

The Age of crumpled Topologies

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From eight points of light, the Greeks bodied forth the cape of Orion, the Hunter ; with a strange indifference to the look of things, the constellations project our natural and cultural world into the sky, forming a drawing that is neither mimetic nor abstract, but diagrammatic. Thus, to « constellate » is to make possible « worlds » emerge from the formlessness inherent to all form : but, in the process of coming forth to light, a world doesn't fully part with darkness, because invisibility is a given of visibility itself, its reverse side. Likewise, meaning doesn't come from presence but from « re-presentation » : the signs substitute themselves for a physical presence that has already vanished ; since a sign and its referent never share the same space-time, there is a structural delay at the very core of semiotics itself (Derrida would call it *differance*)⁽¹⁾. The signs are like ghosts : they come back *again*, inscribing in the phenomenal world the blueprint of new constellations.

From very early on, Caroline Corbasson has been haunted by the mystery of signs : hers were not cultural signs, at least not at first, but natural ones, primitive ones, like the tornados, the landscapes and the nocturnal skies of her childhood in Texas and Canada. And maybe some recurring obsessions of her « optical unconscious »⁽²⁾ come from here : revolving around the « strange strangeness » of the universe, around its « viscosity » (to quote Timothy Morton), they « channel » some obscure part of this Era we've entered, the Age of Anthropocene.

Turning post-romantism upside down, towards its dark side, the anthropocene taught us a lesson the hard way : we can't be hypocrite anymore ; we *do* know

we are trapped in a multidimensional space-time, whose network includes us, but also Earth, galaxies, gamma rays, dark matter etc., resulting eventually in what Morton would call a hyperobject⁽³⁾. Hyperobjects are complex entities formed from a mesh of objects that don't appear to be spatially or temporally related : hence they can't be touched, contained or even fully apprehended. Hyperobjects are so massively distributed in the universe they distort space and time, and so asymmetrical they are way beyond human grasp : being partially invisible, no one can know what they are, because we can only see them indirectly, by the way they affect our reality. They do exist, but they don't exist fully *for us*. They are the « otherness » of reality, inaccessible *per se* but nonetheless as real as tangible objects. They glue together radically heterogeneous scales, as if they were somehow folded in our own space-time : aren't we walking on the residues of species gone way before our own emergence ? Aren't the cosmic radiation and the UV Rays going through all of us ? Aren't we all breathing the result of a bacterial pollution we call Oxygen, and living under the light of dead stars ?

From our very beginning, the world has been writing itself into us like we have been writing ourselves into it ; the universe existed long before us, long before any trace of living consciousness, and this « archi-time » still subsists, pulsating at the edge of time and projecting its spectral waves towards our own timeline and our future : we've always been trading with ghosts, and they have been trading with us ; our history is a photography of the mark they left on everything they touched.

Because they are spectral entities, hyperobjects can't be located in space and time, they are never where they seem to be : they stretch themselves towards unknown areas, ruled by strange laws, like retro causality (for the EPR

paradox for example) or gaussian temporalities, at work with super massive objects like planets.

The age of hyperobjects is one of crumpled topologies. No wonder then that some of Caroline Corbasson's works⁽⁴⁾ use ancient maps as supports, like some sort of « ready-made » she covers entirely with charcoal, except for some little blank spots. The result looks like a folded night sky : what was *before* us recovers our history, like an outer space inside our inner space, an uncanny zone into which maybe she secretly wishes to get lost. Travelling at the speed of light, hidden in its darkness : for a folded space is not a linear topology, it's a space where non concomitant areas can meet, glued together by the fold, neither really conjoined nor disjoined, but both at the same time. Whereas a line sets distinct and discrete areas apart, a fold puts them together, like an interface, or a membrane, articulating from this junction the viscous topology of hyperobjects.

Hyperobjects include us in their own folds, so that we are ourselves in a constant process of folding and unfolding : when we watch distant images of stars and planets on our computer screens, what do we really see if not an image of our own evolution ? Technology is the mirror of our « extended phenotype »⁽⁵⁾ : evolution doesn't stop in our cells but goes on way beyond our body, into the colonized space. Distance, in return, becomes an illusion : we realise that it's just a fiction meant to protect the borders of our familiar world and to set a whole system of ontological hierarchies, starting with the distinction between « nearby » and « faraway », and the emphasis on the substance as opposed and superior to the phenomenon.

Hence maybe this sense of irreality we are experiencing in front of Caroline Corbasson's works : the anthropocene has put our world out of its axis, replacing it with a new paradigm, where « meaning » has been deeply chal-

lenged ; if there is no « reason » why the world should be like it is, it doesn't mean either that we are left only with chaos, but more, that we have to invent a new type of « eco-system », an « ecology without nature »⁽⁶⁾, a new model of co-existence with every « object » sharing the hyperspace of a hyperobject : human beings, animals, plants, stars, ghosts, dark rays, etc.

It's from the very absence of « reason » that a « meaningful » ecosphere can arise, if we just think of « meaning » as a movement starting from an absence of « reason » (*telos*) and « aiming » at nothing specific. If we would chose to maintain some of ontology's vocabulary and state that a hyperobject does indeed have an « essence », we would have to consider this essence as entirely spectral, and in an in(de)finite process of reifying the invisibility folded in the hyperobjects. So that « reality » would eventually mean nothing else than *spectral immanence*. The more the hyperobjects will get closer to our world, the more they will start to manifest the spectral core of reality itself : to the point that our space-time might « bend » and get sucked into them. In many of Caroline Corbasson's works, different temporalities do indeed seem attracted toward each other like magnets ; in the same way, her charcoal drawings unite two different space-times : the hypermodernity of scientific imagery and the immemorial gesture that pushed humans to imprint their first mark onto a cave's walls.

Is Caroline Corbasson aiming at going backwards in time, when she decomposes white light into spectral rays, looking for the formless source of all image ? In one of her recent installations, she uses optical prisms through which she projects images, to create a floating world of sensation, like a neural matrix of sparkling indexes.

The role of the index is central in her work, and somewhat reminiscent of some of the Surrealists' theories⁽⁶⁾. For them, photography especially, being a pure index, was able to « convulse reality »⁽⁷⁾ into the « strange strangeness » of objective hazard, with its emphasis on spatial concomitance as a source of renewed meaning. It's not analogic thinking that Caroline Corbasson is mostly interested in : her turn of mind is more « deliciously masochistic », devoid of sentimentalism, like a dark kind of enlightenment, the knowledge that this universe is « sticking » to us, and no matter what, its presence is indifferent to ours. It was here before us and will still be there long after our disappearance, even if we'll somehow remain part of it, like ghosts folded in its material memory. Matter and energy : aren't they the key words that ultimately flatten every ontological and spatial hierarchy ? If Caroline Corbasson confronts almost obsessively the microcosme and the macrocosme, it's not to oppose them, and not to unite them either, but to get rid of the idea of « dimension » itself ; in the asymmetrical era of hyperobjects, there is no microcosme and no macrocosme either, because there is no possible « measurement » : there is only a « proximation », a « togetherness » of every entity sharing the mesh of a hyperobject.

Strangely enough, hyperobjects have pulled us back to Earth by this very fact they « are » and *are* not at the same time : they do exist but their being is devoid of substantiality. They taught us that « form » and « structure » are mostly fictions meant to support an ontology where everything has one place and *only one* place, secured by linear logic and definitions. Since hyperobjects extend in every direction, they possess what we could call a « meta-form », a form both « in becoming » and exceeding the borders of any definition. Caroline Corbasson's sculpture *For a Void* is reminiscent of this *astructural* approach : here, in what looks like a mappamundi, Earth has disappeared,

maybe because nothing can be forever contained in a structure.

If the End of the World has already occurred, what kind of future does this leave us ? Perhaps, in our journey towards the spectral becoming of hyperobjects, we inherited the task of exploring non-anthropocentric ways of co-relating to everything that « exist ».

Maybe what's left to us is precisely that : coming to closure with ontological closure itself and opening ourselves to the inter-relatedness of a « declosion »⁽⁸⁾ that has always been there without even us noticing.

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- (1) On « differance », see Jacques Derrida, *La Dissémination*, Seuil, Paris, 1972, pp. 9-67
- (2) On the « optical unconscious », see Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1994
- (3) Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects, Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, University of Minnesota Press, 2013
- (4) Caroline Corbasson, *Blackout Books* and *Blackout Maps*, 2013
- (5) Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype*, Oxford University Press, 1982
- (6) Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature, Rethinking environmental Aesthetics*, Harvard University Press, 2009
- (7) André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, NRF Gallimard, 1937
- (8) Rosalind Krauss, « Photography in the service of Surrealism » in *L'Amour Fou, Photography and Surrealism*, Hayward Gallery, London, 1986, pp.15-46
- (9) Jean-Luc Nancy, *La Déclosion*, Galilée, Paris, 2005