

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS A PAST (RESPONSE TO SYMPOSIUM CONTRIBUTORS)

Shajara Néehilan Bensusan

F: Das Vergehen ist anderes als das Gewesen.

J: Wie sollen wir dieses denken?

F: Als die Versammlung des Wahrenden ...

Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, p. 146¹

In the two symposia around *Memory Assemblages* in April 2025, in Brasília and London, the idea that the past – situated, reassembled, affected by addends, and constantly shifting – is what there could be in the beginning was examined from many perspectives. Some contributions came from deconstruction, some from speculative realism, some from hauntology, some from memory studies, some from concerns about immanence, some from post-human engagements, some from reflections on noise – all with their peculiar take on what they had thought through before, during, and after encountering the book. The symposia are now past. The past from which I write, responding to these texts that bring so many different dimensions to the book, is certainly a gathering of what endures. The texts contain much more than what I can respond to, for the book certainly holds more than what I can find, and it thinks more than what I can conceive - this is why we write books: to play with specters.

I thank everyone who took part in the symposia, beginning with those who, for any reason, have not contributed to this volume but were nonetheless important to the discussions we had last April in Brasília and London: Santiago Arcila, Isabela Baldini, Joaquim Barbosa, Evrim Bayindir, Julian Brzozowski, Carlos Henrique Carvalho, Sotiria Ismini Gounari, Jakub Kowalewski, Juliana

¹ Translation: “I: The passing of the past is something else than what has been, J: How are we to think that? I: As the gathering of what endures...” (Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, p. 54).

Martinez, Pedro Mentor, Cecile Malaspina, David Roden, and Joel White. The responses to the twenty participants who contributed to the volume are preliminary, but it was an honor to engage with them. I thank each of you for your help in shaping the book – including those of you who crossed my path only after it was completed.

RESPONSE TO PAUL LIVINGSTON

Paul Livingston contrasts the prevailing logic of effectivity with the possibility of a series of logics of ineffectivity, which would bear witness to the illusoriness of the availability of being to the mastery of some form of effective thinking. These logics bring together forms of life that would rather remain faithful to a decoupling between thinking and being. A central term in this projected contrast is that of ‘witnessing’: what a logic of ineffectivity can do is not effectively capture being in thought—or extract the intelligibility or the forces found in what there is and retain them for the exercise of thinking. In other words, terms such as ‘knowing’, ‘inquiring’, or even ‘accessing’ would be inappropriate, since they fall into the impossible effort of thinking to exert mastery and control over being. Because the logics of ineffectivity cannot effectively extract the intelligibility of whatever concerns them, they do no more than witness, for they spring from, among other things, the formally demonstrable undecidability of sense.

The logic of effectivity, by contrast, attempts to depict the sense of what there is by investigating its possibilities in order to master its workings – and to render it redundant because replicable - assuming that inconsistent alternatives to how things are can be made transparent and eventually rejected through a process that eliminates what is other than the (true) intelligibility of beings. If that process of capturing the forces of what there is must fail – because there is no effective way to determine the sense of being – what remains for thought is to disentangle itself from being and do no more than witness its manifold relations with what surrounds it. Livingston presents a quite interesting reading of (the second part of) Plato’s *Parmenides* where in a sequence of arguments concerning being and the one what emerges is “the multiply contradictory or aporetic results of each of the individual investigations of conceptual pairs” informed by the injunction to actually consider not only the truth but also the falsity of a claim; the text is thus pointing to “the logically demonstrated *impossibility* of deriving [...] a unitary,

noncontradictory, and overall *decidable* sense of the being, becoming, and appearance of the one”.² Instead of leading to the Neoplatonic One or to showing the mistakes that could be corrected by a theory of forms, the arguments in the dialogue make explicit – indeed they witness – the difficulties in the relation between thought and being. They are a testimony of the ineffectivity of thinking to achieve being; they point to nothing but a critical and ineffective relation to what thought can do no more than witness.

In *Memory Assemblages* I describe Livingston’s logics of ineffectivity as an ultrametaphysics. I understand the term as expressing a break with the prevailing metaphysical tradition that engages thinking in the effort to capture the intelligibility of what is around – and eventually of thinkers and thought itself, as the efforts to build a replica of human intelligence that would make it redundant exemplify. An ultrametaphysics is roughly composed of two gestures: a diagnosis of metaphysics and a way forward beyond it, a certain new employment of thought which would be at the same time informed by the effort to escape metaphysics. To summarize a longer discussion of the way ultrametaphysics has itself a history with several chapters,³ we can consider the different diagnoses concerning how an underlying presence has oriented the metaphysical adventure of thought including those of Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Catherine Malabou and Denise Ferreira da Silva. These diagnoses differ immensely, both in the scope of their analysis and in the thrust of the rupture they recommend with metaphysics. In Livingston’s diagnosis, there is a sense in being that metaphysical thinking aims to extract but cannot properly do so because sense is undecidable. My pan-mnemist ultrametaphysics endorses this diagnosis as it does with several others while proposing a general scheme of metaphysical thinking according to which it assumes retention can dispense with retrieval – and thus things can effectively be fully present once and for all no matter what else is added to the picture. Ultrametaphysical diagnoses display both a moral condemnation of metaphysical thinking and an accusation that it is ultimately mistaken – this can be found in different intensities in different diagnoses but it is clearly present in Livingston’s analysis of the logic of effectivity.

² Livingston, “Undecidable sense and the logics of ineffectivity”, p. 15.

³ See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, pp. 129-139.

Disagreement within ultrametaphysics, however, lies less in the diagnoses, which are arguably quite different, than in the way forward from them. It is here too that I locate my disagreements with Livingston.

Indeed, I think Livingston is uncomfortable with the label ‘ultrametaphysics’ not because he disagrees with the effort of providing a diagnosis about metaphysics in general – indeed he provides one such diagnosis – but rather because he sees his logics of ineffectivity as quite different than, say, claims about the plasticity of form, as in Malabou, about the transcendence of the other, as in Levinas, or about the ubiquity of memory assemblages as my spectral realism proposes. He would rather favor a way out that witnesses something like Ludwig Wittgenstein’s practices attached to forms of life and sustaining rules. This would be the positive outcome of the break with the logic of effectivity: to look into the different relations one develops within practices and forms of life. His is a somehow quietist ultrametaphysics and I guess the oddness of the phrase is part of what makes him uncomfortable. What matters most here, however, is that here lies the kernel of our very fruitful disagreement. On the one hand, while I agree thinking is thoroughly situated in its surroundings and it is so before any intentional engagement or any attempt to thematize what it finds around, I think this friction with what is outside must provide a genuine impact on thought. On the other hand, I suspect an appeal to practices end up quieting the insistent disquiet I see in thought: the adventure of metaphysics is not the only alternative we can witness in thinking. To put it in Levinasian terms, the metaphysical desire, or the attraction, the allure, the obsession for the other can put into play in ways that avoid the violent reduction of the other to the same. Further, the appeal to practices (or forms of life) requires some sort of continuity in them that can be compared with that Edmond Husserl postulated for the ideal objects – explicitly for the ideal objects of geometry.⁴ Husserl assumes these objects can be transmitted and inherited as if nothing stands in their way, not even the difficulties with conveying them in written text, as Derrida pointed out.⁵ It is as if they persist because they appeal to their own history which ensures their unicity. To be sure, Wittgenstein’s practices are supposedly less committed to a reason that

⁴ See Husserl, *The Origin of Geometry*.

⁵ See, for instance, Derrida, “Introduction to Husserl’s *Origin of Geometry*”.

traverses history, but their permanence (and their internal changes) seems to be equally dependent only on what is transmitted and inherited. This leads to the beginning of my answer to Livingston question concerning “what establishes or licenses the kind of privilege that memory itself, and in particular a directedness toward the past, seem to have in [the pan-mnemist] project”.⁶ The hazards of propagation, or dissemination, are part of what constitute the relation between thought and itself – and thought and the items to which it consigns its outcomes. This is where memory assemblages may come to the picture, they ensure thought is not in a thorough continuity with itself – nor are practices or forms of life – but rather they are subject to addends coming both from themselves and from outside them. These memory assemblages cannot be frozen out in the name of the continuity of practices – it is perhaps this continuity itself that lacks effectivity.

Pan-mnemism comes from a concern with exteriority, with what is outside a captured intelligibility that is offered as an understanding totality but also with what is outside the established practices that constitute us. Exteriority assumes the form of addition while what addends impact have the form of what is retained somewhere in thought or in the world. This concern provides a way to challenge effectivity and indeed this is one of the paths to ineffectivity I consider in the book.⁷ The insistence of addends imply that no presence – and indeed no sense – is immune to the urge and the requirement for retrieval, and thus no presence is oblivious to the dynamics of memory assemblages. The concern with the past, and how it affects the future has a privilege that comes from the diachrony that is common to being and thought – not because thought extracts the forces of being, but rather because it goes with what there is, it cannot be indifferent to what is added around. Thought and being share both their indexicality and their spectrality – not because one endeavors to master and control the other, but because they are both hostage to addends. Livingston questions whether “pan-mnemism [...] is not really just another kind of “regional” determination of a broader logic of (ineffective and) undecidable sense itself.”⁸ The issue he brings up is whether spectrality could be anything but a path towards logics of ineffectivity that are ultimately only eventually – regionally – concerned with memory and

6 Livingston, “Undecidable sense and the logics of ineffectivity”, p. 39.

7 See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, pp. 150-154.

8 Livingston, “Undecidable sense and the logics of ineffectivity”, p. 39.

the past. My response is that the diachronic entanglement of retention and addition is what could make the appeal to practices and forms of life possible. Practices are themselves retained somewhere and in need for retrieval given any added circumstance. To witness them is to attend to the diachrony they must navigate. Thought is immersed in practices only to the extent that it is in a memory assemblage – and this is the indexical location in which it must be situated. The pan-mnemist ultrametaphysics entails thus a thorough rejection of presence – and of sense – through an ineffective diachrony. In doing that, it suggests the exorcism of the logic of effectivity is a starting point for thought that cannot be dismissed by a focus on the existing practices.

RESPONSE TO ELENA OSTOS

Elena Ostos situates *Memory Assemblages* in a number of philosophical contexts engaged with memory – such as the Foucaudian effort to dismantle the centrality of the subject, the Gadamerian concern about fusing horizon and the debate among different causalist accounts of memory and their post-causalist opponents which chiefly concentrate on the nature of memory traces. Ostos describes pan-mnemism as hinting towards the various contexts in which memory is discussed by positing memory assemblages as an explaining structure that underlies what there is and places memory at the kernel of what is taken as real. Reality is not oblivious to memory, but shaped by its diachronic bifurcation. Ostos moves on to associate my spectral realism with a certain discontent with classical accounts of memory traces as containing at least some residue of content. The landscape of views on memory focusing on departing from contentful traces within the discussions around human and animal memory as a phenomenon to be explained in non-mnemic terms is ample. It involves, saliently, conceptions viewing traces as “the dispositional property of a neural network to reinstate the state it was in during encoding, at the time of retrieval”⁹. In such a view, there is still a “causal link between the original event and what is remembered through procedural causality —the idea that the causal connection exists only at the level of the processes that generate a memory”;¹⁰ one can think of traces as weights in a

⁹ De Brigard, “Simulationism and Memory Traces”.

¹⁰ Ostos, “On Traces and Addends”, p. 49.

trained neural network or as the intensity of connections between two or more elements in a large language model (also supported by neural networks). That landscape also involves attention to an extended mind perspective that could find traces outside the organism. Further, they involve post-causalist views according to which memory is reconstructive and generative and respond in no causal way to whatever has been retained. This landscape bears several similarities with elements of my pan-mnemism, in particular concerning the deflation of content in memory traces. An important difference, as Ostos notices, is that my spectral realist pan-mnemism insists that mnemonic phenomena can be found beyond the limits of a mind, even of an extended mind. Thus, she writes: “Bensusan’s theory of memory without a subject, traces are not something *extended*, for there is no point of reference from which they unfold; they are, rather, *extensive* in themselves”.¹¹ Still, one could still fruitfully compare the pan-mnemist view with those held in the debate around memory traces.

My contention in the book is that there is no content in isolation in archives – that is, in what is retained. The consequence is that a memory assemblage cannot hold content in isolation from addends unless in the notional present time where it is constituted. The permanence of content is beholden to the coming addends – it is not ensured by itself. To be sure, there are traces in texts as there are traces in a contentless sense in the weights of a neural network or similar structures. However, traces, which come in different forms, provide in themselves no general theory of retention. I endorse Malabou’s argument against Derrida’s stress on writing to the effect that there is a form acting as an underlying condition of possibility to the work made by traces. I also claim that no matter with what we replace traces, we find no general ontology of retention because retention is no more than a diachronic pole – a pole in the temporal connection it defines with the addends to come. This general account of memory is oriented by exteriority; as Ostos aptly formulates, “*Memory Assemblages* is not primarily a book about retention, but about retrieval and the conditions that render it possible”.¹² Addends act on whatever they find and the event that they find something is what constitutes the permanence of the past. In this sense, addends guide the process

¹¹ Ostos, “On Traces and Addends”, p. 50.

¹² Ostos, “On Traces and Addends”, p. 61.

of assembling memories by indicating the past as an indexical position, and not a substantive general description in terms of traces, forms or weights in a network. I also find no need to portray the link between the diachronic poles of retention and retrieval in terms of causal connection; to be sure one can find such connections in several cases but it becomes immaterial for the account in the book whether we can find causal links in thought or in the reading of texts. What I do value in causal theories – of memories but also of perception and of reference – is their commitment to externalism: they disentangle what they deal with from both the workings of the internal access the mind eventually entertains and from the individual capacity to discriminate appropriate and inappropriate instances (of what is genuinely remembered, seen or denoted).

The tension Ostos explores between my pan-mnemonism and the different versions of causal theories that postulate some sort of memory traces could incline me towards post-causal accounts. Even though my spectral realism welcomes the generative aspect of memory these accounts tend to emphasize, there is a danger in those views concerning diachrony. They could end up committed to the idea that memory is a synchronous phenomenon and the appeal to the past is not really central to it – thus answering the Aristotle question concerning what distinguishes memory and imagination by shrugging shoulders: nothing, or almost nothing, distinguishes them. I rather agree with Aristotle here, what distinguishes memory from imagination is that the former is about the past. That is, the engagement of the past is a crucial element in the bifurcation of retention and retrieval that constitutes a memory assemblage. The past, as I said above, is an indexical position and not anything that can be substantively described. The past is something we refer to without any appeal to appropriate descriptions; in a sense what replaces traces (or, arguably, what traces can be suitably reduced to) is actually an indexical element. There is no ontology of retention because what constitutes it is an indexical position vis-à-vis the addends that insistently come. Dropping causality by exorcizing diachronicity is anathema to the idea of memory assemblages which is centered in the time bipolarity of retention and retrieval.

RESPONSE TO CESAR SCHIRMER DOS SANTOS

César Schirmer dos Santos engages with the movement of universalization of

memory I propose in the book. He describes pan-mnemism as attributing the two layered diachronic configuration formed by retention and retrieval to all things, as “[e]very existing thing”, he writes, “as a “memory assemblage”, inherently possesses a two-layered structure”.¹³ This gesture of taking “the common process of remembering” as “the *explanans* of all things”,¹⁴ worries him because both the past and truth – and, as a consequence, the truth about the past – become dependent on the procedure of memory which cannot be reduced to pure retention. He then moves on to compare this generality of memory to some form of anti-realism and diagnoses that my “spectral realism functions as a form of idealism, where existence is contingent upon retention and retrieval”.¹⁵ What would be hurt by pan-mnemism is a due distinction between the past composed of truth transcending memories on the one hand and memory itself which cannot constitute the past by itself on the other. Schirmer dos Santos recommends, in contrast, a view according to which truth (about the past) is not in the making but rather ought to be there once and for all independently of what is retained and how it is retrieved. Further, he insists that by not conflating memory and the past, one is safer from the baffling realist claims that ends up taking reality as ghostly while maintaining a commonsensical notion of existence as independent of any cognitive activity – and he assumes memory is one such cognitive activity. If the past is hostage to addition, he maintains, it cannot cause memory and this is where pan-mnemism clashes with what Schirmer dos Santos understands as a tenet of folk ontology to be preserved.

The connection between memory assemblages and the past – and both its truth and truth in general – is crucial for my pan-mnemist spectral realism. Schirmer dos Santos argues that memory is cognitive and acts on representations of the past being able both to be truthful about it and to misrepresent it. My response to this association between memory and representation is twofold.

First, the book puts forward a larger scope for memory – and memory assemblages; thus, this general character of memory assemblages entails that they are not confined to the cognitive workings of human, animals (or plants). There is more to memory than our own recollections – or anyone’s capacity to

¹³ Schirmer dos Santos, “Spectral Realism, Actual Idealism”, p. 67.

¹⁴ Schirmer dos Santos, “Spectral Realism, Actual Idealism”, p. 57.

¹⁵ Schirmer dos Santos, “Spectral Realism, Actual Idealism”, p. 73.

remember. This is the lesson I learn from externalist approaches to remembering, such as the original formulation of C. B. Martin and Max Deutscher:¹⁶ one can remember without cognitive access to what is remembered, that is, without knowing one is remembering, without being aware of what one is remembering, without discriminating what is being remembered. To be sure, Martin and Deutscher are chiefly concerned with remembering, that is, with the representation of past experience (and mostly in humans). But the lesson *Memory Assemblages* learns and generalizes from their efforts is that remembering needs no cognitive access – and further, memory itself is a phenomenon that makes what we consider representational possible, and not a procedure on representations. There is remembering beyond the cognition of remembering – and, further, there is memory beyond remembering. While there is a relevant link between remembering – even understood in an externalist light – and cognition, there is more to memory assemblages than cognition; that is to say that pan-mnemism entails no pan-psychism even if one sees something slightly epistemic in a memory assemblage.

Second, the book challenges precisely the idea that anything can be said to be present once and for all independently of any (mis)representation. The ultrametaphysical character of my spectral realism expresses the notion that memory assemblages are in the same logical space as full presences – while most metaphysical thinking assumes reality is composed of presences, ultrametaphysical pan-mnemism maintains that reality contrasts with the present by being crucially diachronic involving the two non-simultaneous dimensions of retention and retrieval. (Notice that we can talk about learning, storage and retrieval as three different phases, but there is no learning without – simultaneous – storage and thus two non-simultaneous stages composing memory.) Spectral realism contrasts with the metaphysics of presence by taking reality as composed of archives hostage to additions; the past is not kept as it is as a presence, but depends on what stores it, what retains it and, as such, compose a memory assemblage. That the past is subject to additions is plausible at least in some examples: sun rising becomes lawlike after repetitions and fails to be so with an exception, historical events gain different light under new circumstances

¹⁶ See Martin and Deutscher, “Remembering”.

discovered, our accounts of philosophical texts like Plato's dialogues have changed significantly in the last centuries. One could still say that the representation of the past has changed while the past is fully there – that is, present in the sense of retained without the need of any retrieval. This is where the metaphysics of presence strikes back. Spectral realism attempts to move out of this assumption by insisting that there is no such thing as presences that are self-standing, needing no further recuperation. Interestingly, Schirmer dos Santos brings in the Eleatic principle that connects reality with being a cause or an effect of something else. This is a way to connect some existent with what co-exists with it – nothing exists on its own, as a vacuous actuality. The pan-mnemist would emphasize that this dependence takes place in time and thus relies on addition – this is why the absence of a vacuous actuality becomes the impossibility of ensured forgetting. My claim is that there is no such thing as a presence that is fully there once and for all no matter what comes next. I have characterized elsewhere the metaphysics of presence in terms of a connection with perception in order to contrast it with a view of reality that understands it in terms of memory, like spectral realism attempts to do.¹⁷

I maintain that spectral realism is not a form of anti-realism – and it is far from functioning as a form of idealism. Memory assemblages are not cognitive, there is more to memory than what any subject remembers; further, they are not dependent on any subjective variable but rather they constitute subjectivity themselves. Memory assemblages make possible not only subjects but other forms of presence that are themselves always hostage to retrieval. If minimal epistemic qualities are ubiquitous, this is not because reality is a representation, but because the assumption that reality is presence is countered by the mobilization of memory in the relevant logical space; that is, countering the assumption that things are fully there once and for all. These epistemic qualities are basically mnemonic ones: it is addition that ensures that things are archived and thus consigned to memory assemblages. Spectral realism, however, is not a realism of presences, it is a different kind of realism because it relates differently with truth – no truth-maker is there once and for all. The lesson to be learned from various forms of constructivism is that reality is itself in the making and thus upholding

¹⁷ See Bensusan, "Pan-perceptualism and pan-mnemism".

bivalence is far from being a matter of course. But this making of reality is not restricted to any presence – and thus not to the subject – but rather comes from the persistent addition that can take any form. Memory assemblages are common to thought and being, both have two diachronic poles where one without the other is insufficient. Still, one can be bothered by the conflation between memory and the past – and entertain persistent worries concerning the transcendence of truth. In spectral realism, transcendence comes from two directions: first, from other memory assemblages and thus from other archives some of them yet to be uncovered or assembled and second, from addition itself. The past transcends memories because there are always more memory assemblages to be brought to the picture. Truth is understood in terms of a certain commitment both to justice and to investigation. There is, nonetheless, another important point here: diachrony somehow precedes any memory assemblage and this is so because the past is indexical and cannot be fully described by any archive (or any vestige or trace) – there is always more to the past because it is an orientation. This is why diachrony can see off the idea of memory traces.

When mentioning the Eleatic principle, Schirmer dos Santos describes pan-mnemism as the idea that everything is made of memory assemblages while arguing that because it is not proposition in material ontology – like that of the Stranger in Plato's *Sophist* – it is not circular. This is an important point because I tend to be less sure of the distinction between the formal and the material here – for one thing, being taken as presence seems to be both. As a consequence, circularity is always threatening for theories that concern everything – and it is no exception for pan-mnemism. In the book, I claim that the book itself is a memory assemblage, one among many – it is not a full presence but an archive to be assembled by further additions. It is, therefore, not a presence used to deconstruct other presences like others in the past, but no more than another memory assemblage. This is nonetheless less than a complete response to the dangers of circularity: in allowing for other memory assemblages to come, the book is also claiming that the challenges to it will come in the form of another memory assemblage. Thus, any challenge to it is to be understood in its own terms. Notice, however, and this is clearly not a sufficient answer, that the same occurs with the metaphysics of presence: from within its own assumptions, it views any challenge to itself as positing a different class of presences. The space

of ultrametaphysics is precisely one in which presences and memory assemblages can be considered without taking anyone in particular as the only game in town.

RESPONSE TO GRAHAM HARMAN

Graham Harman engages with the role played in my pan-mnemism by addends that bring about retrieval. He remarks that retrieval is a constitutive part of memory at least since John Locke's account while portraying addends as affecting archives in a way that is somehow uniform. Harman writes that "Bensusan's philosophy of addends might look like the ultimate "flat ontology," in which all realities are equal and none is subordinate to any other".¹⁸ Addends, he claims, act like accidents. In the book, I compare addition with the coming of Epicurean *clinamina* that swerve the course of things following no meaning and no reason¹⁹ – no preestablished principle. It is important that addends are not just random, they are something external coming in the direction of what is archived and showing that whatever is stored is up for grabs.²⁰ They do have relevant features of contingency as they act in the encounter with what is retained, they have no fixed content on their own and no hierarchy can be fixed once and for all or, in any case, before the assemblage. Harman disagrees by claiming that some addends are more important than others. This is also why the role of retrieval in *Memory Assemblages* is compared with the one in Marshall McLuhan's work. In his work with Eric McLuhan, retrieval appears in contrast with reversal forming a pair that is part of a tetrad together with enhancement and obsolescence when it comes to (human) media artifacts.²¹ The McLuhan approach holds that retrieval obeys a "figure/ground relation introduced by *Gestalt* psychology",²² it has a structure that brings it about and thus a configuration that places it away from any flat uniformity. Retrieval appears, thus, as less accidental – there is a protocol for the way they have an impact. Addends are not all born equal.

18 Harman, "Ontology of retrieval", p. 78.

19 See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, p. 75.

20 In *Being Up For Grabs* I develop a conception of contingency according to which it is the plural of necessity, thus paving the way for an exorcism of totality in the name of the outside, of the exterior which is carried out in *Indexicalism* (see Bensusan, *Being Up For Grabs* and *Indexicalism*). Addends are thought, in spectral realism, as exterior and it is as such that they act like accidents (and like *clinamina*) to whatever is retained.

21 See McLuhan & McLuhan, *Laws of Media*.

22 Harman, "Ontology of retrieval", p. 81.

My account of addition holds that addends are born equal—and insofar as they are impacts of the exterior on retained archives, it is the persistence of their arrival that ultimately makes a difference in creating distinct memory assemblages. They are born equal, in great quantity, and insistently. As parts of assemblages, however, some addends are clearly more important than others: they are the ones that retrieve the archives deemed relevant, together with which contents are composed. In other words, the importance of archives is decided by the assemblage they form—by themselves, they are contentless. The diachronic nature of assemblages makes clear that there is no full presence in either of the two poles. In this sense, memory assemblages can indeed be described in terms of emergence, since they result from addends that promote retrieval. However, addends on their own do nothing unless they are combined with what is retained from the past; analogously, they cannot act upon a fixed class of archives or even upon a bounded period of time. They can come to retrieve anything that has been retained. Harman mentions McLuhan's example of folks gathering "around the radio set, listening to whatever programs were made available" in the first years of the invention to illustrate how a "McLuhanian analysis would tell us that this points to the retrieval of oral storytelling and tribal communication".²³ What retrieval shows here is that there are archives from the past retained somewhere in the bodies of these people retrieved precisely by the introduction of the radio. Addends can prove relevant or trivial depending on the archives they bring to fore – and this is why memory assemblages are diachronic assemblages. Similarly, it is only within the assemblages – where they acquire content – that what is figure and what is ground is determined. Arguably, memory assemblages involve a *Gestalt* structure, but that structure cannot be projected beyond the specific entanglement of the mobilized archives and the retrieving addends. Harman also doubts retrieval can be understood in terms of addition only for memory "inevitably also loses something of what it once possessed".²⁴ What the logic of addition in *Memory Assemblages* shows is that losses, like negativity and lack, are effects of addition;²⁵ a memory loss is as much a consequence of additions that reconfigure archives and provide them with novel contents as an enhancement of

²³ Harman, "Ontology of retrieval", p. 81.

²⁴ Harman, "Ontology of retrieval", p. 80.

²⁵ See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, pp. 168-173.

memory. What is triggered by addition is the constitution of a memory assemblage, of this diachronic piece of reality that become a starting point for further entanglements as the insistent nature of addition is in line with the direction of time. This is what follows from the shifting block model of time²⁶ that brings together elements of the growing block model – according to which the future is open while the past is settled – with the claim that there is no retention independent of additions. Pan-mnemism entails that time itself is a consequence of the belonging together of memory and addition: what is stored looks forward to a time where no addends are going to be removed, even if they can become dormant.²⁷

RESPONSE TO DEBORAH GOLDGABER

Deborah Goldgaber's piece focuses on the process of compression which is part of what is retained. Compressing is a preamble to decompression but according to my pan-mnemism, content is not preserved in the process. There is no presence that is immune to the diachronic poles of retention and retrieval. We can say this by pointing out that archiving is already producing an assemblage and assembling is not a recursive, computational function. Further, what is compressed or assembled starts out with a class of memory assemblages and compressing can only mean to somehow have an assemblage that condenses or abbreviates this class. In line with Derrida's remarks that "[t]here is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without an outside",²⁸ Goldgaber stresses that compression minimizes "the differential units (infra-structures or infra-patterns in the data) required to both store and restore the "memory" at a future point"

²⁶ See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, pp. 155-157.

²⁷ Archives can be said to be dormant while they are not mobilized in memory assemblages. We can perhaps say that they are withdrawn, to use a notion that is important for Harman's object-oriented philosophy (see, for instance, Harman, *The Quadruple Object*). If we proceed in these lines, we can then say that an archive is always withdrawn as it can always be brought in an assemblage but that never exhaust its capacity to be retrieved. However, it is clear that these are not capacities possessed by the archive itself (or by a memory assemblage that becomes hostage of the additions to come) because the archive on its own is contentless. Arguably, this is a possible way to be fully withdrawn but it is unclear to me whether this is the only alternative open to withdrawn real objects in Harman's account.

²⁸ Derrida, *Archive Fever*, pp. 10-11.

and that these units “are not stored as such, they require a medium which is anything but a blank surface or pure exteriority”.²⁹ That is to say that the very process of archiving encounters addends that are part of the assemblage that ends up being formed – retention comes with the circumstances that enables storing. An archive has its style, its choices beyond its purported content, and thus its diacritic and there is no way separate out its theme from the place of consignment, the technique of repetition or the required exteriority.³⁰ Kolmogorov complexity is an attempt to deal with the issue of compression attempting to make this required exteriority – and the differential units – uniform by postulating that any archive, indeed any object, can have its complexity measured by the length of a program to generate it in a universal Turing machine.³¹ Given a sequence – the program- its Kolmogorov complexity is the length of its shortest version that could retrieve it in its given length; a random sequence is defined as one that cannot be further compressed. As expected, the function from a sequence (or a text) to its Kolmogorov complexity is not computable. Notice that this result is obtained even if the strategy of encoding is always the same. My pan-mnemism entails the random character of each memory assemblage, and indeed of any archive: to compress it further is to come up with a different assemblage. Addends are entangled with archives, they provide in the conditions for archiving, including the exterior element not as a ‘pure exteriority’, but a specific outside that comes to the picture. Archiving is always situated, to assemble what has been retained is to draw on contingencies but the process is guided by the addends.

Goldgaber then goes on to challenge the role of exteriority in the assemblage

29 Goldgaber, “Decompression, Memory, Exteriority”, p. 88.

30 If we think of the text as an archive, we can think of this ‘certain exteriority’ in terms of blank spaces that embody diacritic. Indeed, diacritical is related to the greater importance of the space between the elements than the elements themselves. In any text, the blank space is required to weave elements together, but they are also an abyss or a cave that can fit or hide anything. Goldgaber then aptly connects the addends of a memory assemblage with the ‘hors texte’, the outside the text, which disappears as the blank spaces make everything contained diachronically in the text (see Goldgaber, “Decompression, Memory, Exteriority”, p. 7). I’ll discuss this below. The danger of a ‘certain exteriority’ in an archive is the one brought about by diacritic: “[D]iacritic”, Derrida writes, “already prevents a theme from being a theme, that is, a nuclear unit of meaning, posed there before the eye, present outside of its signifier and referring only to itself”(Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 250).

31 See, for instance, Li & Vitányi, *An Introduction to Kolmogorov Complexity and Its Applications*

of addends and archives. She suspects that the exteriority appearing in the pan-nemist “account of addition [...] seems to me to sit quite in tension with the sort of “outside” or “exteriority” that we commonly associate with the brute contingency of accidents”.³² It seems to me her suspicion has to do with the format exteriority is integrated through addends into memory assemblages. In the book, as in my response to Harman, I explore similarities between addends and Epicurean *clinamina*.³³ Addends are not just accidents but they are the effects of the exterior which is posterior – memory assemblages make room inside them for what is outside and yet still to come. Like the Other in Levinas, addends are both expected and surprising, they decompose assemblages and are expected by the very process of archiving. Goldgaber writes: “in Bensusan’s account of addition there is an appeal to [...] exteriority – the exteriority of the radically other – that is nonetheless undercut by his account”.³⁴ Exteriority is certainly conscripted in the form of addition, of what will come which is vaguely prefigured by messianicity of any archive; messianicity, an undeconstructible for Derrida, is understood in the book as a feature of assemblages that boils down neither to specific expectations nor to a format for the future.³⁵ Spectral realism breaks with the account of the archive centered in the text and epitomized by the trace in Derrida. Positing the trace, and the arche-trace, one gives a fragment of ontology to the archive, something like a representation of what is retained; the thrust of Malabou’s critique of writing is the specific representation that is ascribed to the trace, a representation with limited plasticity for the trace can be kept or erased but not transformed or shifted.³⁶ Malabou proposes to replace the trace with what she takes to be its condition of possibility, the form, in the sense of formation (*Gestellung*). When we replace traces by forms, we search for a better way to characterize archives so that we leave more space to what is to come – to the readings of a text, to the metamorphoses enabled by plasticity. *Memory Assemblages* claims that there is no need for an ontology of the archive: like addends, focus of messianicity but without a specific structure to it, archives are not to be

32 Goldgaber, “Decompression, Memory, Exteriority”, p. 92.

33 See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, p. 75. See also above response to Harman.

34 Goldgaber, “Decompression, Memory, Exteriority”, p. 92.

35 See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, pp. 61-66 and Derrida, “Marx and Sons”.

36 See Malabou, “The end of writing”.

represented in terms of (memory) traces, in terms of forms or in any other terms. An archive requires no more than a hauntology. As a consequence, archives prefigure no specific addends through their very structure – they are just what is retained from the past, the past being nothing substantive but rather an insisting indexical orientation.

Having made this distinction between archives and traces, it is still not clear to me that this Goldgaber challenge is met. She concludes her text claiming that pan-mnemism “shares this problem with Derrida, a reference to a greater, bigger outside that is also capable of destroying the conditions for the generalized or ubiquitous mnesic activity”.³⁷ Exteriority is indeed captured by the mnesic activity in a way that is incorporated in a diachronic scheme that is common to thinking and being. The ultrametaphysical aim of spectral realism is to replace full presences with a thoroughly diachronic bipolarity that is anathema to the extraction the intelligibility of what there is once and for all. The challenges can appear in this format: can addends reassemble not only the construction portrayed in *Memory Assemblages* but the very idea of memory assemblages replacing each other? This is where exteriority exerts a pressure that extends to thinking in general in a way that pan-mnemism attempts to witness but can do it only in a limited way. Perhaps the effort to thematize what there is can be seen itself as a pitfall because it sidetracks one from the task of witnessing a multiplicity in the way Livingston recommends.³⁸ It could seem that addends recruited by memory assemblages become less than what they are when they run wild and can no more than be witnessed. One way out would be to recoil from the ‘pan’ in ‘pan-mnemism’ and claim that albeit ubiquitous, memory assemblages include nothing that could be figured as a totality and addends can disassemble any appeal to the entanglement of retention and retrieval. However, what would replace, even if we limit ourselves to witnessing, the vocabulary of diachrony and insisting reassembling? What *Memory Assemblages* does in this area, I submit, is to point at the perils, to do with the attractions of the metaphysics of presence, of postulating that reality could be ultimately oblivious to what is intermittent.

³⁷ Goldgaber, “Decompression, Memory, Exteriority”, p. 92.

³⁸ See Livingston, “Undecidable sense and the logics of ineffectivity”.

RESPONSE TO JULIO CABRERA

Julio Cabrera takes issue with several features of *Memory Assemblages* and connects it throughout with the endeavor in *Indexicalism*.³⁹ There are, as I have been saying, many points of contact between the two books and it has dawned on me that even if their coupling is imperfect, the second book relies in decisive points on the first. Cabrera is quite aware of these links even if he explores mostly a somehow metaphilosophical question, that of paradox. I'll try to think through the issue and the insufficiencies of my solutions in both books – not because *Memory Assemblages* can salvage *Indexicalism* with its possible problems, but because pan-mnemonism has its own difficulties with paradox, mostly to do with what I referred to as the Goldgaber challenge above. I'll try to put these difficulties in context while touching lightly on some of the other themes Cabrera brings up. I close my response with some remarks on the complex relations between philosophy and one's political stance.

The concern about paradox leads, as Cabrera elaborates, to the question of how the spectral ultrametaphysics I propose can be challenged and how it makes sense of its discontents. The first thing I think about this is that the project of metaphysics – or, the metaphysics of presence – is not put in question from within it. In the terms Heidegger uses in *Being and Time*, there is no possible internal criticism of the supposed all-encompassing scope of the present-at-hand (*Vorhanden*), that is, nothing present-at-hand questions the postulate that there is nothing but what is one way or another *Vorhanden*. Metaphysical systems can surely be both contested and, to some extent at least, refuted; in doing so, nonetheless, one is not assured to challenge metaphysics as such. It is only when we see a dimension outside the reach of presence – or of other suitable defining assumptions common to most or all of the endeavor – that we can put its very game in question.⁴⁰ *Memory Assemblages* proposes an (ultrametaphysical) alternative

39 See Bensusan, *Indexicalism*.

40 See Heidegger, *Being and Time*. For an instance of the explicit connection between the history of Western Metaphysics and the notion of presence, see Heidegger, "Time and being"; there Heidegger writes: From the dawn of Western-European thinking until today, Being means the same as presencing. Presencing, presence speaks of the present. According to current representations, the present, together with past and future, forms the character of time. Being is determined as presence by time" (Heidegger, "Time and being", p. 2). To talk about something that is *Vorhanden*, is to invoke presence, what could present itself in the present

to the metaphysics of presence – that is, it is based on an external criticism in the sense that it involves a diagnosis concerning metaphysics as such and a way forward, as I wrote about the two steps of an ultrametaphysics above in my response to Livingston. The ultrametaphysics I propose in the book is one that thoroughly replaces full presences by memory assemblages and thinks with – to use a term Cabrera uses in contrast with ‘I say that p’ – a number of other ultrametaphysical propositions.

This friction between internal and external developments is prone to paradoxical situations: what is the status of the external criticism in order for it not to invite the (external) criticism that is being rehearsed? At this juncture one can go at least two ways. First, to promptly endorse paradox by saying that the stance of the criticism is grounded on presence but that the criticism is still valid for it is, so to speak, a metaphysics step to put away all other metaphysical steps. Second, to accept that the criticism has no purchase in the realm of presences but rather is already a gesture towards a non-metaphysical (ultrametaphysical) approach. Both procedures have their own problems; the first is adopted in *Indexicalism* and the second in *Memory Assemblages*. Cabrera seems to favor the second, as the first involves some kind of outright condemnation of any kind of substantivist metaphysics – in the case of *Indexicalism* – while the second paves the way for considering the proposed alternative as applicable to itself. He even recommends that as *Memory Assemblages* are portrayed as a memory assemblage, *Indexicalism* should be seen as itself indexical, instead of being a general, substantive thesis about everything. To some extent, I’m not dissatisfied with expanding what could work for pan-mnemism to indexicalism. However, it is also not clear to me that the second solution is free of troubles. While reading Cabrera’s piece, or perhaps during one of our e-mail exchanges, it dawned on me that to say that other memory assemblages can content (or reassemble, or otherwise exercise) pan-mnemism is a somehow pan-mnemist conjecture itself. This is part of what is at stake in the Goldgaber challenge above. Instead, what is desirable from philosophies that think with me while countering what I recommend, is to actually overcome pan-mnemism by moving farther from

time. Heidegger also makes clear in many places that there is no internal criticism of metaphysics that can lead away from the project as a whole.

metaphysics – but this is not an addend that has a room in the scheme of spectral realism. Still, ultrametaphysics attempts to overcome presence in its mostly cosmopolitical consequences; spectral realism does it by emphasizing diachronic assemblages that arguably could do the job. Whether there are hyperaddends that would not fit into any memory assemblage is, to some extent, irrelevant for the issue of presence – unless that reveals a residue of presence in memory assemblages, which is an open possibility.

The two alternative solutions to the paradox associated with totality can be described as: *i*) giving up consistency to maintain completeness and *ii*) leaving the latter aside to safeguard the former. If we put things this way, the solutions are reminiscent of the paradoxico-critical and the generic orientations of thought as Livingston has cartographed, for example, in his *The Logic of Being*.⁴¹ Each of these solutions, however, have their own peculiarities: indexicalism is not maintaining completeness but to exorcise it and pan-mnemism is not by itself protecting consistency. Further, I see no reason while the stance on paradox in the two books ought to be the same, even if one were comfortable with the solution provided by pan-mnemism. Both projects have a dimension of therapy, they try to shake off the emphasis on substantives while witnessing with the world and to bring diachrony to the picture of thought and being. Indexicalism embraces paradox in the sense that it is self-destructive, suicidal. The paradox could be phrased like this: we seek knowledge of all things, when we reach it, we realize we need to encounter things in order to know them and thus there is no knowledge. The suicidal performance is one that makes indexicalism a ladder to be abandoned after reaching the next floor. The next floor is to have a direct contact with things deictic positions, thus with the past itself. This is where the quest leading to spectral realism starts – as I said my answers to Ostos, this deictic past is all we need for memory assemblages to take off. If indexicalism is sacrificial, pan-mnemism is an invitation to sit down and tell more stories. Both images are spectral ones: stories are somehow indifferent to the distinction between life and death while the suicide reminds us of something that was unacceptable, at least for one case of a living existent. Indexicalism is not thus a condemnation of all forms of tactic, strategic, regional or partial substantivism, it is a warning: there

⁴¹ See Livingston, *The Logic of Being*, pp. 128-136.

is a deictic, situated story to be told under the seemingly solid play of substantives.

Few words about realism. As I wrote in my response to Schirmer dos Santos, pan-mnemism is no anti-realism – and I understand it is far to function as an idealism. Idealism focuses on mental or subjective abilities – related to something that is fully present. Abandoning the metaphysics of presence, the very discussion on realism and idealism loses its focus; it belongs in what Heidegger described as the metaphysics of subjectivity.⁴² (Incidentally, the expression ‘metaphysics of subjectivity’ is also adopted by Quentin Meillassoux in his *After Finitude*,⁴³ but not in his later texts, to describe a certain response to correlationism that makes the the correlation between subject, mind or life on the one hand and the world on the other absolute; although there are connections between the two uses of the expression ‘metaphysics of subjectivity’, idealism is not something that would be predicated to any of those Meillassoux puts in his category.) Pan-mnemism is not the view that our minds or our recollections are in any sense privileged or peculiar, they are part of a broader reality that is composed by memory assemblages. The idea of rescuing realism from this context in recent years is mainly motivated by two *desiderata*: to counter correlationism by some sort of robust (speculative) realism and to explore the idea of a reality devoid of presences – an ultrametaphysical reality. Cabrera calls the sort of realism guided by this second desideratum ‘realism X’. Then he claims that “even without accepting the label of idealists, all “realist X” must accept that the reality of presences simply does not exist, that there is only one reality constituted by us”.⁴⁴ For pan-mnemists, there is a reality that is not constituted by us at all, even if we generate some memory assemblages we do that within a dynamics of other memory assemblages – and their correspondingly insisting addends. This ‘us’ cannot be anything but assemblages and with no special privilege at that. The ultrametaphysical gambit is to look for something that would ensure that there are no presences – reality, which then becomes somewhat weird, is made up of something else for there is no ‘reality of presences’. Cabrera proceeds remarking that “we must accept that those who call “realist X” idealists from the perspective

42 See Heidegger, “Metaphysics as History of Being”, pp. 26-49.

43 See Meillassoux, *After Finitude*.

44 Cabrera, “Who’s afraid of Edgar Allan Poe?”, p. 99.

of realism of presences are not wrong”.⁴⁵ If reality is seen as the realm of presences, I guess it would be correct to call ultrametaphysical realists not realists (about presences). Yet the stance taken by ultrametaphysical realism is to dispute the realm of reality – it is far more non-standard than what people often assume.

To conclude my response, I’ll say something about political (and cosmopolitical) implications. Philosophy is many sided pluridimensional thing rough around the edges. It is a dangerous thing. There are battles that orient thinking as there are engagements that are abandoned or left alone by it. I take the urge towards ultrametaphysics as a cosmopolitical one: to think through the colonization, the artificialization and the commodification of things around us. These three processes are not clearly the same, and surely a critics of one of them could welcome the other two while agreement with these processes also comes in degrees.⁴⁶ In general lines, I seek a way out of these three processes realizing that they are resilient and entangled with issues of life and death. This is a route that takes me to a spectral struggle where some memories are chosen to be retrieved.⁴⁷ I certainly enter such a struggle with the commitments I endeavor to add – thought is not achieved from nowhere. Still, macropolitical positions (such as left and right) and cosmopolitical ones are orthogonal and they orient thinking in separate directions – and yet, the two fields are not unrelated either. While there are injustices committed to living people from everywhere in the macropolitical and the cosmopolitical spectra, pan-mnemism is not equally endorsing the views of all of them. Further, that there could be something like rightwing spectral realists – this could be expected from features of memory assemblages – means nothing with respect to the assemblage I construct and endorse in the book. The

45 Cabrera, “Who’s afraid of Edgar Allan Poe?”; p. 99.

46 I explore this divergence of cosmopolitical issues elsewhere (see Bensusan, “Geist and Ge-Stell” and “Cosmopolitical parties in the post-human age”).

47 A significant endeavor to look beyond decolonization, artificialization and commodification in a single, unified effort has been carried out by Black theory, in particular the thinkers of Blackness like Denise Ferreira da Silva, Fred Moten and Saidyia Hartman (see Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, Moten, *The Universal Machine* and Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*). Looking in particular to the total violence persistently imposed to the captive bodies always wounded from the African slave trade, they invite a look at the cosmopolitical (and spectral) distinction between people and things, a distinction that orients much of the post-enlightenment thinking and practices. By doing that, they offer an account of the three processes above that shed new (Black) light into the interconnectedness they entertain. Focusing on memory assemblages strikes me as a route to move away from the violence of the split between people and things.

book tries to open cosmopolitical spaces for future macropolitics. But the book is itself hostage to addends. This witnesses both the spectrality but also the terminality of a text – the specter arises from the end entrenched in the beginning, an end that cannot be the collapse of all memory even if people stop being born. Cabrera plays terminality against spectrality while I would rather inquire, assuming the entanglement of the two, what takes place after terminality.

RESPONSE TO JOSÉ ANTONIO MAGALHÃES

José Antonio Magalhães also discusses the book in conjunction (or in a memory assemblage) with the ideas around indexicalism of my previous book. They makes little effort to hide their preference for the situated metaphysics of *Indexicalism* over the ultrametaphysical pan-mnemism of *Memory Assemblages* and explores the idea of an imperfect coupling between what is recommended in both books to move on to make clear the path he prefers from indexicalist paradoxico-metaphysics to comparative metaphysics and the to the nomic indexicalism, or nomic perspectivism, he proposes. The preference is portrayed as one which would add something other than spectral realism to the indexicalist assemblage. It seems like the nomic metaphysics Magalhães would recommend is best served by moving away from the concerns to do with the deictic past that orient my pan-mnemism. I'll try to say something in favor of the imperfect coupling – apart from what I said in the responses above, especially to Ostos and Cabrera – and then suggest ways in which pan-mnemism could be possibly relevant for a nomic indexicalism. The comparative metaphysics Magalhães mobilizes in his preferred route favors the idea of a multiplicity of metaphysics following a thorough rejection of the Greek exception.⁴⁸ Situated metaphysics is then rendered in pair with this framework that recommends adding more metaphysics, or another metaphysics, to the picture. The perspective of an ultrametaphysics, as I see it, goes somehow further, in the spirit of “a technique, originating from comedic improvisation, known by the formula “yes, and””⁴⁹ advocated by Magalhães, for it sees European project as belonging to a great extent to a cosmopolitical project

⁴⁸ See Charbonnier, Salmon and Skafish, *Comparative Metaphysics*. The subtitle of the book, “ontology after anthropology” makes explicit the project of being informed by what anthropology has unveiled in terms of the thinking of the colonized, often subjugated peoples.

⁴⁹ Magalhães, “Index and nomos”, p. 125.

that needs to be put into question because it favors colonization, artificialization and commodification. Yes, there are ways of thinking about the world that run parallel to the European traditions – what I prefer to call ‘parametaphysics’ as opposed to ultrametaphysics which assumes the lore of Western metaphysics and tries to overcome it – but they can be mobilized to counter the cosmopolitical project of metaphysics.⁵⁰ In other words, yes, ways of seeing the world can be compared and this can further take into consideration the cosmopolitical consequences they have.

Memory Assemblages is explicitly committed to a spectral ultrametaphysics, it is not exploring a paradoxico-metaphysics that aims to end all metaphysics. In a sense, as I said above, it is as if the project of departing from metaphysics has been already motivated and the indexical nature of what is real can be thus assumed. If indexicalism seems to be chiefly spacial in the sense of depicting a landscape of deictic items, pan-mnemism appears to be concerned with time, as Magalhães points out. What matters for the spectral pan-mnemism I recommend is diachronicity, the bipolarity of time that enables the indexical to accomplish its performance – the world cannot be considered without its built-in *Verweisung*, Heidegger’s term often translated as assignment or indication.⁵¹ The direct reference that deictic items can do make them situated because they indicate what is around them, and this indication is not carried out either by a space contiguity that can be viewed as *Vorhanden* (present-at-hand) or by a duration in time. That the past is deictic entails, in pan-mnemist terms, that memories themselves rely on references indicating what has been retained – there is no access to an archive that can dispense a deictic operation. Even our own remembrances are somehow indexed in a way such that descriptions like ‘when I wrote that book’ or ‘when we met in London’ serve to fix a reference that is mobilized in an assemblage. My fear is that without some coupling with an ultrametaphysics, indexicalism could just be understood as a paradoxico-metaphysics of situated presences. Further, specters are needed to bring in the injustices that have been left behind by practices that are already consolidated – including practices within language that hide ways in which intermittence play a

⁵⁰ I explore a distinction between “alternative metaphysics” and “alternative to metaphysics”, not in the context of parametaphysics, elsewhere; see Bensusan “Pan-perceptualism and pan-mnemism”.

⁵¹ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §16.

role in a world that is described in an indexical manner.

I close my response dealing with Magalhães nomic indexicalism. When we consider land, as a ground for justice as Carl Schmitt suggests, there is space for its mnemonic features – Schmitt insists that the land is capable to reward and to keep demarcations and boundaries.⁵² The land, with its *nomos*, hosts archives of its own that are partly retrieved by law and this provides the nomic with features of a memory assemblage. The land that is mobilized in justice has a past, that is, it retains together with a human population around it what took place the division of land; justice is spectral because it depends on the archives that land records – this is why Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari talk about territorial machines as what records production.⁵³ . When Magalhães describes his nomic indexicalism they write: “the first taking and division of the land [...] can only have an indexical form: first, “this is mine” or “ours”; then “this part is for you, that is for them”, and so on”⁵⁴ to make clear how the deictic performance is relevant for the nomic import of the earth. This indexical component seems to be what is archived in a memory assemblage – that would eventually involve laws – that can make sure that the moment where this taking and division of land is retrieved. That mnemonic dimension of the earth is crucial for the political struggle around land demarcation for indigenous peoples around the world – it is relevant for the issues to do with reallocating human or non-human populations. The notion of territory, that is often shared by different populations like in the Amazonian forest, is entangled with what has been retained in by the many relevant archives. A nomic indexicalism, it seems to me, cannot dispense with these mnemonic dimensions; I would even venture to suggest that there is no justice that is not open to the ubiquity of archives – and hence of memory assemblages.

RESPONSE TO MOYSÉS PINTO NETO

Moysés Pinto Neto aptly makes clear why indexicalism needed to be coupled with something of an ultrametaphysical character, and even indicates how the spectral is fitting. He mentions what he calls two postulates that demanded to be revisited

52 See Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, p. 42.

53 See, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-oedipus*, pp. 145-154.

54 See “Index and *nomos*”, p. 135.

in indexicalism: that of interiority (or as interiority-in-reserve and that of the ultimate. Both indicate how the indexicalist metaphysics of the others is at risk of looking too close to a metaphysics of situated presence, as I wrote in my response to Magalhães. The two postulates Pinto Neto brings up are relevant when it comes to the tension between the two books. Interiority, in the scheme of a deictic realism, could be replaced by memory assemblage – that is, by something that is beholden to addition while having no interior content of its own. This is one of the points where I take pan-mnemism could revise and improve indexicalism with several consequences. One of them is that there is no (interior) point beyond the reach of the acts of reference – the deictic story could be told from the point of view of the addends. The second postulate leads to what I take as a less successful story: in my spectral realism there is no ultimate because it portrays itself as another memory assemblage hostage to addition. One could still argue, as I said in previous responses, like the one to Cabrera, that the assemblages themselves appear as a category of the ultimate for what pan-mnemism projects against it is a memory assemblage. Still, the paradox is, at least explicitly, circumvented – which is, as I said in other responses – not necessarily good news.

Pinto Neto, however, chooses to emphasize what is for him a salient disagreement he has both with *Indexicalism* and *Memory Assemblages*: my choice of transcendence over immanence. To be sure, I appeal to an understanding of the latter that makes it easy for me to dismiss it – that of Antonio Negri who himself recommends immanence.⁵⁵ Negri associates immanence to the absence of outside. Pinto Neto wants to defend immanence while leaving space for exteriority somehow – he reckons something can be outdoors and yet still immanent in the sense of sharing the same plane even without sharing the same plan, to play with the two notions of plan and plane in Deleuze and Guattari.⁵⁶ Immanence is perhaps only the idea that there is a flatness, a non-opacity and therefore an accessibility of everything while transcendence entails discontinuity, inaccessibility or what lies beyond understanding. Although I agree that there is an interplay of both, and Deleuze and Guattari seem to assume their interconnectedness, I cannot dismiss transcendence precisely because there is a

⁵⁵ See *Memory Assemblages*, p. 99.

⁵⁶ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 265-272.

grain of truth to what Negri points out about immanence. Negri could be less than the best *porte-parole* of the immanent, but it is hard not to find a sense of continuity without a break in any appeal to it. Indeed, it seems to me that that the cosmopolitical project of extracting the intelligibility of everything requires that they are placed in immanence, that there is nothing that could break access to anything. Pinto Neto's own appeal to the diagnosis Denise Ferreira da Silva provides of the racialized body indicates that "it has been scrutinized, objectified, transformed into an affectable subject by philosophical and life science discourse" and thus, he concludes, "[i]n other words, this is an immanent subject".⁵⁷ Ferreira da Silva's own project following this diagnosis is not to place Black bodies in a distinct, transcendent sphere but to rather destroy the transcendence of the transparent selves who systematically attempt to master what is affectable. Her diagnosis, however, is precisely that the fungible captive body in the scene of subjugation is placed, by the ontoepistemology of total violence, in an immanent space. Affectability, on the other hand, could be understood as an abstention of control by not accessing what is coming in the sense of trying to replicate it or make it redundant; this is a sense in which transparency can again be opposed by opacity. The transcendence I find in the addends and that I take to be a feature of the intermittent specter, is not the transcendence of the transparent, but the transcendence of the exterior that is thus beyond my totalizing reach. This is what I called transcendence 2.0.⁵⁸ Pinto Neto also claims he would rather go for a picture that is "Not transcendent, because transcendence — and here is my central point — *presupposes duality*".⁵⁹ I would say that it gestures towards a multiplicity that could take the form of the double, of the multiple but it is has chiefly the dimension of abstention, of deciding not to, to sense a pull and prefer to see myself bound. This is the lesson I drive from Levinas' insistence that knowledge is an exercise of freedom that is alien to justice.⁶⁰ It is also what I see in the description Eduardo Viveiros de Castro offers of the Araweté: it is a quest for the other that pulls the *Bide* (people, the Araweté) towards both their enemies

57 Pinto Neto, "Memory Assemblages", p. 163.

58 See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, p. 101.

59 Pinto Neto, "Memory Assemblages", p. 162.

60 See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*.

and the *Mai* (the celestial gods) – they prefer not to carry on being themselves.⁶¹ To move out of the self, of the ‘us’, of the known is to perform the boundary, to act oriented by the limit to the immanent expansion of the same. Surely, I see enough problems with the distinction between immanence and transcendence to motivate the abandonment of the vocabulary altogether. It is not clear, notwithstanding, that there is a room for transcendence once one insists in using the admittedly quicksand-like word.

RESPONSE TO GABRIELA LAFETÁ

Gabriela Lafetá suggests *Memory Assemblages* could be too much of an impersonal book. In a landscape of archives, addends and assemblages, she fears the (first-)personal stance Levinas inherited so fruitfully from Husserl’s phenomenology is dismissed too quickly. Levinas’ asymmetry towards the other is built on the notion that it is from a personal perspective that the other appears as such – as an indexical resisting to be rendered in substantive form; without the I that is wounded by the other, there would be no more than a totality deprived of exteriority. In *Indexicalism*, the speculative movement she deplores is arguably already taking shape: instead of a first-person that would meet the exterior, there is a deictic plotline where the other acts because of its very position with respect to anything situated. Lafetá argues that she misses what could go by the very different names of ‘interiority’, ‘subjectivity’ but mostly ‘*psyche*’. Without that, what we end up having is a discourse that could be applied thoroughly but fails to talk to those that somehow seem to have experience. We can consider the three loaded words through which she wants to evoke a certain sense of self that goes through an encounter with the exterior – that could have the form of addends to a collection of roughly dispersed archives; we can consider these words in turn.

Intériorité. I remember discussing the passages Levinas mobilizes this word in *Totality and Infinity* with Lafetá years ago; it appears as what contrasts with totality and is quite an important notion for him in this book but the word disappears in *Otherwise than Being* – giving rise to few occurrences of ‘interiorization.’⁶² Interiority is associated to dwelling, to fruition but also to interruption and to what is offered

61 See Viveiros de Castro, *Os Deuses Canibais*.

62 See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*.

to the other. In my response to Pinto Neto above, I agreed with him that interiority was a risky notion as it appears in *Indexicalism* and that it was suitably replaced, when pan-mnemism was coupled to it, by memory assemblages which could have no contentful interior. My worry with interiority was that it could be a roundabout return of presences that would have no room in a spectral realism. Further, interiority is also the term Saidyia Hartman uses to describe what makes no sense to look for amid slaves with wounded captive bodies that would determine nothing but respond to the demand of their flesh in the scene of subjection.⁶³ Black thinking, at least since the pioneer work of Hortense Spillers,⁶⁴ has been exploring the idea that the narratives of the captive flesh are not endowed with any interiority, with autonomy and no sense of self – and perhaps no individuality in the sense of self-decision. The invitation taken up in different forms by thinkers such as Jared Sexton, Ferreira da Silva and Fred Moten is to debunk the notion of a sovereign person who obeys no one but her own transparent decisions deflating thus the importance for the project of heteronomy – the project of finding ways to reject the stale politics of Western emancipation – of any reference to single, determined beings.⁶⁵ The possible thrust of this critique is that there is no room for the interior unless one aims to preserve human (or white) exceptionalism or the idea that a single being can decide things on her own assuming there are other beings ready to follow that decision. If the goal is to think through heteronomy, maybe the idea of an interiority is not as needed as it could look like at first sight

If we move to ‘subjectivity’, the danger of a full presence could look more explicit, modern metaphysics of presence has very much concentrated on the subject and its variations.⁶⁶ Subjectivity, nonetheless, can be considered as scattered, as filled with different kinds of personal contents in the form of gestures, moods, attitudes, tonalities, habits, conditions and even traumas. I will explore this fragmentation of subjectivity below as a dissemination of the psychic position – a diaspora, perhaps towards an uproar forming a pandemonium. Subjectivity

63 See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

64 See Spillers, “Mama’s baby, papa’s maybe”.

65 See Sexton, “The social life of social death”; Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*, Moten, *The Universal Machine*. Moten, in a chapter of this book, entitled “There is no racism intended” takes up the notion of individual both in the I and in the Other in Levinas.

66 See, for instance, Heidegger, “Metaphysics as History of Being”, pp. 26-49.

could be a dimension – and arguably it is this dimension Lafetá misses in spectral realism; the point of view which enables commitments, promises, engagements and attachments and would make sense, for instance, of the proximity between people. Further, there is an element of subjective attachment that is retrieved in the dog Hagen of the film *White God* mentioned by her when the tune is heard to conjure an archive that has been perhaps dormant but retained. This leads me to the third word Lafetá uses, one which she insists most, that of *psyche*. “Made of a chain of signifiers given to the foundational work of articulations [...] in which they are entangled”, Lafetá writes, “the *psyche* does not bifurcate exclusively between the unconscious and the intentional act, but it forms and deforms an identity”.⁶⁷ There is a plasticity to *psyche* that she considers with Malabou: its many ingredients come together to produce something that has different forms but which enable under some conditions one to respond for it. A *psyche* is perhaps not an interiority, as a subjectivity could be a diaspora of elements but the kind of thing that matters – and that risk pan-mnemism itself being impersonal and, even worse, leaving no space for the personal – is that the *psyche* qua *psyche* is something that could be wounded, because it could be led astray or be replaced; it is something one can evade from. A collection of archives assembled by addends that are exterior to what is retained both in being and thinking could sound utterly oblivious to *psyche* – even if it runs an infestation of ghosts. What is orphan, incomplete, hostage to the exterior, vulnerable, always insufficient is the retained archive – which could afford to be, as an archive, oblivious to anything subjective but only to what is retained or what is added. Hence the complaint Lafetá makes: there is no person in the storyline of pan-mnemism – the mnemonic cuts across *psyche* and subjectivities.

Spectral realism, I would contend nonetheless, attempts to look at the sub-personal not in a way that would fully explain persons away but rather in order to seek the insistent and recombined forces that move the psychic. To be sure, there is no special room for a subject or for a subjective space that would be the privileged dwelling for the haunting of the specters. Rather, the *psyche* appears as a ghost-house: a house with no interiority, with no ontology other than its hauntology. The slogan version of the pan-mnemist approach to the subjective

67 Lafetá, “Specters animate the corners of the earth”, p. 176.

could be this: the psychic is an archive and it is from the first-person perspective of a memory assemblage that I feel the pull of addends. If it is so, what I feel, through my body which is itself a collection of archives always being reassembled, is the wounds that inevitably come my paths some of which I cannot satisfactorily dismiss. Actually, that feeling of the wound is not what makes the wound what it is; the break of the assemblage is a condition of the pair formed by retention and retrieval, by the entanglement memory entertains with addition. Our mental life makes us uncover the mnemic states that embed us from the constitution to the movements of our bodies. That memory precedes *psyche* is a consequence of an exteriority that hits anything no matter what it hosts; that precedence hits the exceptionalism posited by some conceptions of the psychic but also asks for a different way to think through not only subjectivity but also what we sometimes call ‘our experiences’. Specters are in both sides of the division between retention and retrieval: they witness a fragmentation of the subjective, a fragmentation that often we manage to mend through the added force of an individual who responds for herself which mobilizes a pressure to keep some archives in the assemblages we are forced to redo because of addition. To engage in a vocabulary of specters is not to eliminate or dismiss the personal, the language directed to the a second person, the ‘I’ and ‘you’ that Paul Celan contrasts with a language that is “nicht für dich, nicht für mich” – the language of ‘this’ – in his *Gespräch im Gebirg*.⁶⁸ It is, rather, another way of thinking about ourselves and our commitments, one that dissolves or disseminates our unity in an assemblage of archives of different kinds and different times. I have started to explore the idea of what I call *mnemology*: an analysis of what takes place to an archive from a point of view that removes from phenomenology the assumption of an intentional act – which is replaced by a memory assemblage. This will provide a way to think through the interaction between ‘me’ and ‘you’ in terms that takes diachrony into consideration. Dialogues, and our personal stance in them which is partly constituted by them, are spread in time, they attend to a rhythm that is not that of life alone, it is of the imbricated pace of *lavielamort*,⁶⁹ the pace of the text which beats inside a memory assemblage.

68 Celan, *Entretien dans la montagne*, pp 12-14.

69 Term coined by Derrida (Derrida, *La vie la mort*) to explore the intricacies of the entanglement of life and death.

RESPONSE TO PHILLIP VILLANI

The idea that a memory assemblage has a subjective feel to it that can only be projected through another memory assemblage is advanced by Phillip Villani's piece. He argues that what we could find in common with others that we consider of the same species (or of the same kind, for an appropriate kind of 'us') is that we "have a common family of spectres, sedimented into "cross-classified" layers, and interwoven according to a contingent temporal depth that we call on to come into being in the present".⁷⁰ We, and we can include any cross-classified assemblages that share our diachronic condition, live in a temporal depth including the vestiges of what has sedimented in an accumulation of archives into assemblages and which cannot be dismissed. It is from this diachronicity that we attend to the world; spectral realism tries to pay attention to the conjuring and haunting in which these specters insistingly participate. Villani mobilizes a photograph of his father to elaborate on the issue of what it is like to be a memory assemblage that he is, "[w]here then", he asks, "am "I" in this spectral weft of existential reverberations woven between me and my father?".⁷¹ If there is a first-person perspective of a memory assemblage, it is a view from diachrony where what is archived is mixed with what synchronizes the mnemonic inputs coming from different sources. What is retained in genes can be dormant until a moment where the assemblage acquires a congruence that is itself vulnerable – a memory assemblage is thus hostage to the addends being thus beholden to the future but also to the past, to the dormant archives that addends can awaken.

As an archive, an assemblage also consigns something for the future; assemblages are going to be dormant itself. In my attempt to sketch elements of what I call *mnemology* – see my response to Lafetá above – I distinguish several features of memory assemblages including the capacity to establish a connection with the past and the future. This diaspora in time is part of the spectral condition of an assemblage – the answer of what is it like to be a memory assemblage is about the existential condition of being amid archives of all types and addends coming insistently in diverse forms. The idea of a mnemology involves looking at the condition of an archive like Heidegger attempted to do his analysis of the

70 Villani, "What is like to be a memory assemblage", p. 199.

71 Villani, "What is like to be a memory assemblage", p. 185.

Dasein as special among beings – a memory assemblage is, for example, in thrownness (*Geworfenheit*), abandoned in a diachrony.⁷² Diachrony, however, goes beyond finitude and surely is projects itself beyond the terminal event of death; instead of a *Sein zum Tode*, being for death, we are looking at something like a *Bewahren zum Gespenstischen*, awaiting for spectralization.

Villani also considers a memory assemblage formed in the Turin years of Friedrich Nietzsche. He compares assemblages that appear grounded a built from below – shaped by an added sense of shared composition – with the edge of insanity where Nietzsche navigated; the comparison is between “the lucidity which embodies coherence for a consummate spectral realist such as Nietzsche” and those who witness that assemblage. Villani is driven by Pierre Klossowski’s comments on what was happening to Nietzsche during his stay in Turim just before his collapse.⁷³ Villani remarks that “Klossowski’s Nietzsche emerges as a type of radical aesthetic and psychological experiment in the memory assemblage as form of life”.⁷⁴ His way of seeing things became increasingly shaped by the abysses of memory in such a way that “all things [would] embed themselves in a temporal depth which displaces their apparent simple availability to us in the present” once “historical conditions both proximate and distant, mythological and real, have become intimately available as a personal attainment to be taken up [...]”.⁷⁵ It is as if he could experiment in his body what is it like to be a memory assemblage. His perspicuity, as much as the adjacent elements of his personality, can be perhaps described in terms of a management of archives, but that temporality where there is always specters enables a perspective that is situated with respect to the addends that come.

Memory assemblages, Villani suggests, can be fruitfully compared with assembly theory, an account of the origin of life and of complexity based on the information history of different physical and biological ensembles. Assembly theory has been proposed by Sara Walker and colleagues in the last few years to deal with the relations between physical processes, living organism and

⁷² See Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

⁷³ See Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, pp. 171-210.

⁷⁴ Villani, “What is like to be a memory assemblage”, p. 193.

⁷⁵ Villani, “What is like to be a memory assemblage”, p. 194.

informational complexity.⁷⁶ It describes the universe as a collection of ensembles which are a recursive stack of history, a testimony of layers of past interactions in a way that the past cannot be extirpated. The crucial point in common is that assembly is a measure of increasing complexity, as accretion to what already exists is a central element of forming more complex ensembles while this complexity can be measured in terms of operations that take place in time. The complexity of these operations, measured by how many transformations are needed, is what is captured by the assembly index and could be part of an account of the living in the sense of explaining how biological organisms were brought about in a physical world. Likewise, one can measure the assembly index of technical objects, biological neural networks, brains and forms of intelligence. Performed on what is found, these operations are incremental in the sense that they require a starting point that is already there – it is as if these steps in assembly formed a connection between the physical objects that underlie organisms and the biological bodies that have a past in those physical objects. While pan-mnemism certainly has similarities with assembly theory to do with what is common between assemblages and assembly, they also share the importance of what is added to what is found – both look into how and why accretion matters. Assembly theory is a way thus to provide physics with a way to reach biological processes; or rather, to enable physics to profit from biological developments. It is an integrative theory as pan-mnemism also is and clearly assembly theory can fit into the dynamics of memory assemblages: addition acting over ensembles, common features between physical and other kinds of objects, a common process that can be applied to different kinds of content. What is less clear to me is whether assembly theory is itself a *memory* assemblages approach – what seems to be missing is some central tenets of pan-mnemism to do with the diachronicity itself. Assembly theory is certainly historical, in the sense that things are incrementally changed through operations that add complexity – each new ensemble builds on the previous ones in a way that the past is constitutive of any of them. This history of objects, so to speak, is put into question by spectral realism: memory assemblages make clear that history is always dismantled by the past because it is always put into question by addends. There is no continuity in

⁷⁶ See in particular Walker, *Life as No One Knows It* and Sharma et al. “Assembly theory explains and quantifies selection and evolution”.

the dynamics of memory assemblages. In other words, accretion can work on what is found but since what is found is an archive, it could act on something that is dormant for an indefinite amount of time. The mnemonic element makes it possible for different layers of the past to be somehow arbitrarily combined in an assemblage. After all, the role of addition is that of retrieval and it is an-archic. As a consequence, an addend can act on a remote past and bring it back in a different shape – there is no lines of history that can be associated to a memory assemblage, it is closer to what is intermittent, and farther from what could be describe as a duration. An enduring ensemble with increasing assembly index, call it a duration assembly, is still a full presence oblivious to the diachronic whereabouts of what is mnemonic. To be sure, assembly theory is proposed to deal with different and arguably more specific questions: the origin of life and its relation to physics. It is chiefly a theory within physics. Like what I say in the book about minimal logic,⁷⁷ assembly theory can be a way to deal with some of the issues pan-mnemonism brings up; maybe it is not a pan-mnemonist physics but in some respects it can be seen as approaching it.

RESPONSE TO MATHEUS FERREIRA

Matheus Ferreira also brings in Sara Walker's assembly theory to the discussion. He goes on to suggest that *memory assemblages* are somehow *matter assemblies*, while suggesting that the assembly index could be an invaluable tool for a materialist project of explaining complex systems in physical terms. I think the suggestion is apt, but my reservations lie in the association of memory assemblages and matter assemblies. The reason for that has to do with what I wrote above in my response to Villani: memory assemblages are not about continuity but rather are diachronic combinations of archives from different times. What is important for pan-mnemonism is that memory gathers ingredients that could be dormant and it is this diachronic feature that is pervasively projected. Matter, to be sure, could display memory and Ferreira is right in saying that assembly theory portrays matter (or, rather, material objects) as carrying mnemonic content. Materiality, as understood by assembly theory, is certainly composed of memory assemblages, but the disturbing impact of addition is tamed into an ordered chain of

⁷⁷ See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, pp. 160-165.

transformations that bounds the non-monotonicity of the mnemonic.

Materialism has features to explore both within assembly theory—understood as an account of how different kinds of objects are composed of physical items and their transformations—and within pan-mnemism, which offers an account of how matter is attached to its past. I am nonetheless less confident about a convergence between the two—and indeed among the three, if materialism as a general doctrine is also brought into play. Ferreira's materialism can be coupled with pan-mnemism, but the spectral realism I propose is not committed to the idea that the mnemonic is ultimately material; in this respect, assembly theory remains closer to a materialist project. Pan-mnemism, by contrast, could also be coupled with a dissolution of the very notion of matter, which could be conceived as designating something retained once and for all rather than available for retrieval. There is something that I believe deserves the attention of materialisms of different varieties: the role of addition in a memory assemblage. What addends prompt is a gathering of archives to produce a new composition – which can be understood as a synthesis between ingredients of the past and the addend which provides content to both. This gathering requires diachronic archives to be available for retrieval for addends act on what has been retained in the past. What addition does, thus, is the gathering itself – pan-mnemism entails that there are memory assemblages both in thinking and in geological structures, epigenetic processes or the development of tree trunks. This is to say that pan-mnemism proposes an account of composition and synthesis that relies on time – or, rather, addition – but not on any conceptual activity. Addition, in its turn, is sufficiently close to Epicurean *clinamina*, a notion with enough materialist credentials. It is interesting to think that as assembly theory offers materialists ways to think through transformations that generate complex objects, pan-mnemism propounds strategies to conceive compositions that also generate these complex objects – and simpler ones too. Addition is certainly a useful tool in the materialist box for it portrays the synthetic, compositional activity of thought as a result of a gathering that is provoked by whatever triggers any other memory assemblage. Thought – and the quest for intelligibility – appears thus as a mnemonic event like many others, there is nothing that can make it less material than the growth of an organism or the movement of the planets.

Ferreira is aware of the materialist fertility of the notion of addition when he discusses a triptych formed by exteriority, materiality and productivity. These are salient features of any addend: *i.* they come from outside, they are “exterior objects, xeno-materials that add layers to a landscape which permits immanent recombinations”⁷⁸, *ii.* they are indifferent to thinking processes while producing a diffraction in the archives assembled like a lens through which they are brought to the picture or like a heir that materializes memory in an assemblage tied to the current time and *iii.* they produce in the sense that they assemble and “additive productivity impinges itself upon the (known) world — as a colliding xeno-material, as *material shock* —, it demands the remapping, reintegration and reconsideration”⁷⁹ of what was previously recollected. This productivity of addends is what ensures the assemblage to be tied with what has been exterior, to what was not simply retained anywhere in the gathered archives. It is also this (material) productivity that gives rise to the post-nihilist Marxism proposed in the coda of the book. Detached from the related ideas that any production is oriented by the endeavor to artificialize of the world and that there is no role for what is not human but that of enhancing human social relations (of production), Marxism can revolve around the anastrophic capacity of addends. If production is understood in terms akin to addition, forces of production can be what ushers in social transformations not because it turns parts of the world more controllable but rather because it adds something to what had been retained in previous (social) memory assemblages. In the coda of the book, I draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the schizo to conceive of production as indifferent both to recording and to distribution.⁸⁰ A central idea of post-nihilist Marxism could be expressed thus: the schizo, who is concerned with production for the sake of it, is the addend itself. It is clear that production is one variety of addition, or rather that production is what mimics the process of assembling triggered by addends — this is what I think Ferreira labels ‘the ultrametaeconomic’.⁸¹ However, the addend, which is an-archic — or rather post-archic⁸² — is not oriented towards

78 Ferreira, “MA ⇒ MA’: Memory Assemblages as Matter Assemblies”, p. 207.

79 Ferreira, “MA ⇒ MA’: Memory Assemblages as Matter Assemblies”, p. 212.

80 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

81 Ferreira, “MA ⇒ MA’: Memory Assemblages as Matter Assemblies”, p. 212.

82 Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, p. 31.

anything that is not in the presumptive assemblage being forged. Addition is an interruption, but it is to some extent foreseen by what is archived not only because its possible content is to be unveiled by addends but also because exteriority is always somehow expected, it is what constitutes retention as such.⁸³ Similarly, production is inscribed in social relations; they consign their reproduction to the productive forces envisaging ways in which these could be the forces that would show that they, these social relations, are up for grabs.

RESPONSE TO CASSIANA STEPHAN

The submetaphysics of *Periplaneta americana*, attempting to view things from their eyes, is about a quest for hospitality in hostility. The midnight sun, a term Cassiana Stephan inherits from Clarice Lispector⁸⁴, could entail that no amount of sunlight is too little. *Periplaneta Americana* is a tool for critical thinking: it requires the bare minimum of a place in the sun among the organisms that we can directly observe, especially in the tropical and subtropical environments. Stephan connects this submetaphysics with the ultrametaphysical endeavors; if it is so, we can wonder in what kind of world these animals inhabit – not only to conclude, in Heideggerian terms, that they dwell in a great variety of environments but to suspect, again in Heideggerian terms, that they are candidates for beings-in-the-world and, arguably, we can deem them to be the appropriate *Dasein*. In any case, Stephan contrasts their endurance with the notion of substance: they move where it is possible and make do with what is available. Their bodies, often wounded but rarely captive, are ready to escape, but they do so in the wisdom that they continue to be affectable, vulnerable, living in fungibility. Stephan writes that this “kind of wisdom is ineffective because it does not rest on the principle of accumulation, but on the logic of addition, which does not fear loss but confronts it with a view to what may come to be”.⁸⁵ This view of addition suggests that retention is not oriented towards attachment – and not towards accumulation –

83 This is a Levinassian thesis that is operative in spectral realism: the other, exteriority, is concerned in the way thought and action is constituted; I am originally wounded by the other (see Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*). This is also the thrust of the notion of messianicity in Derrida (see “Marx and sons”) and in *Memory Assemblages*.

84 See Lispector, *The Passion according to G.H.* and also Stephan, “O sol da meia-noite”.

85 Stephan, “Cosmic austerity”, p. 226.

but rather a gesture of confidence; retention involves consigning for a future to come, not for a future resembling the past. It is also not pure expenditure, to retain involves what will come but only in the uncertainty of a lore. The apt phrase Stephan mobilizes to describe this cosmic austerity is drawn from Hartman's remark about "The Comet", a short story by W. E. B. Du Bois: *love without legacy*.⁸⁶ The condition brought up when we begin to be oriented by addition is that of a love for what is not foreseeable, for what will come late, for what is not attainable. What is left for the black survivors of the end of the world in Du Bois' story is no immediate future – affectability. Cosmic austerity is perhaps to learn not to love something in order to make it remain, or to cherish what is set to remain.

What follows from the ancient past of *Periplaneta Americana* is a submetaphysics that is not oriented towards capture, rather it leaves the age Heidegger describes as that of danger precisely as a fugitive.⁸⁷ The cockroaches witness the movements of the species towards the establishment of a controlled, captive surroundings. They watch the process while taking care of their survival in any of these stages. I understand a submetaphysics not to look at the metaphysical endeavor as a road among others in the attempt to find a different one – as a ultrametaphysics arguably does – but rather to look for tiny alleys crossing the main road; it attends to the bypasses, the short cuts, the dirty roads, the small lanes, the passageways and the inroads. Stephan associates its task with that of criticism, it lies in the entrails of the encompassing (cosmopolitical) project of metaphysics and finds cracks in it. The cockroach is the unexpected, the alternative view of the big project – it finds empty spaces like squats where there seems to have nothing but functional places. In this sense, the submetaphysics deals in the *in situ*, in the expression championed by Elizabeth Povinelli:⁸⁸ the attention to the fractures, to the wounds, to the cracks, an eye for the suturing. This can be translated into a remark about the addends: they explore what could be reshaped or restructured in what has been retained, they find ways to reassemble the past. Because

86 See Hartman, "The End of White Supremacy".

87 Heidegger observes that the artificialization of the world, turning it into positionality (*Ge-Stell*) has the effect of placing things in danger, and in danger they flee, they escape. This is the condition of what there is in the age of nihilism, being persecuted by the attempts to capture its intelligibility (See Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, pp. 44-63).

88 See Povinelli, *Geontologies*.

addition is entangled with memory, to retrieve is to attend to the friction between awoken archives and the demands of the situated addends. It seems to me that Stephan is suggesting that addends are submetaphysical elements in the spectral realism I propose. They are like cockroaches in the sense that they spread everywhere among the archives and they force recombination for they mobilize together what was previously set apart.

RESPONSE TO MANOLO PINEDO

Manolo Pinedo stresses both the normative and affective import of memories through the others – they are constitutive in the assemblage that addends craft. “One of the reasons why nothing is given, and a fortiori, nothing is given once and for all,” he writes, “is that to be capable of remembering, we need others”.⁸⁹ Certainly, we need others in the sense that archives are not self-standing and self-sustaining representations that retain without anything exterior – to consign is to be open to what is outside. Pinedo writes that “[a] creature considered in isolation is not a creature that can remember”.⁹⁰ To be sure, any memory assemblage emerges from a collection of past archives – which precedes it in the order of addition – and an addend that is exterior. Addition is, from the pan-mnemist point of view, the ubiquitous exteriority that keeps having the impact required for memory to be triggered. As a consequence, it is reasonable to consider that in isolation no one can remember. Pinedo, nonetheless, seems to be thinking of something more specific when he clusters together remembering, the affective and the normative – these last two connected to others, to what is exterior. He asserts that “[r]emembering has a normative nature, not a representational one” and that “[i]f I can remember something, others should be able to grasp my memory, to make sense of it, perhaps even to share it”.⁹¹ Positing a normativity is required for either thinking, including my exercises of remembering, acquires a content through norms or it deals in the given – private contents, ready-made memories immune to addition. Through normativity, remembering becomes something that can be deemed adequate, or accurate; without it, we would

⁸⁹ Pinedo, “Memory with an erotic addition”, p. 233.

⁹⁰ Pinedo, “Memory with an erotic addition”, p. 233.

⁹¹ Pinedo, “Memory with an erotic addition”, p. 233.

appeal to anything like a faculty of memory to provide us with excuses. Norms appear as the ultimate antidote to the given; if memories are not given – for instance because they require retention to endow content to what has been retained – they have a normative underpinning. We share, as he states, a preoccupation with givenness and it is from this concern that he asks: “[i]f we accept that memory without addition is empty, how could we avoid the temptation to conclude that all memories are on a par, that no memory is more faithful to the world than any other?”⁹² Pinedo himself sketches an answer which he connects to feminist standpoint epistemology: one cannot underestimate, not even in the quest for the factive, the role played all through the process of thinking, and remembering, of perspectives. It is an interesting answer, especially because it offers a way to think through remembering that is not responsive only to accurate representations. The idea is that the object of knowledge is not immune to perspectives, and then the object of remembering is equally shaped by them; this makes remembering a situated endeavor that responds to the circumstances being added as much as to other archives that had been retained. From my pan-mnemist viewpoint, this is a step in the right direction, but there is perhaps a second step missing.

Instead of engaging with the normative nature of memory, pan-mnemism would rather attempt to make explicit the mnemonic nature of normativity. Norms themselves archive action, thoughts, gestures, previous experiences – as do concepts, rules or public languages. Us, and our most shared products, are creatures of memory, built up from memory and addition. Pinedo’s examples illustrate how constitutive memories are for each person and for each community; we are what is done with a gathered portion of the past – a memory assemblage, but also a series of them. Norms require enforcement, but its authority is grounded on the past – no norm can subsist without the diachrony of what is retained to provide it with an orientation and of what is retrieved instilling it with content. The quest I share with Pinedo is for what must be the underpinnings in the world to ensure a view of thought (and of remembering) that abolishes givenness in all formats. A community sharing a public language is an archive, an assemblage shaped by additions; when we remember we are shaped by a

⁹² Pinedo, “Memory with an erotic addition”, p. 239.

concepts and the living and dead people that had maintained it. Yet, we are crossed by other memories, those of our genes, of our bodies, of our environment. My aim with a spectral realist pan-mnemism is to attempt to provide an account of the world where nothing is given (once and for all), nothing is fully present, nothing subsists by itself immune from the added circumstances.

To be sure, thought contents are not given, they respond to norms, but those, in turn, respond to the mnemonic – they are themselves memory assemblages among archives and beholden to addition. Norms are sometimes presented as persistently responding to different requirements, constantly being reinstated – which is what one expects from a series of memory assemblages in the hands of further addition. However, norms are not alone in this diachronic exercise of surfing addends while drawing from different archives – they are not an island in an ocean of givenness, or a taint in a wall painted of full presences. Norms have something in common with the mnemonic character of what is around them; the mnemonic character that makes them all insufficiently in the present. The synthesis between the contribution of our thinking (and our norm-making) and the rest of the world is attained by the insistently upcoming addends – norms and thought content in general are no exception to a pan-mnemist view that makes time active through assemblages. Further, reason, or our reasons, are no exception to the ubiquity of the entanglement of retention and retrieval: our efforts to maintain a community, a common measurement, a ‘we’, is always hostage to a possible scissiparity for a (factual) separation of the community can split the rule-following practice in two. Reasons are prey of an ineffectivity for they are also mnemonic in nature. This leads me back to perspectives. We can now appreciate their importance, it is from a perspective that a memory assemblage is forged, but it is never alone, memories can be reassembled by further addition. Why are some memories better than others? Because assemblages can be compared, even if only within the scope of other assemblages. They cannot be compared with what is fully present, with what is given as a parameter – measurement is itself situated. Moreover, the past has been retained in ways that are still to be retrieved, archives are not obliterated for good, they depend on the additions to come. A diachronic world of memory assemblages is not something that is resolved once and for all; like justice, a pan-mnemist world is insistently in the making.

RESPONSE TO FELIPE POLYDORO

One of the reason perception has been generally more favored over memory as a channel of access to how things are is because it seems direct and, in many constructs, transparent. Images are then often taken to be the product of perception and thus a snapshot of how things are at a given moment. Felipe Polydoro's concerns around images of violence suggest transparency is the ideology of the image – and, in particular, the ideology of the image used in the media. He argues that the power of images, specifically police brutality videos, lie not on their value as evidence or in their capacity to make atrocities visible in real-time but rather on the *spectral effect* evoked by videos which itself mobilize at the same movement the visible and the invisible. This spectral effect is what fills the witnessing capacity of the image with its past. This is the effect brought in by Polydoro to debunk the ideology of the image which appears as a figure of the metaphysics of presence – it is the specter that unsettles the way images are tied to perception. Images then appear less as tools to portray a single moment and more like archives which come with their depth that is brought by what is there in the image – like archives, they admit of several retrieval processes triggered by insisting addition. “Once transmuted into images”, Polydoro writes, “actions, people, and things acquire the capacity to return endlessly, even after death”.⁹³ The images of the murder in Favela Naval display a haunting force made evident by the very promise of revelation they make. He writes that “[t]he promise of total visibility that underlies witness videos within a regime of visual surveillance [...] ends up generating haunting precisely because it frustrates that unattainable promise” and then it is in “what remains obscured, and in the reverberations of prior violences, that the mnemonic and spectral force of these images ultimately resides”.⁹⁴ Images are memory assemblages, retaining much more than what supposedly subsists in itself before the camera – and thus, images carry specters beyond any media engagement for one the image is produced, there is no end to haunting.

Polydoro draws on a distinction made by Avery Gordon⁹⁵ between a focus on

93 Polydoro, “Ghosts against necropolitics”, p. 253.

94 Polydoro, “Ghosts against necropolitics”, p. 249.

95 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*.

trauma and an attention to specters. Unlike trauma, haunting produces the urge to do something. It inhabits multiple temporal planes, seeing future possibilities contained in past events. The image as an archive carries specters in the sense of urges to do something about the captive wounded body assassinated in the Favela Naval episode: the murdered man carries the specter of the racist total violence and thus the corpse brings in many others. It is in the wounded dead body where diachronical violence accumulates that a challenge to the order that authorizes police shooting on Black bodies insists – even when often unheard. By seeing memory as spectral – and not only generating a trauma – I try to stress the orientation that the past offers to the passing time. The insistent addends meet with urges from the past, they are not simply bumping into what has been retained because retention is filled with messianicity. This is why I see archives as distinct from traumas, they provide orientation; they bias the passing of time through addition. There is no fixity in archives, they are consigned to retention without any immunity to added ingredients. When we emphasize that perception requires concepts – the Kantian lesson – or that it requires articulation under a sense of importance – what I take to be the Whiteheadian variation – we are already engaging with diachrony: the present without the past is hollow, while the past without the circumstances of retrieval is blind. The past which orients is there in the image, it is in the Black body chased and killed as a resonance to a regime of total violence that is far from being oblivious to concepts and matrices of importance. The ideology of the image is a corollary to the broader conception of perception as self-standing; as I suggested above in my response to Pinedo, the given is tied to an account of the deliverances of the senses as immediate, transparent and self-contained. However, the given is not fully exorcised if we make no appeal to a diachrony that would enable the past to be mobilized in empirical judgements. To say that an image is an archive is to place it outside the realm of perception – and, as I have argued elsewhere, a fortiori outside the scope of any metaphysics of presence.⁹⁶

The contrast between ghosts and necropolitics evokes the persistence of the demands for justice – death is not the ultimate horizon if retention, tied to the multiple possible instances of retrieval, is laden with debts, promises, legacies and

⁹⁶ See Bensusan, “Pan-perceptualism and pan-mnemism”.

commitments. The orientation the past provides is one that indefinitely postpone full obliteration – memories survive even if they lost all its context. Justice is something that always still can be made; an archive “bears a demand for justice, amplified by the spectral quality of [an] anachronic experience”, writes Polydoro.⁹⁷ Justice is spectral because it requires more than one single moment in time, it can be pending, it can be delayed, it can be postponed and it is systematically incomplete. Derrida makes justice and messianicity undeconstructible.⁹⁸ They are perhaps tied together – justice is inscribed in retention because it lies in what is hostage to addends. In other words, the promise of justice haunts the archive because it is filled with messianicity. It is not about a demand to be satisfied once and for all, or even a demand to be formulated once and for all. Rather, it is about an orientation among a multiplicity of others – an orientation that has the form of an urge which cannot be met but through the insistent impact of addends on any memory assemblage. Messianicity lies in the scope of promises and debts, they point at the same insufficiency that is made explicit by the images of total violence like the one in Favela Naval.

RESPONSE TO PEDRO PINHO

Is *Memory Assemblages* after all inscribed in the economy of the trace? Pedro Pinho argues that it fails to take Malabou’s criticism of writing seriously enough to make it bite not only writing but the very diachronicity implicit in operations of memory. Pinho’s point is that even though I assert to be neutral with respect to the chiasm between Derrida’s graphic model and Malabou’s plastic account that dismisses the grammatological in favor of the epigenetic, I end up pending to the Derridian side.⁹⁹ What I think is behind this alleged neutrality between the two contenders – and it is a friction around what can be called an economy of the trace – is that although I follow Derrida’s steps in pointing out a connection between consignation and iteration – what is retained is filled with blank spaces

⁹⁷ Polydoro, “Ghosts against necropolitics”, p. 259.

⁹⁸ See Derrida, “Marx and sons” and Derrida, *Force of Law*.

⁹⁹ Pan-mnemism “posits the notion of memory assemblage as broader than the graphic model Malabou ascribed to the genetic era—and to Derrida’s grammatology—and the plastic model of the epigenetic era. Rather, being neutral between the two, as we have seen, the notion looks ahead toward inheritance systems that can take different forms” (Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, p. 135).

– and the logic of addition I sketch is a variation of the logic of the supplement, I move away from the notions that revolve around the trace. What follows, it seems to me, is that while the trace can be deconstructed by the form and the plasticity it brings with it, my positing of retention as always entangled with addition in a memory assemblage, make it independent of any account of the ontology of retention. There is no general account of retention, no theory of the archive apart from the remark that it is always an assemblage of other archives and a collection of addends. The importance of addition, for pan-mnemism, is that they are exterior to the archive and come after it, so a diachrony with interruptions is brought to the picture. As I wrote in the response to Ostos above while considering some post-causalist approaches to memory, the sense of direction is crucial to understand any kind of transformation – and the past is a deictic to be understood without any appeal to a description in terms of traces or forms. Pinho's argument is that pan-mnemism ends up endorsing a mockery of Malabou's attention to form and plasticity for it places it within the economy of traces. He writes that placed in this context, "the project of plasticity would appear redundant: to reconcile it with deconstruction, one need only replace "trace" with "form," "remission" with "transformation.""¹⁰⁰ What escapes this free replacement of the trace by the form – and thus my alleged neutrality – is that it is the double operation that brings diachrony – deferral but also messianicity – to the picture is precisely what is chiefly criticized by Malabou.

Pinho maintains that, for Malabou, "transformation as origin is something radically different from origin as postponement or deferral."¹⁰¹ What characterizes the economy of the trace is the appeal to an origin of the process of transformation, an origin that is a point of reference and constrains the process. It is as if a fixed point is safeguarded, even if there is nothing but traces of it. The economy of the trace has some remnants of a commitment to an origin, to an original point, even if this has a spectral form – the origin is there somewhere, preserved as what bounds transformation. In contrast, the economy of plasticity would be one where a transformation is an explosion that both gives and receives form in a way that we cannot, even notionally, separate what gives form and what

¹⁰⁰ Pinho, "Memory as Form and as Trace", p. 281.

¹⁰¹ Pinho, "Memory as Form and as Trace", p. 285.

receives form. While we can say that (written) traces receive form from reading (or retrieving), there is no separate pole, in the Malabou's story, that does less than both receive and give form. The economy of the trace would then entail the diachronic bipolarity where something is in the past constraining what will come and whatever comes always later shaping what was inherited. It is, in a sense, a focus on inheritance: there is a lore and subsequently what is done with it. The contrast between the trace and the form is about what a transformation is capable of doing – it would be insufficient to say that Malabou and Derrida disagree only with respect to their preferred ontology of retention. Pinho understands that the discovery of a “precedence of transformation over the trace [...] attests to a past of this structure insusceptible to inscription, impossible to retrieve through the process of memory formation”.¹⁰² Retrieval is impossible, traces are gone; form appears not as an amendment in the economy of the trace with its ontology of retention, but something that is both exploding the trace and leaving any retention behind. As a consequence, death is the last word as transformation is sovereign: nothing, no vestiges, could be ensured, the prospects of anything happening are bound by the plastic, explosive, capacity held by each character.

If we understand the economy of traces in these terms, and contrast it with plasticity accordingly, I claim that pan-mnemism rejects both. More than an assertion of neutrality, I think it is a double rejection that can be compared with my double dismissal of the need for memory traces and the post-causalist prospect of holding there is no diachrony in memory. The economy of traces is relinquished for reasons close to Malabou's criticism: if there is something fixed in the origin of the process, something that will receive form, there is a remnant of a separation between two poles, one receiving and one giving form – the trace is what is read while the reading gives form to it. In memory assemblages the two poles are structured around addition: retrieval impacts memory assemblages that are already hybrid, there are layers of addition establishing a diachrony. It goes against any ontology of retention because memory assemblages are not made of traces (or forms), it is composed by the assembling exercises championed by addends that can take any form – what makes addition what it is is its exteriority and its posteriority. The economy of a separation of poles between traces and

¹⁰² Pinho, “Memory as Form and as Trace”, p. 285.

whatever comes informing it is rejected together with the idea of traces as an appropriate description of the past – an appropriate account of archives. The economy of plasticity where transformation can take any form encourages the rejection of traces – there cannot be traces without forms underlying them and there cannot be retention as a point of departure. On the other hand, the economy of plasticity is also rejected not only because a deictic diachrony is asserted – which makes retention something quite different from what it is in the graphic paradigm – but also because the precedence of transformation over the trace ensures that there could be no complete obliteration which is not in the hands of what will come. Forms cannot exorcise specters; and this is because what is retained is picked up by the addition forging memory assemblages. Traces, or forms, can emerge in the process of assembling archives and addends – the addend acts on no fixed archive, and no fixed constituency of the archive. There is no final transformation – as there is no original retention. It is in this sense that form and transformation provide an account of what is found, of what is encountered – they offer an ontology of retention. Further, pan-mnemism dismisses the idea that no past and no future conditions the sovereign power of transformation; rather, transformations are understood as being haunted and situated: they come with a past, with an exterior, with a circumstance. In other words, if the economy of traces posits a two layers account that separate giving and receiving form – and traces gives retention some structure once and for all – pan-mnemism rejects it; if the economy of plasticity asserts the sovereignty of transformation over diachronicity, it is equally in tension with my spectral realism. Perhaps Malabou's account of transformation is backed only by the plastic capacity, the transformability of everything; it is so, it is arguably based on some sort of *dynamis* (force, power, disposition) which belongs to whatever could display transformation. Even if form is understood as something different from presence, as Malabou argues, one can again see the diachrony coming back. *Memory Assemblages* can be seen as an effort to think any transformation through by mobilizing poles that are situated with respect to what is taking place, poles that follow from the passing of time in its impurity.

RESPONSE TO OLIVER NORMAN

Oliver Norman claims that *Memory Assemblages* threads through a crucial notion

for Vladimir Jankélévitch without naming it, the notion of the irreversible. It nonetheless gives an account of what cannot be reversed through asymmetric addition and the way it impacts on what is retained. The irreversible in Jankélévitch is a figure of the contingent: what cannot be undone is irremediable, because it follows no principle, it cannot be compressed into something of a lesser complexity, it cannot be instantiated in the reverse order. It is a notion that connects the contingent and the singular and, indeed, I use to think of the notion in connection to accident, to what is out of the blue or what is up for grabs.¹⁰³ This connection explains why Jankélévitch understands iteration and repetition are in friction with the irreversible and this is why he thinks the irreversible points at the temporality of time itself. Spectral realism attempts to take time itself as made of irreversibility, of what insistingly comes later; time is an effect of addition. Jankélévitch comes close to mobilize recurrence within a framework like addition for “the second recurrence”, in the words of Norman, “would always be second, always come after the first”.¹⁰⁴ Coming back is the singular act in iteration – the specter is haunted by the irreversible. Iteration marks a difference, it does so by being composed by addends. The irreversible nature of addition, and thus of time, is ubiquitous and common to thought as much as it is to being. Whatever has any kind of consequence, in space or in the space of forms, of objects or of reasons is vulnerable to addition – which is to say it is open to what is exterior, to what is outside it. To countenance the other as an other, or the exterior as an exterior, is to allow the irreversible to be irreversible – to escape from any kind of purported reversibility attempted by making additions irrelevant.

Norman remarks that what makes the irreversible crucial to time is that there is a time passing even when the arrow of time is reverted for “even if we could travel backwards or forwards in time, we would still be held hostage by the logic of irreversibility or of addition, time would as it were still move forward” and “nothing would be subtracted only added”.¹⁰⁵ I would share this primacy of addition – the primacy of a crowned anarchist – to answer Norman’s second challenge: “[d]oes [*Memory Assemblages*] open the horizon of the problem of

¹⁰³ See Bensusan, *Being Up For Grabs*.

¹⁰⁴ Norman, “The Specter of Irreversibility”, p. 291.

¹⁰⁵ Norman, “The Specter of Irreversibility”, p. 293.

entropy and thermodynamics?¹⁰⁶ The issue was also raised by Joel White in the London Symposium who asked about the energy demands of addition. If all energy is consumed, he would insist, there is no addition, no retrieval, no new memory assemblages, no specters. It is an interesting issue because theories of energy are themselves memory assemblages that are beholden to further addition; but will things acquire a final form where retention is ensured once energy is drawn away? This is where Jankélévitch's claim that we are hostage to the logic of irreversibility even in quite different physical scenarios can be brought to the picture. The end of all energy is itself an addend and the continuation of this state also adds something to the picture – no ending is the ending of irreversibility, or the disappearance of any exteriority and, *a fortiori*, of any addend. Just as retention is not only something that is kept somewhere with the purpose of being useful in the future, addition is not only a new event (or a new thought) coming to the picture. The stagnation of everything, and each instance of the continuation of this condition, are themselves addends. The point of spectral realism is precisely that things are not immune to addition; the end of the world, like the extinction of the many species that anthropic climate change has provoked, cannot be the final word. But the objection is that if the universe is a closed system of energy that can consume itself to full the stability of extinction, there would come the point where nothing else will happen – not even the degeneration of what has reached its final form. The objection assumes the system is itself immune to addition and thus is not open to a future that comes with irreversibility. Spectral realism would resist the idea of a closed system as a way to integrate addends in a retained structure that dispenses retrieval. As a consequence, it plays irreversibility – and the idea that retention and retrieval have no general format – against the idea that a final state can be achieved. Spectral realist pan-mnemism takes memory assemblages not as a figure of the physical economy of energy, but as what contrasts with full presences that are often assumed when accounting, for example, for the stock of energy in the cosmos.

106 Norman, "The Specter of Irreversibility", p. 304.

RESPONSE TO RAINRI BACK

Rainri Back closes his piece asking whether the inherent force of each being should be considered by pan-mnemism. Assuming that once each being possesses its own force, the assemblages they participate cannot be oblivious to the forces they reckon with. What I think is operative in his last paragraphs is the double idea that *i*) a force retains a fixed collection of capacities to perform specific things, it embodies dispositions, potentialities, it is a translation of *dynamis* as Aristotle used in contrast with his attention to *energeia* and *ii*) a force is something that is possessed by a being, something that is at its disposal – the force to burn, the force to extinguish a fire, the force to produce flames – much like Aristotle’s idea of a being enjoying a *eklein*, a possession of a *dynamis*.¹⁰⁷ This double idea is very close to the kernel of the argument Heidegger uses to examine the Aristotelian expansion of the notion of presence (*Anwesenheit*) which was somehow already operative in the Megarians.¹⁰⁸ While the Megarians took any capacity, any force to be only in its exercise, *energeia*, Aristotle found a way to associate it to something that is present in the being itself, an inherent possession. This I believe because Aristotle seems to understand *energeia*, at least in certain cases, as something that requires an explanation that Megarians cannot provide – it is impossible to possess the art of building without having obtained it, he claims.¹⁰⁹ The explanation for the craft of building – or of change or movement – is offered in terms of the possession, and acquisition, of a force. This is to say that the force has to be present in the being in order for the corresponding activity to take place. Without a force internally present in it, the capacity cannot be operative – the explanation that the Megarians were missing comes precisely from postulating that there are presences that would not present themselves. In other words, that there are presences that are not operative – capacities or forces of a being that are not displayed in action (in *energeia*). Pan-mnemism aims at exorcising presence – as an ultrametaphysics, it endeavors to do away with the assumption that presences that are fully constituted determine how everything is. Memory assemblages are an alternative to presence – in that sense, they belong

107 See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, © 1046b29-1047b3.

108 See Heidegger, *Aristoteles, Metaphysik* *Θ 1–5*, pp. 173-182.

109 See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, © 1046b36-7.

in the same logical space, the logical space of ways of facing the world, or the logical space of the dispensations of beings (*Geschicks des Seins*) to use Heidegger's image.¹¹⁰ If pan-mnemism made room for forces in this sense, it will become another variation of the metaphysics of presence; while memory assemblages are brought to the pan-mnemist spectral realist picture to provide the basis of an alternative to metaphysics.

Here is how this image of memory assemblages deactivates the priority of presence when it comes to force, capacities or dispositions. There are here two salient gestures. The first is that it postulates that which is retained has no content independent of the operative pairing that forms the assemblage, that is, with the pairing with addends. The second is that concomitance between what is mobilized and what is executed is undone since the operative pairing requires the past, it requires archives retained in another time. The first gesture dismisses the idea of a possession in Aristotle (a force being possessed, being inherent etc.). The second one rejects the concomitance posited by the Megarians when emphasizing that forces or potentialities exist only when they present themselves in action. The first has that the archive is nothing in itself, it is not something that remains present except from a point where it becomes a past upon which addition acts – it is the activity of assemblage that provides it with content. The knowledge of how to build something can be in one's own memory, but it could be, for example, in a tutorial book or video that is brought to the picture while the building is required. In other words, the archive is not present (*vorhanden*), available, exposed, intelligible independently of what and how ἐνέργεια will bring it to light. The second gesture ensures that what is being executed is not fully there, it cannot be anything without appealing to a diachronic element, to something that is not concomitant but rather lodged in the past while not as a full presence. When building a house, to use Aristotle's example, a person mobilizes their archives about construction in conjunction with others that the circumstance requires (reads books about the soil, has conversations about the climate, etc.). The ἐνέργεια does rely on the past, on the archives that constitute the past, but there is no need for a thing to possess a *dynamis*, for a force to be inherent to the being. Aristotle's possession is dismissed while the Megarians are deemed wrong, as

110 See Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, p. 47.

Aristotle argued, when they take execution as self-contained, mobilizing nothing except what is synchronous. Pan-mnemism inherits the diachrony that Aristotle postulates in his interaction with the Megarians while rejecting the inherence of a force as a presence.

RESPONSE TO FEDERICO NIETO

Federico Nieto focuses on the interplay between syntax and excess that is suggested by *Memory Assemblages* when it conceives of a retention that is excessive with respect to any particular retrieval. Following perhaps too close the path made by Derrida when thinking of writing, I often in the book refer to archives in general as having a syntax – and indeed they need white spaces, margins, exteriority. In any case, this excess in retention can be seen as the raw material for addition to do their assembling: the excess added insistently, in an image described in the book as akin to that of George Bataille¹¹¹, is accumulated in a retained form in previous memory assemblages. This is to say that the excess is somehow stored, not in the form of a(n excess of) content but as what can be mobilized in retrieval – a syntax. Excess comes in addends and is stored in the assemblages. The general economy which is understood by Bataille to be around excess, is operative both in the addends coming and in the addends that have already settled in a memory assemblage. It is the excess stored in the assemblages that make them a ghost-house: they haunt whatever content is extracted from a syntax. What Octavia Butler makes explicit in *Kindred* is that the antebellum Maryland time travel episodes is a specter looming around the signifier of the black skin of Dana: it matters less if they had happened, it matters that they left her crippled.¹¹² The skin color of Dana is read in several ways in her Los Angeles life in 1976, but there is an excess held in it, the excess carries on having effects on her life. Spectral realism is a way to transit between general economy and hauntology: the excess of the addends are turned into specters when memory assemblages are constituted. If there were no excess, there would be no addends, no memory that can be distinguished from substantial presences and, thus, no specters. It is the distinction between what is retrieved in retention, a content,

¹¹¹ See Bataille, *The Accursed Share*.

¹¹² See Butler, *Kindred*.

and a retention as an archive that belongs in more than one memory assemblages is what ensures that reality is haunted – to talk about excess is to gesture towards the specters that escape any particular retrieval. Specters appear thus as a projection towards the future.

This projection is what is at stake also in the similarities between addition and production in the post-nihilist Marxism I recommend in the coda of the book. The spectrality harbored in the archives enable anastrophe as the future coming together. Nieto remarks that “it could be thought then that the recovery of that which is retained through subterranean traces to certain narratives of production is what could allow” a model of “a broad conception of justice [which] would be anastrophic” as something to be completed, or as something “triggers its own construction through a non-linear time series that clashes with [...] lineal progression”.¹¹³ As I pointed out above in my response to Polydoro, justice is entangled with messianicity in the sense that it is what is yet to be recovered that is also at stake in retention. In terms of production, it means production entertains some kind of promise, a promise that somehow haunts the social relations that co-exist with the impulse brought in by the productive forces. It is as if the impact of addition on what is retained could be expressed in a conflicting social organization. Nieto goes further by defining labor itself as an *ateological abjection*, lacking head and tail, and, thus, without a *telos*. It is as if the schizo ingredient in production was a promise which is itself an insurrection not only against the attempts to tame production through a circuitry of property – of distribution and recording – but also against the artificialization of the world which is a result of a certain employment of the forces of production. The commonality between these two cosmopolitical issue is made evident by Ferreira da Silva’s emphasis in the wounded captive body in the scene of subjugation that describes what contrasts with transparent, sovereign people in the dichotomy made explicit by slavery between people and things.¹¹⁴ It is this body in its condition tied to an ateological labor that could bring apart the double cosmopolitical order that is a haunted memory assemblage; apart from the retrieved order, the specters loom because they carry the excess carried by addends.

¹¹³ Nieto, “The spectral ethics of syntax and excess”, p. 327.

¹¹⁴ Ferreira da Silva, *Unpayable Debt*.

RESPONSE TO MICAH TEWERS

Micah Tewers endeavors to apply the framework of *Memory Assemblages* to the current macropolitical and geopolitical state-of-affairs in the United States. He examines how the atmosphere in the country – and in the empire around it – have slid towards an explicit form of despotism. He then tries to find in the American Revolution, and especially in the ideas of Thomas Paine, archives that could help reshaping this trajectory. These ideas can be placed together with some Marxist notions and with claims by Martin Luther King and others. He makes clear that national political projects act as memory assemblages dealing with elements in history and measuring them against current circumstances. Tewers is further inspired to conceive a cosmopolitical analogue of Paine’s ideas concerning agrarian justice. But soon he notices that “Bensusan stops shy of offering a concrete plan”.¹¹⁵ Especially in the coda around spectral Marxism, I rehearse the idea that forces of production act like addends to the social fabric producing anastrophic shifts that could jeopardize the cosmopolitical order centered on labor exploitation and artificialization of things. This clearly stops short of offering a memory assemblage – a project of action – for it limits itself to stress how addends act on archives and, as it is more explicit in my response to Nieto above, how they keep having effects after a memory assemblage is constituted. In particular, I suggest nothing concerning nations, and can do no much more than insisting that nations are memory assemblages which are both situated and up for grabs.

I have been interested in the diaspora – as a figure of dissemination and, in a sense, of rearranging combinations, of reassembling memories. Memory assemblages result from the gap between addends and archives which is the gap between a narrative and its left-overs or between the current and the spectral. Homi Bhabha explores what he calls a *DissemiNation*: a nation that is not a nation and not a race except in the sense of the race of those who are racialized, a collection of scattered people, of exiles and refugees.¹¹⁶ There is a sense in which the colonial enterprise, that of promoting a racialized division of labor ultimately in a global scale, is haunted by this image of the coming together of the different

¹¹⁵ Tewers, “The specter of the American Revolution”; p. 7.

¹¹⁶ Bhabha, “Dissemination”.

rejects to create something new – the solidarity between natives and slaves in many occasions in Chungara¹¹⁷, the gathering of Blacks of different origins to create resistance, the connection between immigrants from different places in European shores or the constitution of the U.S. placing together people from different part of the world (or even, to some extent, the coming together of folks from diverse origins in the first years of the Israeli occupation). To be sure, the emerging project in some of these cases was racial and colonial. But dissemination, as a possible memory assemblage concerning generating nations rather than preserving them, haunts it in various degrees of intensity. This is a political ghost that I think is worth awaking. Amid global tragedies like those of colonization, and the racializing modernity that accompanies it, there are excesses, specters, unfinished stories that keep being brought back by the insistently additional circumstances.

RESPONSE TO WALTER MENON

Walter Menon places my pan-mnemist spectral realist in an environment involving the Stoic incorporeals and Deleuzian related surface logic. He compares indexicals with Stoic incorporeals – like any syncategorematic expression, deixis have a syntactic flesh. In this sense, they deal in the spaces between things, in the diacritic between the poles and thus, as Deleuze points out, in the their surface. They are, in this sense, a matter of skin. “The surface is neither reducible to bodies nor detachable from them”, he writes.¹¹⁸ It is in this sense that dealing with indexicals leads to a shift in the drawing of the connections between logic and ontology (or, as I would rather say, between logic and hauntology). The incorporeals are operated when memory assemblage bridge together a collection of addends having an impact in the past and the archives they mobilize. The collapse of incorporeal, Menon stresses, acquires the form of the present. Interestingly, it is perhaps the clash of memory assemblages and coming addends that compose the present for pan-mnemism. There is a residual privilege of the present constituted by distinction between the dormant and the currently active memory assemblage. It is a privilege of something other

¹¹⁷ For the expression ‘Chungara’, see Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁸ Menon, “Radical exteriority and incorporeal”, p. 357.

than a moment of time – it could be a plurality of these moments as memory assemblages can be said to be contemporaries only in a measurement driven by the impact of addends (many of which can come simultaneously and entwined). But are memory assemblages incorporeal or are they rather closer to material assemblies as Ferreira suggested?¹¹⁹ This could be a question that is hard to answer because it is hard to grasp to what it boils down. Incorporeals are, for the Stoics, part of a material constitution for they are like the syncategoremata of matter; they are about the organizing surface and, as such, they are about what can be measured by the assembly index. I would limit myself to say that the ultrametaphysics of pan-mnemism is an alternative to metaphysics that can be tied together to more than one form of materialism.

The spectrality of indexicals is added by Menon to the indexicality of specters that appears in the book. The latter is about the situated character of addition – and of exteriority – and the localized impact of excess. It is the deictic past that makes diachrony operative and enables an account of memory to relinquish traces. The spectrality of indexicals, for Menon, points at the somehow ghostly character of what can point to anything – perhaps one could think of retention as a character and retrieval as the content of an indexical to use the terms favored by David Kaplan about demonstratives.¹²⁰ Indexicals can function like ghosts, they provide orientation and no self-sufficient content; further, they carry promises, projections, perhaps commitments. Indexicalism portrays the world as always insufficient, always postponing, always referring to what will come to complete it. In this sense, indexicalism is also an account of diachronicity – time is tied to reference, as the observations on *Verweisung* in Heidegger suggest.¹²¹ If to defer is a spectral verb - pan-mnemism holds that it is so – to refer is arguably no less associated to the diachronic. Menon makes explicit that spectral realism was perhaps in embryo in *Indexicalism*:¹²² if to refer is constitutive of a world in which the deictic is absolute, to defer should be a central part of the way indexicals manage to co-exist with each other. The spectrality of indexicals makes

119 See Ferreira, “MA \Rightarrow MA’: Memory Assemblages as Matter Assemblies” and also my response above.

120 See Kaplan, “Demonstratives”. But I would resist this comparison in favor of another, involving the fixation of reference and a posterior description which keeps some of the insights of Kaplan’s analysis but deals with some of its drawbacks (see Bensusan, Simó & Silva, “Even monsters demonstrate”).

121 See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §16.

122 See Bensusan, *Indexicalism*.

indexicalism and pan-mnemism closer together – both are situated, both are about the ineffectivity of what seems to be fully present, and both put diachrony at the center of the play.

Menon wonders whether fiction can be included in the scope of what appears as an addend and thus in a memory assemblage. His question, inspired by Fabián Ludueña's reading of H. P. Lovecraft, is about the scope of a pan-mnemist spectral realism. The question edges on the issue of the borders between what is remembered and what is imagined. The book recommends the idea that memory is crucially bipolar and endorses the Aristotelian idea that what distinguishes memory from imagination is that the former is about the past. As a consequence, there is an indexical sense of the past, that orients archives and make them something to be retrieved, a past that is ultimately independent of any assumptions about memory traces. The distinction between memory and imagination is not of an exclusive disjunction; they intersect, and, further, imagination comes with memory while memory is triggered by imagination. Saul Kripke proposed to approach fictional entities and entities of pretense – once we pretend they are there, we pretend they have a past that can interact with other narratives we know and pretend they can be affected but what affects other entities.¹²³ Further, fictional character elucidate features of the past – they can be seen as addends that enable retrieving of what was before merely retained in the archives. As I write in the book, the work of historians of the obliterated like Hartman indicate that what can be imagined from the archive is a strategy of retrieval.¹²⁴ Fiction reveals what is retained in ways that perhaps could not be done otherwise – it lies in addends and archives together with specters, with excess, with what can impact current memory assemblages. This is not to place imagination at the service of memory, but rather to show that the diachronic structure revealed by memory cannot be oblivious to imagination. Addends, to be sure, come in many varieties and there is no general account of them as there is no general account of archives. Memory assemblages are pervasive but elusive products of these two very different types of things colliding with each other.

hilantra@gmail.com

¹²³ See Kripke, *Reference and Existence*.

¹²⁴ See Bensusan, *Memory Assemblages*, p. 55.

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