

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A MEMORY ASSEMBLAGE?

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ABSTRACT: The following text seeks to outline a somewhat idiosyncratic engagement with Hilan Bensusan's proposal of *spectral realism* as set out in his 2024 book *Memory Assemblages*, employing a heterogeneous set of elements to situate this framework within a particular psychological problematic. Initially taking up Whitehead's distinction between sciences of exclusive and cross classification, we seek to show how the latter can be seen as relevant within Bensusan's perspective, such that assembled entities present a fundamentally "cross-classificatory" character, which counteracts logics that understand entities via exclusive mechanisms. Following this, we draw out a distinction between the size of objects in space and their size in time as it pertains within Imari Walker's Assembly Theory, seeking to understand this research program as a current exemplar of a cross-classificatory science, and more particularly showing how its understanding of this contrast implies a commensurate increase in cross-classificatory relations within a temporal "depth" of an essentially contingent, assembled kind. This allows us to draw out the dual aspects of contingency and diachronicity as vital properties of assembled entities as they appear within Bensusan's outlook. Finally, we develop the foregoing considerations within a specifically psychological problematic as it relates to the aggregation and disaggregation of intentional subjects, taking assembly depth as the condition which operates this transition.

KEYWORDS: Spectral Realism; Assembly theory; Contingency; Diachronicity; History.

daß im Grund jeder Name in der Geschichte ich bin.
Letter to Burkhardt from Nietzsche.

la nature ne fait jamais des sauts/Natura non facit saltus
G. W. Leibniz/C. Linnaeus

INTRODUCTION

The following considerations were motivated by what could be considered a

relatively mundane occurrence, almost a cinematic cliché: the discovery of a black and white photo of my father amidst a stack of other items at the back of a draw. On that occasion, the initial, everyday surprise of its unexpected discovery, soon gave way to surprise of a subtler, uncannier (*unheimlich*) sort on suddenly being reminded of my resemblance to my father; it was indeed an uncanny experience to see that my face was haunted by the face of another. Unbeknownst to someone who might see me in the street, my face is marked by the trace of another's, such that my own, to heed the rhythm of a Derridean turn of phrase, always already belongs to another, one not present, but who carried, once upon a time, a likeness not so different to my own. Always and everywhere, my father comes to meet me in the present, and in this meeting appears in the apparition of my face, which becomes the echo of another's, even as it appears as mine, present in the present. Would my face however, be more than a recollection? Is it an imprint, the vivid, material reconstitution of a form? But if it was imprinted onto something, this raises a question regarding the matter that serves as the substrate for the reproduction of such "superficial traits" (traces). The form which carries the likeness of my father's face is mine, is me (?), but then, we would have to assume from the outset that this is not so unambiguously the case, that is, that my face *belongs* to me. In the blink of an eye, (*im Augenblick*), through a type of ambivalent reversibility, the apparent appearing of this face *now*, becomes troubled, haunted in its supposed transparency as something promptly available for visual appraisal. A face, insofar as it could be understood to be the moniker of this or that *individual*, which allows us to recognize someone and soon after declare, somewhat indexically: "look, there is Phillip!" becomes a type of unwieldy paradox, unwilling to submit itself to any closed, unitary identification. We seem to create the need for a kind of supplementary affirmation of the type n^{+1} whereby I would also have to assert: "look, there too is Phillip's father one step removed!"

What would it mean however, if I were to add that this likeness I'm speaking of, this measure of proximity between me and my father, which is also some measure of distance, extends beyond merely facial or visual similarity, to include certain behaviors as well. First and foremost, a curious dislike of verbal expression; a tendency to, when in doubt, remain silent; an enjoyment of cycling and reading, notably popular books on science. If one were to *see* me seated today,

reading in the *Largo do Campo Grande*, in *Salvador da Bahia*, would that person know that they were also seeing, at a certain distance, a man seated, reading on the train that he caught from Gardenvale station to Melbourne's north on his way to work every weekday for thirty-five years? As such, this similarity is not simply a *visual* condition, but seems to expand outward as a possessive multi-modal web of recapitulated traits, a nebulous halo which condenses itself around this subject, putatively known as Phillip. *Where* then, am "I" in this spectral weft of existential reverberations woven between me and my father? What is mine, proper to me, and what is my father's? In fact, we appear to be dealing with a phenomenon not so distant from what Bensusan (2024) highlights when, on paraphrasing Quine, he will speak of:

‘a pale grey lore, black with what has been archived and white with what is recalled about that. But I have found no substantial reasons for concluding that there are any quite black threads in it, or any white ones.’ What is in retention is entangled with operations of retrieval.¹

In this sense, present entities reveal an archaeological complexity, a layered density which augments itself to the extent that it requires the recapitulation of more and more strata from past moments as the guarantor of its ontological richness. Given this, should we accept the idea that we are dealing with an ontology that only ever trades in "grey" entities? Would "I" be a curious type of spectral hybrid, an ontological chimera as Timothy Morton, in his *The Ecological Thought* (2010) argues, haunted by the contingency of my assembly, and furthermore, would it be possible for me to experience myself as such? That is, to ask myself "what is it like to be a memory assemblage?" and to pose this question as an intimate, "subjective" concern?

ASSEMBLING SOME TOOLS

To begin to unpick some of these issues, we will have recourse to a useful contrast outlined by Alfred North Whitehead in his late work *Adventures of Ideas (AI)* (1933). There, he draws a distinction between what he labels *sciences of exclusive classification*

¹ Bensusan (2024, p.167)

and *sciences of cross classification*. As an example of the former, he nominates Aristotle's classification into genre, species and sub-species, while as an instance of the latter, he identifies the science of projective geometry. In taking up this proposed distinction, beyond its simply representing some technical divergence reflective of local epistemological considerations, we will assume that it constitutes a paradigmatic divergence embodying strongly contrasting manners of producing coherence, with attendant consequences in terms of distinct ontological commitments regarding the entities so understood. In these terms, Whitehead (1967) describes how:

It is well-known that Geometry can be developed without any reference to distance, and without any reference to numerical coordinates for the indication of points. Geometry, developed in this fashion has been termed 'Non-metrical Projective Geometry'. Elsewhere I have termed it, '*the science of cross-classification*'. Aristotle's *science of classification into genera, and species, and sub-species, is the science of mutually exclusive classification*. It develops Plato's suggestion of a science of division.²

As a general concern, we know that for Whitehead Aristotelianism and particularly the type of logic that it promulgates, was one of his main focuses of critique, often cited by him in the context of placing his own philosophy of organism into relief. As such, its being contrasted with projective geometry here is telling. Bertrand Russell, in the dedication to his 1891 book *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*, some decades prior to the publication of *AI* in 1933, states that "to my Whitehead I owe, also, the inestimable assistance of constant criticism and suggestion throughout the course of construction, *especially as regards the philosophical importance of projective geometry*"³. Whitehead's reflections regarding projective geometry therefore, had an extended period of maturation of some 40 years. Additionally, we could understand philosophical importance here in the properly Whiteheadian sense as that which gains relief in some wider environment through its constituting some subjective aim, one pertinent here to the formulation of the philosophy of organism. As we will see, for Whitehead, projective geometry possesses philosophical importance as one example of a

² Whitehead, (1967, p.137-138, emphasis ours)

³ Russell (2023, p.xvii-xviii, emphasis ours)

whole group of such possible sciences, operating in contrast to Aristotelian logic. If sciences of exclusive classification presuppose certain philosophical implications, encountering their native terrain within the general coherence of Aristotelean logic, projective geometry, by contrast, with its origins in aesthetic concerns related to the representation of perspective, embodies a far subtler tool in terms of its capacity to parse entities according to types of mutual relation. Such a geometry expresses how one form is projected, via the passage of light, “into” or “onto” another, allowing for the understanding of forms according to certain homologies that protectively instantiate themselves between surfaces, wherein the form presupposes the projective relation; a “*here*” always functionally implies an “*over there*”. In this sense, we can understand it as a type of assembly device, insofar as it shows how one surface receives a projected form as the expression of a certain invariant relation between entities in some type of environmental space. Given this, such a tool functions as a more effective way to begin to parse the “grey ontology” that we already began to consider in the introduction. Following this lead, Whitehead, will go on to assert that:

Projective Geometry is only one example of ***a science of cross-classification***. Other such sciences have not been developed, partly because no obvious applications have obtruded themselves, and partly because the abstract interest of such sciences have not engaged the interest of any large group of mathematicians. For example, in *Principia Mathematica*, Section 93, ‘On the Inductive Analysis of the Field of a Relation’, is a suggestion for another science of that type. *Indeed, the whole of Vol. I is devoted to the initiation of non-numerical quasi-geometrical sciences, together with a technique for their elaboration.*⁴

As such, we could well imagine the proliferation of a group of such sciences of cross-classification, the initiation of a whole host of “non-numerical quasi-geometrical sciences” overseen by this new organon, as a burgeoning speculative enterprise directed towards the investigation of entities grounded in a fundamentally different way of making sense. Such sciences prioritise the diachronic as opposed to the synchronic through the investigation of the

⁴ Whitehead (1967, p.138, emphasis ours)

temporal depth of fields of relations, and diverge fundamentally from propositional logic and the division of entities according to their belonging to overarching taxa such as genre, species and sub-species. Rather, according to sciences of cross-classification, we wish to argue that it becomes a question of excavating the archaeology of the diverse functional ways in which entities *belong not to taxa but rather to one another*, modes of relation that must be mnemonically sedimented into the constitution of such quasi-geometrical structures. Given this, Whitehead further asserts that:

Aristotelian Logic, apart from the guardianship of mathematics, is the fertile matrix of fallacies. It deals with propositional forms only adapted for the expression of high abstractions usual in current conversation where the *presupposed background is ignored*. But it is evident that even the appeal to mathematics is too narrow, at least if mathematics is taken to mean those branches hitherto developed. *The general science of mathematics is concerned with the investigation of patterns of connectedness, in abstraction from the particular relata and the particular modes of connection. It is only in some special branches of mathematics that notions of quantity and number are dominant themes. The real point is that the essential connectedness of things can never be safely omitted. This is the doctrine of the thoroughgoing relativity which infects the universe and which makes the totality of things as it were a Receptacle uniting all that happens.*⁵

This passage can be read in light of the statement with which Whitehead closes *Modes of Thought* (1938) where he argues that “philosophy is similar to poetry, and the two seek to express that good sense that we call civilization. In each case there is *reference to form beyond the direct meaning of words*. Poetry allies itself with meter, *philosophy with mathematical pattern*”⁶. For Whitehead mathematical pattern acts as the adjacent subtext for the elaboration of philosophy insofar as it directs itself towards a doctrine of thoroughgoing relativity that guards against the ignorance of the presupposed background. We can argue that the stakes of such ignorance will be crucial in our consideration of memory assemblages, wherein entities imply relatively more proximate and distant mnemonic relations as the background or depth necessary to their aggregation. Such depth becomes the archive historically compiled from contingent, heterogeneous layers that

5 Whitehead (1967, p. 153-154)

6 Whitehead (1968, p.174)

sediment themselves in apparently present entities which in fact are distributed throughout all the historically assembled byways that they require to nurture their coming into presence. We should note however, that such archiving has a finally *anarchival* “ground” insofar as contingency rather than essence determines the fundamental character of the relationship between the archived instances. The vigour of the memory assemblage enterprise could be taken as vitally dependent on our sensitivity towards these presupposed backgrounds. In a certain sense, our problem here becomes that of the conventional “propositional forms adapted for the expression of high abstractions” as a type of mould that shapes thought insofar as we employ them as our means of expression, and tacitly adopt them as indicative of doubtful ontological commitments. If we take the exclusive framework and its adjacent means of expression as our manner of getting at grey entities or entities that assemble themselves via complex sedimentary processes of mnemonic accretion, we cannot but arrive at unsatisfactory outcomes, producing the appearance of their being unwieldy or ungraspable. Rather, we seek some means of parsing such entities that takes into account their manner of becoming distributed amid a set of historically sedimented relations that serve as the environment for their condensation, instantiating a complex object with multiple entry and exit points, as a kind of ontological labyrinth. We assume that all entities are at some level constitutively heterogeneous to the extent that they necessarily reflect contingent historical trajectories or lineages, which trace out a temporal maze as necessary to their composition.

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIG INTO DEEP SPECTRAL TIME

Further extending our employment of the distinction between exclusive and cross classificatory sciences, a possible candidate for a current example of one such *science of cross classification*, which makes a crucial feature of contingency, can be found in Sara Imari Walker’s book *Life as No One Knows It* (2024). There, she outlines an ongoing research program in origins of life research which she names assembly theory. In sketching out this proposal, she draws a distinction between the size of objects in space and their size in time. While the former appears to provide us with a description of relatively discrete, bounded entities whose

position can be more or less clearly delineated in the present, the latter depends on an understanding of objects wherein it becomes essential to think through the contingent trajectories of their assembly. As such, objects become folded up histories, mnemonically sedimented into some apparently restricted boundary. Given this, Walker asserts that for “assembly theory, the past is rolled up into the present, and is instantiated in the current moment in the assembly space of objects that exist now. Stated slightly differently, assembly theory describes every object you interact with as a recursive stack of its history”⁷. According to what we have already considered, we could argue that this stacked history implies a certain number of remembered cross classifications with past entities that a given entity must “contain” to mediate its assembly in the present; as such, we proceed by gradually and patiently stacking one thing atop another, that is, *natura non facit saltus*. For assembly theory objects are “abstractions” from sets of variably large lineages that stream through time, such that “objects with larger assembly spaces are deeper in time”⁸. Assembly theory in this manner, disturbs our intuitive sense of what we take the size of an object to be, such that the distinction between diachronic and synchronic descriptions becomes symptomatic of a radical shift in terms of ontological commitments, whereby once we adopt the diachronic point of view, it would be necessary for our whole expressive and epistemological outlook to undergo an equally far-reaching shift. This could be the difference we already noted in the prior section between “propositional forms only adapted for the expression of high abstractions” dealing with bounded entities discretely present in the present and modes of expression which seek to parse the relative temporal heterogeneity of complex assembled entities dependent on mnemonic accretion. Regarding mnemonic assemblies, Walker will assert that:

The key hypothesis of assembly theory is that the observation of complex objects implies that the ‘information’ about the steps of their formation must exist in other objects—that is, it implies a physically instantiated memory-or, if you like, a set of constraints for their formation, which can happen only via evolution or learning.⁹

7 Walker (2024, p.98)

8 Walker (2024, p.158)

9 Walker (2024, p.90)

From this perspective, saying that an object is simply *here* or *over-there* becomes a designation with a strictly relative and localized sense. Here, an evolving reality learns through this evolutionary process and any object signifies the return of a whole host of learnt objects, or in other words, is possible in the present because it recapitulates some historical stack of memories which it itself is distributed throughout. We begin to have the sense that the world in its construction is indeed eternally returning, or bringing forward memories of past events as the elements that it uses to build-up its futures. The object as the folded-up synchronization of the contingent diachronic history necessary to its assembly, distributes itself throughout a type of historical maze with multiple entry and exit points. Grey entities or complex memory assemblages, understanding that we are only ever dealing with such grey or complex objects, are insoluble within the medium of “propositional forms [...] adapted to the expression of high abstractions usual in current conversation”. As a mediation of the apparent synchronicity of a given object, assembly theory will propose the idea of an assembly index, which would be:

how we formalize how hard it is for the universe to build something. We calculate it by breaking an object apart: it is defined by the smallest number of physically possible steps necessary to produce an object. For a given object, the *assembly space* is defined as the pathway by which that object can be built from elementary building blocks, using only recursive operations combining what has already been built in the past.¹⁰

If we return to our prior distinction between sciences of exclusive and cross classification, in an assembly space we find objects always involved in diverse types of cross-classificatory constitution reflective of the degree of heterogeneity of their assemblage. To the extent that we produce increasingly more complex assemblages, increasingly higher assembly indexes arise, corresponding to entities which require ever greater coincident configurations of mnemonic mechanisms to allow them to pass into existence. The assembly index of any given entity becomes a way of pointing at it in the environment of some arbitrary number of

10 Walker (2024, p.95)

intersecting mnemonic lineages or genealogies, whose overall conjunction we can call the assembly space, as the general background serving as an extensive continuum that situates their mutual co-instantiation. As a corollary to this, Walker also argues that “objects are more likely to exist together if they share overlapping histories in the objects that came before them (e.g., if they have a shared assembly space)”¹¹. In a sense, reality likes to build things in a type of geometrical manifold that expresses cascading degrees of freedom insofar as we increase the assembly index of the components that make it up. It shows itself capable of additional, “supplementary” extensions - addends - through the “positing” of novel, adjacent possibles, which are themselves contingent on the state of the system’s complexity at any given point in its evolution. In this regard, Walker observes that “the realizable future is larger now than it was in the past, and the future increases in size as assembly increases”¹². Some type or types of mnemonic mechanism are necessary to turn the adjacent possibles that pass into novel existence within the manifold into durable features that make-up its exponentially expanding structure. In this sense, and to take one example, if there are complex things like human brains, that display some elevated capacity to produce memories, or that have an increased mnemonic density with higher degrees of freedom, this is simply a reflection of the fact that reality in general, long before it produces such complex objects, has for some time already been embarked on a project of trying to remember itself across all levels of its composition. Daniel Dennett pithily observed that “essentialism is a bad idea; we’ve known that ever since Darwin...”¹³; and consequent to this, he also spoke of what he called “the Darwinian lesson, that is, that anything interesting has gradual edges”¹⁴. In the present context, the gradual edges of any given entity that we are speaking of trace its relative boundary throughout a set of contingently aligned phenomena, becoming the line of the trajectories of the historical assembly necessary to its existence, in opposition to some preexisting essence which could dictate the necessity of its coming into existence. Such edges indicate the extent to which we are obliged to discover how deep such trajectories

¹¹ Walker (2024, p.158)

¹² Walker (2024, p.158)

¹³ Dennett (2024, 1:26:16)

¹⁴ Dennett (2024, 1:23:07)

are embedded into the general history of the *world's* evolution, or, to what degree it extends far beyond its apparent position in some simple here-and-now to involve a complex contingent history crucial to its synchronic condensation.

BETWEEN LUCIDITY AND EUPHORIA IN SPECTRAL (AN)ARCHAEOLOGY

At this point, we will attempt a sort of synthesis of the foregoing elements, via a seemingly tangential and idiosyncratic referent as a point of convergence, that is, the figure of Friedrich Nietzsche in Pierre Klossowski's work *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle* (1960); more specifically, we will turn to its final chapter *The Euphoria of Turin*. We should confess that we cannot provide any particularly convincing justification for the use of this reference at this point, other than its being an insistent, obsessive memory carried in the author's brain ever since they came into contact with it, now some number of years ago. This fascination owes itself in part to Klossowski's text constituting a type of *sui generis* investigation of Nietzsche's thought, employing a form of reading which fits comfortably neither within philosophy proper nor institutionalized psychoanalysis or psychology. In the development of his analysis, Klossowski has recourse as much to Nietzsche's published output as to his private correspondence and biographical information, producing a text bordering on a genre which maybe could be described as philosophical existential psychology. In the book's final chapter, Klossowski's Nietzsche, in the period just prior to his final collapse, oscillates between extreme states of, on one hand, exhaustive genealogical lucidity and on the other, boundless, performative delirium, wherein the genealogical practice itself acts as the linchpin precipitating this oscillatory motion. In asking as we do here: "what is it like to be a memory assemblage?", Klossowski's Nietzsche emerges as a type of radical aesthetic and psychological experiment in the memory assemblage as form of life. What we will seek to argue more particularly, is that in Turin, the world for Nietzsche has become one viewed fundamentally through the depth of memory assemblages such that Nietzsche's present is overtaken by the spectres of these assemblages. Within Nietzsche's doctrine of *amor fati* everything returns, or, the world is eternally returning through the memories necessary to the formation of its future, but it returns at multiple levels simultaneously and via the heterogeneous materials that it is constantly employing to put itself together, while

Nietzsche in turn, has become obliged, according to the adoption of his own doctrine, to affirm everything that has returned. Faces are seen in faces; forms are reflected into forms and all things embed themselves in a temporal depth which displaces their apparent simple availability to us in the present. The scrupulous attention to genealogical lineages that the professor of philology at the University of Basel cultivated, or the consequent tendency to read sociological and anthropological phenomena through a genealogical lens in his philosophy, has led Nietzsche to a point wherein historical conditions both proximate and distant, mythological and real, have become intimately available as a personal attainment to be taken up and histrionically projected “at will”, according to the vicissitudes of an affective life which filters itself through these materials, making them a type of transitive costume in a theatre of self-creation as the actor carrying out the transvaluation of all values. As such, however, Nietzsche has ceased to posit himself through the medium of “propositional forms only adapted for the expression of high abstractions usual in current conversation”; to be able to enter into “current conversation”, it would be necessary for him to assume the relevance of such “propositional forms”, but for him, the outcome of his viewing the world via the depth of the assembly space of entities, is that such propositional forms are precisely what have ceased to have any meaning for him. It will be Nietzsche’s histrionic performativity that aims to ameliorate this lacuna, seeking to bridge a gap which has opened up between him and the present due to its being flooded by the spectres that reality indeed recruits in its efforts to build any present thing which can subsequently serve as the object of some situated pragmatic concern. This has led Nietzsche as such, to become an actor rather than an agent properly speaking, whereby his discourse dramatizes a free-wheeling histrionic re-assembly of history, performed on the stage of the increasingly disaggregated Nietzschean ego. As a depiction of what the world had become for Nietzsche according to Klossowski’s reading, we will cite the following passage:

The euphoria of Turin led Nietzsche to maintain, in a kind of *interpretive* availability, the residues of everything that constituted the past in the context of his present experience. What everyday life normally holds at a distance, so as to receive only the bare fact of the *day after day* – this is what suddenly irrupted in Nietzsche: the horizon of the past crept closer until it merged with the everyday, until they both occupied the same level. In turn, everyday things abruptly receded into the distance: *yesterday* became today the day before yesterday spilled over into

tomorrow. The landscape of Turin, the monumental squares, the promenades along the Po River, were bathed in a kind of Claude Lorraine luminosity (Dostoevsky's *golden age*), a diaphanousness that removed the weight of things and made them recede into an infinite distance. The stream of light here became a stream of laughter – *the laughter from which truth emerges*, the laughter in which all identities explode, including Nietzsche's. What also exploded was the meaning that things can have or lose for other things, not in terms of a limited linkage or a narrow context, but in terms of *variations of light*.¹⁵

Here, we seem to have re-encountered the light from the space of projective geometry with which we began. However, whereas there it indicated some relatively limited relation which pertains between two forms according to some given perspective, here, it refers to the perspective of Nietzsche's disaggregated ego as it experiences the world as a comprehensively, contingently assembled composition. This light washes over Turin's landscape, streaming across its monumental squares and promenades, and is transubstantiated into a laughter which echoes throughout reality. Here, the laughter incarnates the force that leads all identities to explode because it expresses the "joke" that no identity is found to guarantee itself within itself, but only persists through recapitulating the *n* memories which make its existence in the present possible. Despite the narcissism of the ego, it would have to accept the condition according to which it in fact depends on spectres of all types to pull itself together. The light of projective geometry which indicates some specific relation of dependence, here is transubstantiated into a laughter which expresses an apprehension of the generality of this condition of the contingency of the world as a ubiquitously assembled thing. The relatively bounded entities which we deal with in "everyday life" seem to dissolve into the historical depth of the assembly of spectres that constitute their background and nourishment; Nietzsche has become consummately incapable of ignorance regarding this depth. It is because *natura non facit saltus* that we cannot really separate "everyday life" from this historical depth nor position a non-composed point within the extension of this depth; nature builds itself by returning, by recursively putting one foot in front of the other. For Klossowski, Nietzsche in Turin, experienced the impossibility of this

15 Klossowski (2008, p.193)

separation as an existential destiny, such that these spectres returned to implacably demand the recognition of their rights due to their arduous efforts in the world's creation, as much as we might try to exorcize them from the limited horizon of our everyday substantial concerns. "The past creeps closer until it merges with the everyday"; such that the everyday as the situation of the apparent weightiness of limited pragmatic concerns seems to dissolve into the "infinite distance" of the "weightlessness" of the army of spectres that indeed had to be rallied in aid of the world's creation. Klossowski in his reading of Nietzsche's last fragmentary communication, an annotation with no apparent addressee, a message in a bottle thrown into the sea of existence, will describe how:

In the course of this final message, Nietzsche was dispersed and reassembled at different levels, and at different intervals of time. Whereas the greatest suffering was evoked one last time in order for Nietzsche to sign his own name, the greatest delight was made manifest at the level of impulsive fluctuations: namely, the freedom to designate themselves, at last, according to their own interpretation. Nietzsche's obsessive thought had always been that events, actions, apparent decisions, and indeed the entire world have a completely different aspect from those they have taken on, from the beginning of time, in the sphere of language. Now he saw the world beyond language: was it the sphere of absolute muteness, or on the contrary the sphere of absolute language? The agent no longer led anything back to itself, but led itself into all things, which all designated themselves with the same swiftness as so many 'in-themselves'...¹⁶

With what speed then, are we capable of summoning and dispelling spectres, and by what rights can we curtail their claims once they return to demand their dues? Nietzsche who had banished the division between the pragmatic everyday context of the present and the contingent historical depth of its assembly, at the price, according to Klossowski, of the dissolution of his own ego, could do so freely. He no longer had to observe the censure of a reality principle that ordered itself according to the presence of intentional moral agents who fortified themselves against the agency of spectres as the condition of their formation. In Nietzsche, a superfluity of background, of history, of contingency was allowed to

16 Klossowski (2008, p.192)

flourish, nourishing the growth of the incredible floridas that proliferated and covered the Nietzschean ego, at the same time that the latter, in a consciousness that was once tied to it, hosted the assembly of an array of spectres. For Klossowski, the possibility of the convocation of this spiritual conclave depends finally on his no longer being able to position himself simply in the “everyday” as the agent of a limited set of actions which would be the effective pragmatic expression of the centripetal force of his own ego, of that identity known as *Nietzsche*. It also however, overwhelms the types of coherence adequate to a gregarious language that satisfies the censure of a reality principle that watches over “current conversation”, and which requires addressors and addressees to suppose the stability of their egos as the recipients and sources of these messages. Nietzsche becomes able to treat these modes of communication only histrionically, turning them into theatrical *gestures*. Here, the remains of the Nietzschean ego buoy themselves up momentarily on the wreckage of such gestures, but what comes to predominate finally is a consciousness which could no longer properly be said to be Nietzschean as such, insofar as the proper here supposes a coherence which scans memories according to the force of an egoic centre of which they would be properties.

To return to our apparently more banal, but albeit uncanny experience of discovering the resemblance of one’s own face to one’s father’s, and Klossowski’s vastly more disquieting depiction of the catastrophic collapse of the Nietzschean ego in *The Euphoria of Turin*, how could we understand the relation between these two experiences within the aegis of the memory assembly framework? Certainly, both processes seem to rely on summoning spectres, seem to attest to the prescience of spectral realism, one via a relatively subtle insinuation, the other as the arrival of an existentially destabilizing throng of spectres. Perhaps however, we could take the figure of the mask, so central to Nietzsche, as a point of contact which would bring these two examples into contact. Klossowski describes how:

Nietzsche developed the phantasm of the mask from this same motif (of unconscious dissimulation and the conscious simulacrum of the authentic). The mask is not only a metaphor of universal importance, but something to which Nietzsche had recourse in his own behaviour towards his contemporaries. *The mask hides the absence of a determinate physiognomy*, it parallels his relationship with the

unforeseeable and unfathomable Chaos.¹⁷

For an identity, for a determinate physiognomy, that is, one which would be proper, or which would find itself in place, in the *right* place, the deluge of memories which accompany it, which indeed haunt it in its formation, cannot but be seen as the unforeseeable, as a chaos which disturbs the linear order issuing from its intentional itinerary. The unsettling realization that maybe there are no determinate physiognomies, or the unexpected apprehension that physiognomies do not emerge from essences but only from contingent, heterogeneous mixtures, an apprehension towards which we are driven by the uncanny insinuation occasioned by the experience with which we opened this text, comes to predominate. At the moment when I expect to see myself, I find my proper physiognomy disturbed by the trace of another who I didn't expect to see there; the narcissism of the ego which might have taken itself as some foundational instance, discovers that it is obliged to share its enclosure with an accumulation of ghosts. For Lacan the mirror phase would be a foundational moment of integration of the agent, a process of introjection whereby the subject condenses itself around some consummated image which allows self-recognition to take place. Is there however, an experience of one's image which, rather than inducing an encounter with some putative identity, seems to become the occasion for a disturbance of its self-evidence? What does it mean therefore, for the face to see itself, but rather than seeing simply itself, discover the trace of another, encounter the spectre of another as a type of mask interpolating itself like an unforeseen guest. The act of seeing, which should serve as a gesture directed towards recognition, becomes the experience of an uncanny echo wherein a type of memory is able to touch the present within sight itself, producing "a pale grey lore, black with the background of what has been archived from the past and white with the transparency of what is recalled about that in the present." We would have an experience proximate to that of the transcendence of the face of the Other in the formation of Levinasian ethics, but whereas there it is precipitated by the experience of another's face, here we deal rather with the experience of the other's co-presence within the appearing of my own face. What

17 Klossowski (2008, p.171)

we in fact realize, is that we were only ever confusing the experience of recognising a visual image with the existence of an identity in an ontological sense. Rather, we are amazed to find that the world indeed stiches itself together, assembles itself, by eternally returning through sedimentations of memory, it goes towards itself to meet itself, but can never find itself absolutely in this patchwork of itself that it is. It is never simply in place, or, in another sense, as Whitehead would argue, there is no simple position to act as the docile site of unambiguous indexical acts; the frontier between inside and outside, insofar as these conditions apply to fundamentally assembled entities, never holds finally but rather does so only to some relative degree. The world goes on, repeating acts of assembly, an obsessive bricoleur ceaselessly trying to (re)construct itself, taking up what is closest to hand – *natura non facit saltus* – in these attempts at self-construction. However, in so doing, to the extent that its efforts never achieve absolute similitude, it manages only to further enrich itself, multiplying itself through an openness tantamount to a type of constitutive exaptation.

CONCLUSION

All of this is to say that, if we belong to one another, we do so not because we are atomic exemplars all crowded into some taxonomic boat christened “*homo sapiens*”, each member assigned their correct seat according to a proper name adequate to a process of exclusive identification. Rather, it is because all of us 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. What *matters* in being are our spectral relatives, not our determinate, exclusive positions, or, in other words, in pointing at some position we are really invoking a spectral density which only *a posteriori*, would allow us to *imagine* the apparent simplicity of that point. In this sense, Nietzsche’s assertion that “*daß im Grund jeder Name in der Geschichte ich bin*”, far from being a hyperbolic assertion indicative of unrestrained psychopathology, is rather, simply, a relatively parsimonious conclusion to be drawn from noting the throng of common spectral ancestors which undergird the respective presences of those to whom I draw near in my historical depth; I am never alone because I carry within me an outside which spectrally saturates me. In this regard, as a member belonging to the overall society of *this* reality, with any given member, I must have *at least one*

spectre in common; with most, I have some number; and with still others I have a vast assembly. As my proximity to a given member grows, so too does the number of our common spectres, intensifying the cross-classificatory web which sets me in motion in relation to another. As we have already seen, “objects are more likely to exist together if they share overlapping histories in the objects that came before them (e.g., if they have a shared assembly space)”. The problem is that here, the lucidity which embodies coherence for a consummate spectral realist such as Nietzsche, becomes delirium for an identity which takes itself to be some sort of foundational instance. The question becomes one of how we understand the relationship between naming and identity; identity, insofar as we could view it as a coherent concept, and naming, to the extent that we understand it to be an effective practice, circle around a paradoxical “transitive synchronization” of a spectral multiplicity. In spectral realism, things cannot be made out of proper stuff, the *right* stuff, but rather, only from the *unheimlich*, we are made out of uncanny stuff; our roots spread outwards, feeling their way within the depth of an assembly space and drawing in nutrients from n spectres so that we might extend our branches upward into the light of the present. It would be via the displacement instigated in the soul by the apprehension of this condition that we could perhaps begin to respond to the question: “what is it like to be a memory assemblage?”

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