impossible under current narratives is the most important struggle to keep the space of multi-possibilities open. To keep the voices of the buzzing world speaking and resonating. It is not just a hut - it is a multitude of practices, actions, transformative acts that re-shape the space of the Im-possible. There is an ulteriority beyond urgency, unthinkable spaces for creative novelty - not ex nihilo, but ex combination (as Whitehead would say), recombining differences, multiplicities, multi-vocal perspectives into new forms. The cloud of the impossible is maybe a god-to-come. A creatable god as we have learned. Created in and by the subversive actions and performative practices of alternative, impossible futures.

Barbara Muraca
Assistant Professor of Environmental and Social Philosophy
Oregon State University - School of History, Philosophy, and Religion
Milam Hall 322
OR-97331, Corvallis
Email: barbara.muraca@oregonstate.edu

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[42] CoI, 28. See also: Keller, C. (2005): Apocalypse Now and Then. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
[43] See Haiven, M. and Khasnabish, A. (2014): The Radical Imagination. London: Zed Books.
[44] See Latour's comment on Lars von Trier's Film in: Latour, B. (2017): Facing Gaia. Cambridge: Polity Press.