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SPELLS OF OUR INHABITING:

TRANSITIONING FROM THE SPECTRE OF GNOSTIC ESTRANGEMENT
TO A PHILOSOPHY OF ENTANGLED OVERFLOWING

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PhD in Philosophy
The University of Edinburgh

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SIGNED DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis explores the cardinal importance of cosmological and theological narratives in our engagement with the contemporary ecological transition. Drawing upon the analyses of political philosophers Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin, I argue that the category of Gnosticism provides a fruitful angle from which to approach the present environmental issue as well as the challenge of an ecological inhabiting of the earth. Originally referring to a variety of religious systems which bloomed in early Christianity, the concept of Gnosticism gravitates around the cardinal theme of a cultural estrangement from the world. While Hans Jonas' study of Gnosticism elucidates the nihilistic dimension of the structural dualism pervading modern cosmology by relating the latter to a deep-ingrained tendency to escape from the world – which his environmental ethics of responsibility famously attempted to remedy –, Eric Voegelin focuses on the political manifestations of this spiritual inclination. Voegelin's insights and his developments around the platonic concept of *metaxy* contribute to unravel what modern gnostic movements struggle to contain: the irreducible *in-betweenness* of being in the world. This enduring and ubiquitous in-betweenness of worldly processes, I submit, is what simultaneously moves and resists the dualistic structure of modern cosmology: it also lies at the core of what is being unveiled along the ecological mutation, what remains unthought and yet must be thought. The perspective of Gnosticism thus enables both Jonas and Voegelin to reach a greater analytical depth as well as a critical distance from within the system of thought they intend to approach. Focusing on the notion of inhabiting, the “hermeneutics of Gnosticism” developed in this research aims to further illuminate some of the cosmological tropes framing our understanding of and involvement in the present ecological mutation. It uncovers for instance such pervasive ideas as that of an abyssal alienation from the world, a perpetual yearning to overcome the conditions of our inhabiting, or a radical dualism between God and the world as compelling cultural spells cast upon our inhabiting of the world. As I draw attention to some of these spells and how they bewitch the way we inhabit the world, I hope for the tropes of our inhabiting to be reclaimed on the path to a

resilient and peaceful inhabiting of the earth. My analysis of the spectre of Gnosticism in our cosmologies brings into relief the relevance of alternate ways of dwelling and of engaging with the present ecological transition. These are mobilized by alternate narratives which, from process philosophy to ecofeminist thought through the poetics of créolité, recount a hopeful entanglement with the world, the resilient openness of our inhabiting, and a joyful, vernacular overflowing of our Gaian becomings.

LAY SUMMARY

Why and how are stories crucial in order to properly engage with the present challenge of an ecological transition? What is the legitimacy of a philosophical inquiry in this issue yet so worldly, traditionally ranging from earth sciences to political ecology? To what extent do the narratives we both inherit and perpetuate condition the way we inhabit this world? Such are the interrogations which prompted this doctoral research. The present work arises from the intuition that our relationship to the earth and involvement within the ongoing ecological collapse have everything to do with the constellation of myths, tropes, paradigms, ideas and discourses which weave our conceptual landscape. With the ecofeminist author Starhawk, I propose to approach this constellation of narratives as “cultural spells”. As I confront some of these spells and uncover some of the ways they bewitch us, I unfold the cardinal thought according to which our inhabiting of the world – comprising of the many mundane ways in which we work, consume, eat, dress, travel, dwell and relate to other earthlings – ultimately relies upon powerful and contingent stories. Stories which we must reflect upon if we wish to transition toward a more sustainable model of inhabiting. Drawing upon the work of two political philosophers of Modernity, Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin, I identify in the mythology of Gnosticism a key to approach contemporary inhabiting. The term Gnosticism refers to an obscure syncretism of spiritual movements blooming in early Christianity and converging towards an experience of the world as a hostile place from which humanity is radically estranged. I argue that delving into the cosmology of Gnosticism illuminates a cultural estrangement from the earth along with the dualistic architecture of thought around which this imaginary of alienation is enforced. Luckily, the contemporary pathologies of the inhabiting unveiled by the lens of Gnosticism can be addressed, and a resilient relationship with the world reclaimed as we allow ourselves to tell different stories.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this doctoral dissertation has been a journey in entanglements and overflowings. As I reach the end of this research, I feel both deeply indebted to the manifold entanglements that have rooted me this past three years and overflowed with gratitude for what they gave birth to: a peaceful abundance exceeding the academic scope of a doctoral research.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Foreword

A world of tales and spells – why stories matter

Studying the tales told and spread in our world, the writer and activist Starhawk, a prominent voice in contemporary earth-based spirituality and ecofeminism, defines a spell as “a story we tell ourselves that shapes our emotional and psychic world”. A story, she adds, “so pervasive that most people mistake it for reality”.¹ Drawing attention to the powerful spells cast by various institutions of authority such as corporate media or public universities, Starhawk leans upon the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s definition of culture as « the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves »², to approach culture ultimately as a set of tales and spells. In *Dreaming the Dark*, Starhawk thus enquires into the irrational, the unseen and obscure that underlies the modernist paradigm of rationality, uncovering its “other side” as she reveals its rootedness in spiritual, mythical, symbolical and metaphorical narratives. I am indebted to her enquiry into the dark as I approach the contemporary, urgently empirical event of a global ecological crisis from an interrogation about the cultural narratives, tales, spells and metaphors that frame and condition our engagement with it.

¹ STARHAWK, “Spells and Counterspells: Why Act Now?”, 2001, p.1. URL:<https://starhawk.org/Activism/activism%20writings/Globalization/Spells%20and%20Counterspells-Why%20Act%20Now.pdf> Accessed 27.03.2019.

² Clifford GEERTZ, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, p. 448.

Following Starhawk, who emphasizes the necessity of naming the narratives structuring our political landscape – notably the dreams of conquest and the pursuit of progress – the ecofeminist philosopher Emilie Hache proposes to reclaim the founding tales of our cosmologies. She offers to

underline the power of narratives in our lives, their ability to connect us to a form of powerlessness as well as to empower us, their ability to make us disappear, to make us doubt our own existence or, on the contrary, to give us confidence; their ability to help us imagine other worlds just as to make them impossible.³

Emilie Hache signals the embeddedness of the concrete world in a constellation of narratives: these assume a radical power over the course of our mundane trajectories and pervade the sphere of intimacy as they infuse our ability to imagine and act. Which stories, which tales, which patterns of thought did we inherit from the evolving tissue of the world? Which tropes colonize our imaginary – upon which narratives do we lean as we think, co-create and become with the world? Who is this world populated with tales, “promiscuous mixtures of thinking and becoming-with”⁴? More precisely, which thinking of the world enables us to, or prevent us from, inhabiting the world? Could certain images and narratives impoverish our relationship to the world, thus hindering us from dwelling as well and fully as we may aspire to? What is summoned, what is brought to life and what remains unthought when we speak of “the world”? This preliminary interrogation is crucial. In Donna Haraway’s words,

³ Emilie HACHE, « Se réappropriier le champ de la longue durée. Contribution écoféministe à une histoire après l’anthropocène ». Conference given in Brussels on the 23.02.2017, for the research seminar « Esthétiques et pratiques de la terre » organized by Thierry Drumm and Aline Wiame, GECO, ULB. I translate from French:

« Pour souligner la puissance des récits dans nos vies, leur pouvoir de nous connecter a une forme d’impuissance comme de nous rendre puissantes, leur pouvoir de nous faire disparaître, de nous faire douter de notre propre existence comme à l’inverse de nous donner confiance ; leur pouvoir de nous aider a imaginer d’autres mondes comme de les rendre impossibles. »

⁴ Joseph WEISS, “The Erotics of Destruction and the End of the Anthropocene”, Society for Cultural Anthropology, Visual and New Media Review, *Fieldsights*, October 2019.
URL: <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/godzilla-and-camille-the-erotics-of-destruction-and-the-end-of-the-anthropocene>
Accessed 02.02.2020.

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties.⁵

Emphasizing the processes through which matters and stories coevolve with each other, Donna Haraway reveals the inextricable bond between word and world. Her thought discovers a network of bodies and discourses composing a “material-semiotic” world.⁶ Approaching the literary and discursive as a mode of the bodily, the perspective of New Materialism might guide our attempt to think the words of the world without falling into dichotomous patterns of thinking. The New Materialist approach sheds light on the production of meaning within world processes and the ways through which such processes come to express themselves. In this regard, being attentive to and weaving the many stories through which the world tells itself is a way to celebrate its intelligibility. Echoing the biosemiotics insight that “the natural world is perfused with signs, meanings and purposes which are material and which evolve”⁷, this thesis attends to the perpetual emergence of the world through matter and meaning. Conscious of the permeability between inside and outside, it approaches our enmeshed processes of inhabiting the world as a creative conversation between narratives and material processes.

The reflections unfolded in this dissertation emerge in the consciousness of the philosophical challenge to unthink “the world” as conceptual construct. Entangled in mystery, they intend to both elucidate the world-making – or world-alienating – dimension of our symbolic systems and embrace the processes in the world giving birth to new stories and ideas. Not an accumulation of inert objects, not a totality, not a

⁵ Donna HARAWAY, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 2016, Duke University Press, Durham and London, p. 12.

⁶ Donna HARAWAY, *Simions, Cyborgs and Women*, Free Association Books, New York, 1991.

⁷ Wendy WHEELER, “The Biosemiotic Turn: Abduction, or, the Nature of Creative Reason in Nature and Culture”, in *Ecocritical Theory. New European Approaches*, ed. Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville and London, 2011, p.279.

“container”⁸, the world is not either absorbed in the stories that weave and recount it. Hence, our unthinking of the world should also acknowledge the perpetual opening of new ways of inhabiting and becoming-with that arise from our encounters with the trajectories of others: not a solipsistic fiction, not either a scenic space where to perform a dance of intersubjectivity, the world is to be thought as a co-creative process, an engagement in creation. The notion of “worlding”⁹ embraced by New Materialism provides a welcome perspective through which open processes of human-non-human enmeshment can be considered: removing boundaries between subject and environment, it draws our attention to the world as an ontological process and an active involvement in events.

The environmental transition as philosophical event

I propose to consider the complex entanglement of multidimensional phenomena commonly referred to as a global ecological crisis as *an event in thought*: namely, as an event which disrupts the ways we have been thinking, a historical contingency which, as it arises, overflows the conceptual and symbolical framework that fails to contain it. This suggests that something is happening here and now that provides us with a wonderful opportunity to think: think anew the worlds we live in, the ones we fail to inhabit, the ones collapsing alongside the exhaustion of an energetic regime based on a logic of extraction – and those worlds whose blossoming we could witness. This event is rooted in narratives as much as it requires alternative ones: it bears an unexpected potential for reclaiming and reshaping the narratives which condition our inhabiting of the world. The kaleidoscopic event of the present ecological mutation sanctions a wonderful intertwinement of ecology, politics, geology, earth sciences, ethics, economics, sociology, philosophy, religion, poetics, even arts! It is as dramatically concrete as it is abstract, something so immense comprehension struggles to

⁸ Ibid, p.14.

⁹ See Helen Palmer and Vicky Hunter’s contribution to the definition of the term “worlding” in the *Almanac of New Materialism*, March 2018.

URL: <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/w/worlding.html>

Accessed 20.02.2020.

reach; as global as it is local, intimate and public; past, present and future; an omnipresent loss. There is no way to ignore it. The environmental mutation engages our whole being in the world and concerns the very perpetuation of this being: contained and involved within it, we have to think through it. “Think we must”, Virginia Woolf insisted in her *Three Guineas*. As an ultimate resource in resisting the banality of evil that is being lived and witnessed, *think we must*.¹⁰ The insurrectional thought invoked by Virginia Woolf arises from a movement of suspension, a pause observed amidst our daily activities so as to suspend our passive involvement in processes we did not agree to feed and sustain. It also implies a certain refusal to submit ourselves to disciplinary confinements that claim to dictate our thoughts and our engagement within the world. The Woolfian injunction is thus an invitation to think and live beyond cosmological segregations. In order to think, we must disobey: the work of Virginia Woolf testifies to a philosophical thought embraced as an act of disobedience, expression and creation, committed to weaving subversive ties across separations and to reclaiming an alienated sense of our embeddedness in the world.

The threshold we have crossed: what era have we plunged into?

What I wish to suggest here is that the ecological issue contains a deeply unsettling element touching upon the way we live and think in the world. Something which should not be understated, in that it represents a crack in a cosmological and civilizational edifice. This crack, uncovering the profound embeddedness of our systems of thought in the world, and vice-versa, is exemplified by the concept of the Anthropocene. The latter is but one common attempt to name the specificity of the epoch we inhabit, “to name what is happening in the airs, waters, and places, in the rocks,

¹⁰ The prominent feminist sciences scholar Donna Haraway compares the contemporary urgency to think in the time of the environmental mutation to the ethical injunction described by Hannah Arendt to resist what the philosopher called “the banality of evil”, rooted in an “incapacity to think” and a disengagement from the world that is being lived.

See Donna HARAWAY, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble”, 05.09.2014.

URL: <http://opentranscripts.org/transcript/anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/>

Accessed 11.03.2019.

and oceans, and atmospheres.”¹¹ First coined by the biologist Eugene F. Stoermer and popularized by the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, the term “Anthropocene” designates the unprecedented scope of human action upon the earth’s ecosystems, so significant as to constitute a new geological epoch succeeding to the Holocene. The Anthropocene states indeed that human processes have become the major geological force influencing earthly processes. Shedding light upon a multiplicity of geological forces and processes responding to human agency, the framework of the Anthropocene summons us to study the ecological crisis from within the entangled complexity of its abundant intersections.

One major criticism formulated against the concept of Anthropocene was that it essentializes human action and unifies humanity into a homogenous force, thereby obscuring major discrepancies in the way humans live, produce and consume, along with the social contingency of dynamics that are internal to a capitalist model of development. Doing so, it naturalizes and depoliticizes a mode of production specific to a certain sociohistorical context and conceals the role of the capital as politically hegemonic force in the present geological mutation. The term Capitalocene therefore allows for more depth, nuance and fairness in the treatment of human processes and the question of our responsibility towards the present environmental collapse¹². Capitalist infrastructures of production and consumption, as well as the energy industry sustaining them, are causing powerful, self-amplifying, irreversible planetary processes and contribute to reshape nonhuman forces such as climate patterns, species evolution, drought zones, the ocean conveyor system, glacier flows or hurricanes. As Emilie Hache observes, conceiving capitalism as an amplifying geological force also contains a great potential of astonishment:

The madness of capitalism has thus not only attacked and destroyed both the human species and “nature”, but it went so far as to modify the regimen of existence of an earth’s system that has been our home

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Andreas MALM, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, Versobooks, 2015.

for 10 000 years. Such a scale of human action totally exceeds our frames of thought.¹³

Another way to get to grips with the present era was proposed by Donna Haraway through the term of “Chtulucene”. Pointing towards something that overflows the scope of the Anthropos, the Chtulucene “sneaks in and through” to survive both capitalism and human presence on earth. It designates the tentacular always growling beneath the earth, the dreadful earthly processes that in the mythology of the moderns had been relegated to the traditional past – what would have been conquered and defeated by a promethean Anthropos. The Chtulucene therefore embodies the realization of an obstinate persistence of earthly processes amidst what we perceive as an apocalypse, “a thick kind of ongoingness at stake” manifesting the victory of the tentacular, relentlessly composing the world even amidst the ruins of capitalism. As an alternative storytelling apparatus offering to complement that of the Capitalocene, the Chtulucene embraces the sneakiness of ongoing earthly processes of worlding, and the permanent composition of the world. “Simultaneously about past, present and what is to come”¹⁴, the thought of the Chtulucene introduces some hope and resilience in the story of the environmental collapse.

A tale of estrangement

This story often crystallizes as a tale of estrangement. The environmentalist and process philosopher John B. Cobb asks “why civilized human beings, and especially those in the modern West, have become so alienated from nature”.¹⁵ Many accounts of the environmental crisis, including within deep ecology, perpetuate the

¹³ Emilie HACHE, « Tremblez, tremblez, les sorcières sont de retour ! », in *Pensez l'Anthropocène*, dir. Rémi Beau and Catherine Larrère, p.118.

¹⁴ Donna Haraway interviewed by Juliana Fausto, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Déborah Danowski, 21.08.2014, *Os Mil Nomes de Gaia*.

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1x0oxUHOIA8>

Accessed 27.03.2019.

See also Donna J. HARAWAY, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene*, Duke University Press, 2016. Chapter 2: “Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chtulucene”.

¹⁵ John B. COBB Jr, “Deep Ecology and Process Thought”, *Process Studies*, pp. 112-131, Vol.30, Number 1, Spring-Summer, 2001.

Rousseauist idea according to which the modern civilizing of humanity on the path to progress proved a deepening alienation from both the self and the world. Emphasizing ecological interdependence over the isolation of individual agents set against each other in the struggle for survival, most debates in environmental thought provide a critical account of this civilizational alienation. A major contribution of environmental studies thus lies in the deconstruction of the terms of this tale of estrangement, such as proposed by Bruno Latour who, in *We Have Never Been Modern*, argues that the division between nature and culture or between object and subject is but *one* concept sustaining deceptive dualistic cosmologies. This realization fuels repeated attempts to mend the modern gulf between the world and the selves by weaving a tangled web of earthly, hybrid interconnections that cannot be solved within a dualistic pattern of thought. Starhawk thus understands ecology as the science of relationships¹⁶, and a precious start for unraveling the estrangement from and commodification of the world as the cultural and spiritual bases for a capitalist exploitation of resources. More recently, Latour describes in *Facing Gaia* the active process of dis-animation required to empty the material world from all meaning and value. Emilie Hache proposes to recover from such a culture of distance and detachment by cultivating our ability to feel, to be touched, moved and met by what comes to us.¹⁷ She thereby suggests that the resolution of the ecological crisis should imply a renewed engagement with the sensory world. But where may we meet the world and reconcile with it?

In “The Liminal Space between Things. Epiphany and the Physical”¹⁸, Timothy Morton draws from the artist James Turrel’s understanding that art happens in the liminal space between things to define the field of ecocriticism as the thinking of the relations between things coexisting. He pleads for the development of ecocriticism as

¹⁶ Conference “Permaculture and the Sacred: A Conversation with Starhawk”, Harvard Divinity School URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV-MsQYrW0g> Accessed 27.03.2019.

¹⁷ Emilie HACHE, « Se réappropriier le champ de la longue durée. Contribution écoféministe à une histoire après l’anthropocène ». art. cit.

¹⁸ Timothy MORTON, “The Liminal Space between Things. Epiphany and the Physical”, in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella IOVINO and Serpil OPPERMANN, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2014.

a care for the attunement between beings – human and non-human – and for their mutual emergence in liminality. Their arising, Morton argues, always full of the absence surrounding them, should be received as an epiphany:

Ecocriticism should enable a caring attunement to the irreducibility of a red wheelbarrow, a plum, a blade of grass, a field of grass, a cluster of gardening tools, the Earth on which they sit, the garden in which they reside. Things are a kind of liminal space made of other things. Art happens in and as this liminal space, this *between*, which is just what a thing is: a meeting place of other beings (“thing is Old English for “meeting place”). This meeting place is not ontically given (...). Rather, it is shot through and through with nothingness. It is given in the way that beauty is given: an epiphany that coexists anarchically alongside us, physically before us, and despite us.”¹⁹

Failing to care for this epiphany and to attune ourselves to it appears to coincide with a political as well as cultural alienation from the world. How might we begin to resolve an issue that fails to be acknowledged? The disturbing obscurity, subterranean dimension of the environmental issue is such that the greater part of today’s politicians, along with those with the power to implement immediate structural changes, agree to deny it altogether. This denial, if not the full-blown conscious negation of the most urgent concern of our time reveals a deep-ranging, pathological indifference to the planetary paving our collective subconscious – or those of the elites ensuring the perpetuation of a collapsing system. Popular culture provides an invaluable insight into this “collective subconscious”, as well as an abundant source of illustrations of the way it is constructed through the diffusion of certain narrative structures, ideological tropes and metaphors.

The cosmological propaganda spread by some Hollywood blockbusters is particularly conspicuous in a movie like *Interstellar*. Christopher Nolan’s highly successful sci-fi production offers indeed a crystal-clear demonstration of the political negationism as well as the disdain for the world conveyed in the dominant approach to the contemporary ecological crisis. While the plot is set in a dystopian future where the

¹⁹ P. 279.

earth has become uninhabitable, and humanity is struggling with the consequences of what we recognize as a now familiar ecological crisis, the film carefully avoids any political treatment of the catastrophe. A global crop blight along with severe dust storms are depicted, but the causes and origins of these violent climate disruptions, and of course the political responsibility for them remain unmentioned: the earth seems to be ontologically, eternally hostile to humans, who can conceive of no other solution than leaving this planet and finding a new one to colonize. The film thus totally depoliticizes the ecological issue by actively concealing its anthropic origin and the responsibility of a capitalist system sustained by decades of neoliberal policies. Not only does it de-responsibilize the governments involved in these policies, *Interstellar* also mystifies the humanist, colonialist posture of a space conquest succeeding to the “discovery” and colonization of the earth and its inhabitants, thereby perpetuating a predatory relationship to the world. As it fails to envision the end of capitalism and the peaceful inhabiting of the earth that might succeed from it, the film represents the ultimate stage of a capitalist logics of consumption and exploitation: the world an obsolete vessel from which all profit has been exhausted, and whose overcoming represents humanity’s only chance for salvation.²⁰

As much as it is cultural, the climate negationism illustrated in *Interstellar* is also, and perhaps most importantly political. It is therefore essential to understand what is often depicted as a global indifference or unconsciousness to the ecological issue as a deliberate choice, an institutionalized posture of contempt for that which ties us to the world. In *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, Bruno Latour argues that, for the last thirty years, the whole political landscape has been organized around the dedication of the economic elites to escape from the common world. Exploding inequalities, massive deregulation and the intensification of a neoliberal globalization all illustrate this commitment from the powerful few to live offshore and abandon the earth. This posture of disengagement from the world we inhabit and co-

²⁰ For a more exhaustive analysis of the political culture underlying the movie, see: Paul RIGOUSTE, “Interstellar: l’homme du passé est l’homme de l’avenir”, in *Le Cinéma est Politique*, 27.11.2014.

URL: <http://www.lecinemaestpolitique.fr/interstellar-2014-lhomme-du-passe-est-lhomme-de-lavenir/>
Accessed 27.03.2019.

create also requires a massive investment in the organization of climate change denial. Deconstructing the narrative of a global unconsciousness often mobilized to justify the institutional inertia regarding the ecological issue and unveiling it as a rhetorical strategy of climate denial, Latour's approach to the present climate mutation uncovers the interests of a certain oligarchy to purposely ignore what constitutes a colossal threat to a system of production and consumption that benefits them. Not only does Latour thereby assert the ultimate political dimension of the ecological issue, he also draws our attention to a fantasized posture of emancipation from the bonds of the world and reveals the deep-ranging dream to escape the earth underlying this stance²¹.

Elucidating the embeddedness of this cultural and political alienation from the world is one of the root-questions of this research. It resumes an interrogation in which ecology arose: an interrogation about our inhabiting, our dwelling, our relationship to the intimate alterity we have come to call the world, and which the modern cosmology baptized nature. The reflections unfolded in this research draw upon Bruno Latour's account of Modernity. Latour analyses Modernity first and foremost as an epistemological regime, a cosmological order segregating reality along structural binaries such as nature and culture, object and subject, facts and their interpretations, secular and religious. This purifying practice of the Moderns, along with their devotion for the god of reason, amounts for Latour to a matter of faith. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, he deconstructs the Modern narrative and exhibits a deceptive dualism failing to contain a world populated by "hybrids"²². The philosophy of Bruno Latour uncovers Modernity as a political hegemony enforcing its order across the globe through an all-present modernization front of which the advocates of progress are the missionaries²³. His in-depth investigation of Modernity as a mode of worlding elucidates what it means to inhabit the earth from within the cosmology of Modernity. While the common word "modernity" refers loosely to the historical era that arose in the wake of the European

²¹ Bruno LATOUR, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, Polity Press, 2018.

²² Bruno LATOUR, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, La Découverte, Paris, 1998.

²³ Bruno LATOUR, *Down to Earth*, op. cit.

Renaissance, each occurrence of the word “Modernity” in this thesis shall summon Bruno Latour’s legacy.

How do we inhabit the earth, and how should we inhabit it? How to cohabit with those inhabiting this same, common world? How to dwell peacefully in a world into which, as we learn from the Abrahamic tales that infuse our modern western cosmology, we have fallen? How to engage with what surrounds us? Coined by XIXth century German zoologist Ernst Haeckel, the science of ecology deals with this riddle of the inhabiting, understood as the relationship of living things to their environments. The prefix “eco” from the Ancient Greek *οἶκος* refers indeed to the house as dwelling place, habitation, suggesting that ecology wonders about the relationship to our home, and the ecological crisis therefore points toward a crisis of our inhabiting. As the loss of habitat threatens a whole variety of species, it materializes an ecological crisis contemporary to a not less criminal refugee crisis. In June 2018, the Dutch NGO *United for Intercultural Action* (UNITED) recorded the death of 34,361 migrants in the process of travelling to Europe from the early 1990s. The report reveals that not all deaths occur at sea, but also in detention blocks, asylum units, factories and town centres.²⁴ Meanwhile, the sixth mass extinction of life on earth, monitored as the most devastating event since the asteroid impact that wiped out the dinosaurs, also finds its roots in anthropogenic causes.²⁵ Elizabeth Kolbert equates the current disbelief surrounding this issue, i.e. the fact that certain human behaviours may lead to the mass extinction of whole species, to a cultural posture of denialism.

In *Imagining Extinction*²⁶, Ursula Heise also approaches extinction as a cultural predicament. Her analysis of extinction discourses acknowledges the primacy of narratives and unravels biodiversity as a cultural as well as a political issue. Approaching the concern of multispecies justice through the prism of cultural imagination, Heise

²⁴ Niamh MCINTYRE, Mark RICE-OXLEY, “It’s 34,361 and rising: how the List tallies Europe’s migrant bodycount.”, *The Guardian*, 20.06.2018.

URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/20/the-list-europe-migrant-bodycount>
Accessed 11.03.2019.

²⁵ Elizabeth KOLBERT, *The Sixth Extinction. An Unnatural History*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.

²⁶ Ursula HEISE, *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meaning of Endangered Species*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2016.

draws our attention to the stories which structure the way cultures care or not about other species. Her literary approach to extinction thereby also invites us to think intersectional structures of oppression encompassing both humans and non-humans, leading us to wonder how we may negotiate difference and extend our respect to other beings and species. What conditions our perception of ecological abundance and biological diversity? Which are the narratives that, conveying a cultural alienation from the outer world, are the heralds of a twofold crisis of the home and others? Which narratives might on the contrary enable us to share a world with innumerable entangled forms of life and embrace our obligation toward a more than human world?²⁷ This I aim to explore in the present dissertation.

²⁷ See also Deborah Bird ROSE, Thom van DOOREN and Matthew CHERLEW, *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death and Generations*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2017.

Acknowledging the ecological, cultural and ethical dimensions of extinction, this collective volume dives into the “entangled significance of extinction” (p.3) and seeks to engage the complexity of specific sites of loss. Exploring modes of response those of us who remain might give to the lives lost to extinction, the different chapters articulate an effort to inhabit and pay tribute to an incredible biological and cultural diversity. The authors reassert the immense power of narratives as they claim that “it matters which stories we use to tell and think other stories with” and commit to “tell stories in ways that are open and accountable to these diverse others” (p.4). In the afterword, Vinciane Despret further unravels the cardinal idea according to which we populate the earth with stories. She wonders about the absence left by extinction: what is lost with the presence of extinct species? Who suffers? What is lost, she argues, is a part of the world. We as humans can mourn the loss of extinct species, but ultimately, “the world dies from each absence”. She writes: “every sensation of every being of the world is a mode through which the world lives and feels itself, and through which it exists. And every sensation of every being of the world causes all the beings of the world to feel and think themselves differently. When a being is no more, the world narrows all of a sudden, and a part of reality collapses. Each time an existence disappears it is a piece of the universe of sensations that fades away.” Before adding: “but what the world has lost even more is the unique, sensual, living, warm, musical, and colourful point of view that the passenger Pigeons created upon it and with it. This unique point of view to which the world owed the sensations of so many things, is no more.” (p.220).

2. Methodological approach

Thinking beyond disciplinary structures

Wherefrom and how do I proceed? The methodological approach adopted in this doctoral research is inherent to the object of its study: the environmental crisis as a radically complex, entangled and kaleidoscopic event which can hardly be reduced to a single discipline. My research thus evolves within a deeply transdisciplinary framework, one blurring the boundaries between the traditional academic disciplines of environmental philosophy, religious studies, political science, cosmological anthropology or the anthropology of worlds, ecofeminist studies and even literary hermeneutics.

The transdisciplinary stance embraced in this research is appreciated as a condition for analysing and subverting the modern episteme, its disciplinary structures and its regime of truth. Michel Foucault describes the latter as “a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and functioning of statements”, reminding us thereby that truth “is produced by virtue of multiple constraints” and relies upon a complex disciplinary apparatus of separation.²⁸ The notion of regime of truth invites us to approach the production of truth and knowledge as a political, economic and institutional regime of power, shedding light on the entanglement of scientific discourses with the exercise of power. Ecofeminist philosopher Val Plumwood thus identifies the “standpoint of mastery” in a series of epistemological dualisms conditioning beliefs about the self and its relationship to others. She argues that the modern dualism between reason and nature infuses an infrastructure of domination manifest in sexism, racism, capitalism, colonialism and the exploitation of nature, where women, racialized people and non-humans are subordinated to the representatives of reason.²⁹

²⁸ Michel FOUCAULT, *Surveiller et Punir*, Gallimard, 1975, p.113. My translation.

²⁹ See Val PLUMWOOD, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Routledge, 1992. and *Environmental Culture: the Ecological Crisis of Reason*, Routledge, 2002.

Drawing upon these considerations, the methodological approach adopted in this dissertation is one sensitive to the profound link between the religious and the political. The reflection unfolded in this research proposes to restore the radical power of theological conceptions in the political culture of modern western secularized societies. It is indebted to Carl Schmitt's notion of the politico-theological and his now famous insight into the theological foundation of the modern state: "all significant concepts of the state are secularized concepts of God." "Only by being aware of this analogy", Schmitt pursues, "can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries."³⁰

Attempting to define it, religion arises as a problematic category, difficult to delimit and translate into non-European languages. How does it differ from the similarly vast spheres of culture, spirituality or even ideology? Moreover, how does the "return of spirituality" relate to institutional religion and to the consensus of the secularization of western societies? The research field of critical religion analyses the category of religion as cardinal to the ideological arsenal of western Modernity. Timothy Fitzgerald thus deconstructs the concept of religion, disguised as an unproblematic and ubiquitous universal, as a modern fiction underlying the production of a fantasized secular. According to him, the religious, being removed to a marginal, privatised domain, serves to delineate and mystify the proclaimed rationality and universality of the secular order. In this regard, the blooming of contemporary spiritualities appear as an outgrowth of this dynamic of marginalization of institutional religion. As the binary opposition between religious and secular tends to neutralize the discourses that divert from the prescribed secular, it reveals a political agenda of legitimation of an ideological (neoliberal capitalist) order. Following Latour's intuition of the radically political dimension of the cosmological regime of Modernity anchored in cardinal binaries,

³⁰ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, Mass.: MIT, Cambridge, 1985. p.36.

Fitzgerald therefore argues that the modern invention of religion was simultaneously the invention of modern politics.³¹

I suggest that both the analysis of the current ecological crisis as well as our concrete involvement in it would greatly benefit from the inclusion of the “religious” and the “spiritual” into the reflection. Here the emerging category of spirituality, as popular as it is versatile, arises as a contemporary subversion of the modern binary between religious and secular. In a conference on Permaculture and the Sacred she gave at Harvard Divinity School, Starhawk argues that bringing together spirituality, ecology and politics creates a rich hinge allowing a more fertile look at the contemporary systems of thought which presently frame the environmental issue.³² She maintains, along with cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, that “religion” is constitutive of culture for it creates a cultural ethos that defines the core values of a society and the persons living in it.³³ Starhawk consistently formulates the urgency to disclose and cultivate the link between the spiritual and the political³⁴, emphasizing how much religion, concepts of God and the sacred not only determine and reinforce socio-political relationships, but also are connected to and reveal metaphors deeply embedded in our language and thought. She notably observes that goodness and value were traditionally associated with things *outside and beyond the world*, while the down-below of the material world and anything embodied were devalued as dirty, obscure, inherently flawed and corrupted (such associations, as Val Plumwood also observed, underlying and reinforcing sexist, racist and specist structures of domination). Starhawk then reminds us of the depreciative meaning of dirt – this very dirt without which we cannot live.³⁵

³¹ Timothy FITZGERALD, “Critical religion and critical research on religion: Religion and politics as modern fictions”, *Critical Research on Religion*, 2015, 3 (3), pp.315-319.

³² STARHAWK, “Permaculture and the Sacred: A Conversation with Starhawk”, Harvard Divinity School,

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV-MsQYrW0g&list=PLg3dQRY8HYBsZIpl0zETJ8bbG4pUaSYG4>

Accessed 27.03.2019.

³³ Jone SALOMONSEN, *Enchanted Feminism: The Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco*, 2002, Routledge, p.143.

³⁴ STARHAWK, *The Spiral Dance*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, Special 20th Anniversary Edition, 1999 (1979), Introduction.

³⁵ STARHAWK, “Permaculture and the Sacred: A Conversation with Starhawk”, Harvard Divinity School,

Identifying these deeply ingrained structures of thought and language allow us to distance ourselves from them and potentially subvert them with alternative beliefs: hence, for example, the subversive potential of the belief in the sacredness of the earth, or the neopagan cult of the Goddess, for 1970s environmental and ecofeminist activism. It also sparks and rehabilitates a reflection around the sacred, understood as what we care about, that for which we care³⁶, what is most important to us, what mobilizes us, what moves us. The cultures which we inherited from have indeed located the sacred outside the world, thus devaluating the latter as a worthless place. Starhawk denounces a “great bewitchment, a spell cast upon the world to enforce the belief that the economic profit of a few stands above the living system of the earth”.³⁷ Which conception of the sacred entitle us to destroy the living system that supports our life and other forms of life?

Delving into the mythology of our inhabiting – for an environmental hermeneutics of metaphors

This thesis is concerned with the obscure power of myths, symbols and metaphors in dictating the way we dwell in the world. It approaches the crisis of the home and of the inhabiting manifested by the environmental mutation through a lens that unfolds the intimate union of poetics and poiesis: the marriage of literary forms and discourses with a transformative action in the world – in other words, of myths and politics. Emphasizing the belief that current policies are informed by an ideological structure which itself draws upon an array of theological and mythical narratives means going against the methodological paradigm of rationalism which postulates that empirical reality obeys an intrinsically logical structure of truth. It implies to embrace

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV-MsQYrW0g&list=PLg3dQRY8HYBsZIpl0zETJ8bbG4pUaSYG4>
Accessed 27.03.2019.

³⁶ Emilie HACHE, *Ce à quoi nous tenons. Propositions pour une écologie pragmatique*. Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2011.

³⁷ STARHAWK, “Permaculture and the Sacred: A Conversation with Starhawk”, Harvard Divinity School.

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zV-MsQYrW0g&list=PLg3dQRY8HYBsZIpl0zETJ8bbG4pUaSYG4>
Accessed 27.03.2019.

the slippery mode of speculation and interpretation, even amidst an event so concrete as the global ecological mutation.

In his introduction to *Facing the Planetary*, William E. Connolly argues that “the mythic today expresses that which circulates below the threshold of official expression”, and suggests that the study of myths might both enable an in-depth understanding of official narratives and cosmologies and inform an alternative, resilient engagement with the latter: “the turn to myth is a turn toward an insurrection of voices straining to be heard beneath the clamor of dominant stories.”³⁸ The political theorist draws upon the mythological potential of the Book of Job to interpret the intensification of support for neoliberal ideology after it led to the economic meltdown of 2008, or the radicalization of climate denialism in face of growing evidence supporting climate change. He thereby summons the hermeneutical potential of cultural myths and metaphors in order to approach contemporary events otherwise difficult to grasp.

As the present ecological transition confronts us with the colossal challenge to develop new categories of thought, new words and new ideas to express unprecedented realities, the creativity of speculative philosophy is called for. It appears indeed that the environmental crisis reawakens philosophy to its most essential task: that of dwelling amidst the openness of thought, cracking open a conceptual framework rendered obsolete and unable to channel emerging thought processes, and thinking on the edge of a vacillating world. Applying the methods and resources of the field of hermeneutics to the current environmental issue, I argue, honours the task of philosophically engaging with the present world and its plural becomings insofar as it confronts and embraces our inescapable involvement – notably interpretative, but not only – in these same becomings. The task of hermeneutics is one of interpretation understood as mediation and creation of meaning: it is a task of connecting and engaging with the world by embracing the ontological blurring of object and subject. In this perspective, I propose in this doctoral dissertation to delve into the metaphors of our inhabiting so as to gain a new insight on the current environmental crisis. The metaphor of the root, for instance, might be worth investigating as it is, Cathy Wampole observes, “constantly evoked in situations of cultural rupture, ecological

³⁸ William E. CONNOLLY, *Facing the Planetary*, Duke University Press, 2017, p.1.

alienation, and technophobic angst.”³⁹ Hans Blumenberg developed his own “paradigms for a metaphorology”, emphasizing the methodological benefit of studying the metaphors grounding our cosmologies:

metaphorology seeks to burrow down to the substructure of thought, the underground, the nutrient solution of systematic crystallizations.⁴⁰

3. Research problem, apparatus and potential outcome

A Hermeneutics of Gnosticism for the present environmental transition

Throughout this introductory chapter, I have wondered about an ambient estrangement from the world and the pervasive ways in which it is conveyed in our cosmologies, narratives and metaphors. This defines the general interrogation leading this doctoral research. As we ponder over this question and attempt to answer it, I propose to investigate the imaginary of Gnosticism as an original, unexpected resource in the field of environmental humanities. Whence the alienation from the world? How to inhabit this unruly world? The root questions of ecology, I argue, are the same as those formulated by Gnosticism, an obscure name given by modern historians to describe a variety of ancient religious ideas and systems which arose in the Mediterranean world of early Christianity. A heterogenous corpus of beliefs and narratives which strikes however by the unity of their experience: that of the utter alienness of the world, the absence of sacredness in the world, and the burning desire to escape worldly existence.

Two German political philosophers of the XXth century, Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin, delved into the perplexing category of Gnosticism and analysed in their own

³⁹ Cathy WAMPOLE, *Rootedness. The Ramifications of a metaphor*, University of Chicago Press, 2016, p.31.

⁴⁰ Hans BLUMENBERG, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trad. Robert Savage, Cornell University Press, 2010 (1960), p.5.

respective ways the political modernity of the West in light of these gnostic cosmologies. While both view Gnosticism as a key to diagnose the modern predicament, their diagnoses of Modernity are characterized by parallels and contrasts which the first two chapters of this dissertation aim to explore. In many regards, Hans Jonas' philosophy appears to have anticipated the issues related to the ecological crisis: committed to overcome the ethical nihilism pervading modern thought and politics, his ethics of responsibility for the technological age laid the groundwork for the field of environmental ethics, while his philosophy of biology and his critique of modern dualism anticipated contemporary developments in ecological ontology. Eric Voegelin's philosophical project focused on what he called the pneumo-pathological condition of modernity, manifest according to him in the rise of totalitarian ideologies within modern political movements. Emphasizing the organic link between politics and religion, Voegelin aimed to identify the spiritual disorders of political modernity. Both philosophers diagnosed at the heart of Modernity an attitude of contempt for the world which echoes greatly with the contemporary ecological issue.

Drawing upon their original and somehow still unacknowledged insights, this research attempts to unfold the potential of Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin's analyses of Gnosticism for approaching the contemporary ecological mutation. The research apparatus building this project proposes to transpose Jonas and Voegelin's diagnoses of modern Gnosticism to the burning political context of the ecological issue – which in many regards appears as the crowning event of political modernity –, thereby assessing their relevance from a contemporary perspective. This thought apparatus intends in a way to submit Jonas and Voegelin's insights on Gnosticism to the test of the present, asking whether the contemporary event of the ecological mutation confirms, disproves, alters or even prolongs their hypotheses, and *vice-versa*, to illuminate the riddle of the ecological issue with the unexpected help of their concept of Gnosticism. What does the perspective of Gnosticism, as endorsed by Jonas and Voegelin, teach us about the advent of the ecological crisis? Reciprocally, what does the contemporary context add to their diagnosis of Modern Gnosticism? The specificity of my approach is therefore to aim at a cross-fertilization between the concept of Gnosticism and the present advent of the ecological crisis. This experimental thought apparatus resembles in this regard what Hans Georg Gadamer described as a hermeneutic circle. A decisive

figure in the rise of twentieth century hermeneutics, the German philosopher develops a dialogic approach grounded in Heideggerian thinking and characterized by the notion of interpretative interdependence. Gadamer conceives interpretation as a dialogical and practical activity, based on a set of prior conceptions, experiences and concerns defining a prior hermeneutical situatedness. More particularly, his development of the concept of hermeneutic circle suggests that neither the object nor the subject of the interpretation can be understood without reference to one another. In the specific context of this doctoral research, the idea of hermeneutic circle allows us to appreciate the fact that neither the perspective of Gnosticism nor the contemporary event of the ecological mutation could be regarded as independent entities: they should instead always be approached as the contingent products of interpretations entangled with each other along a hermeneutic process engaging a kaleidoscope of perspectives. Gadamer's re-thinking of traditional hermeneutics moreover emphasizes how the act of interpretation always involves the prospect of application, for it is oriented toward present concerns and interests which condition our entrance into the hermeneutic dialogue in the first place⁴¹.

The hermeneutics of Gnosticism I propose to develop in this research is intended as an attempt to renew the traditional engagement with the present ecological issue. Drawing upon the analyses of Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin, I suggest that the concept of Gnosticism may unveil cardinal metaphors of our inhabiting, thereby enabling a renewed understanding of contemporary politics' involvement in the present ecological mutation. I argue that the concept of Gnosticism provides an invaluable hermeneutical key allowing us to think through the present environmental crisis. More specifically, the perspective of Gnosticism allows us to explore the religious, spiritual and cosmological origin of what is often depicted as a contemporary indifference for the world and the terrestrial. Something in the gnostic understanding – or misunderstanding – of the ideas of immanence and transcendence appears to condition the modern engagement with the world, itself greatly determined by a dualistic concept of nature. In this dissertation, I propose to explore the ways in which the hermeneutics of

⁴¹ Hans Georg GADAMER, "Hermeneutics and Social Science", *Cultural Hermeneutics*, 2 (4), December 1975, pp. 307–316.

Gnosticism might illuminate our current understanding of the ecological issue, as well as the ways in which this new light might enable a rediscovery of the world we inhabit.

How legitimate is the category of Gnosticism?

The hermeneutical investigation of parallels between the cosmologies of ancient Gnosticism and the modern era falls within a certain tradition of thought embraced by other contemporary thinkers such as Hans Blumenberg⁴², Ludwig von Balthasar⁴³, Hans Urs von Balthasar⁴³, Jacob Taubes⁴⁴ or even Carl Jung. This tradition perceives strong echoes between both systems of thought and therefore emphasizes the outstanding relevance of the gnostic insights for the study of key aspects of modern cosmology and its predicaments. The gnostic ethereal insistence on the other world and the beyond would parallel for instance Modernity's tendencies toward political and cultural millenarianism. The present research distinguishes itself radically from a genealogical enquiry into the historical generation of modern cosmologies. Well aware of the cultural contingency of this construct, it recognizes Gnosticism as a *hermeneutical concept of political philosophy* rather than a legitimate historiographical category. Throughout this project, I propose to handle the concept of Gnosticism as a conceptual invention particularly sensitive to the presence of certain symbolic structures in our narratives. This requires our perpetual and dutiful attention against the temptation to essentialize this hermeneutical perspective and to mistake Gnosticism for an objective reality. I explore Gnosticism as a lens, one amongst many others, to approach the present world and the ways in which we inhabit it – conceptually, symbolically, but also in the most embodied way, empirically, daily, politically, ecologically – unfolding this conceptual invention initiated by Jonas and Voegelin to throw light upon something that might otherwise remain undisclosed, unformulated, unthought.

⁴² Hans BLUMENBERG, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1976.

⁴³ Hans URS VON BALTHASAR, *The Scandal of the Incarnation. Irenaeus against the Heretics*, Ignatius Press, 1990 (1981).

⁴⁴ Jacob TAUBES, *Abendländische Eschatologie*, Berlin, Matthes und Seitz, 2007.

4. Thesis outline

A brief overview of how the different chapters of this dissertation fold into one another and how they articulate my argument will prove helpful before delving into the heart of our hermeneutics of Gnosticism. The dissertation can be divided into two main parts: the first, composed of the first three chapters, draws upon the respective analyses of Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin to elaborate my own hermeneutics of Gnosticism. The second part intends to articulate the contribution of this hermeneutics for the contemporary thought of the environmental transition, displaying how a reflection around the metaphors of our inhabiting disclosed by the perspective of Gnosticism might inform a renewed cosmological as well as political engagement with the present ecological issue.

Chapter 1 engages Hans Jonas' concept of Gnosticism and the ways in which his diagnosis of a worldless dualism might illuminate the contemporary context of the ecological crisis. Jonas identifies in gnostic narratives a "tripartite dualism" where the figure of God crystallizes a radical rupture between humanity and the world, thus dictating a structural dynamic of escape from the world, or *Demundanization* (Entweltlichung). Jonas' study of Gnosticism from an existential perspective unveils dualism as a worldless, nihilistic form of engagement with the world articulated around the belief that the worldly and the divine are two irreconcilable poles of a definitive rupture. I propose to delve into the figure of the abyss to approach this gnostic dualism and articulate its dynamic as one of sealing, or closure of the world.

Chapter 2 elucidates Eric Voegelin's insights on Gnosticism, originally aimed at a diagnosis of the pneumo-pathological element pervading the political and ideological movements of the XXth century. Suggesting that Gnosticism stems from the difficulty of dwelling in-between, Voegelin's analyses provide a key to approach the present challenge of inhabiting a world of collapse and emergence, destruction and

creation, and of sustaining hope in the face of irreparable loss. At the roots of the gnostic rebellion against worldly being, the philosopher identifies a feeling of alienation from the world, an incapacity of dwelling translating into a perpetual revolt and the belief that politics is the privileged means to overcome this alienated condition. Voegelin qualifies this gnostic inhabiting as *Anoia* – a forgetfulness of the co-penetration and co-creation involved in the process of common worlding⁴⁵. His understanding of the platonic idea of *metaxy* allows us furthermore to conceptualize the pathology of Gnosticism as an incapacity to sustain the overflowing tension of worldly being. This inaugurates a cardinal theme that will be further explored in later chapters.

Following these preliminary explorations, chapter 3 synthesizes my reflections around Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin’s analyses of Gnosticism in the purpose of laying down the main features of my hermeneutics of Gnosticism. My reflections pivot as this third chapter harvests the fruits which emerged from my study of the work of Jonas and Voegelin and draws the first conclusions of a hermeneutics of Gnosticism for the present ecological crisis. What does the perspective of Gnosticism illuminate about the contemporary context? What key tropes of our contemporary inhabiting does the hermeneutics of Gnosticism unveil? Key ideas that arose along my study of Jonas and Voegelin indicate the pathology of a worldless inhabiting, a tragedy of the home ordaining an eminently political crisis. As the chapter proceeds, I propose to understand this worldless inhabiting as resulting from a dualistic closure of the world. Both Jonas and Voegelin point indeed toward the idea of an ontological tension, an open in-betweenness characterizing worldly becoming, whereby I reconceptualize Gnosticism as the dualistic reduction of the ontological tension of the world. I argue that a hermeneutics of Gnosticism reveals precisely what the pathological inhabiting diagnosed by Jonas and Voegelin is committed to conceal, absorb and escape from: the tension of being in the world.

⁴⁵ Voegelin, Eric, *Order and History – In Search of Order*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1987, p.43.

Chapter 4 inaugurates the most speculative and creative side of this dissertation, flowing from the analyses laid out along the first part. It observes a shift in my approach as I propose to draw upon the hermeneutics of Gnosticism elaborated in the earlier chapters to unfold the ramifications of my hypothesis and develop original reflections about the cosmological mutation induced by the contemporary ecological crisis. One key challenge of this fourth chapter is to delve deeper into the metaxic tension identified at the heart of Gnosticism to uncover the central concern of dwelling in-between – in between species, people, borders, times, political systems, disciplines, paradigms – in order to mend the alienated inhabiting of the Gnostics. To this end, I explore alternative metaphors that might inform a resilient inhabiting for the present. Along the way, as I attempt to bridge the notion of planetary entanglement with the openness of worldly processes of becoming, I introduce the idea of rooted overflowing as a way to think the irreducible metaxy of the world disclosed anew by the present ecological mutation.

Lastly, chapter 5 embraces the eminently political dimension of my hermeneutics of Gnosticism and articulates the modalities of a possible alternative, sustainable and creative inhabiting to support present political action. This concluding chapter presents itself as the deliberately more concrete development of the cosmo-ontological speculations unfolded in the previous chapters, and blooms into a reflection on the consequences of a hermeneutics of Gnosticism for contemporary political philosophy as well as for a resilient politics of the present. I approach the political as the art of inhabiting a world of entangled becomings, and the ecological crisis as therefore archetypical of the political. I explore some of the ways in which the advent of the ecological mutation summons us to redefine the conceptual framework of present politics, and how our hermeneutics of Gnosticism might support one such redefinition. This mutation of political philosophy is addressed from three angles: the apocalyptic scope of politics unveiled by the ecological crisis, illuminating its profound liminality as well as its eschatological density; the imperative of an ethics of entangled responsibility,

and the mission of inhabiting the world with love to heal the alienated inhabiting diagnosed under Gnosticism.

CHAPTER 1

HANS JONAS' ANALYSIS OF GNOSTICISM: SUBVERTING DUALISM TO INHABIT THE WORLD

Introduction

- 1) The significance of Gnosticism in Hans Jonas' philosophy: a reflection on the inhabiting of the world

In his study of the work of Hans Jonas justly entitled *Habiter le Monde*, Robert Theis argues that Jonas' whole philosophical thought follows from his study of Gnosticism – the existential analysis of his young years laying the groundwork for his future philosophy of nature, his environmental ethics of responsibility, and even the more speculative theological developments presented in *The Concept of God after Auschwitz*. Robert Theis goes on to suggest that Jonas' work is led by a key idea: that of inhabiting the world. Micha Brumlik characterizes indeed Jonas' philosophy as a “revolt against the escape from the world”⁴⁶. In the present chapter, I wish to further Theis' claim, arguing that Jonas' early works on Gnosticism condition the later development of his thought, characterized by an ontology of the world inscribing the ethical

⁴⁶ Micha BRUMLIK, "Revolte wider die Weltflucht. Zum Tode des Philosophen *Hans Jonas*," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 8 February 1993, 8. 42.

duty of dwelling in the world. To the discovery in his early research on Gnosticism of a deep anti-cosmic dualism pervading modern cosmology, Jonas shall answer with a philosophy of life offering to think the “deep rootedness of the spirit and freedom in the very web of a nature that carries in itself the tendency towards life and consciousness.”⁴⁷ *The Imperative of Responsibility* thus represents the philosopher’s attempt to establish the conditions of a new ethics for the technological civilization which would ground the moral imperative of preserving worldly being. Doing so, Jonas goes against the gnostic contempt for the world and deliberately commits the sin of “naturalistic fallacy”, characterizing the transition from Being to Ought, or from ontology to ethics. Jonas’ ethical thought illustrates the quest for an ethical principle rooted in a solicitous, sensitive and response-able engagement with worldly being, thereby fully embracing the entanglement of ontology and ethics. Impregnated with the problematic of the theodicy which he confronted in the *Concept of God after Auschwitz*, the Jonassian ethics of responsibility displays a metaphysico-theological dimension, manifest notably in the will to ground the moral imperative within a cosmological system.

While Jonas does not explicitly refer to this theological, more freely speculative dimension of his thought when recounting the stages of his intellectual journey, it is our intention to demonstrate how this dimension operates as a latent, if essential aspect of his philosophy:

Initially came my study of the Gnosticism of late antiquity from the perspective of existential analysis; then my encounter with the natural sciences on my way to formulating a philosophy of the organism; and finally my turn from theoretical to practical philosophy – that is, to ethics – in response to the urgent challenge of technology that could no longer be ignored.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Robert THEIS, *Habiter le monde*, Michalon, 2008, p.10. My translation.

⁴⁸ Hans JONAS, “Wissenschaft as Personal Experience”, *Hastings Center Report*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Jul. - Aug., 2002), p.28.

Jonas draws the generation of his ethical philosophy as stemming from a philosophy of worldly being, itself rooted in an existential analysis. His ethical thought succeeds first to an original exploration, from the existential-gnostic perspective, of what modern cosmology refers to as the “subjective”, then to a study of the world, of “natural” and “objective” being, approached through the lens of the philosophy of organism. Led by the ambition to overcome the gnostic divorce between humanity and the world, Jonas thus goes from the subject to the object and concludes on the ethical, where he attempts to bridge these two poles of modern dualism. Confronted by the colossal task of formulating an ethics for a secular civilization in dire need to contain its hubristic action on the beings of the world, the Imperative of Responsibility raises the interrogation

whether, without restoring the category of the sacred, the category most thoroughly destroyed by the scientific enlightenment, we can have an ethics able to cope with the extreme powers which we possess today.⁴⁹

What may ground the perfectly immanent transcendence of that which calls for the protection of worldly being(s)? Jonas’ ethical thought is infused with the profound intuition that “no “secularization” may go so far that we forfeit the awareness or intuitions of transcendence which religion has made accessible and from which an inalienable content can be salvaged into the post-religious perspective”⁵⁰, and radiates the strong belief in the immanent transcendence of the moral imperative: “religion in eclipse cannot relieve ethics of its task”⁵¹. Jonas’ work thus manifests the acute consciousness of the overlap of ethics and religion, as well as the intuition of a deep ontological entanglement of worldly being that overflows a dualistic structure of thought.

⁴⁹ Hans JONAS, *The Imperative of Responsibility, In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1987, p.23.

⁵⁰ Hans Jonas to Ernst Simon, 7 February 1981, *Hans Jonas Papers*, HJ 7-13-16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Jonas' interpretation of Gnosticism appears to be a paramount element in his critique of modern dualistic cosmology, as well as a decisive step on the way to a renewed thought of nature. In his early work, Jonas proposes to uncover the presence within existentialist thought of an underlying dualism – the same dualism which he thinks to have unveiled throughout his hermeneutical study of Gnosticism. This original hermeneutical enquiry seems to have determined the whole of his philosophical project, identifiable by a thought of the “mediation between nature and the other of nature”⁵² - between the modern concept of nature and that which overflows it: the spirit, the creative consciousness, or the immanent openness of the world. Such a project implies an alternative ontology of the world which Jonas, inspired by the thought of Alfred North Whitehead, contributed to sketch and which still remains to be fully embraced and unfolded by contemporary philosophy. The advent of the ecological crisis only exacerbates the inadequacy of the modern dualistic cosmology in approaching the ontological entanglement of worldly beings manifested by present events. The pivotal problematic of dualism, which Jonas first identified in the light of his analysis of Gnosticism, reflects itself with a particular intensity in the present ecological crisis:

This situation is magnified in the case of the impact of contemporary humankind's technology on the natural environment. And indeed, as this phenomenon – namely, the threat we pose to the planet's ecology – became more and more apparent during the second half of this century and finally even came to the attention of philosophers, *suddenly one of the oldest philosophical questions, that of the relationship between human being and nature, between mind and matter – in other words, the age-old question of dualism – took on a totally new form*. Now this question is no longer something to meditate on in the calm light of theory; it is illuminated by the lightning flashes of an approaching storm, warnings of a crisis that we, its unintentional creators, have the planetary duty of trying to avert. Thanks to this exceedingly practical aspect of the problem, *the reconciliation between our presumptuous special status as humans and the universe as a whole*, which is the source of our life, is becoming a central concern of philosophy. I see in this an urgent task for philosophy

⁵² Robert THEIS, *Habiter le monde*, op. cit., p.32.

to address, both at the present moment and into the coming century.⁵³

Attempting to address the gnostic element pervading modern thought, Jonas had to proceed to an *Aufhebung* of the nihilistic tendency in Heideggerian philosophy, upon which his analysis focuses. In a proper dialectical movement, Jonas' philosophical thought intends to preserve the gnostic intuition of an existential tension, a dwelling in between, while overcoming the nihilistic tendency to a withdrawal from the world, a Demundanization of our thought and inhabiting. This project relies upon a unique approach to and conceptualization of the category of Gnosticism.

2) The Jonassian approach to Gnosticism

A controversial category

Hans Jonas' approach to Gnosticism is a controversial one. While several scholars have discarded Jonas' study of ancient Gnosticism, converging on the obsolescence of his analysis, some have come to question the legitimacy of the very category of Gnosticism. Present scholarly research in religious historiography tends indeed to challenge the validity of the category of Gnosticism, denouncing its pretention to characterize a monolithic religious phenomenon, while the term appears to cover a wide range of heterogeneous traditions that fail to even converge on a specific set of features. Michael Williams'⁵⁴ work thus contributes to uncover the category of Gnosticism, which Jonas largely contributed to define, as a Modern construct, with no reliable evidence in ancient sources to support the unification of a profusion of mythological narratives, leading him to plead for the dismantling of the category of Gnosticism.

⁵³ Hans JONAS, "Philosophy at the End of the Century: A Survey of Its Past and Future", *Social Research*, Vol. 61, No. 4, Sixtieth Anniversary 1934-1994: The Legacy of Our Past (WINTER 1994), pp. 813-832. Here p.826. I emphasize.

⁵⁴ Michael Allen WILLIAMS, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996.

In an article on Jonas' construct "Gnosticism"⁵⁵, Michael Waldstein provides a condensed insight into the scholarly criticism raised around the Jonassian use of the term, and proposes to investigate the intellectual generation of the concept by Jonas. He notably highlights the seminal influence, along with the hermeneutic principles inherited from Heidegger's existential analytic, of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*, as well as Hegel's philosophy of history. These idealistic influences seem to have crystallized the main critiques formulated against the Jonassian category of Gnosticism, its legitimacy having been assessed along a pure historical perspective:

Jonas' theses are fascinating in their insightful soaring above the details of the earth. But they tend to misrepresent the actual history suggested by the texts from Nah Hammadi. In this respect there is surely much merit in Williams' plea for dismantling the category "Gnosticism" as inherited from Jonas.⁵⁶

It is quite interesting to notice here that the critiques raised against Jonas' approach to the category of Gnosticism tend to reproduce the dualism which the Jonassian understanding of Gnosticism precisely contributes to unveil, and which the philosopher invites us to critically consider: namely, that opposing the "ideal", or "conceptual", to the "historical" or "empirical". So that Jonas' analysis of the structural dualism of gnostic systems of thought appears to anticipate the critique that would stigmatize his perspective on Gnosticism as too "ideal", "conceptual", "existential", "ethereal" or "spiritual", therefore failing to relate the pure historical, factual, empirical reality of Late Antiquity spiritual movements. If we consider the main critiques formulated against Jonas' analysis, and while we cannot but acknowledge the constructed nature of his concept of Gnosticism, we might also deem such critiques targeted at the too "ideal" dimension of his interpretation irrelevant to the concern lying at the core of the present chapter and thesis. The critique of the excessive idealism of one's thought only bears relevance to one who accepts the postulate of a dualistic system opposing the ideal to the factual, which the present dissertation intends to challenge. What is more, Jonas' interest in ancient Gnosticism is an "ideal" one indeed,

⁵⁵ Michael WALDSTEIN, "Hans Jonas' Construct "Gnosticism": Analysis and Critique", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Volume 8, Number 3, Fall 2000, pp. 341-372.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.370.

and therein, I wish to argue, lies its significance – at least to the humble extent of a philosophical, hermeneutical endeavour. As Arthur Darby Nock had already sensed in 1936, “Jonas’ real interest lies in an attempt to make a synthesis. (...) He is a metaphysician trying to shake off the yoke of history and to lead us to a higher level of comprehension.”⁵⁷ To this extent, Jonas’ interpretation of Gnosticism must be regarded as a speculative exercise in systematic and hermeneutical philosophy. His doctoral research, undertaken under the joint supervision of Martin Heidegger and Martin Bultmann and aptly entitled “The Concept of Gnosis”⁵⁸, was led by the quest for a cardinal idea underpinning the profusion of spiritual and mythological innovations arising in the Late Antiquity period. Jonas’ approach to Gnosticism is a particular one, insofar as it does not dwell on its genealogical, nor even historical dimension. While aware of the strong syncretism characterizing gnostic movements, gathering elements stemming from Jewish, Babylonian, Egyptian, Syriac, or Iranian milieus, Jonas remained attentive to the potential presence of a common idea, a common posture towards the world and towards existence. His study is that of a mythological, mystical, cosmological, conceptual, philosophical Gnosis, and ought therefore to be treated as such. Drawing upon the existential analytic formulated by his professor in *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Jonas’ early analysis of gnostic narratives focused more specifically on the existential attitude characterizing these religious experiences. He thus offered to study Gnosticism as a phenomenon that demands to be interpreted along an existential analysis delving into some fundamental experience of our being in the world. The light he shed on ancient Gnosticism was reflected into a fruitful hermeneutical circle with existential philosophy, thereby unfolding some of the hermeneutical potential of the category of Gnosticism.

⁵⁷ Arthur DARBY NOCK, “Review of Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist I*,” *Gnomon* 12 (1936): 605–12; reprinted in Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World*, ed. Zeph Stewart, 2 vols. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1972), p. 444.

⁵⁸ Hans JONAS, *Der Begriff der Gnosis*, Hubert, Göttingen, 1930.

Jonas' approach to Gnosticism is characterized by the fecund hermeneutical association of the gnostic and existentialist thoughts. Waldstein mentions an "intense mirroring between historiography and existential philosophy"⁵⁹ distinctive of Jonas' work on Gnosticism, while Jonas himself admits to "a certain circularity in procedure", proceeding from the realization that "what I had learnt out there [about the gnostic existence] made me now better understand the [existentialist] shore from which I had set out."⁶⁰ The Heideggerian existential analytic provided indeed Jonas with the conceptual tools which then allowed him to elucidate what first appeared as a highly heterogeneous thought movement. This proved a methodological success, as Jonas regarded the existential perspective to constitute a hermeneutical key to unlock Gnosticism and to make sense out of the profusion of gnostic expressions. According to Jonas, Gnosticism thus represents "the new discovery of the Self which showed the Self's incommensurability with all world-nature" and stands for the realization that such discovery occurs "through a break with the world", thereby achieving "a cosmic turning-point of the Spirit"⁶¹ – which might be understood here as an avatar of the Heideggerian category of Being. Jonas' hermeneutic approach to Gnosticism converges on the colossal task of retrieving the self-understanding of human existence from its objectivation in mythological projections. As we shall see, the self-understanding characteristic of Gnosticism lies in a strong dualism opposing humanity to the world and locating salvation in a movement of liberation and escape from the world – what Jonas conceptualized under the term *Entweltlichung*, literally *Demundanization*. Jonas soon realized however that such hermeneutical success might rely on some previously unnoticed, if essential, affinity between both systems of thought. What if the object of study became in itself a hermeneutical tool? Jonas sensed that his concept of Gnosticism might as well provide a key to unlock existentialism. This cardinal in-

⁵⁹ Michael WALDSTEIN, art. cit., p.370.

⁶⁰ Hans JONAS, "Gnosticism, Existentialism and Nihilism", Epilogue to *the Gnostic Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston, 2001, p.320.

⁶¹ Hans JONAS, *Gnosis und Spätantiker Geist I*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1993, pp.170-171.

sight came with another realization, namely that of the utter contingency of the existential approach, thereby deconstructing the latter's claim to universality. This acknowledgement of the ontological and epistemological situatedness of the thinker's perspective led Jonas to pay critical attention to the intellectual influences he had inherited from his professors, whose profound "Gnosticism" he shall later become more and more aware of⁶².

"What was there between Existentialism and Gnosticism which made the latter open up at the touch of the former?"⁶³ Jonas asks. In "Gnosticism, Existentialism and Nihilism", the thinker returns to the "elective affinity" which had disclosed itself throughout his early study of Gnosticism, and which lays at the heart of the hermeneutical circle involved in his analysis. When studying gnostic texts, Jonas was "stuck by the familiarity of the seemingly utterly strange"⁶⁴, and came to identify a community of inspiration between contemporary existentialist philosophy and the phenomenon of late antiquity gnosis. The philosopher notes that both thoughts emerged in an analogous historical context characterized by an atmosphere of civilizational decay and displayed an existential posture towards the world one might qualify as estranged or nihilistic. Jonas thus formulates the hypothesis that the hermeneutical affinity and the conceptual echo between both movements might be due "to the very kind of "existence" on either side"⁶⁵ – thereby furthering the existential analysis inherited from his contemporaries. Gnostic writings may resemble more mythological imagination than the strict conceptual analysis led by Heidegger or Sartre; not to mention the explicitly religious dimension of Gnosticism, when contemporary existentialism thrives on the thought of the death of God. Yet such divergences should not occult the essential anxiety stemming from both the gnostic and existentialist self's being-in-the-world. Both movements offer indeed the expression of the imprisonment of the self in a world it did not choose to dwell in and an alienation from which it is longing to break free. The themes of the alien world, of the absent God and of the resulting feeling of existential isolation manifest a common nihilistic tendency unfolding into a worldless and dualistic system of thought. While Jonas interprets the modern age as the manifestation of

⁶² Hans JONAS, "Gnosticism, Existentialism and Nihilism", art. cit., p.321.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.320.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.321.

a nihilistic crisis of meaning and orientation, he identifies the beginning of such a crisis in Pascal's depiction of the existential isolation of humanity, plunged amidst the infinitude of the universe. From Pascal unto his own existentialist professors, Jonas distinguishes the articulation of a deep existential anxiety with the depiction of an ontological alienness infusing a posture of ethical indifference to the world. For him, the essence of such "gnostic" nihilism lies in a dualistic cosmology recounting an estranged relationship between humanity and the world.

3) Towards a concept of Gnosticism as dualistic and acosmic cosmology

Attempting to extract the ontological network of the gnostic symbolism, Jonas finds a deep tendency of rupture with the world, a cosmological estrangement which he conceptualizes under the term of Demundanization – *Entweltlichungstendenz*⁶⁶. Jonas interprets this tendency of withdrawal from the world as both a modality of being in the world, a mode of existence and inhabiting, and a perspective of salvation. Hence, the gnostic Demundanization roots itself in an eschatological, anti-cosmic dualism articulated around the trinomial cosmos – humanity – God⁶⁷. This essential acosmism or worldlessness of the gnostic system of thought, illustrated through the motives of the negation of and escape from the world, characterizes the gnostic self-understanding and affects all perceptions of the self and the world. Focusing on a Demundanization tendency which draws upon an onto-theological dualism between God and the world, Jonas' conceptualization of Gnosticism thus allows a greater awareness of the acosmic tendency of modern cosmology, similarly blossoming within a dualistic structure of thought.

⁶⁶ Hans JONAS, *Gnosis und Spätantiker Geist*, op.cit., p.2.

⁶⁷ Hans JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion*, op. cit., p.32 sq.

A. The primary experience of the alienness of the world

Jonas' account of Gnosticism roots itself in the diagnosis of a primary experience of alienation in and from the world. The gnostic experience of estrangement in the world is characterized by the sense of a cureless ontological lack, the absence of God in the world – which resonates in Modernity through the motive of the death of God –, both feelings resulting into an overwhelming desire to overcome the modalities of mundane existence. The dynamic of Demundanization, identified by Jonas as central feature of Gnosticism, thus proceeds from a particular mode of existence, a type of dwelling, a gnostic being-in-the-world characterized by a tremendous cosmic anxiety. This study of the gnostic inhabiting of the world allows Jonas, drawing upon the existential analytic of his peers, to identify elemental features of the gnostic profile amidst a profusion of mythological narratives. For Jonas, the theological, cosmological, anthropological and soteriological dimensions of Gnosis all proceed from an original and traumatic experience of being in the world.

Jonas identifies various leitmotifs both running through the numerous mythological systems he studied and pervading modern narratives of the condition of the self, whose being in the world is determined by the notion of a primordial fall intended to express the constrained character of our worldly existence. Eric Pommier summarizes the gnostic dramaturgy outlined by Jonas in four acts⁶⁸: the absence of god in the world, the figure of the Demiurge, Humanity's entrance onto the stage of the world, and the escape from the world. Before delving any deeper into the tropes of a gnostic inhabiting, let us very briefly present the main stages of this dramaturgy.

- The trope of the absence of god in the world is crucial in the development of the gnostic inhabiting. Gnostic narratives depict the divine as extramundane, otherworldly, located in some undetermined beyond the world: this topological dimension bears an immediate ontological signification as it unfolds into the cardinal distinction between god and the world. In the gnostic cosmology indeed, god and the world are from radically different essences, ontologically stranger to each other. One

⁶⁸ Eric POMMIER, *Jonas*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2013, p.34 sq.

epistemological consequence of this ontological divorce pronounced by the radical transcendence of the divine lies in Humanity's unovercomeable state of ignorance: as prisoners from a stranger world, we cannot know God. The idea of the otherworldliness of God, his absence and ontological alterity from the world thus lays the foundation of the gnostic doctrine of knowledge. The latter lays the accent on an epistemological lack and proceeds from the urge to know God as the *Void-of-the-World, Other-than-the-World*. In this respect, Gnosticism appears as one of the sources of negative theology – primarily conceiving God in its negativity, here indeed in its non-being in the world.

- The figure of the Demiurge pops in the gnostic drama of worldly creation to justify the existence of an alienating world. It appears in gnostic narratives as either a caricature of the God of the Ancient Testament – despotic, arrogant and malevolent – or as a wandering figure subject to remorse for creating a world of imperfections and sufferings. The Demiurge arises from a break of the divine auto-sufficiency, a movement of auto-differentiation of the Absolute reminiscent of the mechanism of cell-division. This idea of a crack in the divine allowing for the emergence of the world appears essential in Jonas' analysis of Gnosticism as well as in the later development of his thought. In gnostic mythology, this mytheme unfolds into a polytheist theology intended to unify the extreme and paradoxical transcendence of the divine with its constitutive weakness, from which the world would proceed.

- Humanity's entrance onto the stage of the World results from another sinister design: the archons' – servants of the Demiurge – presumptuous attempt at imitating the divine. Throughout the several stages of the gnostic decay relating the drama of the divine exile from the world, humanity still manages to preserve a fragment of the divine, which endures in the spirit. The human spirit represents the ultimate stage of God's exile in the world, and as such embodies its last chance for redemption. Gnostic narratives convey a sense of the deep ambiguity of human existence, figuring the enslavement of a divine fragment cast into an ontologically alien world. The human condition of ignorance and blindness is key to understand the gnostic dynamic of

achieving redemption through a knowledge that would release humanity from its enslavement in the world.

- The perspective of an escape from the world marks the ultimate act of the gnostic dramaturgy, articulated around the achievement of *Gnosis*. Gnosis is the revealed and revelatory knowledge of Humanity's supra-natural, otherworldly, divine origins. It is a performative knowledge that, by breaking the forgetfulness in which human existence was blindly dwelling, achieves the simultaneous salvation of Humanity and God. Both destination of the gnostic exile and provenance of the call, Gnosis is the liberating knowledge allowing Humanity to tear itself away from the world and to be born again in the consciousness of its divine roots.

Amidst this gnostic dramaturgy, I identified three themes, three tropes that might operate as hermeneutical keys and allow us to elucidate the nature of gnostic inhabiting, both in its antique and its more contemporary declinations: the Fall into and Escape from the world, the Alien and the Home, and the Abyss.

The Fall into and Escape from the World

The gnostic Being-in-the-World is characterized by the twofold expression of an original fall into the world, and the ensuing urge of a redemptive escape from the world. Jonas describes the notion of the fall as one of the fundamental symbols of Gnosticism: "a pre-cosmic fall of part of the divine principle underlies the genesis of the world and of human existence in the majority of gnostic systems"⁶⁹. The mytheme of the fall has widely pervaded the development of Judeo-Christian cosmologies, which make sense of human existence as following from an original fall into the world. The Heideggerian notion of thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) provides an illustration of the persistency in contemporary thought – even in a thinker notoriously critical of the

⁶⁹ Hans JONAS, *Gnostic Religion*, op. cit., p.62.

western philosophical tradition – of this representation of a fall, a sinking into the world emphasizing the arbitrary and sinister nature of worldly existence. Always attentive to the existential dimension of narratives, Jonas notes that

in both cases “to have been thrown” is not merely a description of the past but an attribute qualifying the given existential situation as determined by that past. It is from the gnostic experience of the present situation of life that this dramatic image of its genesis has been projected into the past, and it is part of the mythological expression of this experience.⁷⁰

Just like the gnostic fall, the Heideggerian *Geworfenheit* figures a way for the self to represent the anxious wandering of its existence in the world: the gnostic Being-in-the-World is a being-thrown, a being-fallen (*Verfallenheit*), a passive sinking into worldly existence. Displaying the passivity of the soul cast and lost into the world against its will, the gnostic myth depicts the fall as a degeneration. The gnostic trope of the fall represents indeed the progressive loss of the divine as it descends into the world, and the dispersion of divine sparks, along with the call arising from the ethereal voice of “a stranger whose coming constitutes an entering of the beyond into the world”⁷¹. The idea of the fall as a movement of dispersion of divine sparks into the obscurity of the world conveys a depreciation of the latter, perceived in its ontological opposition to the realm of light. Worldly being embodies a break in the purity of the luminous being whose integrity was jeopardized by the creation of the world. As we shall see further in the following chapters, this gnostic conception of the breaking open of the cosmic confinement through a divine transcendence might also potentially evoke the presence of the possible within the world and its overflowing through its openness. In this respect, the Heideggerian concept of the openness of Being appears to prolong the gnostic thought of an ontological break within worldly being, leaving it open to the potential irruption of a transformative transcendence.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.64.

⁷¹ Robert THEIS, *Jonas*, op. cit, p.18

Succeeding to the original fall, the gnostic yearning is led by the desire to escape the modalities of mundane existence, and the gnostic salvation lies in a triumph over the world: “the world must be overcome”⁷². Gnosticism thus conceives of salvation as an extramundane event leading humanity away from the world. In this respect, the gnostic complaint for a way out of the world is re-enacted in Charles Baudelaire’s poem “Anywhere out of the world?”, as well as in the reaction of the Moderns to the environmental crisis as portrayed by Bruno Latour⁷³: “free at last, finally we are getting rid of this rotten earth!”. The end of the gnostic mythology lies indeed in Humanity’s redemption through the overcoming of the world and the restoration of the divine – lost, dispersed, misled and wounded by worldly being. As they project the redemptive escape from the world along an ascensional movement towards the super-mundane, gnostic narratives weave an ethical and eschatological structure infused with a vertical imaginary in which the world is depicted as the *below* and the divine as the *beyond the world*. The movement of a divine transcendence breaking the world open is thus conceived of as vertical, stemming from an otherworldly, supernatural source that is not already present in worldly being. Worldly being on the contrary tends to be referred to in the language of horizontality and immanence, the interdependence entailed in worldly bounds conceived in terms of an enslavement from which man is yearning to break free. The mytheme of the torpor is recurrent in gnostic narratives and is employed to describe the condition of humanity enslaved in the world, inciting men to “wake up from their sleep”⁷⁴ and regain the memory of their origins. To the realization of the state of worldly alienation succeeds the gnostic complaint, which may also appear as an indignation, an accusation. Expressions of such complaint manifest the spirit’s attempts to escape the closed world, to flee from time and space, both considered as elements of a demoniac system preventing the spirit from finding home. Voltaire thus formulates one modern declination of such loathing of worldly existence, illustrating the gnostic hatred of our rootedness: “one is angry to have been born, one is indignant to be a man”⁷⁵. Gnostic

⁷² Hans JONAS, *Gnostic Religion*, op.cit., p.329.

⁷³ Bruno LATOUR, « Comment s’orienter? Réflexions sur la possible canalisation de quelques affects politiques », Unpublished draft for *Down To Earth*, p.38.

⁷⁴ Hans JONAS, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist I*, op.cit., p.127.

⁷⁵ VOLTAIRE, *Concerning conspiracies against people, or proscriptions*, 1766. URL: <http://societe-voltaire.org/voltaire-conspiracies.pdf>

narratives from then and from today are filled with expressions of the existential anxiety, some cosmic unease prompted by an ontological spatio-temporal adversity. An essential element of the Jonassian concept of Gnosticism, this urge to escape the world largely echoes our second theme, for it often converges with the experiences of the alienness of the world and the yearning for home.

The Alien and the Home

Another essential element of the Gnostic thought lies in the feeling of a homesickness⁷⁶ erected to a cosmic level and manifesting an existential crisis of the rootedness. Gnostic narratives express indeed the feeling of an ontological strangeness at the origin of some profound unease and discontent towards this world to which the self does not belong. Jonas relates various expressions in Mandaean texts of “the frightened and nostalgic state of the soul forlorn in the world”⁷⁷, “the forlornness of the Life from beyond sojourning in the world”, and the “feeling of having been forgotten in the foreign land”⁷⁸. The philosopher identifies essential features of Gnosticism in the representation of a life lost in the alien world, the ensuing feelings of homelessness and restless wandering and the “plight of the Soul in the labyrinth of the hostile world”⁷⁹.

The Strange, *das Fremde* appears as another key aspect of the concept of Gnosticism, drawing upon an elementary experience of life in the world. From this primary experience of alienness proceeds the conception of the absolute transcendence of God, embodied in the figure of the Alien God, which contributes to further anchor the radical dualism opposing the divine to the worldly: “the Divine is alien to the World”, is “the totally Other”.⁸⁰ The texts studied by Jonas cultivate the notion of the deep alienness of life on earth, thereby emphasizing the ontological strangeness of human life,

Accessed 11.03.2019.

⁷⁶ Hans JONAS, *Gnostic Religion*, op. cit., p.65 sq.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.65

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.66.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.67.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.327.

from divine origin, arising amidst a world of death and chaos. Coming from elsewhere, the spirit feels a stranger in the world in which it was cast: gnostic narratives recount the sufferings which come with the lot of the stranger: wandering, loneliness, lack of understanding. The notion of the Alien is still present in the gnostic experience of a worldly alienation, where the “dispersal” of the divine light translates on an existential level into the manifold distractions arising from the worldly chaos surrounding it.⁸¹ This radical experience of worldly alienation, along with an incapacity of finding home within the world, conditions the perception by the gnostic mind of the ontological hostility of the World. Jonas finds in Mandaean literature the recurrent theme of a life that was thrown into a world that is ontologically strange, namely from a different nature than human existence. And yet, as Levinas reminds us, we are in the world⁸²: here we must dwell, we must find home.

The strangeness of the worldly habitation and the exigency to inhabit the hostile make the love of the home suspicious to the Gnostics. In contrast to the Greek thought that situates humanity within a complete and harmonious cosmos, thereby allowing for meaning and sense to be conferred upon existence, the gnostic cosmology is articulated around the feeling of an existence in exile, wandering in an alien world and yearning for a home. Whereas the Greek representation of humanity’s place in the cosmos is characterized by intimacy and feeling at home in the world, illustrated by Hellenistic cosmopolitanism, the Gnostic cosmology conceives of the world as what is alien to humanity. While the Hellenistic cosmos is intelligible, entails intrinsic value, and displays the union between consciousness and the world, the gnostic consciousness is homeless, aches from the hostile indifference of an alien world and asks to divorce from it. In this respect, the gnostic metaphors of the alien and the home contribute to further convey the cosmological dualism between humanity and the world, which we will approach in our next section. As Susan Taubes rightfully notes in an article on the gnostic essence of Heidegger’s nihilism, the framing of the ontological strangeness of the world and the radical alterity of the divine in dualistic terms contributes to enshrine the closeness, finitude and hopelessness of the world: « the notion of strangeness engenders that of a beyond that limits and confines the world into a

⁸¹ Ibid, p.62.

⁸² Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l’Extériorité*, Livre de Poche, 1987, p.21.

closed system: all that is, is locked and lost within the world.⁸³» Gnosticism conceives god and the world in radical, mutually exclusive, dualistic terms where the world is the unhomey home of the strange and god the intimate other of the world.

The Abyss, the Rift, and Cosmic Anxiety

Condemned to wander in an alien world, the lamentations of the gnostic soul merge into the expression of a general Weltschmerz, thereby defining our third theme identified among the Jonassian account of Gnosticism. The cosmic anxiety appears indeed as an essential, perhaps most manifest feature of Gnosticism, primarily characterized by the “feeling of an absolute rift between man and that in which he finds himself lodged – the world.”⁸⁴

Jonas finds in gnostic narratives the manifold expressions of a tremendous existential anxiety erected to a cosmic level, a *Weltangst* over the inescapability of our being-in-the-world. Here again, the existentialist wording of Jonas’ contemporaries serves as a privileged access to the gnostic mind, whose existential crisis Jonas links to the emphasis in existentialist philosophy on the feeling of an abyss opposing the self to the universe. The philosopher identifies indeed both in gnostic texts and in modern thought a similar sense of the hostile indifference of the universe to the aspirations of the self⁸⁵, its modern counterpart finding a prodigious expression in Blaise Pascal’s writings: “cast into the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened.”⁸⁶ Imbued with the theme of the abyss, the gnostic-

⁸³ Susan TAUBES, “The Gnostic Foundations of Heidegger’s Nihilism”, *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Jul., 1954), p.159.

⁸⁴ Hans JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion*, op.cit., p.327.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.322.

⁸⁶ Blaise PASCAL, *Pensées*, Brunschvieg, p.205. Quoted in Hans JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion*, op.cit., p.322.

“When I see the blind and wretched state of man. When I survey the whole universe in its dumbness and man left to himself with no light, as though lost in this corner of the universe, without knowing who put him there, what he has come to do, what will become of him when he dies, incapable of knowing anything, I am moved to terror, like a man transported in his sleep to some terrifying desert island, who wakes up quite lost and with no means of escape. Then I marvel that so wretched a state does not drive people to despair.”

existentialist prose revolves around the attempt to express the bottomless depth disclosed by our existence in the world, by our standing on the edge of the groundless, and the feeling of vertigo that comes with the consciousness of the infinite openness of worldly becomings. The gnostic being-in-the-world studied by Jonas suffers similarly from the perception of this abyss, and its expressions are infused with the notion of an extreme, hopeless loneliness, an unfathomable ignorance, along with the feeling of being abandoned in the void of a world filled with an eternally silent indifference. There is no escape out of a deserted world where the complaints of the self are left unheard: the world has ceased to speak, its voice inaudible to the forgotten orphans of an absent God.

Pervading gnostic imaginaries, the trope of the abyss conveys a sense of radical rupture between the self and the world, which Jonas identifies as an elemental feature of gnostic cosmologies. The latter express an indignation towards the ontological dependency of human existence to the world, and the feeling of man's insignificance disclosed by it. The cosmic anxiety identified by Jonas in both ancient and contemporary forms of Gnosticism thus manifests itself through a despoliation of worldly bonds, leading the self to deplore the liability "to be crushed at any moment by the forces of an immense and blind universe in which his existence is but a particular blind accident, no less blind than would be the accident of his destruction."⁸⁷ Jonas highlights the underlying dualistic premise of gnostic narratives, assuming that "as a thinking reed, however, [humanity] is no part of the sum, *not belonging to it, but radically different, incommensurable*: for the *res extensa* does not think, so Descartes had taught, and nature is nothing but *res extensa* – body, matter, external magnitude."⁸⁸ The radical strangeness and contingency of human existence prevents the thinking subject to find any meaning within a nature deserted by sense. Jonas uncovers the presence in Gnosticism of a strong man-world dualism, emphasizing the exceptional character of consciousness amidst worldly being: "[humanity] alone in the world thinks, not because but in spite of his being part of nature"⁸⁹. The why to our existence remains an enigma, and Gnosticism asserts our estrangement from the natural world,

⁸⁷ Hans JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion*, op.cit., p.322.

⁸⁸ Ibid. I emphasize.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.323.

our distance from God and the gap within ourselves.⁹⁰ In this respect, the mytheme of the abyss, along with the feeling of a cosmic anxiety it elicits, appears as a crystallization of the dualistic approach to the world characteristic of Gnosticism, filled with the feeling of an “unbridgeable gulf”⁹¹, namely an “estrangement between man and the world”⁹². Charles Baudelaire’s poem “The Abyss” (*Le Gouffre*) is full of the gnostic lexicon of the cosmic anxiety, and illustrates perfectly this idea of a rift separating the self from the world:

Le Gouffre

Pascal avait son gouffre, avec lui se mouvant.
— Hélas! tout est abîme, — action, désir, rêve,
Parole! Et sur mon poil qui tout droit se relève
Mainte fois de la Peur je sens passer le vent.

En haut, en bas, partout, la profondeur, la grève,
Le silence, l'espace affreux et captivant...
Sur le fond de mes nuits Dieu de son doigt savant
Dessine un cauchemar multiforme et sans trêve.

J'ai peur du sommeil comme on a peur d'un grand trou,
Tout plein de vague horreur, menant on ne sait où;
Je ne vois qu'infini par toutes les fenêtres,

Et mon esprit, toujours du vertige hanté,
Jalouse du néant l'insensibilité.
— Ah! *ne jamais sortir des Nombres et des Êtres!*⁹³

The last verse – “Ah! Not to ever come out of the Numbers and Beings!” – expresses the regret of being in the world - as opposed to being the world -, of having been thrown into this life, while the poet “envies the insensitivity of the nothingness”. But

⁹⁰ Eric POMMIER, op.cit, p.40.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid, p.325.

⁹³ Charles BAUDELAIRE, “Le Gouffre”, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Gallimard Flammarion, Paris, 1964 (1857), p.201.

it also conveys the idea of an ontological difference, unbridgeable - of a radical dualism opposing human life to the rest of worldly being, here referred to as “numbers and beings” and “the awful and captivating space”, thereby perpetuating the idea of worldly existence as primarily captive, imprisoned into an infinite yet confined space. Baudelaire’s poem thus provides a paradigmatic expression of modern Gnosticism in its depiction of an existential dualism articulated around the image of the abyss. This expression suggests, in the continuity of Jonas’ interpretation of Gnosticism, that a certain existential gulf builds the foundation for the dualistic structure of thought diagnosed by Jonas both in gnostic narratives and in modern cosmology.

In this first section dedicated to the existential dimension of Jonassian Gnosticism, I explored some fundamental modalities of the gnostic being-in-the-world. I outlined the existential framework of a gnostic alienation from the world, primarily manifested through the themes of the fall, the strange, and the abyss. This portrait of the gnostic existence should allow us to now approach the cosmology which Jonas describes as gnostic, as well as enable a perceptive understanding of Jonas’ hermeneutical approach to Gnosticism – flowing from the existential to the cosmological. In retracing Jonas’ own intellectual path towards the conceptualization of Gnosticism, I intend to demonstrate how the dynamic of Demundanization, identified by Jonas as driving force of Gnosticism, is closely tied to an estranged mode of existence in the world and unfolds into a dualistic cosmological system.

B. Gnosticism as acosmic dualism

In the *Gnostic Religion*, Jonas writes that “the cardinal feature of gnostic thought is the radical dualism that governs the relation of God and world, and correspondingly that of man and world”⁹⁴. This second section proposes to delve into the gnostic cosmology, identifiable according to Jonas by a structural *acosmic dualism*. While doing so, I propose to pay attention to the unfolding within gnostic cosmology of the existential dualism previously outlined, as well as the centrality of the theological dimension of such dualism. Jonas’ examination of gnostic systems of thought is led indeed by the identification of a threefold opposition of man and the world, spirit and soul, and god and the world, thereby uncovering a structural, deep-ingrained dualism, defined by Jonas as “anthropological acosmism”.

The cosmo-ontological unfolding of an existential dualism

Jonas’ account of Gnosticism emphasizes the existential generation of gnostic cosmological systems, characterized by a structural acosmic, or worldless dualism. Jonas considers such dualism as the key, unifying feature of the gnostic thought, and situates its origin in the experience of a divorce between the self and the world:

This dualistic mood underlies the whole gnostic attitude and unifies the widely diversified, more or less systematic expressions which that attitude gave itself in gnostic ritual and belief. *It is on this primary human foundation of a dualistic mood, a passionately felt experience of man, that the articulated dualistic doctrines rest.*⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Hans JONAS, *Gnostic Religion*, op.cit., p.42.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.251. I emphasize.

Jonas' understanding of the existential roots of the cosmological dualism in Gnosticism might remind us the approach advocated by Michael Jackson's existential anthropology⁹⁶. Drawing upon the legacies of phenomenology and existentialism, the anthropologist proposes to approach human experience through a perspective combining collective worldviews and individual lifeworld, thereby offering to bridge the traditional epistemological opposition between individualism and holism. Jonas' approach to the gnostic cosmology resembles indeed an anthropological one, emphasizing the existential experience lying at its core, as well as shedding light on its historical contingency. Hence, Jonas argues that an existential estrangement between humanity and the world underlies the development of an anthropological dualism conceiving of humanity as made of two substances – body and mind, but also soul and spirit. This anthropological dualism unfolds unto a cosmological level with the thought of a Pascalian “gulf” simultaneously separating mankind from its most authentic divine essence and from the world. The notion of a rupture between logos and cosmos brings such conception to a deeper level of abstraction and is consumed in the gnostic representation of a redemptive knowledge releasing humanity from its worldly bonds. The world and the worldly beings that populate it – to which humanity does not belong –, figures the utter absence of sense and meaning, and from the spirit's incapacity to dwell in it proceeds the gnostic drama of being in the world. As we know now, the gnostic doctrine of knowledge is what mediates the engagement of the gnostic self with the world, or more exactly, what mediates its *escape from* the world – the Gnosis comes indeed to relieve the sufferings of the self cast into an alien world. In this perspective, the only way to make sense out of the world is to deny its meaning and to escape from it. From the necessity of mediation, the gnostic thought derives the ontological divergence of humanity from the world, these building two distinct realms of reality. This opposition between humanity and the world overlaps that between logos and cosmos, spirit and matter, and God and the world. The concept of the logos allows us to approach the dualism of gnostic cosmologies as articulated around a cardinal theological dualism: “the dualism between man and world posits as its metaphysical counterpart that between the world and God”⁹⁷.

⁹⁶ Michael JACKSON, *Existential Anthropology: Events, Exigencies, and Effects*, Berghahn Books, 2005.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

A pivotal theological dualism

Hans Jonas' conceptualization of Gnosticism is articulated around a theological dualism distinguishing between, and ultimately opposing, God to the world. This dualism is so paramount within Jonas' understanding of Gnosticism that it seems to crystallise, initiate and organize the gnostic cosmology as a whole.

The Jonassian interpretation of Gnosticism as acosmic dualism, in other words, as a structure of dualistic narratives articulating a profound dynamic of rejection of the world, manifests itself most clearly in the systematic opposition between divine and worldly being. Gnostic dualism appears indeed condensed in the theological dualism opposing God to the World. More precisely, the gnostic cosmology outlined by Jonas might be interpreted as the unfolding of a thought of the otherworldliness of God, from which the adivinity of the world is then derived – or is this the other way around? The otherworldliness of God and the adivinity of the world, both constituting essential features of the Jonassian concept of Gnosticism, soon appear as two sides of the same coin, proceeding from the same gnostic impulse of ontologically opposing the divine to the worldly. In this respect, and as we shall see further on, the Jonassian account of Gnosticism might be interpreted as the cosmological unfolding of an original, twofold hypostatization of god and the world as two irreconcilable poles of one primordial duality. The theological and ontological differentiation between god and the world conditions the representation of the divine as other-worldly and reciprocally, of the world as non-divine. The gnostic theology thus considers God as a stranger to the world, as the complete other which cannot be comprehended in worldly terms, and insists on a vertical axis opposing the worldly here below to the divine beyond. The high/low antithesis systematically structures in gnostic narratives the distance between terrestrial and divine worlds, and while gnostic theologies sometimes display some sense of a divine interiority unfolding within the dramatic history of the world, they also retain a strong interiority/exteriority, or spirit/incarnation dualism, thereby perpetuating an essential god/world dualism.

The gnostic emphasis on the absolute transcendence of God from the world may find an echo in the tradition of apophatic theology. Introduced in Christian theology by the early sixth-century author Dionysius the Areopagite, the terminology of apophatic and cataphatic theologies distinguishes between the use of positive or negative statements to approach God. The ways of affirmation or negation refer to an already well-established theological practice reaching back into the traditions of the Hebrew scriptures and classical Greek philosophy. Central in Christian Mysticism, where it celebrates a mystery beyond expression, apophatic theology conveys the sense of an overwhelming transcendence of God and allows, in Andrew Louth's words, "an engagement that leaves a sense of withdrawal"⁹⁸. The obscurely felt presence of God combined with its radical incomprehensibility result in a richness of experience that overflows any attempt to articulate it. In apophatic theology, God is therefore experienced as a *beyond*: beyond being, beyond intellect, beyond words, concepts and images. In this regard, the gnostic experience of God as a beyond is reminiscent of the posture of apophatic theology, which offers a way to channel the gnostic intuition of the ineffability of a divine only manifesting itself in a movement of withdrawal from worldly being. But the apophatic language should not be equated with a gnostic posture of desolation in the face of the absence of God in the world: it can also recount the experience of a divine saturation⁹⁹, an overwhelming presence of God even manifest in her absence. Still, Jonas insists that the God of the Gnostics is primarily apprehended in its negative relation to the world, Basilides speaking of a *non-being God*. This leads Jonas to qualify Gnosticism as a "nihilistic theology"¹⁰⁰. He explains:

the gnostic God, as distinct from the demiurge, is the totally different, the other, the unknown. Like his inner-human counterpart, the acosmic self or pneuma, whose hidden nature also reveals itself only in the negative experience of otherness, of non-identification and of protested indefinable freedom, this God has more of the *nihil* than the *ens* in his concept.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Andrew LOUTH, "Apophatic and Cataphatic Theology" in A. Hollywood & P. Beckman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge Companions to Religion, 2012, pp. 137-146

⁹⁹ Jean-Luc Marion's theory of saturated phenomena insists on the overwhelming presence of a beyond which excesses our perception and understanding, thus calling for a phenomenality of excess. He mentions divine revelation as one such saturated phenomenon.

See notably Jean-Luc MARION, *De surcroît : études sur les phénomènes saturés*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2010 (2001).

¹⁰⁰ Hans JONAS, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist I*, op.cit, p.250.

¹⁰¹ Hans JONAS, *Gnostic Religion*, op.cit, p.332.

Jonas describes the gnostic god as ultimate negation of the world: defined negatively in relation to the world, it endorses a nihilistic function towards all mundane bond. Gnostic theology thus asserts the radical a-mundanity, if not anti-mundanity of God: the gnostic God is absolutely transcendent, its transcendence understood here in the sense of an extra-mundanity. It is an absent, alien, unknown, hidden and withdrawn God.

In Modernity, the gnostic thought of the otherworldliness of God declines itself in the concept of the *deus absconditus* and culminates in the motive of the Death of God.

This gnostic idea of the absence of the divine in the world particularly shines through modern thought in concepts such as the *deus absconditus*, present in the theology of Martin Luther, and the motive of the death of god, mobilized in philosophy by figures such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche or Heidegger. The notion of *deus absconditus* and the motive of the death of god arise as two modern instances of a theology rooted in the experience of the absence of God from the world. The *deus absconditus*, or *hidden God* expresses the experience of a God who discloses itself primarily through the mode of withdrawal. Emphasising the abstrudity, incomprehensibility and ineffability of a God revealing neither its being, intentions nor commands, it perpetuates the gnostic imagery of the unknowability of the one true God, standing outside of the world, as well as the gnostic trope of humanity's condition of ignorance. Spelling out the fundamental barrier to the human cognition of God, the notion of *deus absconditus* "confirms the abysmal separation between the human and the divine, which constitutes this-worldly existence and has devastating consequences for the ability of human beings to experience God as a god of love".¹⁰²

Following the analogy between the God-World and the Humanity-World dichotomies, the apophatic thought endorsed in Gnosticism suggests that the spiritual dimension of our selves is just as undefinable as the divine, or only definable in

¹⁰² Sasja Emilie MATHIASSEN STOPA, "'Seeking Refuge in God against God': The Hidden God in Lutheran Theology and the Postmodern Weakening of God", *Open Theology*, 4, 2018, p. 663.

negative terms, as it first signals itself in its alterity from the world – an alterity that brings it closer to a god defined in its “pure acosmic alterity”¹⁰³. This echoes the modern idea, particularly developed in existential philosophy, of the incomprehensibility of human existence in the world (Pascal), its unassimilable character within the whole of worldly being, along with the representation of a certain original virginity of the human mind, prone to becoming stained by the history of the world (Rousseau). Conceptions such as these maintain a dualistic structure of thought, systematically asserting the ontological divergence between Humanity and the World. In gnostic cosmologies, this is most conspicuously manifested in the thought of God’s utter alterity and exteriority from the world, condensed in the idea of the radical transcendence of the divine.

Jonas’ interpretation of Gnosticism suggests that the relationship of divine transcendence to the world, as well as that between this transcendence and humanity, also conditions that between Humanity and the world. In this way, the apophatic timbre of gnostic theology appears to ground a nihilistic relationship to the world – an engagement with worldly being determined by the sense of the radical absence of the divine, a deep-felt absence whose perception was only enabled by the sporadic introduction in the world of an absolute transcendence through human existence. Humanity is indeed considered as the privileged medium of the awareness of an ontological perversion in the world. If the Gnosis retains the concept of god, it therefore portrays the figure of an absent god, a god that deserted the world and filled it with its absence. In this respect, the gnostic god is diametrically opposed to the divinities of Hellenistic cosmology and proclaims the dismissal of the latter – in Jonas’ words: “the God of the cosmos is dead”¹⁰⁴. The Gnostic god is *not from this world*. And this world is not from the one true God – rather, it is the product of lower powers. To the extent to which the gnostic god is the negation of the world¹⁰⁵, gnostic thought perceives worldly being as a negation of the divine.

¹⁰³ Eric POMMIER, op.cit, p.38.

¹⁰⁴ Hans JONAS, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist I*, op.cit, p.331.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.332.

It appears clearly how a modern motive such as the *death of god* might resonate with the nihilism of gnostic theology. Both merge into the thought of the absence of god in the world, and in the consecration of a latent opposition between worldly and divine. As Jonas reminds us, Heidegger's analysis of the Nietzschean exclamation of the death of God states that "the names God and Christian God are in Nietzsche's thought used to denote the transcendental (supra-sensible) world in general"¹⁰⁶. This corroborates the hypothesis, inferred from Jonas' conceptualization of Gnosticism, of a central theological dualism distinguishing between the immanence of the world and the transcendence of the divine, and therefrom pervading the whole of gnostic cosmologies along a structural dualism. Heidegger's rephrasing of the Nietzschean announcement highlights indeed the implicit eviction of the transcendental, or the supra-sensible, from worldly being, and the underlying dynamic of Demundanization in a shift of focus towards the divine acosmic Self. Susan Taubes observes in an article reflecting on the gnostic roots of Heideggerian nihilism that

all interest is introverted in the contemplation of the negative acosmic self. The fullness of the god is finally *emptiness*. *The emphasis is on an emotional relation to this emptiness.*¹⁰⁷

Here, Susan Taubes uncovers the negative nature of the gnostic relation to transcendence, arising from the primal perception of an ontological emptiness, a lack, or absence of God. From this negative relation to the divine, she draws the nihilistic implications of the gnostic cosmology, as she further notes that:

the negativity of the gnostic god serves to undermine totally the positive empirical reality of the world and its claim to any value or validity¹⁰⁸

Uncovering the gnostic conception of a non-relationship of the divine to the world contributes to outline the question of how the cosmological understanding of the presence of the divine within the world conditions our intellectual, sensuous and

¹⁰⁶ Martin Heidegger in *Holzwege*, quoted by Jonas in *The Gnostic Religion*, op.cit, p.331.

¹⁰⁷ Susan TAUBES, art. cit., p. 160. I emphasize.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

ethical engagement with worldly being. The nihilistic implications of the gnostic thought of the absence of God in the world, or the death of God, seem indeed to merge into the conception of the ontological and irredeemable *a-divinity of the world*.

The gnostic concept of the radical transcendence of God, or in other words, the otherworldliness of the divine, reciprocally unfolds within the wider gnostic system of thought in the idea of the a-divinity of world. The otherworldliness of the divine and the a-divinity of the world appear indeed to be closely tied together in gnostic cosmologies, where the death of the cosmic God simultaneously figures the death of the Greek cosmos: the world has ceased to be divine and to bear ultimate, intrinsic moral values¹⁰⁹. The cosmic chaos is now devoid of meaning or final aims, unable to usher human existence in the world, nor to accompany it along its wandering. The gnostic world is confined to the realm of immanence, deserted of any divine transcendence, so that the gnostic systematic movement of demundanization of God is mirrored in a parallel movement of de-divinization of the world. While we will have the opportunity to reflect more in depth on the gnostic thought of immanence and transcendence, it is noteworthy to specify here that the gnostic concept of immanence bears the meaning of alienation and worldly entrenchment, while the concept of transcendence is understood as what breaks open the constraint of the world and allows to escape from it, perpetuating the dualism between worldly immanence and divine transcendence. By concentrating divine being in the non-worldly (and by conceiving of humanity as ontologically other-worldly), the gnostic idea of God, conceived as “nothingness of the world”¹¹⁰, deprives the world of its divinity, and of whatever qualities are contained in such term - transcendence, infinity, freedom, creation, openness. Crucially here, the gnostic concept of God is a negative one, for the gnostic god is fathomed first and foremost as what is not the world, what is other. The development of gnostic theology therefore unfolds along a structural dynamic of demundanization of the divine, which manifests itself primarily as a dedivinization of the world.

¹⁰⁹ Hans JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion*, op. cit., p.331

¹¹⁰ Hans JONAS, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist I*, op. cit., p.151.

This original and pivotal movement of Gnosticism then unfurls into a cosmology which Jonas identifies as “cosmic nihilism”¹¹¹, consisting in a systematic enterprise of negation, reduction and devaluation of world being. Analysing the Gnosticism underlying Heidegger’s philosophy, Susan Taubes observes how “the variety and manifoldness of the empirical world is bracketed out”¹¹², somehow reminding us of the anti-worldly echoes in modern narratives of nature.

The eschatological tension contained in the gnostic temporal dualism

The gnostic conception of time offers yet another illustration of both the acosmic dualism of gnostic cosmology and its ultimate theological character.

Characterized by a strong dualism, the gnostic temporality displays a twofold contrast between past and present, and present and future. By constantly opposing the present to the non-present, this temporal dualism manifests another instance of the gnostic dynamic of demundanization, discernible in the motive of the vacuity of the present. Out of time, the gnostic temporality is led by a movement of escape from a past fall and directed towards a future salvation, thereby leaving no space for a thought of the presence of the present. The diagnosis of a temporality without present thus provides Jonas with another opportunity to draw a hermeneutical parallel between the gnostic and existentialist systems of thought. Jonas’ analysis of antique and modern nihilism suggests indeed that gnostic nihilism takes roots in the devaluation of the present, conceived as that against which ultimate aspirations are targeted. Gnosticism understands humane existence as an accidental event situated within an ontological tension between past and future, in which the present loses all focus and signification. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as temporal conceptions appear to be so often inherited from, or at least intimately entangled with theological ones, this turning away from the

¹¹¹ Ibid, p.150.

¹¹² Susan TAUBES, art.cit., p.160.

present and the dynamic perspective of gnostic temporality are determined by eschatological conceptions:

there is past and there is future, from which we stem and towards which we hasten, and the present only is the moment of knowledge itself, the incident from one to another *in the supreme crisis of the eschatological now*.¹¹³

The eschatological dimension of the gnostic temporal dualism further illustrates the centrality of the theological in gnostic dualism. The gnostic eschatology presents itself as the project of an inversion of Humanity's original fall into the world, thereby setting up the dynamical perspective of gnostic becoming, starting with a fall and ending with an ascension. The depiction in gnostic narratives of the present as an ontological state of crisis is supported by the theological representation of the drama of worldly being, conceived as a degeneration which started with the creation of the world, and which is to end in its overcoming. Being is firstly experienced by the gnostic self as a catastrophe which ought therefore to be overcome – temporarily as well as spatially: *anywhere out of the world*, anywhen but now. The gnostic eschatology thus situates the eschaton, or the ultimate ends, in the *future*, figuring an “out of the present world”. Following Jonas' observation of the presence of a gnostic temporality in modern thought, we could identify such motive in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's depiction of the present as degenerate state of being, or more evidently in the modern dogma of progress, constantly exhorting to overcome the present.

The proximity of existentialism and Gnosticism also manifests itself in their common depreciation of the present, primarily experienced and conceived as a state of crisis, an insignificant passing through, signalling the legacy of a dramatic past and leading us at best to a future destination. Susan Taubes thus sees in Heidegger's thought of authenticity the illustration of such gnostic depreciation of the present, conceived as a devalued and inauthentic mode of existence in which we cannot dwell. Taubes reminds us that Heidegger's conception of the present as bound to two

¹¹³ Hans JONAS, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist II*, op. cit., p. 375. I emphasize.

temporal “ekstases” reflects the projective dimension of time: the present, a drama, has no value in itself and only makes sense when approached from the perspective of the temporally ecstatic structure of existence. The ecstatic nature of time conceptualized by Heidegger thus declines the gnostic drive to escape the present mode of existence, and perpetuates the gnostic dualism between the self and the present world, the here below and the beyond, interiority and exteriority:

Man, standing *outside* the immediate, spatially surrounding present (stasis), stands in time. Because *man stands outside the present*, he is able to gather and concentrate himself within. The beyond is introverted; *it is more inner than the inness of the world*.¹¹⁴

The expression in gnostic narratives of a drive to escape from the present and the devaluation of the present thus appears as a manifestation of a wider devaluation of the world, referred to by Jonas as Demundanization. As the gnostic eschatology fails to think the presence of the eschaton in the innerness of the world, locating it in a future and otherworldly horizon, it contributes to further negate the (eschatological) presence of the world. This fundamental negation of the world builds for Jonas the roots of an acosmic nihilism, which the next part proposes to elucidate.

In this second section, we endeavoured to delve into the cosmological dualism characterizing the Jonassian concept of Gnosticism. We thus explored and retraced the overarching presence of a dualistic structure of thought, pervading from the existential to the theological dimensions of Gnosticism, and culminating into the dualistic apprehension of the eschaton, which the gnostic eschatology situates in a “beyond the world”. In so doing, we wished to point towards the essentially theological dimension

¹¹⁴ Susan TAUBES, art.cit, p.162. I emphasize.

While Taubes’ particularly insightful analysis of the Heideggerian philosophy appears to anticipate the problematic of immanentization of the beyond which Eric Voegelin would later theorize, let us focus for now on the denigration of the world manifested here, implying a theological dualism where the presence of a transcendent beyond is found exclusively within the self, and not in the otherness of worldly being.

of gnostic dualism, crystallized in the thought of the otherworldliness of God and the adivinity of worldly being. Such theological dualism, we argued, lies at the core of a cosmological dualism which appears to articulate, on a structural level, the essential dynamic of Demundanization infusing gnostic narratives. It thus appeared to us that the dualistic structure of gnostic thought, not only manifested but also organized a cosmological estrangement lying at the roots of the Jonassian concept of Gnosticism, whose existential generation we examined in the first part of this chapter. From the experience of an existential estrangement from the world, the fundamental experience of the acosmicity of the self, to its cosmological articulation throughout a dualistic structure of thought, we now wish to complete our elucidation of the Jonassian concept of Gnosticism by examining the development on an ethical level of the dynamic of Demundanization identified by our author as the sap of Gnosticism. The essential acosmism of gnostic narratives, Jonas' analysis suggests, unfolds in a nihilistic mode of being in the world, which he relates to the ethical failure of contemporary thought.

C. The Gnostic estrangement from the world as nihilism

Jonas' diagnosis of a gnostic nihilism pervading contemporary existential thought is closely tied to his analysis of the acosmism of gnostic narratives. His understanding of nihilism, both antique and contemporary, is informed by a conceptualization of Gnosticism as an *acosmic* system of thought. Consecrating the yearning for an escape from worldly being, Gnosticism would indeed enfold into an ethical nihilism which completes the scission between humanity and the world. Jonas' critical analysis of nihilism thus articulates itself around the cardinal idea that ethical nihilism blossoms upon acosmic, worldless cosmologies, his philosophy suggesting in return that ethics may only find its roots within the world.

In the following and final section of this chapter, I propose to explore Jonas' hypothesis of the generation of ethical nihilism in the fundamental acosmicity of gnostic cosmologies. Jonas describes how the acosmism of gnostic thought, also referred to as cosmic nihilism, acts as a systematic depreciation and ultimately leads into a negation of the world. This acosmism typically manifests itself through a gnostic temporality that figures a structural escape out of the present, where the self constantly yearns for another time, past or future. As we shall see, Jonas notably identifies this acosmic temporality in the utopianism of modern politics and holds a general "worldlessness" to lie at the root of the nihilistic tendency of modernity, where cosmic nihilism enfolds into a diffuse ethical nihilism. For Jonas, this is particularly exemplified by the failure of Heideggerian philosophy, built upon an acosmic ontology of the Dasein. This observation, along with the early diagnosis of a gnostic acosmism, shall determine the philosophical task to recover, through the Imperative of Responsibility, the ontological generation of an ethics grounded in worldly being.

Jonas defines gnostic ethics as acosmic: just like the whole of gnostic cosmologies, it stems from a deep ingrained contempt for and revolt against the world. In the *Gnostic Religion*, he states that gnostic morality is distinctively “determined by hostility toward the world and contempt for all mundane ties”¹¹⁵. From this acosmic posture proceeds the Gnostic anomism, illustrated either through an antinomian libertinism, or through ascetic morals¹¹⁶. Jonas mentions Plotin’s critique of the distinctive anomism of the Gnostics, defined by the absence of norms or values: for the ancient philosopher, the Gnostics would “lack a theory of virtue”¹¹⁷ as they fail to find any good in the world. Plotin condemns indeed Gnosticism’s opposition to the antique, Hellenist metaphysic of the cosmic order. The Gnostics do not feel obligated to a world which they experience as ontologically strange, only inspiring in them a posture of utter detachment and non-accountability¹¹⁸. The dualistic acosmism of the Gnostics, consuming the divorce between the self and the world, evolves into a cosmic nihilism which then prolongs itself into an ethical nihilism. Jonas therefore posits that acosmism, which he most often refers to as Demundanization, the movement of disengagement from and ultimate negation of the world, constitutes the very sap of Gnosticism and contains as such the seeds of nihilism. This acosmic nihilism identified by Jonas as lying at the heart of gnostic narratives shall indeed allow him to draw together Gnosticism and Existentialism and to extend further the analogy on an ethical level, where the existential and ontological affinities of both systems of thought uncover similar nihilistic developments. In fact, this is on the ethical level that the similarity between gnostic and existentialist narratives appears for Jonas to be strongest: both recount the self’s anxious and wandering inhabiting of a disenchanted world, and the despair that comes along with the lack of any meaning or value within worldly being.

The depreciation of the world thus arises as a central feature of gnostic ethics, proceeding from an original posture of estrangement from worldly beings. We find

¹¹⁵ Hans JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion*, op. cit., p.46.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p.266.

¹¹⁸ Robert THEIS, *Hans Jonas: Habiter le Monde*. op.cit., p.21.

that this depreciation of the world is common to both Gnosticism and Existentialism which, in different ways, merge in their dualistic apprehension of worldly being: while antique Gnosticism thinks the cosmos as the hostile creation of a demiurge, Existentialism depicts nature as indifferent, and embodies in this regard a more desperate variation of nihilism. In both cases, the gnostic and existentialist subject defines itself primarily through its opposition to this alternatively hostile or indifferent world. Existentialist philosophy conceives indeed of nature as an absolute alterity which cannot be reached, nor even fathomed, and which represents in Jonas' words "an absolute void, the true bottomless well"¹¹⁹. This conception of the world, along with the ethical implications it bears, is what crystallizes Jonas' dismissal of the Heideggerian philosophy.¹²⁰ It also conveys a temporal nihilism, besides an existential and ontological one: as mentioned earlier, the dynamic dimension of the temporal posture found in gnostic as well as existentialist narratives orients existence away from the present, and contains as such the danger of annihilating present being – this annihilation arising as another manifestation of the gnostic tendency to Demundanization. The idea of a throw out of nowhere moreover implies an unrestrained leap forward, whose direction is to be determined amidst the ethical vacuum of a world devoid of any value. Not only has the gnostic mind been thrown, but it must also therefrom project itself into a future which no predetermined value enlightens. However, a certain asymmetry between the

¹¹⁹ Hans JONAS, *Prinzip Verantwortung*, op.cit., p.236.

¹²⁰ In this regard, we may wonder whether Jonas is being too quick on condemning Heidegger's thought of the world. The latter attempted indeed to overcome an objectifying view of nature that would fail to recognize the ontological withdrawing of worldly being. Did he not find in the presocratic concept of *phusis* a force that gives all the while withdrawing? Besides, Heidegger's later thought of the world represents the attempt to turn away from a modern, dualistic and anthropocentric apprehension of nature, which the ontological turn of his philosophy embodies. The concept of the quadripartite further conveys the representation of man, god, sky and earth as contemporaneously emerging into one determinate world (see Raphael Winkler, "Heidegger and the Beyond"). This conception of the unsurpassable entanglement of the Dasein within worldly being might have led Heidegger to assert that "man is nature" (Martin HEIDEGGER, *Einleitung zur Philosophie*, GA, 27, § 37, p.328). While Jonas appears to hold on tight to the transcendence within the concept of nature, blaming Heidegger for his hubristic disregard for the finitude of human knowledge and arguing for a cosmological thought based on a pattern of the whole and the parts, Heidegger's philosophy strives to think the emergence of openness within worldly being. This might well represent one fundamental difference between the two philosophers, as Jonas seems indeed to prolong the modern concept of nature, while Heidegger tends to oppose it through a thought of worldly being.

gnostic and existentialist forms of nihilism ought to be noted, in that ancient Gnosticism regards the world as anti-divine, while modern existentialism sees it as utterly indifferent, and appears in this respect as a more radical, more desperate form of ethical nihilism. Unless one understands the divine or religious in the terms proposed by Michel Serres: namely, as a kind of *care*, a deep-rooted concern, a scrupulous attention to what summons our responsibility and fears our negligence.¹²¹ While the word “care” echoes Heidegger’s notion of *Sorge*, Jonas throws light on the implicit theological background underlying modern Existentialism, most manifest in the notion of a being-thrown into the world, as he asks: “what is the throw without the thrower?” How could the a-theological, indifferent substance of nature engender the concerned being-in-the-world of the Dasein? Jonas identifies in the removal of a thought of the presence of an ontological *care* in nature, or, following Serres’ etymology of the world religion, the removal of a thought of God in the thought of the world, the paramount manifestation of modern nihilism:

That nature does not care, one way or the other, is the true abyss. That only man cares, in his finitude facing nothing but death, alone with his contingency and the objective meaninglessness of his projecting meanings, is a truly unprecedented situation¹²²

Not only does Jonas bring our focus to the structural inconsistency of the modern system of thought, exemplified in Existentialism, but his concept of Gnosticism also suggests to approach the modern cosmology as a dualistic structure of thought which would have been amputated from one of its poles – the divine one. One such amputation would have resulted into the evacuation of all purpose and value from nature, and eventually from man: “as a product of the indifferent, its being must be indifferent too.”¹²³ Secular Modernity thus arises as what Robert Theis describes as a “monist dualism”¹²⁴, preserving a dualistic structure of thought while *seemingly* abolishing one

¹²¹ Michel SERRES, *Statues. Le Second Livre des Fondations*, Flammarion, 2014, p.47.

¹²² Hans JONAS, “Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism”, art. cit., p. 45.

¹²³ Hans JONAS, *GSG II*, p.378.

¹²⁴ Robert THEIS, *Hans Jonas: Habiter le Monde*, op.cit, p.32.

of its poles – the “divine” one. Seemingly because, as we shall later see, such a dualistic scheme of thought can only endure thanks to the irreducible tension upon which it is erected. In this sense, the death of God did not contribute to make Modernity more secular, or more monist, it only made it more nihilistic. Jonas is concerned about finding a third way, away from the temptation to reduce the dualistic tension, either through a naturalistic (inherited from the “worldly” pole”) or idealistic (inherited from the “divine” pole) form of monism. This third way should “avoid the dualistic alienation”¹²⁵ in which western Modernity found itself caught, failing to seize the simultaneously immanent and transcendent presence of the world.

The relation to transcendence is the relation to the world

Before further expanding on the ethical nihilism of Gnosticism, let us take a provisory step towards a deeper understanding of Jonas’ argument on the origin of ethical nihilism in the acosmicity of gnostic thought, by examining an idea which emerged from my study of the Jonassian concept of Gnosticism. From my earlier considerations on both the existential and cosmological variations of Gnosticism, it appears indeed that the gnostic relationship to the world is essentially tied to the gnostic relationship to transcendence. More specifically, Jonas’ analysis suggests that the gnostic conception of transcendence conditions the gnostic engagement with the world, thereby drawing together being-in-the-world and being-to-God. At the root of the acosmic nihilism identified by Jonas in gnostic narratives, we might find the absence of positive relationship between God and the world. Jonas observes in the gnostic conception of transcendence the roots of an acosmic nihilism denying the presence of any value, and therefore of any moral command binding us to the world:

a transcendence withdrawn from any normative relation to the world is equal to a transcendence which has lost its effective force. In other words, for all purposes of man’s relation to the reality that surrounds him this hidden God is a nihilistic conception: no nomos

¹²⁵ Hans JONAS, *GSG II*, p.379.

emanates from him, no law for nature and thus none for human action as part of the natural order.¹²⁶

Our philosopher's analysis of gnostic theologies suggests that the radicality of divine transcendence bears nihilistic implications that unfold on an ethical level into an acosmic nihilism. Contained in the yearning for an escape out of the world, the gnostic relationship to the world is a negative one. An antinomian posture inevitably follows from the gnostic premises that the world is a critical manifestation of being that ought to be overcome in order to reunite with the divine: the gnostic mind does not indeed feel accountable to the world, nor to anyone, in any way. Rather, it might feel accountable to an acosmic god that legitimates a contempt for the material world.

These considerations only further the analogy drawn between Gnosticism and Existentialism, both systems of thought meeting in an approach to the divine characterized once again by a situation of rupture between god and the world. While Gnosticism stands in opposition to the antique metaphysic of the cosmic order, Existentialism prolongs western Christian metaphysics and blossoms on the thought of the death of God. Both appear as manifestations of the Nietzschean observation, understood by Heidegger as the loss of higher values and of the effectiveness of ideas, the supra-sensitive, the Ideal. Even when the Gnosis retains the idea of God, it is one that does not have any positive relationship to the world and results in the nihilistic depreciation, if not negation of the world. Jonas takes it further as he states that "the "death of God" means not only the actual devaluation of highest values, but also the loss of the very possibility of obligatory values as such." For him, the motive of the death of God identifies a nihilistic tendency pervading Modernity, by which "the very concept of law was negated in all its aspects".¹²⁷ Nietzsche's idea of the death of God intended indeed to designate the devaluation of supreme values, and above all the loss of their possible foundation in an absolute. This simultaneous phenomenon of loss of the divine, transcendent pole of being, along with the dynamic of loss of the world (Demundanization), I argue, points towards something essential in the concept of Gnosticism.

¹²⁶ Hans JONAS, *GR*, p.332. I emphasize.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

The narratives considered by Jonas as gnostic, and this includes existentialist philosophy, convey the joint representation of a rupture with the world and a rupture with God. The devaluation of the cosmos, which appears in gnostic texts primarily as a dedivinization, as well as the feeling of being thrown and lost into an alien world, are for Jonas the result of the failure of the antique doctrine of the whole and the parts, present notably in pantheism and in post-aristotelician physico-theology¹²⁸. The pursuit in existentialist philosophy of the motive of the insignificance of our existence in the world, along with the expression of a wandering without belonging within the infinitude of an indifferent universe, illustrate the collapse of a cosmological framework providing our dwelling in the world with a ground, a meaning and an orientation. Jonas' analysis of Gnosticism, and the later developments of his thought towards philosophical biology and moral philosophy, suggest that the dissolution of the link to the whole results in a weakening of the normative bond tying us to the world. His concept of Gnosticism thus appears to embody this situation of rupture of the onto-ethical link to the world. The dereliction of moral norms of action, as well as of a visceral sense of responsibility binding us to our fellow beings of the world, arise as the direct consequences of the rupture of this umbilical link with the rest of worldly being. Jonas had already sensed that moral collapse of Modernity is being manifested, with an unprecedented intensity and scale, through the advent of the environmental issue, which consecrates a cosmological as well as ethical rupture of our civilization with the world.

As we shall see again in chapter 3, Jonas' appraisal of a parts and whole kind of cosmology might be problematic insofar as it appears as another declination of a dualistic and reductive approach to worldly being. Jonas seems indeed to assimilate the death of God with the death of a holistic cosmology – and this is legitimate, as the God whose death Nietzsche announced was indeed a holistic, almighty one, embodying a being superior to the world and characterized by an infinite power over its lower, subordinated creation. In *Facing Gaia*, Bruno Latour suggests that we should not mourn the loss of a holistic cosmology, which not only subsides through the

¹²⁸ Hans JONAS, *Gnosis und Spätantiker Geist II*, p.369.

modern cosmology of nature, but also perpetuates obsolete patterns of engagement with worldly being that fail to approach the simultaneous immanence and overflowing of its agency. A Gaian approach to the world would, on the other hand, allow to catch even just a glimpse of the submerging complexity of worldly being, whose planetary entanglement overflows any dualistic cosmology.

These considerations corroborate one central hypothesis of my research, according to which a specific thought of the tension between transcendence and immanence governs our understanding of and therefore our dwelling in the world. Robert Theis identified something crucial as he noted that what was common to both the gnostic assertion of God's absolute transcendence and the existentialist claim of its death laid in the absence of God within the world, as well as any kind of positive relationship between the divine and the worldly. Unfolding this reflection leads me to the following hypothesis: namely, that the disappearance of the idea of God, the eclipse and discard of a thought of God along the development of western Modernity, was contemporaneous with a failure to think worldly being. Jonas' concept of Gnosticism brings to light this joint failure to think the divine and the world. My interpretation suggests more particularly that this twofold disappearance manifests itself jointly through the disappearance of a thought of transcendence of the world, and of the immanent divinity of worldly being. This follows Jonas' postulate, implicit in his analysis of antique and modern nihilism, that a godless world is an ethically empty world, and that the gnostic expression of the absence of god in the world – resulting in a Dedivinization of the world –, amounts to a loss of world, which Jonas conceptualized in the notion of Demundanization. Arguing that modern nihilism blossomed upon the spiritual emptiness established by modern science¹²⁹, Jonas implies that the depreciation of nature is one manifestation of the Death of God. His diagnosis of a Gnostic acosmism infusing modernity and enabling the triumph of nihilism directly associates our attachment to the world with the realm of ethics, suggesting that the transcendence of the moral imperative finds its roots within the world.

¹²⁹ Ibid, p. 377.

The relation to the world is paradigmatic of ethics

Jonas' analysis of Gnosticism and his interpretation of both antique and contemporary forms of nihilism convey an understanding of ethics as world-bound. Not only does the philosopher relate the quest for and exercise of a moral imperative to our belonging to the world, a cosmos, but his thought also suggests that this moral imperative arises from worldly being itself, thus going against the gnostic, modern representation of an otherworldly, transcendent ground of ethics. While the spirit of the Gnosis tears humanity away from the cosmos, thus making it a cosmic stranger or an apatrid, the Heideggerian Dasein presents it as that which projects itself freely, independently from any given essence. In the continuity of the existentialist tradition, Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" argues that Man does not belong to an objective or essential order, thereby not only suggesting a divorce from the world, but also a radical independence from any immanent, groundless origin. Existentialism thus represents the challenge, and blatant defeat, of groundless ethics: it stands for the attempt to anchor moral responsibility in the utter groundlessness, openness of being. In this respect, while Gnosticism figures a Demundanization of God, Existentialism represents a Demundanization, or an evacuation altogether, of the idea of transcendent ground – a notion constitutive of the modern concept of God. We saw earlier how the Gnostics' acosmism, their worldlessness, unfolds itself into nihilistic ethics. This is manifestly what conditioned Jonas' allegiance to a somewhat holistic cosmology, leading him to link the idea of cosmos to an ontological normativity, and proclaim that "that which has no nature has no norm".¹³⁰ Jonas opposes indeed the mechanistic approach to nature, which would result in the abandoning of the idea of finality in nature, and hence of a teleological perspective on worldly being. This presumed link between finality and value builds the central argument of the Jonassian ethics, deducing a certain hierarchy of values from the presence of ends identifiable in the beings of nature. Jonas, for whom values proceed from being and are manifested through finality, argues that the collapse of this axiological worldview allowed an acosmic nihilism to triumph. The indissoluble link between ontology and ethics

¹³⁰ Hans JONAS, *Prinzip Verantwortung*, op.cit, p.232.

present in Jonas' thought crystallizes the philosopher's resistance to the modern dualistic paradigm: it allows him to refute Gnostic antinomianism by asserting a primordial, ontological link between our being-in-the-world and our being-ethical-bound, *morally responsible*. Jonas' philosophy points as such toward an understanding of ethics as *that which morally binds us to the world*.

Here, a crucial issue appears in the assimilation of this moral bond to the world, namely the entanglement of ethics and worldly being, to the presence of a *ground* for moral action. Such a ground was traditionally found in the concept of nature, providing the modern subject with a firm, objective, immutable terrain, indeed a frozen landscape for human action. Now what the present environmental crisis enjoins us to think, lies precisely in the contingency and precariousness of this natural (back)ground: that the world can be unfathomable and yet ethically full at the same time appears as one central lesson of environmental and moral philosophy. Full of the existential imperative of grounding moral responsibility amidst the bottomless, Jonas anticipated the thought of the contingency of natural being in his philosophy of biology, environmental ethics and even the more speculative-theological dimension of his work, suggesting that the ethical imperative transcends the groundless contingency of worldly being, all the while being immanent to it. In a Whiteheadian circle, the immanence of the ethical imperative transcends the contingency of worldly being: ethics stems from the abyss of immanence and transcends it. This of course subverts the gnostic dualism structuring modern narratives, the latter strictly distinguishing between the amoral immanence of nature and the subjective transcendence of culture. In opposing gnostic cosmologies, Jonas' thought contributes to blur the dualistic lines organizing the way we conceive of and engage with the world, and his philosophy of nature particularly points toward the obsolescence of the immanence-transcendence divide when it comes to think the imperative of moral responsibility amidst the perpetual emergence of worldly being.

Conclusion: thinking the abyss of worldly being

What can we learn from Jonas' concept of Gnosticism, and how does this relate to the present environmental crisis? Hans Jonas' largely hermeneutical engagement with the Gnostic religion was infused with the political and intellectual challenges of his own time, ranging from the ethical void left by the Second World War to the increasing concerns surrounding the advent of a technological civilization. Surely did the German philosopher think his way through an intense time which witnessed the onset of global environmental devastation succeed to the genocides of the Second World War. In this perspective, the concept of Gnosticism proved a fruitful hermeneutical tool to approach a world involved in violent waves of transformations. It is my postulate that a thought of Gnosticism might enlighten our path through the no less intense times we live in. Jonas' understanding of Gnosticism is articulated around the unifying feature of dualism, which shall later infuse his whole speculative work. We saw how Jonas identifies at the core of gnostic narratives a tripartite dualism, where the figure of God crystallizes a radical rupture between Humanity and the World and manifests a structural dynamic of Demundanization. Through the concept of Gnosticism, Jonas unveils dualism as a type of engagement with the world, characterized by the primordial experience of a profound duality and reflected in the gnostic theological dualism between god and the world. Jonas analyzes this *demundanized* type of engagement with the world, along with the nihilistic posture it elicits, as existential before being cosmological. In this first chapter I proposed to approach this dynamic of Demundanization as manifesting a joint movement of Demundanization of God and Dedivinization of the world, thereby highlighting a primordial tension structuring gnostic dualism. Such a tension notably shines through the modern representations of the otherworldliness of God, but also and mostly of the adivinity of the world: as recent developments in environmental philosophy suggest (Latour, Stengers, Hache), modern cosmology deprives the world of its intrinsic value, agency, creativity, openness and transcendence – in a sense, from its divinity. Jonas' diagnosis of the radical dualism governing the relation of God and the world as a cardinal feature of gnostic thought thus points toward the hermeneutical potential of the category of Gnosticism in approaching modern cosmology, and the advent of the

environmental crisis within it. More specifically, the Jonassian analysis of Gnosticism indicates how both movements of Demundanization and Dedivinization merge into the same dynamic of reduction of a primordial tension. Jonas' concept of Gnosticism embodies indeed the crucial idea that God and the World are different entities, two irreconcilable poles of an inescapable dualism.

I wish to suggest that this gnostic dualism between God and the World, resulting into a structural dynamic of Demundanization, is based upon an ontological tension whose reduction operates as an obstruction and sealing of the openness of worldly being. What Heidegger theorized under the "Forgetting of Being", and what I propose to think in terms of sealing of the openness of the world, thus appears as a consequence of the dynamic of Demundanization observed by Jonas. This sealing, or closure of the world, notably manifests itself in the gnostic notion of the abyss. We saw in the first part of this chapter that the gnostic narratives studied by Jonas are articulated around the thought of an abyss, alienating the self from the world and eliciting a primordial experience of cosmic anxiety. The motives of the alienness of worldly being and the yearning for a home thus outline the figure of a pivotal abyss organizing gnostic cosmologies along a structural dualism. In this sense, the abyss appears to designate that which stands between the dualistic boundaries erected by gnostic systems of thought, and that which is simultaneously being reduced by them. The thought of such an abyss and what it might contain, I argue, bears great potential for approaching the openness of worldly being. This latter notion of openness, which I wish to uncover as underlying the concept of Gnosticism, shines through the gnostic theme of an ontological crack in divine being allowing the creation of the world.¹³¹ Within the gnostic mythology itself, unfolding the original experience of a crack in divine being, we can thus anticipate the thought of an ontological openness conditioning worldly being. We might also discern, in the thought of the radical transcendence and alterity of the divine, the opportunity to reflect upon the presence of this transcendence and alterity within the world itself – yet without thereby giving in the dualistic opposition of the divine to the worldly. This tension that we are starting to outline, and that Jonas' concept of Gnosticism contributes to unveil, dwelling

¹³¹ Eric POMMIER, *op.cit.*, p.34.

somewhere within the openness of worldly being, amidst the abyss, between the alien and the home, nature and culture, the divine and the worldly... seems to be crystallized in the immanence-transcendence duality. But these are merely preliminary considerations, which should introduce us to the more speculative and hermeneutical reflection that is to blossom in the following chapters of this dissertation.

For now, I wish to conclude on the persisting presence of Gnosticism in contemporary systems of thought, that is, in the very narratives that are conditioning our engagement with the world and the way we presently inhabit it. Jonas' analysis of the Gnostic religion contributes indeed to throw light on the worldless dualism structuring contemporary narratives. In her article on the Gnosticism of Heideggerian philosophy, Susan Taubes writes that "the gnostic speculative system may become totally immanent in its structure and yet retain at its centre the principle of transcendence"¹³². She thereby points toward the secularisation of the gnostic mythology in Modernity and suggests that the supposed immanentization of theological contents might obscure, but not evacuate the element of transcendence implied in the very notion of immanence. Immanence and transcendence, just as secular and theological, build an inextricable tension which is always contained in either of its poles. Any claim about the secular implies a reciprocal claim about the theological. Therein lies, it seems to me, the main lesson of Hans Jonas' concept of Gnosticism: in the deep-ingrained dualism of our cosmologies, we can find a tension, like a mirror. That this tension is worth rediscovering, as we are today summoned to a renewed encounter with the world, builds the postulate of this research.

¹³² Susan TAUBES, art. cit., p.61.

CHAPTER 2

ERIC VOEGELIN'S CONCEPT OF GNOSTICISM AND THE PNEUMO-PATHOLOGY OF POLITICAL MODERNITY

Introduction: Voegelin's concept of Gnosticism in his philosophy

Eric Voegelin's prolific works have not benefited from the same recognition as the philosophy of Hans Jonas. His subversive political thought, informed by subtle developments in philosophy of consciousness, appears to have been somewhat omitted, if not discarded by orthodox political science. Known as one of the severest critics of Modernity, Voegelin's concept of Gnosticism played a central role in his theorization of the modern predicament and modernity's dismissal of the transcendent dimension of reality. He understood Gnosticism as the expression of a revolt against the structure of existence in the world, led by the belief that humans could fundamentally alter it through the implementation on a socio-political level of an esoteric knowledge. His use of the term Gnosticism reinvests three essential features which to a certain extent overlap with Jonas' concept: namely, (1) a strong feeling of existential alienation, incompleteness and unfulfillment, resulting in (2) a revolt against human condition, and – that is where Voegelin distinguishes himself from previous understandings of Gnosticism – (3) a belief in the transformative power of esoteric knowledge and political action to overcome this alienated condition. Attentive to the evolution of our

ability to symbolize and communicate the adventures and discoveries of consciousness, the Voegelinian approach to Gnosticism proposes to rehabilitate in political philosophy a thought of consciousness and its symbolic manifestations. Voegelin's interpretation of Gnosticism stands out through the originality, subtlety and perceptive depth of his analysis, thereby delivering a contribution to the philosophy of modernity whose paramount importance, this chapter aims to show, is yet to be acknowledged.

A Philosophy of Transcendent Order

The philosophical thought of Eric Voegelin is one of order-disorder (as illustrated by the title of his multi-volume magnum opus *Order and History*). Indebted to the legacy of classical and Christian philosophy, whose key tenets were laid by authors such as Plato, Aristotle, St Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, his thought reflects the conviction that the order of being discernible within the world is surmounted by a transcendent source of being. Voegelin's philosophy thus postulates the *world-transcendent origin of the order of being*, and somehow appears to manifest an obsessive concern with the radically transcendent character of this order – in this concern, we might identify the source of his fervent opposition to the Gnosticism of Modernity. The Voegelinian analysis of Gnosticism revolves indeed around the polarity between transcendence and immanence, and lies more particularly in its definition as a dynamic of *Immanentization*, on which the present chapter shall further expand. But as Voegelin links the acknowledgement of the transcendent nature of the order of being to an existential posture of “loving openness”, he reveals the subtlety of his understanding of transcendence, thereby also suggesting the complexity of his concept of Gnosticism. In *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, he writes that:

The prerequisite of analysis is still *the perception of the order of being unto its origin in transcendent being*, in particular, *the loving openness of the soul to its transcendent ground of order*.¹³³

¹³³ Eric VOEGELIN, *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism. An Essay on Late Modernity*, Gateway Editions, Washington, 2003 (1968), p.14. I emphasize.

The approach to being outlined here, both epistemological and existential, along with an understanding of philosophy as “*the love of being* through love of divine being as the source of its order”¹³⁴, reveal Voegelin’s fundamentally anti-gnostic stain, characterized by a loving openness in and to the world. This being open to the transcendent ground of being, or to the transcendence in being, chimes with Voegelin’s later use of the concept of *metaxy*, and thus determines what he considers to be the cardinal problem of philosophy. The same postulate of the transcendent ground of politics lies at the heart of the Platonic-Aristotelian paradigm of political science, whose tradition Voegelin intends to perpetuate. The pervasive intuition of the transcendent order of being thus characterizes the Voegelinian philosophy as a whole, and provides us with a key to approach Voegelin’s concept of Gnosticism, as well as how it relates to his political thought. Voegelin set himself the goal of specifying the character of the modern crisis while uncovering its spiritual origin: as such, the purpose of his thought implied an “elucidation of the symbolism and psychology of the mass movements of our times”¹³⁵, which the concept of Gnosticism is intended to illuminate. Voegelin’s analysis of Gnosticism thus falls within a pneumatological approach to political sciences, one that explores the deep-ranging relationship between ideas and politics.

Politics of the noetic

In *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, Voegelin emphasizes the “pneumopathological” nature of the gnostic revolt, shedding light upon the link between the pneumatic, or spiritual dimension of Gnosticism, and its pathological character. According to Thomas Lordan, the philosophy of Voegelin aims at “recovering the experiences that engendered the symbols of western order”¹³⁶. His approach to Gnosticism calls for an elucidation of the spiritual roots of gnostic movements, requiring an analysis

¹³⁴ Eric VOEGELIN, *Order and History I – Israel and Revelation*. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge 1957, p.xiv. I emphasize.

¹³⁵ Eric VOEGELIN, Foreword to the American Edition of *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, p. xix.

¹³⁶ Thomas LORDAN, “Eric Voegelin and Henri de Lubac: The Metaxy and the Suspended Middle (Part I)”, *Voegelin View*, May 2016.

URL: <https://voegelinview.com/eric-voegelin-henri-de-lubac-metaxy-suspended-middle/>
Accessed 11.01.2019.

particularly attentive to this subtle element Voegelin intended to unveil in the pneumopathological, which we propose to approach here through a perspective we might characterize as “noetico-politic”.

Voegelin’s political philosophy reflects a concern for the noetic, that is, for the way beliefs, ideals, thoughts and intentions affect the world. Infused with the postulate that political science depends upon a study of the noetic, his analysis of modern politics is crucially informed by a philosophy of consciousness:

The problems of human order in society and history originate in the order of consciousness. The philosophy of consciousness is therefore the centerpiece of a philosophy of politics.¹³⁷

Voegelin’s preoccupation with the problem of the metaxy, which I propose to explore in this chapter, illustrates his belief that consciousness is of paramount importance to the unfolding of history. James Wisner reminds us that the idea that political science is conditioned upon specific existential accomplishments is central to Voegelin’s understanding of theoretical thought.¹³⁸ While Voegelin considers theory primarily as a mode of existence, Wisner describes our author’s intellectual inquiry as relying upon the “discipline of an existential love”¹³⁹, whereby we recognize his intrinsically anti-gnostic posture, committed to a loving and welcoming openness toward worldly being and resisting the gnostic motive of a perpetual revolt against it. Voegelin argues indeed that reality is best rendered by the noetic expressions of a soul “who is attuned to the divine order of the cosmos, not [one] who exists in revolt against it”¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁷ Eric VOEGELIN, *The New Science of Politics*, University of Chicago Press, 1952, p. 1.

¹³⁸ James L. WISER, “From Cultural Analysis to Philosophical Anthropology: An Examination of Voegelin’s concept of Gnosticism”, *The Review of Politics*, Vol.42, 1, January 1980, p.98.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Eric VOEGELIN, “Reason: The Classic Experience”, in *Anamnesis, On the Theory of History and Politics*, ed. Gerhart Niemeyer, University of Missouri Press, 1978. p.97.

The Concept of Gnosticism as a diagnosis of the modern predicament

Wiser argues that a correct understanding of the Voegelinian approach to theory is crucial for seizing the meaning of the concept of Gnosticism for modern political science. Voegelin employs and develops the category of Gnosticism for the purpose of throwing light onto the elements that are constitutive of the modern predicament: Gnosticism is to qualify Political Modernity, and diagnose the pathological substance pervading it. In *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, Voegelin thus extends and deepens the thesis he formulated in *The New Science of Politics* (1952), according to which “the essence of modernity is Gnosticism”. Voegelin contends that modern ideological mass movements and the dominant philosophical schools are in some sense continuations of the various anti-Christian, gnostic sects. He argues for both a historical continuity and an experiential equivalence between the ancient movements and such modern phenomena as positivism, Marxism, Freudianism, existentialism, progressivism, utopianism, revolutionary activism, fascism, communism, national socialism... as well as all other “isms”. Voegelin seemed aware however to be engaged in the hazy enterprise of illuminating Modernity from within, as he concedes that “the struggle against the consequences of Gnosticism is being conducted in the very language of Gnosticism.”¹⁴¹ With these words indeed, Voegelin points toward the latent character of deep ingrained gnostic elements in our cosmologies. He thereby indicates the need to uncover the presence of Gnosticism in the structures of thought and language that condition our existence in the world, before attempting to develop an alternative thought. Voegelin’s philosophy is a speculative “work in progress”¹⁴², one that stands on the edge of thought, and which therefore perpetually requires our contribution.

An apophatic thought of our dwelling in the open

I propose to approach Voegelin’s analysis of Gnosticism as embedded in an apophatic thought, revolving around the notion of an existential openness of our being in the world. While the adjective “apophatic” is usually employed in a theological context to describe a discourse which concedes an unovercomeable ignorance of God,

¹⁴¹ Eric VOEGELIN, Foreword to the American Edition of *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, p.xx.

¹⁴² Ibid.

aware of the impossibility to reach a definite grasp of the divine, it can also be applied to a speculative thought that departs from a propositional logic and proceeds with an epistemological humility. In this perspective, Heidegger's thought of the withdrawal of Being can be qualified as apophatic. Likewise, we could describe Voegelin's thought as apophatic in the sense that it opposes the positivist project of a possessive knowledge of the world and renounces the quest for a definite seize upon being. In *Plato and Aristotle*, he warns us against the attempts to achieve possessive knowledge by formulating doctrines leading to the "desecration of a mystery"¹⁴³, whereby he reveals his apophatic conception of truth. As he denounces the "failure of immanentist metaphysics", he describes indeed truth as an "orientating force in the soul, about which we can speak only in analogical symbols."¹⁴⁴

Echoing Plato's way of accessing the "ultimate realities", Voegelin's approach to truth promotes a non-propositional, symbolic and analogical discourse, giving way to the myth as legitimate medium for communicating the fundamental experiences of being in the world. Voegelin is envisaging another notion of veracity as he states that "a myth can never be 'untrue' because it would not exist unless it had its experiential basis in the movements of the soul which it symbolizes". He considers myths as the "legitimate expressions" of existential experiences and traces their evolution from a collective enterprise to a tool for representing "spiritual movements...of the individual soul".¹⁰ Commenting on the cosmic myth of the Egyptians, the philosopher maintains indeed that the "truth" of their story "will arise from the unconscious, stratified in depth into the collective unconscious of the people." Human beings, Voegelin argues, "are engaged in the creation of a mytho-speculative symbol that will satisfy their desire to express"¹⁴⁵. The reduction by a positivist paradigm of such essential mytho-speculative attempts at fulfilling a longing for expression would only result in a sterility all the more disastrous as it claims the ultimate monopoly of "objective" truth. In an enlightening article about Voegelin's concept of Metaxy, James Rhodes explains that,

¹⁴³ Eric VOEGELIN, *Order and History III – Plato and Aristotle*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1957, p. 19.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p.363.

¹⁴⁵ Eric VOEGELIN, "The Moving Soul", in *What is History? And Other Late Unpublished Writings*, 1990, p.165.

because the myth symbolizes the “fundamental movements in the soul”, Voegelin inveighs mightily against handling it with a literalism that would “split the symbol from the experience by hypostatizing the symbol as a proposition on objects.”¹¹ From here on and throughout the present chapter, I would like to draw our attention to the presence in modern thought of a certain movement of hypostatization, of hypostatizing or essentializing reduction, and to the defiance manifested by Voegelin towards it. The condemnation of a hypostatizing way of thought, I wish to argue, is a crucial element in Voegelin’s critical understanding of Gnosticism and follows from the apophatic orientation of his thought towards the “open”.

The rehabilitation of the mythical or symbolic language manifested in Voegelin’s thought throws light on his approach to the concept of Gnosticism, as well as on the role it plays in his philosophy. Employed by Voegelin, the perspective of Gnosticism appears subversive, notably in its epistemological postulate of a mythical language that might uncover things left unseen by the rational scientific paradigm of Modernity. Stephen McKnight notes indeed that the gnostic pattern identified by Voegelin in the modern world is “crucial for analysts to explore because these elements of modernity are usually claimed to be derived from science and secularization and not from ancient esoteric religions.”¹⁴⁶ Defined in these terms, the perspective of Gnosticism echoes with the very approach I wish to promote in this dissertation.

The apophatic character of Voegelin’s philosophy seems directly related to the idea of openness, which appears to stand at the centre of Voegelin’s approach. As already mentioned, his thought is infused with a posture, epistemological just as much as existential, of “loving openness” towards Being. From this being-open in the world results a philosophy in the open, one that embraces the speculative breadth of thought and claims its legitimacy as well as its urgency:

Reason has the definite existential content of openness towards reality (...) In face of the breakdown of philosophy in modern Western

¹⁴⁶ Stephen MCKNIGHT, “Eric Voegelin and the Changing Perspective on the Gnostic Features of Modernity.”, in *International and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Eric Voegelin*, ed. Stephen A. McKnight and Geoffrey L.Price. University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1997.

society, the bond between reason and existential philia, between reason and openness toward the ground must be made thematically explicit.¹⁴⁷

As I hope to demonstrate in the present chapter, this idea of openness is all the more crucial as it connects with the concept of metaxy, absolutely pivotal in Voegelin's thought and which, I wish to argue, provides a key to unlock his concept of Gnosticism. It is my intuition that both the concepts of openness and metaxy express Voegelin's "insight concerning the divine presence and operation in the cosmos"¹⁴⁸, which only a speculative, hermeneutical, and poetic language may provide, resorting notably to the resources of mythical expression. Voegelin depicts life in openness as an existential posture allowing a better knowledge of reality, characterized by a conscious, creative and illuminating participation within worldly being. The philosopher, therefore, is called to wander in the openness of the in-between, in the "erotic tension" of her existence in the world, torn between the being and the beyond, and by the persisting experience of the joint presence of God and the world.

A reclaiming of Jonas' analysis

Although Voegelin's philosophy distinguishes itself radically from Jonas', manifesting different sensitivities and different concerns, his resumption of the Jonasian analysis of Gnosticism seems to converge on the original diagnosis of the gnostic character of at least some elements of Modernity. Both thinkers identify significant analogies between ancient Gnosticism and the modern condition, and demonstrate in their political analysis a particular sensitivity to the existential and spiritual condition of modern societies:

The collapse of the ancient empires of the East, the loss of independence for Israel and the Hellenic and Phoenician city-states, the population shifts, the deportations and enslavements, and the interpen-

¹⁴⁷ Eric VOEGELIN, "Reason: The Classic Experience", art. cit, p.101.

¹⁴⁸ James RHODES, "What is the Metaxy? Diotima and Voegelin", *Voegelin View*, June 2013. URL: <https://voegelinview.com/what-is-the-metaxy-diotima-and-voegelin/> Accessed 11.01.2019.

tration of cultures *reduce men who exercise no control over the proceedings of history to an extreme state of forlornness in the turmoil of the world*, of intellectual disorientation, of material and spiritual insecurity. The loss of meaning that results from the breakdown of institutions, civilizations, and ethnic cohesion evokes attempts to regain an understanding of the meaning of human existence in the given conditions of the world.¹⁴⁹

Among the “profusion of gnostic experiences and symbolic expressions” already acknowledged by Jonas, Voegelin distinguishes what he considers along with his colleague as the central feature of Gnosticism, namely “*the experience of the world as an alien place* into which man has strayed and from which he must find his way back home to the other world of his origin.”¹⁵⁰ For Voegelin too, who sees in Hegel’s alienated spirit or Heidegger’s being-thrown contemporary expressions of a gnostic being in the world, the great mythopoems of Gnosticism revolve around questions of the origin, of an original having been flung and the perspective of a liberating escape from the world. Voegelin thus shares with Jonas an existential perspective on Gnosticism, assuming that

this similarity in symbolic expression results from a homogeneity in experience of the world [and that] the homogeneity goes beyond the experience of the world to the image of man and salvation with which *both the modern and the ancient gnostics respond to the condition of “flungness” in the alien world.*¹⁵¹

Both philosophers converge moreover in their observation that modern thought is at least partly rooted in a gnostic mode of inhabiting the world, the latter hinges upon the twofold experience of an alienation from a world deemed hostile, and a rebellion against the ground of being – whose divinity both Voegelin and Jonas seem to agree on. While Jonas’ analysis of contemporary forms of Gnosticism aimed primarily at an enhanced understanding of the nihilistic element pervading modern thought through

¹⁴⁹ Eric VOEGELIN, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, op. cit., p.6. My emphasis.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p.7. My emphasis.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p.8. My emphasis.

existentialism, Voegelin's concern focuses on providing an articulated account of the political expressions of modern Gnosticism in order to develop "a new interpretation of European intellectual history and of modern politics", thereby uncovering the *pneumopathological* condition of political modernity¹⁵². Voegelin's thought distinguishes itself however by a political conservatism, led by the notion of order and the idea that the disorders of society were caused by attempts at overcoming the transcendent order of being:

The structure of the order of being will not change because one finds it defective and runs away from it. The attempt at world destruction will not destroy the world, but will only increase the disorder in society.¹⁵³

Opposing the gnostic posture of an existential revolt against worldly being, Voegelin's interpretation of Gnosticism rather suggests renewing the order of the world through actions grounded in the love of the world, thereby reminding us of Jonas' radical concern for the perpetuation of worldly being.

Some critical considerations

James Wisner brings our attention to Voegelin's own detachment from his early statements about the nature of Modernity such as formulated in the *New Science of Politics*, in *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, and in the *Political Religions*. In more recent statements, Voegelin indicated that Gnosticism, although certainly a major force in the development of contemporary society, should not be considered as its essence. Modernity revealing itself as more complex than his original position would suggest, and appearing rather as a composite of several traditions, he indicated the need to enlarge the "investigation of contemporary consciousness so as to include an examination of its Gnostic, Hermetic and Alchemistic conceits".¹⁵⁴ Gnosticism ought

¹⁵² Ibid, p.5.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p.9.

¹⁵⁴ Eric VOEGELIN, "Response to Professor Altizer," *Journal of the American Academy Religion*, 6 (1975), 762-65, quoted by James WISNER in "From Cultural Analysis to Philosophical Anthropology: An Examination of Voegelin's concept of Gnosticism", art. cit., p.93.

to be considered not as the exclusive source of modern cosmologies, but along other factors, such as the “metastatic apocalypse” or the process of immanentization with its origins in the revival of neo-Platonism. Stephen McKnight thus argues that the themes that enter modern thought through Renaissance Neoplatonism and Hermeticism have a thrust profoundly different from those associated with ancient and modern Gnostic nihilism. A mode of esoteric saving knowledge in particular, emphasizing human dominance over nature and the transformation of the natural and social order into paradise, would have gained attention in the Renaissance and grown to become a pattern in modernity and play a key role in the development of modern utopian political ideologies. This pattern would have notably contributed to the modern belief that an epistemological breakthrough separates the new age from the past and equips modern humanity with the power to master nature and perfect society.¹⁵⁵

In this light, Wiser rightfully notes that “Voegelin’s partial disclaimer of his own concept raises a question as to the importance of the term [of Gnosticism] itself”, asking whether Gnosticism is a “useful conceptual tool in our attempt to understand the modern condition”.¹⁵⁶ My insight is that the interest in Gnosticism, purely hermeneutic here, lies not so much in the concept itself but, rather, in what it contributes to unconceal. Following Wiser, one of the claims of this chapter is that Voegelin’s analysis of the gnostic phenomenon does provide an important theoretical insight, one that might be “usefully extended beyond the realm of cultural analysis for which it was originally developed”.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Stephen MCKNIGHT, “Eric Voegelin and the Changing Perspective on the Gnostic Features of Modernity”, in *The Allure of Gnosticism: The Gnostic Experience in Jungian Psychology and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Robert A.Segal, June Singer and Murray Stein, Open Court, 1995.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p.94.

A. The Gnostic Revolution: overcoming a godless world

Like Jonas, Voegelin's philosophy of Gnosticism falls into an understanding of the gnostic impulse as a longing for the overcoming of the world: the gnostic drive is one for a revolution against the world. More precisely, Voegelin situates the source of the gnostic revolt in the condition of alienation by and from a de-divinized world. "The de-divinization of the world through Christianity and the creation of a god-empty world", Voegelin argues, "are the prerequisites for Western existence as a whole"¹⁵⁸ In the *New Science of Politics*, Voegelin maintains that the de-divinization of the temporal sphere of power was historically followed by a process of re-divinization, characteristic of the late Middle Ages and the subsequent modernity.¹⁵⁹ With the process of de-divinization, a spiritual vacuum was cast upon the world, which various ideologies attempted to alleviate. Gnosticism, for Voegelin, is not only the most prominent and explicit of these attempts, but also takes on an archetypal dimension for the flowering in Modernity of liberalism, capitalism, positivism, progressivism, socialism, and all forms of totalitarianisms draining the world as they claim the exhaustion of truth. Voegelin drew strong parallels between Gnosticism and the utopian dreams of scientism and political revolution characterizing modern times. What unites all these modern enterprises, and what thus defines Gnosticism in its core, I argue, is the rejection of the world. Three features in particular are characteristic of Voegelin's concept of Gnosticism: the claim of a radical, ontological break with the times past; the claim that the source of this rupture is an extraordinary epistemological breakthrough providing humanity with both the knowledge and the ability to perfect society; and the conviction that this epistemological advance allows humanity to alter the conditions of existence and shape its own destiny.

¹⁵⁸ Eric VOEGELIN, "The Spiritual and Political Future of the Western World", quoted by Harald Bergbauer in "Eric Voegelin on the Early Christianity: Philosophical, Theological, and Political Implications", 2010, p.9.

URL: <https://sites01.lsu.edu/faculty/voegelin/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2015/09/Bergbauer.pdf>
Accessed 11.03.2019.

¹⁵⁹ Eric VOEGELIN, *The New Science of Politics*, op.cit.

The notion of a radical rupture with the present world appears essential to Voegelin's understanding of Gnosticism. The ideological and political movements he characterized as gnostics share indeed a common posture of rupture with the world, and claim the introduction of an epochal break, instigated by an epistemological one. Among the conceptual imaginary of Modernity, Voegelin identifies one gnostic symbol in particular expressing this idea of an epochal rupture: the notion of the "Three Ages", separating western history into ancient, medieval and modern times, each very distinctively characterized by specific epistemological landscapes. The gnostic temporality is thus a purely linear one, proceeding from the cursed times of the fall to the redemption of the end of times. But this end of times, the actualization of the overcoming, the final completion of the rupture, appears to never really happen: rather, it is perpetually postponed, so that nothing ever seems to fulfil the gnostic revolution. The latter embodies an eternal dissatisfaction with the present world: it is an eternal revolution. The modern dogma of progress and its declination in the sanctity of economic growth illustrate for example the gnostic movement of a perpetual overcoming, or escape out of present worldly being, and finds its epistemological roots in a science Thomas Kuhn described as "post-normal", evolving along successive paradigmatic breaks. The gnostic impulse amounts to a perpetual, insatiable, ontological yearning for an overcoming of the world in its present manifestation. As we know, Voegelin proposed to investigate the existential pendant of this yearning by digging more specifically into its spiritual roots. While most thinkers of Modernity have linked the epistemological leap of Scientism to the process of secularization¹⁶⁰, Voegelin interprets Gnosticism as a movement instigated by the "de-divinization" of the world throughout the development of Christianity. What matters to us for now is the notion of a break, rupture and rejection of the world characterizing Voegelin's concept of Gnosticism: Gnostics are wishing to put an end to this world, breaking from one world to another, and this ontological rupture is motivated by a profound unease in, dissatisfaction with,

¹⁶⁰ See Emilie HACHE (dir.), *De l'univers clos au monde infini*, Dehors, 2014.

and hatred of the world. This fantasized rupture with the present world may only happen through the possession of a specific kind of knowledge.

The knowledge that shall redeem us

A second feature of Gnosticism is the notion of a redemptive knowledge, which Voegelin recognizes in the modern phenomenon of ideologies. The philosopher refers to modern ideologies as various attempts to re-divinize a temporal order otherwise experienced as devoid of meaning and purpose.¹⁶¹ More specifically, his analysis of Gnosticism draws a parallel between ancient Gnosis, defined as both “the knowledge of falling captive to the world” and “the means of escaping it”¹⁶², and modern conceptions of scientific knowledge.

Voegelin articulates the concept of Gnosticism around the idea of a *saving knowledge*. The elevation of knowledge to the rank of privileged mean to salvation is notably apparent in the gnostic belief in the redeeming effect of the identification of the sources of worldly alienation. Voegelin identifies that same belief in the modern concept of science, and sees in the prodigious advancement, since the XVIIth century, of this new instrument of cognition, the symbolic vehicle of the gnostic truth. The philosopher considers indeed scientism as one of the strongest gnostic movements involved in the development of Western society. Against the widely acknowledged theory of secularization, and the more specific idea that modern science blossomed upon the secularization of knowledge and society, Voegelin witnesses the evolution of science into the equivalent of an esoteric religion, called upon by various social and political reformers. He thereby undercuts a basic tenet of modernity: in arguing that such root-concepts as that of knowledge or history are religious in origin and function, he challenges the hypothesis of secularization as a fundamental modernist theme.

¹⁶¹ Eric VOEGELIN, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*, The University of Chicago Press, 1952, p.107.

¹⁶² Eric VOEGELIN, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, op.cit, p.9.

Because it considers it possible to fully grasp some knowledge that until then had remained concealed, and yearns for the possession of this knowledge, the gnostic understanding of truth is a *possessive*, as well as a systemic one. It aims at achieving an integral, exhaustive form of knowledge that would conquer ignorance by disclosing the ultimate principles of Being. Voegelin rises against such attempts, which he recognizes in the modern philosophies of Thomas More, Thomas Hobbes or Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In identifying the human logos with the divine one, the latter intends indeed to make the process of history fully comprehensible. In the three cases, for Voegelin, “the thinker suppresses an essential element of reality”, lying in the consciousness that “*the constitution of being remains beyond the reach of the thinker’s lust for power*”¹⁶³ For this forgetting, Voegelin blames the *libido dominandi* typical of Gnosticism, appearing in philosophy by means of systems construction and dogmatic certitude. As the construction of systems relies on the obstruction of reality and the reduction of a perpetual mystery in Being, the “suppression” that goes with the various attempts at achieving systematic knowledge amounts for Voegelin to a closure against reality. Against the claim to *actual knowledge* (*wirkliches Wissen*) present in Hegel’s phenomenology and ranging through modern science, Voegelin reminds us that philosophy dwells in the love of wisdom, not its possession. His conception of philosophy is one that opposes the gnostic hatred of worldly being infusing the desire of dominion that is manifest in the urge to system construction:

*Philosophy springs from the love of being; it is man’s loving endeavour to perceive the order of being and attune himself to it. Gnosis desires dominion over being; in order to seize control of being the gnostic constructs his system. The building of systems is a gnostic form of reasoning, not a philosophical one.*¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.106. My emphasis.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p.30. My emphasis.

Escaping the World

If Gnosticism conceives knowledge as *the way* to achieve salvation, wherein exactly lies this salvation? The gnostic yearning for salvation arises from a condition of alienation, experienced as an unovercomeable entanglement with and entrapment in worldly being. The Gnostic myth of the “Hymn of the Pearl” thus expresses entrapment as the fundamental condition of mankind, an entrapment characterized by a condition of ignorance of our origin and ultimate purpose – hence the gnostic idea that knowledge is the means to redemption. Voegelin finds this element in the narratives of modern political revolutionaries like Auguste Comte or Karl Marx, who sought to use scientific knowledge in order to overcome an alienated state of existence. He argues that the development of the “social science project” took science far beyond its boundaries, disregarding its own limitations and using it in the same way ancient Gnostics used esoteric knowledge – as a means for escaping worldly alienation and transforming existence.

For Voegelin, who shares with Jonas the common understanding of Gnosticism as pessimistic and dualistic view of the world, the gnostic soteriology sees redemption in the *alteration of the conditions of existence through the mastering of worldly being*. The aim of the gnostic revolution is therefore the plain transfiguration of the world: “the gnostic revolution has for its purpose a change in the nature of man and the establishment of a transfigured society”¹⁶⁵ Voegelin stands firm on the ground prepared by Plato, Aristotle and St Augustine against those who dream of changing the world: “the nature of a thing cannot be changed; whoever tries to ‘alter’ its nature destroys the thing.”¹⁶⁶ Gnosticism thus arises as a revolted answer to the imperfection of the world through an attempt at its salvational fulfilment. While the Christian posture finds redemption through grace in death, the Gnostics situate redemption in the death of the present world and the advent of a new one: “the aim is destruction of the old world

¹⁶⁵ Eric VOEGELIN, *The New Science of Politics*, op. cit, p.211.

¹⁶⁶ Eric VOEGELIN, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*. op.cit. p. 43.

and passage to the new. The instrument of salvation is gnosis itself – knowledge.”¹⁶⁷ If Jonas interprets this yearning for another world as a dynamic of Demundanization, Voegelin defines the gnostic rebellion against worldly being as a process of Immanentization. As we expand further on the notion of Immanentization, we shall see that these two terms are not necessarily opposed, but rather converge in a sense of closure of the world. Both philosophers meet indeed in their analysis of a dualistic concept of salvation, understood in a radical opposition to worldly being as it is presently experienced. In the gnostic idea of redemption through revolution, we find indeed an absolutely crucial ontological postulate proceeding from the existential experience of being as inherently flawed, whose conditions therefore have to be overcome. The gnostic self has to be *saved* from present, mundane being. Voegelin’s definition of Gnosticism distinguishes itself with the particular idea that the labour of salvation, entailing the dissolution of the worldly constitution of being, falls to mankind, and materializes in modern ideological and mass political movements. The latter would indeed exhibit “a definite animosity towards the very structure of existence itself.”¹⁶⁸ Voegelin’s analysis of these political movements therefore proposes approaching the whole project of modern western society as a political religion.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p.8.

¹⁶⁸ James L. WISER, “From Cultural Analysis to Philosophical Anthropology: An Examination of Voegelin’s concept of Gnosticism”, art. cit., p.95.

B. Modernity as Immanent Political Religion

The Modern Political Religion

In the fifth chapter of the *New Science of Politics*, Voegelin presents the hypothesis according to which what lies at the heart of the modern predicament is a “peculiar pneumopathological state”¹⁶⁹. In order to understand modern civilization, the philosopher argues, we must descend to the symbolic representation of our existential experience in the modern world. Voegelin’s political philosophy displays an enhanced sensitivity to the existential dimension of political phenomena. Like Jonas, Voegelin submits an existential definition of Gnosticism, in which he recognizes the core features of modern existence, underlying all modern political projects. Voegelin’s analysis of Gnosticism is first and foremost an analysis of gnostic consciousness: one that experiences the world as fundamentally flawed, and longs for an overcoming of this alienated condition. It is essential to acknowledge this existential focus, in order to prevent any misunderstanding of the Voegelinian approach to Gnosticism and therefore also his analysis of political modernity. Intending to elucidate the depths of its consciousness, Voegelin proposes to disclose Modernity as a *Political Religion*. In the light of his analysis of consciousness, the civilizational process of modernity appeared to him as the historical manifestation of a “mystical work of self-salvation”¹⁷⁰:

Gnosticism most effectively released human forces for the building of a civilization because on their fervent application to intramundane activity was put the premium of salvation.¹⁷¹

Voegelin thus interprets the whole unfolding of the modern civilizational process as ultimately led by a gnostic consciousness yearning for a redemption in the overcoming of the present world. At the core of this progressive endeavour lies the discovery of the gnosis, a precious type of knowledge that shall unlock the development of the

¹⁶⁹ Eric VOEGELIN, *The New Science of Politics*, op.cit, p.139

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.129.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.130.

modern political project and lead societies to a greater stage of civilization. We might recognize here echoes of the narratives of progress and growth, both falling into the ideological framework of modern civilization. To the hegemonic development of the modern civilizational process and its ideological dogmas, Voegelin only sees a limit in totalitarian political projects. “Totalitarianism”, which manifests itself in all-encompassing ideologies promoting a systematic conception of truth, “is the end form of progressive civilisation”¹⁷².

Voegelin’s condemnation of modern ideologies and their gnostic dimension allows us to approach the concept of ideology as a systemic, possessive type of knowledge claiming to seize the total realm of being. Closely tied to the phenomenon of ideologies, which he understands as modern avatars of the *gnosis*, Voegelin’s definition of totalitarianism overlaps with his analysis of Gnosticism. He thus considered liberalism, scientism, positivism, progressivism and democratism – among others “isms” – to be gnostic ideologies, revealing the presence of Gnosticism all over the modern age. Ranging through the political ideologies which emphasize movement toward a goal rather than the nature of the goal pursued, its magnitude is colossal. It follows from Voegelin’s teaching that, despite the defeat of Nazi Germany and the containment of Soviet aggression, western societies have by no means exorcised the demon of ideological totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt had yet warned us against the latent danger of silent forms of totalitarianism infusing our civilization, remaining unconscious, concealed under the aegis of growth, progress or development, and the perspective of a redemptory end to history. In this context, Voegelin’s approach to Modernity as political religion provides an acute insight into modern narratives, beyond their claim to an enlightened and non-ideological secularism. Against the widely established thesis of secularization, Voegelin refers to ideologies as attempts to re-divinize the temporal order¹⁷³ and offers an interpretation of Modernity as a process of *Immanentization*.

¹⁷² Ibid, p.132.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p.107.

The Immanentization and the unworldly world

In some regards, Voegelin's notion of Immanentization, defining the core dynamic of Gnosticism and thereby also Modernity, may appear as a variation of the secularization thesis. It acknowledges indeed to a certain extent that modern societies and cosmologies did not exactly expel all theological content, but rather internalized them, incorporating them into their structures of thought. Such a dynamic would indeed succeed to a prior process of *de-divinization*. According to Voegelin, one major consequence of the development of monotheistic Christianity is that it created a "world emptied of gods", reducing a plurality of divinities to a metaphysical god which was transferred from this earthly world to an indeterminate and absent beyond. The process of de-divinization itself would have succeeded to the primary experience of a world full of a divine presence manifesting a cosmological order complete in itself, and occurred as a decisive consequence of what Voegelin called the "leap in being" – on which the next point shall expand. The emergence of a dynamic of de-divinization thus refers to the experience, and the progressive noetic realization, that the divine is a "beyond" transcending the world, never encountered in worldly existence. In philosophical terms, what the event of de-divinization implies is that the origin, ground and purpose of being are not perceived as contained in the world, but as lying "beyond" worldly being: the world is experienced as the groundless vestige of a divine principle absent from its creation, orphan of a god who fled¹⁷⁴.

What Voegelin conceptualized under the term of "de-divinization" appears to have elicited dualistic repercussions on the development of modern cosmology, thereby recalling Jonas' analysis of Gnosticism. As worldly being was dissociated from divine being, the structure of being itself was altered and on it was super-imposed a dualistic architecture of being. As I suggest in the next chapter, the ontological indices of *immanent* and *transcendent* are archetypal of a dualistic ontology articulated around the divorce between God and the world, and the yearning to bridge the immanence of worldly being to the transcendence of a divine beyond. Another manifestation

¹⁷⁴ See the entry "De-divinization" from Jack Elliott's Dictionary of Voegelinia Terminology. URL: [http://watershade.net/ev/ev-dictionary.html#de-divinization of the world](http://watershade.net/ev/ev-dictionary.html#de-divinization%20of%20the%20world) Accessed 11.03.2019.

of this structural dualism concurrent to the dynamic of de-divinization is found in the modern process of political secularization: the latter consists in the dissociation of previously unified spiritual and temporal powers, henceforth to be represented by the church and by the empire and then the state, thereby ensuring a “double representation of man in society”¹⁷⁵. Both events of the de-divinization of the world and the development of a dualistic cosmology prepare and condition the process of Immanentization described by Voegelin: the Immanentization characterizing modern societies occurs in a de-divinized, dualistic world. Now what does that term cover?

Lying at the core of modern Gnosticism, the process of Immanentization identified by Voegelin is first and foremost an eschatological phenomenon: it has to do with modern conceptions of salvation and the end of the world, and is defined as an *Immanentization of the eschaton*. In his lecture on the link between politics and religion in Voegelin’s thought, Bruno Latour offers a perceptive insight into the subtle relevance of Voegelin’s essential idea for our time.¹⁷⁶ The philosopher suggests indeed that Voegelin’s concept of immanentization provides a key to understand the modern aversion for immanence. But let us first have a closer look at this immanentization thesis. In *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin argues that XIIth century Italian theologian Joachim de Flore initiated a tradition of philosophies and political movements locating the advent of end of time in the linearity of time. He identifies in the Joachimist idea of the Third Realm the burgeoning urge to transform the world and to draw its historical course to a close, which would later evolve into modern utopianism. The “fallacious immanentization of the eschaton” thus designates the political drive to realize the eschaton within history, thereby putting an end to time. What is lost however in the belief that the end of time, the advent of the eschaton, is in our hands, Latour

¹⁷⁵ Linda C. RAEDER, “Voegelin on Gnosticism, Modernity, and the Balance of Consciousness”, in *Anamnesis Journal*, November 2013, Online Essays. URL: <http://anamnesisjournal.com/2013/11/voegelin-on-gnosticism-modernity-and-the-balance-of-consciousness-by-linda-c-raeder/> Accessed 11.01.2019.

¹⁷⁶ Bruno LATOUR, “Politics and Religion. A Reading of Eric Voegelin”, Universitaet zu Koeln, 27th July 2015.

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgyrneCHWMg&t=1960s>

Accessed 11.03.2019.

See also *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, Harvard University Press, 2017.

argues, is some ontological hiatus, the suspension of linearity, the discontinuous irruption of the world as something perpetually overflowing any historical course or framework. In the attempt to make politics fulfil the eschaton and thus bring the world to a closure, something crucial about worldly being was lost – its persistent openness.

What motivates this political ambition? “What specific uncertainty was so disturbing that it had to be overcome by the dubious means of fallacious immanentization?”¹⁷⁷ Voegelin argues that the dynamic of immanentization appeals to those anxious about the impending, uncertain course of history, eager to achieve certainty about the meaning, essential “eidos” of history. In a de-divinized culture erected upon a world deserted by the gods, only the tenuous bond of faith remains to guide our existence, which few prove able to sustain:

the attempt at immanentizing the meaning of existence is fundamentally an attempt at bringing our knowledge of transcendence into a firmer grip than the *cognito fidei*.¹⁷⁸

From the High Middle Ages onwards, Voegelin describes a constant descent into Gnosticism through a process of immanentization resulting in the progressive evacuation of all transcendence from the world. As the transcendence is immanentized, the tension contained in both immanence and transcendence is lost. The irruption of the Leviathan to pacify political instabilities, embodying the figure of the state as ultimate authority, evacuates in the same way the inherent volatility and contingency of politics by inscribing them into timeless and immutable “laws of nature”. The result, Latour argues, is the loss of two essential instabilities, whose elemental connection was obscured by modernity: that of the religious mode of existence, and that of the political. Reduced to the application of a transcendent plan onto reality, politics has become the substitution of a non-world, a utopia, to the present world. What succeeds to the failure of the successive attempts at the immanentization of the eschaton manifested by mod-

¹⁷⁷ Eric VOEGELIN, *The New Science of Politics*, op.cit, p.187.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p.189.

ern politics, Latour explains, is the rejection of an immanence despised for, well, despised for its transcendence! The immanence of the world does not let itself be harnessed to fit into an ideal of what it should be: it is self-transcendent. Here we discern the crux of a problem I wish to elucidate in the coming chapters; for now let it suffice to say that the attempt at immanentizing a transcendent eschaton, that is, in the realm of politics, at shaping the world into an idea of what it should be, resulted in a posture of perpetual discontent with the world, which, following Latour's reasoning, it appears fair to connect to the present environmental crisis. In the tradition of Heidegger's loss of being, or Jonas' forgetting of life, Latour links more specifically the ecological issue with the loss of matter along the development of modernity. According to him, the irruption of the ecological crisis, as the study of the earth's critical zone reacting to human actions reveals, proclaims an end to the inertness of matter, and thereby offers an opportunity to re-encounter the agency of worldly beings – an agency lost with the loss of immanence. Although I shall further expand on this, it is important to understand here that Voegelin's notion of immanentization refers to a loss of both the immanent and the transcendent dimensions of worldly being, as these may only subsist together: any attempt at reducing their tension, for instance by absorbing one into another like in the immanentization (which presents itself as an immanentization of a transcendent eschaton), results in their coincident loss. This becomes particularly perceptible in the light of Latour's analysis of modern dualism, which, focussing on the most archetypical nature-culture divide, taught us to consider dualistic polarities as one concept instead of two distinct ones. The challenge outlined by Voegelin and articulated by Latour lies therefore in the resistance to the dualistic urge to reduce the ontological tension in the world. Especially, it summons us to embrace the tension of politics, by preserving its indomitable instability, the uncertainty of its outcome, and by dwelling in the precariousness of worldly being as it is being manifested by the present environmental crisis.

This challenge takes on an eschatological meaning, and Voegelin's concept of immanentization contributes indeed to uncover the way modern conceptions of eschatology decisively affect the structure of modern politics.¹⁷⁹ In chapter 4 of the *New*

¹⁷⁹ Jacob TAUBES, *Occidental Eschatology*, Stanford University Press, 2009 (1947).

Science of Politics, Voegelin describes the process of immanentization of the Christian notion of eschatological fulfilment, and argues that teleological and axiological components of Christian symbolism reappear in modern variants of immanentization such as Progressivism or Utopianism. Prolonging this reflection into the present context of the ecological issue, Latour argues that secularized societies cannot take in the advent of the ecological mutation, as it would represent a second apocalypse. The ecological crisis figures the actual irruption of an unprecedented, unexpected eschaton, both transcending, interrupting modern conceptions of eschatology and arising from the transcendent immanence of worldly beings. Despite the many warnings of climate scientists, “the Moderns” stand after the apocalypse, after the ultimate revelations of the Enlightenment, the scientific revolution and the resulting process of secularization, bringing about the much-desired end of history. The truth has been revealed, the end of time has come as the eschaton was absorbed into the colossal project of modernization.

If Voegelin’s analysis of Gnosticism as Immanentization appears as a variation of the secularization thesis characterized by a focus on the eschatological dimension of modern political movements, it also presents a declination of the motive of the death of God: “the death of God is the cardinal issue of gnosis, both ancient and modern.”¹⁸⁰ Recalling Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx’s interpretation of the Judeo-Christian transcendent God as the projection into a hypostatic beyond of the best of humanity, Voegelin interprets the promethean yearning of modern humanism as another manifestation of the process of immanentization¹⁸¹. He thus depicts Marx as a “speculative gnostic”, who “construes the order of being as *a process of nature complete in itself*” by evacuating all transcendence from the world. The purpose of this speculation, Voegelin argues, is indeed “to shut off the process of being from transcendent being and have man create himself”¹⁸². In this evacuation of transcendence from worldly

¹⁸⁰ Eric VOEGELIN, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, op.cit., p. xx.

¹⁸¹ As James Wisner reminds us, Voegelin was convinced that the modern process of immanentization, manifesting itself in the divinization of the profane spheres of the scientifico-political, “[was] not motivated primarily by a desire to celebrate mundane existence as such”, but rather was “based upon a prior rejection of reality’s transcendent grounding.” He concludes that “immanentization was only the first step towards the attempted construction of a second reality – a construction motivated by the fundamental rejection of historical existence.” James L WISER, “From Cultural Analysis to Philosophical Anthropology: An Examination of Voegelin’s concept of Gnosticism”, art. cit., p.95.

¹⁸² Eric VOEGELIN, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, p.16.

being, Voegelin sees the main danger of a process of immanentization leaving “an unworldly world” emptied of its transcendence:

When consciousness of the cosmic bond of being as the background of all philosophy declines, there arise the well-known dangers of the dedivinized world and the unworldly God, *the unworldly world* as nothing but a nexus of relations between immanent things, and the dedivinized God reduced to mere existence.¹⁸³

Here, Voegelin offers a wonderful expression of what he fundamentally rejects in Gnosticism: namely, the way it obstructs and seals off the creative process of worldly being in the attempt to seize it fully, thereby exhausting its self-transcendence. That towards which Voegelin seems to point here is that transcendence is impaired when it is conceived as otherworldly, or worse, nonworldly. That is to say that the open process of worldly being does not need to be grounded in a radical, otherworldly transcendence, and the transcendent dimension of a being does not exclude its resilient, immanent creativity. Perhaps this depiction of an *unworldly world* might echo Jonas’ interpretation of the gnostic dynamic of loss of the world: both Jonas’ concept of Demundanization and Voegelin’s Immanentization refer indeed to a common negation of the world in its own ontological, self-transcending openness. For Voegelin, this occurs through a dynamic of reduction of the tension that defines our being in the world.

¹⁸³ Eric VOEGELIN, *Anamnesis*, op. cit., p.79. My emphasis.

C. Inhabiting in-between the worlds

The leap in the abyss of Being

In the first volume of *Order and History - Israel and Revelation*, Voegelin mentions “a change in the order of Being and existence itself¹⁸⁴ following the introduction, inherent to the process of immanentization, of the idea of an otherworldly transcendence. The “leap in Being” describes indeed the realization that the source of cosmic order and creation is not located within the cosmos itself, but ‘beyond’ it, therefore opening a breach in worldly being separating the divine principle from the world. According to Voegelin, this conceptual discovery was only clearly articulated in the Greek and Judeo-Christian symbolics. In Neolithic agricultural societies, the divine is not fully differentiated from a world infused with wonder and enchantment, neither is the world as creation distinguished from its creators. The representation of a single order encompassing the natural worlds and the realm of human experience conveys a deep sense of attunement to the cosmos. In this context, the event identified by Voegelin as a leap in being symbolizes the encounter with a creation whose cause or origin could not be found within the world, thus setting off a quest for the original cause characterizing a metaphysical engagement with the world. As the single ordering, originating, and preserving source of being is experienced in its absolute transcendence beyond the world, the leap of being figures the sense of a gulf in the hierarchy of being, separating divine from mundane existence. The development of monotheism thus corresponds to the discovery and experience of an absolute transcendent force located “beyond Being in tangible existence”¹⁸⁵. Voegelin further argues that the discovery which plunged humanity into the abyss of being proclaimed a whole new historical mode of existence: one that divides the stream of time into the before and after of the great leap and unites all humans into a universal humanity. Thus, he analyses both the linear temporality and the universalism of modern cosmology as the legacy of the leap

¹⁸⁴ Eric VOEGELIN, *Order and History I – Israel and Revelation*, op.cit, p. 47.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

in being and the insights it released, establishing a new aeon of history that still conditions modernity's narratives and self-understanding.

“The discovery of a transcendent source of Being beyond existence”, Thomas Hollweck notes, “radically alters man's understanding of his place in the cosmos from his previous experience of consubstantiality”.¹⁸⁶ On an ontological level, one main consequence of such a discovery is the separation of humanity from the consubstantiality of the world, symbolized by the theological motive of the fall from the garden of Eden. Like the original fall from a place of union, the leap in being insulates human existence from worldly being, and results in the devaluation of its participation in the world. It is a *leap in the abyss of being*, leaving humanity in-between a divine world from which it has fallen, and an alien world in which it was thrown. Voegelin's philosophy proposes to investigate on an existential level the disorienting consequences of the leap, experienced as an exile from both God and the world. It suggests that the leap in being engendered a *tensional in-between* a creative force from beyond and existence in the world, an in-between whose conscious recognition and symbolic representation provides a key to approaching the development of modern cosmology. By overlooking this element, Voegelin argues, contemporary philosophy has ignored an essential aspect of human existence that is the *life in between*.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas A. HOLLWECK, “Cosmos and the ‘Leap in Being’ in Voegelin's Philosophy”, *106th American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, 26th Eric Voegelin Society Annual International Meeting*, org. by Ellis Sandoz, Washington, D.C., Sept. 2-5, 2010. URL: <https://sites01.lsu.edu/faculty/voegelin/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2015/09/Thomas-Hollweck.pdf>
Accessed 11.01.2019.

Dwelling in the Metaxy

In Plato's *Symposium*, the philosopher and priestess Diotima defines Eros as "a great daimon," understanding the daimonic¹⁸⁷ as a "between (*metaxy*) god and mortal".¹⁸⁸ Voegelin read in this line a major platonic insight and treated the term "metaxy" as a substantive category whose meaning proved paramount to his philosophy. He confided indeed to his doctoral student Ellis Sandoz that the greatest issue of his work was "to restore the problem of the Metaxy for society and history."¹⁸⁹ If the philosopher only fully explored and elaborated the idea of Metaxy in the volume V of his *Order and History*, it seems to pervade the whole of his thought. Voegelin defines the Metaxy, or In-Between, as

the meeting-ground of the human and the divine in a consciousness
of their distinction and interpenetration¹⁹⁰

In the present section, I propose to elucidate how the problem of the metaxy relates to his analysis of Gnosticism, and how the experience of an original tension precedes any gnostic movement.

At the core of the thought of an ontological in-between, Voegelin identifies a theophanic process of *differentiation of consciousness*, referring to the sharpened consciousness of an existential tension, experienced as a being-torn between two poles. This differentiating event thus discovers the metaxic nature of human consciousness: suspended over a gulf, dwelling between the divine and the worldly, participating in

¹⁸⁷ In his doctoral dissertation about the daimonic, Stephen A. Diamond states that it is "as much concerned with creativity as with negative reactions". He claims that "a special characteristic of the daimonic model is that it considers both creativity on one side, and anger and rage on the other side, as coming from the same source". Stephen A. DIAMOND, "*Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic: The Psychological Genesis of Violence, Evil, and Creativity*". Foreword.

¹⁸⁸ Plato, 202d13-e1.

¹⁸⁹ Eric Voegelin to Ellis Sandoz, December 30, 1971. Quoted by Sandoz in his introduction to Voegelin, *Order and History V – In Search of Order*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1987, p. 12.

¹⁹⁰ Eric VOEGELIN, *Collected Works Vol. 12 - Published Essays, 1966-1985*, Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, p. 233.

both but fixed in neither. This discovery coincides with the distinction of a single creative force, an absolutely transcendent source of Being symbolized in the concept of the One God. As Voegelin identifies the development of a sense of an ontological schism, referring in particular to the distinction between the transcendent, divine ground of Being and the world of immanence¹⁹¹, he seems to point toward the birth of modern dualism, articulated around such ontological divides as that between nature and culture, natural and supernatural, or God and the world. But the thought our philosopher wishes to rehabilitate in the idea of metaxy is one of the in-between, of the middle ground, of that which overflows binary polarities and thereby subverts modern dualism. Voegelin's concept of metaxy thus points towards exactly that which a dualistic cosmology misses about our being in the world: the tensional structure of existence, of an existence in-between the worlds.

In the essay "Eternal Being in Time" (*Ewiges Sein in der Zeit*) published in his *Anamnesis*, Voegelin defines the "philosophical experience" as a pair of tensions in the soul, the first of which being that "between time and eternity."¹⁹² He argues there that humans "experience in [themselves] the tension to divine being"¹⁹³, standing in-between poles of being symbolized by the divine and the worldly. Voegelin defines this inbetweenness as an existential tension, and summons us to embrace the "erotic tension towards the ground of being" by:

consciously exist[ing] in the tension of the in-between (metaxy), in which the divine and the human *partake* of each other.¹⁹⁴

The concept of metaxy does not refer to "an empty space between immanent and transcendent objects", merely indicating the void between dualistic poles, but designates

¹⁹¹ Eugene WEBB, *Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of History*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, Washington, 1981.

¹⁹² James RHODES, "What is the Metaxy? Diotima and Voegelin", art.cit.

¹⁹³ Eric VOEGELIN, *Anamnesis*, op.cit, pp. 128, 129.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 154. My emphasis.

rather “the area of mutual participation of divine and human reality”.¹⁹⁵ The metaxic tension is one actively, positively experienced, and opening up the possibility of a fruitful and mutual participation (metalepsis) in and with the world. Voegelin’s intuition is that Eros, the mediator of the metaxic tension, symbolizes either an attraction or a pull in opposite directions – between time and eternity, divine and worldly, being and nothingness etc.¹⁹⁶ That which stands in between, and which Voegelin’s concept of metaxy intends to unveil, should not be hypostatized as an object on which propositions could be formed: it first arises as the experience of an existential tension characterizing the human condition. Voegelin argues that the anthropological dimension of the metaxy reaches its fullest symbolic achievement in the Pauline vision of the Transfiguration, which expresses both humans’ ascent toward the creative force, and the descent of the creative force toward them in a tensional co-penetration of immanence and transcendence. Voegelin thus fills the term “metaxy” with new meanings by treating dualistic polarities as symbols of experiential poles. He thereby provides a deeper interpretation of Plato, suggesting that the antique philosopher is conscious of existing not only between god and man, but also in between all other pairs of poles grounding modern philosophy – the one and the unlimited, the one and the many, consciousness and unconsciousness, time and eternity... all platonic symbols of an in-betweenness unfolding from the primary metaxy, understood as an existence in tension.

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Bridging the poles of a manifold experience in the world, the existential tension described by Voegelin is no human prerogative: it arises from and is grounded in worldly being: “there is no flux of presence in the Metaxy without its foundation in the biophysical existence of man on earth in the universe.”¹⁹⁸ The tensional structure of existence unveiled by the concept of metaxy thus expands to the world in all the concreteness of its overwhelming and eerie presence: it is a cosmic metaxy. Voegelin

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p.176.

¹⁹⁶ Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, op.cit, p. 127.

¹⁹⁷ James RHODES, art. Cit.

¹⁹⁸ Eric VOEGELIN, *The Ecumenic Age*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974, p. 333.

challenges the founding postulates of modern dualism as he suggests that the unfathomable element in cultural processes is inseparable from that of natural processes:

the Mystery of the historical process is inseparable from the Mystery of the reality which brings forth the universe and the earth, plant and animal life on earth, and ultimately man and his consciousness.¹⁹⁹

Brendan Purcell thus proposes to approach the “metaxic issue” in terms of cosmic emergence, instead of limiting it to the realm of strictly anthropological, existential experience.²⁰⁰ The immanence of the “hierarchy of being” described by Voegelin as composed of different “stratas of reality participating into one another”²⁰¹ coexists indeed with the transcendent openness of a cosmic metaxy, illuminated by the experience of our being in the world as an existence in between. The inbetweenness contained in the concept of metaxy is as ontological as it is existential:

once the truth of man’s existence had been understood as the In-Between reality of noetic consciousness, the truth of the process as a whole could be restated as the existence of *all* things in the In-Between of the One and the Apeiron.²⁰²

Voegelin saw in the forgetting of the cosmic community of the metaxy, what Andrew Hoffman calls the “full metaxic partnership in the community of Being”²⁰³, a modern disease of consciousness manifested through a “withdrawal into existential solitude”²⁰⁴ – the anoia. Voegelin’s concept of metaxy is closely tied to the thought of the community and consubstantiality of worldly beings, imprinted by the intuition that “God, man,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Brendan PURCELL, “Human Emergence as Cosmic Metaxy”, *Voegelin View*, March 2009. URL: <https://voegelinview.com/human-emergence-as-cosmic-metaxy-i/> Accessed 11.01.2019.

²⁰¹ Eric VOEGELIN, *The Ecumenic Age*, op. cit, p. 335.

²⁰² Ibid, p. 185.

²⁰³ Andrew HOFFMAN, “Eric Voegelin’s Leap of Being.” *Voegelin View*, April 2017. URL: <https://voegelinview.com/eric-voegelins-leap-part/> Accessed 11.01.2019.

²⁰⁴ Charles Warren BURCHFIELD, *Eric Voegelin’s Mystical Epistemology and Its Influence on Ethics and Politics*, The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1994, p.183.

world, and society form a primordial community of Being”²⁰⁵ in which “consciousness occurs as an event of participation between partners in the community of Being”²⁰⁶. Voegelin’s thought of the metaxy describes the depth of our being suspended in between the worlds, the breadth of our being simultaneously reaching through other worldly beings, and the potential luminosity of our wandering as we become conscious of our participation in the mysterious and creative process of being. But as the transcendent openness is separated from the immanent process of being, the creators from their creation, and our existential wandering amidst the abyss from the yearning emergence of worldly beings, something is lost. The fall from the conscious dwelling in the metaxy results for Voegelin in a “loss of being”.

The Gnostic loss of the world

Voegelin was well aware of the difficulty in embracing and maintaining the metaxic tension of existence. The philosopher read in the strong sense of anomie and estrangement pervading the consciousness of his time, traditional symptoms of Gnosticism resulting from the restlessness of our being caught in-between. Drawing a parallel with Henri de Lubac’s thought of the “suspended middle”²⁰⁷, Thomas Lordan argues that Voegelin’s philosophy evokes experiences of “longing for something that one knows is not here, that it is not in the gift of the world to give.”²⁰⁸ As he reflects on the forgetfulness of the “partnership in the community of Being”²⁰⁹, Voegelin joins in the tradition of thought initiated by the Heideggerian diagnosis of a Forgetting of Being consumed along the development of western philosophy. According to him, the gnostic loss of the world manifests itself in the loss of consubstantiality, which Andrew Hoffman refers to as a “fall from the grace of consubstantiality”²¹⁰, or which we could

²⁰⁵ Eric VOEGELIN, *Order and History I – Israel and Revelation*, op. cit., p.1.

²⁰⁶ Eric VOEGELIN, *Order and History V – In Search of Order*, op.cit, p.15.

²⁰⁷ John MILBANK, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005.

²⁰⁸ Thomas LORDAN, “Eric Voegelin and Henri de Lubac: The Metaxy and the Suspended Middle (Part I)”, art.cit, p.5.

²⁰⁹ Eric VOEGELIN, *Order and History I – Israel and Revelation*, op.cit., p.11.

²¹⁰ Andrew HOFFMAN, art.cit., p.5: “Whereas man was previously at home in the world, when Adam and Eve become aware of a separate God outside of their existence, *consubstantiality is lost*, everything

approach in terms of a process of disentanglement from the world. How does such a loss relate to the metaxic tension brought to light by Voegelin?

In *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, Voegelin argues that “border experiences” of the metaxy are prone to be reduced by a possessive approach to knowledge, led by the “temptation to fall from uncertain truth into certain untruth”.²¹¹ Such an approach to knowledge, as we know, is a traditional feature of Gnosticism, but is also characteristic of a metaphysico-scientific type of engagement with the world, aiming at propositional pronouncements about a reality that one ought to reduce in order to grasp. The main danger arising from the metaxy thus resides in its potential reduction through a movement of hypostatization. The hypostatization of the metaxic tension refers to its disjointing, its dismantling through the essentialization of its poles into two distinct substances or entities, leading for example to the distinction between transcendence and immanence, the worldly and the beyond, nature and culture, self and other... But attempts at reducing any event in the metaxy to an object of propositional knowledge result in its evasion: the tensional structure of the metaxy also indicates its evanescence, and the impossibility to ultimately capture it. The annihilation of the primal tension in a movement of hypostatization results indeed in what Voegelin eloquently called a “decapitation of Being”. If Voegelin’s “decapitation of Being”, or loss of substantiality, appears as another postmodern variation on the Nietzschean theme of the Death of God, alongside Heidegger’s Forgetting of Being and Jonas’ Forgetting of Life, it also provides an original insight into the metaxic context in which Modernity’s founding loss occurred. Voegelin’s interpretation suggests that being was “beheaded” as it was divided into distinct realms – worldly, divine, natural, cultural, objective, subjective, transcendent, immanent etc. In this regard, the gnostic dynamic of immanentization constituted an absorption, an abortion of the transcendent openness of the world as well as a quelling covering of the organic creativity of immanence²¹², and the murder of God was at the same time a murder of the world. Voegelin’s analysis of

falls apart and *they are no longer at home* in the garden but cast out into a world of alienation.” My emphasis.

²¹¹ Eric VOEGELIN, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*, op. cit., p.75.

²¹² Voegelin’s conception of transcendence stands for the metaxic openness of being.

Gnosticism thus indicates that worldly being was lost as the metaxic tension that ties all these ontological realms together and open them up to another was obliterated, the possibility for translation evacuated and their openness sealed. Negating the metaxy was like closing the door of the world – it negated its liminality, openness and thus creativity. In this sense, “the eclipse of transcendence constitutes the ultimate devaluation of the world”²¹³.

Therein, I argue, lies an essential teaching of Voegelin’s concept of Gnosticism, as well as the culminating point of his contribution to the philosophy of Modernity: the identification of a movement of reduction, closure, or sealing of an ontological tension between immanence and transcendence constitutive of worldly being. The gnostic mythology provided a rich palette of symbols expressing the restlessness and the alienness of a wandering felt by those who were cast inbetween, and the movement described by Voegelin as gnostic is one that aims to put an end to the metaxic edginess. But the unease of this tensional inbetweenness, as turbulent as it might be, is part of our being in the world. Attempting to remove it is losing the world.

²¹³ Wolfgang SMITH, *Teilhardism and the New Religion. A Thorough Analysis of the Teachings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, TAN Books, Charlotte, North Carolina, 1988.

Conclusion

Eric Voegelin's account of Gnosticism glows with the originality, subtlety and depth of his philosophical thought. Aimed at a diagnosis of the *pneumopathological* element pervading the political and ideological movements of the XXth century, his conceptualization of Gnosticism provides a key to approach the present challenge of thinking our dwelling in between worlds both collapsing and emerging. Voegelin's analysis suggests that Gnosticism stems from the difficulty of dwelling in-between: at the roots of a pervasive rebellion against worldly being, the philosopher identifies an existential restlessness, a feeling of alienation in and from the world. The incapacity of feeling at home within the world would translate into a perpetual revolt, informed by a conception of salvatory knowledge and politics as a means to overcome the conditions of existence in the world. The dualistic scheme of modern cosmology and politics identified by Jonas thus appears infused with an original posture of gnostic rejection of the world, manifest in the political project of perfecting society through the mastering, draining and exploitation of worldly beings. Voegelin qualifies this pathological inhabiting of the world as *Anoia*, referring to the forgetfulness of the co-penetration and co-creation implied in our inhabiting the world. This forgetting of what our dwelling in-between includes chimes with Jonas' diagnosis of a loss of *response-ability*, in Donna Haraway's orthography²¹⁴ – with our incapacity to communicate with the worlds between which we reside. Voegelin's thought of Gnosticism suggests that the cure to such a pathological being in the world should include a rediscovery of our being *in-between, with and with-in* the worlds. This involves bridging the abyss separating God from the world, and embracing our dwelling in the metaxic gulf as well as our participation into the process of worldly becoming.

David Walsh considers Voegelin to be one of the great figures of XXth century political philosophy, in that his thought is “warning us and calling our attention to the abyss which was opened up by that sense of unlimited human power”²¹⁵. An abyss

²¹⁴ Donna J. HARAWAY, *When species meet*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008.
Donna J. HARAWAY, “Awash in urine: DES and Premarin® in multi-species response-ability”. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 40(1-2), 2012, pp. 301-316.

²¹⁵ David WALSH in “Eric Voegelin: Philosopher of Consciousness, Part II.” Documentary on the life of German philosopher Eric Voegelin.

was opened and persists indeed in our perception of, and thus engagement with the world: that segregating nature from culture, worldly from divine, object from subject, economics from politics, politics from religion, being from possible. Voegelin's thought of the metaxy draws attention to the disastrous effects of such a segregation, and endeavours to bridge realms of thought that Modernity has set apart. Politics stand right in the middle of the metaxic challenge: it summons us to preserve the possible amidst the instability of times manifesting the precariousness of the world. It calls for a posture of caring humility and responsibility as it reminds us of its ultimately apocalyptic dimension: here and now, perpetually in between the worlds, we are emerging.

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHPLBfZ045Y>
Accessed 11.01.2019.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT GNOSTICISM UNCONCEALS: TOWARDS AN ENVIRONMENTAL HERMENEUTICS OF GNOSTICISM FOR THE PRESENT TIMES

Introduction – A Hermeneutics of Gnosticism for the Environmental Transition

As a relatively recent invention of modern political philosophy, the concept of Gnosticism is hermeneutic in nature: both in Jonas and in Voegelin's analyses, it aims at uncovering the cultural and philosophical ramifications of a pathological being in the world characteristic of Modernity, and focuses on its manifestations in modern cosmology and politics. Hans Jonas thus considered the concept of Gnosticism to provide "an enlightening help"²¹⁶ in addressing Modernity's elusive and yet deeply ingrained nihilism, which he approached from an existential perspective inherited from Heidegger's *Daseinsanalyse*. Eric Voegelin diagnosed in the political millenarianism of Modernity the manifestation of a gnostic obsession with the other world, unfolding

²¹⁶ Hans JONAS, *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man*, University of Chicago Press, 1980, p.xix.

into the denial of the present world. Both authors approached the concept of Gnosticism in the attempt to achieve a greater understanding of Modernity. In this third chapter, I wish to elucidate the ways in which Jonas and Voegelin's respective concept of Gnosticism is articulated to their critique of Modernity, how they echo with each other, and how we might harvest the fruits of their analyses in the perspective of a reflection around the contemporary context of the ecological mutation and the challenge of inhabiting a collapsing world. This shall represent the first step towards unfolding an environmental hermeneutics of Gnosticism for the present times.

What may Jonas and Voegelin's respective analysis of Gnosticism teach us about the times we live in, and the advent of the environmental crisis they witness? This doctoral research arises from the postulate that the environmental issue provides us with an unprecedented opportunity to rethink the world, worldly beings, our own being in the world, and the way we inhabit amidst the dazzling reflections of a collapsing and burgeoning diversity of beings. I propose to approach it as a kaleidoscopic event bathing worldly being in a bouquet of new colours, which might then be illuminated from different perspectives. The hermeneutical perspective on environmental philosophy embraced in this dissertation thus feeds upon a play of light and shadow around what the environmental crisis might reveal of worldly being that had previously remained unthought. It asks how to articulate that which remains unthought with that which must be thought, and how to sustain its clearing. Drawing upon Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin's conceptualizations studied in the two previous chapters, I mobilize the hermeneutical potential of the category of Gnosticism to throw new light on the environmental crisis as a philosophical issue. I raise the hypothesis that the amazing intertwinement of politics, science, ethics, religion, arts, myths and cosmology which the environmental issue crystallizes, rests upon founding symbols and metaphors conditioning our engagement with the world – mostly expressions of an unrooting and of an abyssal distance keeping the self away from the world. I argue that it is crucial to acknowledge these *tropes of our being in the world* to gain a deeper understanding of the way we conceive and inhabit worldly being. Crystalizing such tropes, a Hermeneutics of Gnosticism contributes to illuminate our being in the world as well as its particular configuration in the present environmental crisis. The hermeneutical potential of the perspective of Gnosticism thus unfurls upon contact with the contemporary

context of the environmental mutation, which reciprocally illuminates Gnosticism as a distinct way of inhabiting the world. Both ultimately deal with the way we dwell, the way we are in the world and inhabit amidst worldly beings. What does this hermeneutical circle disclose about our inhabiting? What is being revealed, and which tropes of our inhabiting might enlighten our path as we journey through the uncanny obscurity of the environmental issue? Before we deploy the breadth of hermeneutical speculation, let us first return to Jonas and Voegelin's respective thought of Gnosticism, and to the preliminary conclusions we already drew from them.

Like the rest of his philosophical thought, Jonas' analysis of Gnosticism revolves around the key idea of a cosmological dualism cultivating a demundanized engagement with the world: the Jonassian idea of Gnosticism crystallizes a dualistic, worldless, and ethically nihilistic variation of our inhabiting. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I proposed to approach the "dynamic of Demundanization", identified by Jonas at the core of the gnostic system of thought, as disclosing a primordial tension caught in a dualistic structure of thought. Upon asking ourselves what was being "demundanized" in the gnostic worldview, it was suggested that the Demundanization (of God) conceptualized by Jonas manifested a simultaneous Dedivinization (of the world). In other words, Jonas' concept of Gnosticism embodies the cardinal experience of a tragic chasm separating God and the world into two separate entities, two irreconcilable poles of an inescapable dualism. The hypothesis I formulated, and which I now wish to explore in the present chapter, is that the gnostic dualism analyzed by Jonas discloses a tension which also shines through modern dualism. More precisely, the acosmism identified by Jonas as the essence of Gnosticism is articulated around an ontological tension whose systematic reduction into a dualistic structure of thought operates as an obstruction, or sealing, of the openness of worldly Being. Throwing light upon the worldless dualism structuring contemporary narratives, Jonas' analysis of the Gnostic Religion thus also points toward the tension within this deep-ingrained dualism. Unfolding Jonas' intuition, this chapter proposes to elucidate the worldlessness pervading our cosmologies by researching the tension lying beneath dualism.

In many respects, Eric Voegelin's analysis of Gnosticism appears to unfold the Jonassian insights with the intention of a deepened philosophical critique of modernity.

More explicitly than Jonas, who had limited his reflections to the identification of a certain *elective affinity* between Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism, repeatedly highlighting the merely analogous character of an eventual presence of Gnosticism in Modernity, Voegelin's understanding of Gnosticism is led by the desire to diagnose the "pneumopathological" element in modern societies. The critical potential of Voegelin's philosophy, including his interpretation of the concept of Gnosticism, thus appears to be more glaring, definitely more elaborate than Jonas'. Still, our interpretation of Voegelin's analysis of Gnosticism has emphasized the same tension which also appeared in Jonas' reflections. Voegelin's thought, I argued, strives indeed to conceptualize the modern reduction of an ontological tension, for which the political philosopher finds a fortunate expression in the platonic idea of *metaxy* – inbetweenness. Voegelin's analysis suggests that Gnosticism stems from the difficulty of being in the world as *dwelling in-between*. At the roots of a pervasive rebellion against worldly being, which would characterize the modern political being in the world, the philosopher identifies the same existential restlessness, a feeling of alienation in and from the world, also described by Jonas. The gnostic failure to feel at home in the world would then translate into a perpetual revolt, which Voegelin notably identifies in the modern conception of science as salvatory knowledge and politics as a means to overcome the conditions of existence in the world. Less acknowledged, and, as I hope to show, perhaps even more relevant for addressing the politico-philosophical issues of our time, is Voegelin's interpretation of the gnostic being in the world as *Anoia*, referring to the forgetting of the co-penetration and co-creation implied in our inhabiting *in-between* the world.

Without delving any deeper into the interpretation of Jonas and Voegelin's ideas of Gnosticism, which we have already explored in the first two chapters, I wish to draw your attention toward two common themes infusing their philosophical thoughts – two potential hermeneutical keys that may bridge their understandings of Gnosticism. These two recurring themes, I submit, are those of an *alienation from worldly being* unfolding itself in a dualistic structure of thought, and of an *ontological tension*, formulated in terms of an existential *inbetweenness* which modern dualism would fail to think. I suggest that these two motives enable us to bridge the two

philosophers' ideas of Gnosticism and to draw connections between their analyses of Modernity, in order to gain a clearer insight into contemporary issues related to our inhabiting. Maybe the "metaxic gulf" entailed in our existence in the world, signalling the poles of a ubiquitous inbetweenness and thus unbridgeable distance, chimes with the structural dualism of Modernity. Jonas and Voegelin's reflections on the concept of Gnosticism both seem to indicate the primordial experience of a breach, some deeply felt alienated condition lying at the core of a gnostic engagement with the world, and expressed in the trope of an existential *abyss*. Ultimately, across the widely recognized feature of dualism, their analyses of Gnosticism both shed light on some obscure ontological tension around which gnostic systems of thought appear to be articulated, and whose reduction would lie at the heart of the modern predicament. In order to develop a hermeneutic of Gnosticism suited to contemporary issues in political philosophy, gravitating toward questions of inhabiting, I propose to delve into these two tropes of a dualistic alienation, and the ontological tension it encloses.

What might a renewed understanding of Gnosticism enlighten of our contemporary being in the world? The first manifestation of Gnosticism, or the first feature it illuminates of contemporary cosmologies, is the *worldlessness* of our inhabiting – an unrooted inhabiting alienated from the world. The second teaching revolves around the implications of a dualistic engagement with the world, approached here in terms of a *closure, or condemnation of the world*. The third lesson we might draw from the perspective of Gnosticism lies in the politically subversive potential of reversing the tropes of our inhabiting.

A. Uncovering the worldless inhabiting of modern politics

As they reinvest the trope of a disdain for the world, manifest in feelings of an existential alienation, profound homesickness, and in the yearning for another world that would absolve this condition, both Jonas and Voegelin's analyses of Gnosticism emphasize the worldlessness of modern cosmology. In the following section, I suggest that the current environmental crisis, allowing a rediscovery of our earth-boundedness, presents us with an exceptional opportunity to reflect upon the worldlessness of modern cosmology as disclosed by the concept of Gnosticism. Or could it be the other way around? The gnostic worldlessness might illuminate our own inhabiting of the world as well as how the latter shapes our treatment of the ecological issue. Either way, the concept of Gnosticism and the contemporary context of the environmental crisis dovetail into a fruitful hermeneutical couple that points toward the problematic worldlessness of our inhabiting.

Throwing light upon the way we dwell in the world, the perspective of Gnosticism adopted by Jonas and Voegelin designates a *pathological form of inhabiting* characteristic of the modern predicament, and of which the present environmental crisis offers a phenomenal manifestation. I argue indeed that a hermeneutics of Gnosticism points toward a crisis of our inhabiting, which should be understood as an eminently political crisis. By emphasizing the experience of being in the world as being homeless, and formulating the drama of the unrooting of the self as *a tragedy of the home*, the category of Gnosticism allows us to consider the *worldlessness* infusing modern cosmology and politics. Jonas and Voegelin's concepts of Gnosticism both provide a diagnosis of the essential worldlessness of modern politics, thus allowing us to reflect upon the ecological issue in terms of the relationship between present politics and the world. One of their most perceptive insights lies in their analysis of the fundamentally utopian dynamic of modern politics, which the two philosophers interpret as the manifestation of a desire to escape worldly being. How so? Jonas' critique of Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope* analyzes utopianism as the idolatrous pursuit of a technicist

dynamic, led by a nihilistic drive to overcome worldly being and failing thereby to exert the ethical responsibility binding us to the present world²¹⁷. Echoing Jonas' position, Voegelin's diagnosis of the fallacy of immanentization denounces the pathological blindness of modern political movements towards the structure of worldly being.²¹⁸ Both political philosophers thus ultimately draw upon the concept of Gnosticism to diagnose the modern failure to anchor one's political existence into the present world, and portray the condition of the modern political subject as having been thrown into a world whose overcoming is a pre-requisite for salvation.

Still organizing contemporary political narratives, the dogma of progress as neoliberal capitalist development and economic growth offers a concrete articulation of this being in the world embracing the yearning for a perpetual escape from the present modalities of worldly existence. Crystallized in the recent discipline of Geo-engineering, the modern concept of technique tends to perpetuate the understanding of human action in the world in terms of an objectifying, mastering, and overcoming of an alienated "natural world", thereby assuming a dualistic opposition between humanity and nature that denies the very agency of the many other beings left in-between. An

²¹⁷ Remnants of the revolutionary Gnosis, Christian Wiese argues, do appear to permeate Ernst Bloch's utopianism, notably his vision of a messianic future in which humanity will truly be at home in the world. Jonas' dismissal of Bloch's principle of hope thus roots itself in a distrust for the modern temporality of messianism, oriented toward a transcendent future and therefore interpreted as a form of escapism. Jonas fears that the Blochian ontology of the not-yet-being might lead to a devaluation of being in relation to non-being. Nevertheless, the common opposition between Hans Jonas and Ernst Bloch – Jonas dedicated indeed several chapters of his *Imperative of Responsibility* to the critique of the *Principle of Hope* – should not obliterate the presence of a common aim within the philosophers' intellectual journey, namely their commitment to the refoundation of contemporary ethics through the overcoming of nihilism. Avishag Zafrani demonstrates indeed that for both Bloch and Jonas, the resistance against nihilism is conditioned by the quest for a founding principle – the hope to emancipate ourselves from economic and social alienation for the former, for the latter, the imperative of anchoring ethics in the presence of the world.

See Christian WIESE, *The Life and Thought of Hans Jonas: Jewish Dimensions*, Brandeis University Press, Waltham, 2007, p.106.

And Avishag ZAFRANI, « Ernst Bloch et Hans Jonas : refondation de l'Éthique », *Alter*, 22 | 2014. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/alter/29> Accessed on the 10.02.2020.

²¹⁸ "The truth of Gnosticism is vitiated... by the fallacious immanentization of the Christian eschaton. This fallacy is not simply a theoretical mistake concerning the meaning of the eschaton, committed by this or that thinker, perhaps an affair of the schools. On the basis of this fallacy, Gnostic thinkers, leaders, and their followers interpret a concrete society and its order as an eschaton; and, insofar as they apply their fallacious construction to concrete social problems, they misrepresent the structure of immanent reality." Eric Voegelin in *The New Science of Politics*, The University of Chicago Press, 1987 (1952), p.166.

extreme development of Geoengineering and the modern dream of redemption through the domestication of, and ultimately escape from the laws of nature, can be found in the “Mars One” mission,²¹⁹ whose proclaimed goal is to establish the “first human settlement on Mars”. The project brings together the modern dogma of progress, the colonialist impetus of humanist universalism, and the gnostic trope of the obsolescence of the earth in the depiction of the conquest of Mars as “the next giant leap for human-kind” towards salvation. In the fictional realm also, we find ourselves surrounded by contemporary illustrations of the modern worldlessness. The hit web series *Stranger Things* created by the Duffer brothers thus deploys the science fictional trope of the alien, obscure and threatening, as well as the hostility of the abyssal world swarming under our feet. The series holds a surprisingly rich symbolic potential for a reflection around the condition of human civilization in the age of the Anthropocene, and we shall indeed expand further on its prolific hermeneutics for environmental philosophy in the next chapter.

The theme of the worldlessness of our condition appears to be relatively widespread in modern political philosophy: while Hans Jonas identified a Demundanization tendency (*Entweltlichungstendenz*) spreading from modern existentialism up to political utopianism, Hannah Arendt in the prologue to her *Human Condition* deplores the worldless inhabiting of those who, despite being “earth-bound creatures”, “have begun to act as though [they] were dwellers of the universe”²²⁰. Günther Anders’ and Arendt’s joint reflections on Rilke’s *Duineser Elegien* develop the theme of the world-estrangement of contemporary human beings further (*Weltfremdheit des Menschen*)²²¹. Contemporary philosopher Bruno Latour lingers too over this key idea of a modern worldlessness, as he summons the earthlings to land (*atterrir*)²²² and be grounded in a common world in order to face the political challenge arising with the

²¹⁹ See the website of the Mars One project: <https://www.mars-one.com/> Accessed 11.03.2019.

²²⁰ Hannah ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, 1998 (1958), p.3.

²²¹ Gunther ANDERS, Hannah ARENDT, “Rilke’s Duineser Elegien”, *Internationale Günther Anders Gesellschaft*, 1930.
URL: <http://www.guenther-anders-gesellschaft.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Arendt-Stern-1930-Rilkes-Duineser-Elegien.pdf>
Accessed 22.01.2019.

²²² Bruno LATOUR, *Où atterrir ? Comment s’orienter en politique*, La Découverte, 2017.

advent of Gaia. Günther Anders and Bruno Latour's thoughts are both concerned with the implications of the ecological crisis for political philosophy and anthropology. As they provide us with two beautiful formulations of the worldlessness of modern politics, I argue that their analyses support a hermeneutical approach to the contemporary ecological issue from the symbolic perspective of Gnosticism.

Günther Anders' intellectual engagement in political ecology and his critique of the technological civilization coincide largely with the philosophical concerns of his close friend Hans Jonas. As one of Heidegger's most rebellious children, the political philosopher critically analysed contemporary figures of worldlessness in an anthropological philosophy defining human beings as unworldly and worldless²²³. Anders diagnosed the "burdensome *extraterritoriality*" of modern humans as a "pathology of freedom" inflicted upon a being which, "in contrast to animals, is not fitted into any world, but must always first create a world for himself"²²⁴. Further on this pathology of freedom, he writes that:

Abstraction – the freedom in front of the world, the fact of being made for generality and indeterminacy, the detachment from the world, the practice and the transformation of this world – is the fundamental anthropological category, which reveals both the metaphysical condition of the human being, and its logos, its productivity, its interiority, its free will, and its historicity.²²⁵

As Anders suggests, this notion of abstraction from the world as fundamental anthropological category is a modern philosophical trope which may be found again notably in George Bataille²²⁶, who defines humanity as both a negation and overcoming of the world. Interestingly, Heidegger appears to simultaneously perpetuate and reverse this

²²³ Günther ANDERS, *Mensch ohne Welt, Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur*, C.H. Beck, Munich, 1984.

²²⁴ Konrad Paul LIESSMANN, "Despair and Responsibility: Affinities and Differences in the Thought of Hans Jonas and Guenther Anders", in *The Legacy of Hans Jonas: Judaism and the Phenomenon of Life*, ed. Hava TIROSH-SAMUELSON, Christian WIESE, p.137.

²²⁵ Günther ANDERS, « Pathologie de la liberté. Essai sur la non-identification », in *Recherches Philosophiques*, 6, pp.22-54. English traduction by K. Wolfe, *Deleuze Studies*, 3, 2009, pp.278-310.

²²⁶ Georges BATAILLE, *L'Erotisme*, Editions de Minuit, 2011 (1957).

trope as he states that (worldly) Being withdraws itself from us and first occurs as a concealment of itself:

That which is to be thought turns away from us. It withdraws from us. But how can we have the least knowledge of something that is withdrawn from the outset? How can we even give it a name? Whatever withdraws refuses arrival. But—withdrawing is not nothing. Withdrawal is event [appropriation, ereignis]. In fact, what withdraws may even concern and claim man more essentially than anything present that strikes and touches him.²²⁷

Both perspectives, whether they focus on the human or the world, on beings or Being, emphasize the distance which insulates one from the other. Heidegger's perception of the distance between the Dasein and Being is however sensitive to the presence in the absence and sees in the withdrawal of Being a positive distance that gives and resists: *not an absence*, not a desertion, nor a mere hiddenness. Heidegger was condemned by many for the lack of concreteness of his thought and the well-known moral compromise permitted by a philosophy disjoined from the world, insulated by an existential as well as ontological solitude. But his philosophy only brought to a masterly synthesized formulation the worldlessness which has been infusing modern thought, and attempted indeed to conceptualize the unbridgeable distance characterizing our engagement with a world from which we are abstracted. That the world is never fully present to us, or that we never really belong to it, arises as an existential expression of the widespread paradigm of "negative anthropology", stating that human freedom, culture and historicity stem from our not being fully immersed in, or adjusted to the world – from a fortuitous alienation. Dismissing the doctrines of humanity's invariant characteristics, the school of negative anthropology refuses to essentialize humanity and instead reasserts the radical contingency of its fate. But in this abstraction from judgment and the dedication to inscribe humanity in a nexus of socio-cultural relations, the modern paradigm of negative anthropology appears to rely on the assumption that the non-human world ontologically differs from an exclusively human condition –

²²⁷ Martin HEIDEGGER, *What is called thinking?* Translated by Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray, Harper & Row, New York, 1968.

contingent, resilient, hopeful. In Modernity, the human condition is indeed apprehended in its radical, ontological as well as existential opposition to the world – a world of essence, rigidity, immutability and inescapable natural laws. As Günther Anders envisioned, the modern paradigm of negative anthropology thus appears closely tied to the gnostic trope of world-estrangement.

In *Mensch ohne Welt*, Günther Anders acknowledged the worldlessness of Modernity as he saw it more concretely condensed in the class condition of the proletariat, dispossessed of the means of production through which they ensure the perpetuation of the world of the dominant class. If members of the proletariat are in the world, they are not at home in it.²²⁸ Anders further identifies such a sense of being without a world in the condition of the unemployed, “key-figures of our age” who are “not even allowed to carry [their chains]”²²⁹. What stigmatizes according to Anders the worldlessness of advanced-industrial societies is indeed the juxtaposition, instead of integration, of its members, only allowing a shallow participation in culture as producer-consumers – thereby echoing Herbert Marcuse’s analysis of the one-dimensional man²³⁰. The figure of the unemployed thus embodies the ultimate failure of integration into a capitalist world, of those prevented to act in it either as a producer or as a consumer. Anders’ belief in the modification of reality through the projection of an alternate world by new media constantly overfeeding its coerced consumers with pre-digested images and ideological systems (*Weltanschauungen* and *Weltbilder*), thereby superseding the need for a genuine engagement with the worlds surrounding us, prolongs his thought of the worldlessness of our civilization.

This diagnosis of a cultural worldlessness echoes one of Günther Anders’ main contributions to the political philosophy of the ecological crisis: the “Promethean Gap” he identified between our capacity of producing and our capacity of imagining the consequences of our productive and consumptive activity – the abyssal gap between the concrete relations of production and the ideological narratives that frame

²²⁸ Günther ANDERS, *Mensch ohne Welt. Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur*, Beck, München, 1984, p.ii.

²²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. xiii–xiv.

²³⁰ Herbert MARCUSE, *L’Homme unidimensionnel. Etudes sur l’idéologie de la société industrielle*. Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1968.

them, between knowledge and consciousness, doing and feeling, action and imagination²³¹. In other words, Anders' Promethean Gap resides in the diagnosis of the pathological discrepancy characterizing our technological civilization, and the identification of an abyss opposing the fictional world it elaborated (the unlimited inert universe of Modernity) to the ones effectively suffering from the consequences of our activity. Anders' analysis of the technological civilization is thus infused with the acute awareness of a hubristic gap separating human action from the world we inhabit, exemplified by the unconceivable width of our nuclear power. If we now read Anders' depiction of contemporary civilization from a gnostic lens, then the unprecedented scale of the threat posed to the earth's ecology and worldly being by nuclear power may appear as the extraordinarily *material* manifestation of a gnostic alienation from worldly being, and the ultimate historical embodiment of a gnostic failure to inhabit a world from which humans have divorced. The second volume of the *Obsolescence of Man – On the Destruction of Life in the Age of the Third Industrial Revolution* addresses this crucial question of the jeopardizing of the world understood as the transcendental condition to our existence, and unveils the issue of being grounded in a common world as essential to our political dwelling on earth.

Resuming this problematic of inhabiting and composing a common world in the “new climatic regime”, Bruno Latour offers to elaborate the first principles of Gaian Politics. In his most recent book, *Où atterrir? Comment s'orienter en politique*²³², the philosopher attempts to make sense out of the present geo-political landscape. Focusing on three phenomena which he identifies as the key events organizing contemporary geo-politics – the amplified deregulation of the economy, the explosion of inequalities and the systematic denial of climate change – Latour argues that the present situation is characterized by the crucial realization that *there is no inhabitable*

²³¹ Günther ANDERS. *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen 1: Über die Seele im Zeitalter der zweiten industriellen Revolution*, 1956, Munich: C. H. Beck, p.18.

²³² Bruno LATOUR, *Où atterrir ? Comment s'orienter en politique*, La Découverte, 2017.

world suited to the modern civilizational project. No inhabitable world, and *a world not inhabited*: Latour suggests that contemporary times might be better understood from the perspective of an *escape from the world*, thereby throwing light on the *worldlessness* characterizing our treatment of the ecological issue.

Throughout this text, Latour's language strongly resonates with the gnostic symbolism of cosmic exile and yearning for an escape from the world. His description of the modern condition ideally expresses the gnostic being in the world studied in the first two chapters, articulating the twofold dynamic of cosmic alienation and the desire of emancipation from the world:

To get out, to escape, to emancipate ourselves – finally! Breathing in the fresh air of the universe, abandoning the cosmos. First picture. To suffocate, to lack air, to pant, to search for a shelter, a protection, a cosmos. Second picture.²³³

Latour interprets the recent events of Brexit and Donald Trump's election as illustrations of the utter disorientation of a globalized civilization witnessing the collapse of its order and the loss of all landmarks. As he depicts the wandering of a worldless civilization and the exile of the modern people, disoriented amidst the deserted infinitude of the universe, he reports the modern uprooting and waves toward the contemporary challenge of inhabiting the world. The Latourian considerations on the journey of an acosmic Modernity and the necessity of its landing all perpetuate the gnostic metaphor of an original uprooting to express a being in the world experienced as an exile and describe the subsequent quest for a home to land on. The philosopher narrates the political shipwreck of our times as the drama of *a loss of the world*, reminding us of what Jonas had called *Demundanization*:

the impression of vertigo, of panic almost, which goes through contemporary politics, comes from the collapsing of the ground beneath our feet.²³⁴

²³³ Bruno LATOUR, *Ibid*, p.38.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, p.10.

In so doing, Latour presents us here with an outstanding opportunity to link the gnostic symbolism to the environmental issue. *What is being revealed in this hermeneutical circle, and what Latour's thought particularly illuminates, I argue, is the close entanglement of the dualism and worldlessness of modern cosmology.* While the “gnostic spirit” analysed by Hans Jonas situates redemption in the overcoming of the world, resulting in fantasized ideas of a beyond-the-world and unfolding into a dualistic cosmology ultimately opposing God and the World, Eric Voegelin's interpretation focuses on the ways in which a gnostic engagement with the world corrupts a very fragile sense of the ontological inbetweenness, subtle metaxic tension and eschatological openness of worldly being. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour famously deconstructed the illusion of modern dualism as concealing the ontological hybridation of worldly beings populating the world from the entangled multiplicity of their modes of existence or, as I propose to call them, *modes of inhabiting*. His critique of the modern fantasy of a universal objectivity targets in particular the perspective of the global. The so called “view from Sirius” would have enabled the Moderns to access the world from afar, from an isolated point of view preserved from all worldly entanglement by a hermetic ontological divide between object and subject, nature and culture – really, between humanity and the world. As we know, the gnostic dynamic of Demundanization identified by Jonas takes root in the original experience of the deep otherness, ontological alterity of the world. This feeling of alienation from the world fuels a gnostic mythology unfolding into a dualistic architecture of thought. The latter rests upon the ontological opposition between humanity and the world. Jonas' insights direct our attention to the presence of a gnostic type of engagement with the world pervading modern cosmology – *a cosmology both dualistic and worldless*. The structural dualism opposing humanity to the world thus illuminates the feeling of loss of the world described by Latour – a world whose intense complexity neither the concepts of Nature nor that of Culture allow us to approach. Latour has extensively criticized the modern construct of Nature, which conditions our treatment of the ecological issue, for con-

veying misleading conceptions of the materiality, homogeneity, amorality and atemporality of world beings²³⁵. The concept of Nature would indeed define the world as Uchronia as well as Utopia – a timeless, spaceless fiction: no wonder that the Moderns are worldless if all they are left with to think to the world is the concept of Nature! Operating within a dualistic framework opposing humanity to this fictional world, the anthropocentrism of modern thought maintains the gnostic narrative of an ontological rupture with the world – whereby it becomes clear that the metaxic tension of our existence in the world, which Voegelin summoned us to preserve, was broken and erected into a divorce.

The dualistic narrative of Modernity seems to operate as if all dualistic distinction presupposed in its very structure the hegemony of one pole over another, thereby inducing a systematic disdain for the “weaker pole”. At least this appears to be the case for the pivotal dichotomy between humanity and the world. This dualistic opposition manifests itself on an epistemological level through the domination of the positivist paradigm proclaiming the legitimacy of “natural”, or “objective” sciences over against more “subjective”, “socially-constructed” or “immanent” ways of knowing. In *We Have Never Been Modern* and more recently in *Facing Gaia*, Bruno Latour incriminates such an epistemological paradigm, arguing that the ontological dualism on which it relies is not only contradicted by the strong hybridity of scientific practices, but also eclipses much of the complexity of the world, thereby proving inaccurate as well as ineffective even on a strictly epistemological level. The systematic praising of a fantasized objectivity – as “objective”, “positivist”, “rational”, or “universal” as they might proclaim themselves, scientists still stand in the world, interacting with the very facts they wish to observe -, and the valorisation of the perspective of a fictional global appears alongside a certain depreciation, if not disdain, for the perspectives that would stem from within the world, as opposed to a view from the outside, or from a beyond the world. This very modern suspicion towards the immanence of the “subjective”, of the socially constructed, thereby intangible, contingent, impermanent, I suggest, is closely tied to the gnostic repression of what we might call the mundane, the worldly,

²³⁵ Bruno LATOUR, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, La Découverte, Paris, 1998.

the earthly, the terrestrial as opposed to the otherworldly, the global or the universal. The perspective of Gnosticism thus allows us, beyond the mere analogy between two dualistic structures of thought, to understand the modern epistemological depreciation of the subjective as a form of repression of the immanence of the earthly over against the transcendence of the universal. In other words, it provides a symbolic framework which illuminates the simultaneous dualism and worldlessness of a modern cosmology articulated around the repression of the worldly.

This repression was also sensed by ecofeminist thought – in many regards anticipated by Virginia Woolf’s insights on modern industrial civilization²³⁶ – inasmuch as it throws light on the systematic organization in patriarcho-capitalist societies of the repression of the feminine alongside that of the natural world. In relating the oppression of women to that of nature, the ecofeminist approach draws attention to the exploitative dimension of a dualistic structure of thought, overarching the nature-culture divide as well as binary gender categories. Emphasizing the intersectionality of modern dualism, the ecofeminist approach helps to unveil the cosmological architecture of a deep-ingrained repression of our rootedness and a strong desire of emancipation from what engendered us. The ecofeminist perspective thus appears to corroborate the hypothesis arising from our approach to modernity through the lens of Gnosticism: namely, that *modern civilization is grounded in the repression of the engenderment, of our ontological dependency, hence, of our rootedness in the world*. Latour’s diagnosis of modern and present times as being drawn by a desire of emancipation from the earthly, from the terrestrial towards the global and universal, only elaborates this idea further.

Eric Voegelin’s interpretation of modern gnosticism also echoes Latour’s analysis of the modern condition: the perpetual quest for the emancipation from the present world described by Latour recalls indeed the *immanentization of the eschaton* into a fantasised world, resulting from a desperate attempt to survive the unbearable absence of meaning within the world. Voegelin’s as well as Jonas’ concepts of Gnosticism lay emphasis on the devaluation of the present world in favour of a depiction of a fictional

²³⁶ Virginia WOOLF, *Three Guineas*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1938.

non-world, a utopia, a beyond-the-world. With Latour, they affirm *the eminently political character of this worldless dwelling*. Jonas, Voegelin and Latour's insights on Modernity thus converge toward the political nature of the issues arising from a *Demundanzation* of our cosmology and the structural dualism articulating it. The contemporary advent of the environmental issue, as an event revealing the worldlessness of a system of thought which must now confront the "return of the Earth", the earthly, or rather, of the *earthling*, only enhances the pertinence of their diagnosis. Latour's interpretation of contemporary geopolitics²³⁷ suggests indeed that, yearning for an emancipation from the world, a worldless Modernity would now meet the world again, the earthlings relentlessly reminding it of its original engenderment and ontological interdependency. As we fail to inhabit it and dwell within its precarious and entangled becomings, the world, in a beautiful irony, now seems to fail us, falling away beneath our incredulous, disorientated feet. It is a shipwreck – the shipwreck of a civilization that needs to *accoster*, to dock as the world threatens to sink. But what stands between us and the world?

Our interpretation of Anders' and Latour's diagnoses of the worldlessness of contemporary politics in the light of Gnosticism emphasized the image of a far-reaching, all embracing gap. The abyss separating the Moderns from the world seems indeed to articulate both the worldlessness of their inhabiting and the structural dualism of their engagement with worldly being. The next section will delve into this trope which, I argue, unifies two ideas and raises them together to achieve a greater understanding of the modern inhabiting: it uncovers along a chiasmic pattern the worldlessness of a dualistic engagement with worldly being as well as the dualist unfolding of a worldless inhabiting. The Gnostic symbolism allows us indeed to bridge two essential characteristics of the modern being in the world, worldless and dualistic. The cosmological unrooting illuminated by our hermeneutics of Gnosticism, the modern alienation from the worldly as well as the crisis of the inhabiting unveiled as an eminently political crisis, thus all appear to be tied up into a dualistic structure of

²³⁷ Bruno LATOUR, *Où atterrir ? Comment s'orienter en politique*, op.cit.

thought. Let us now see what our hermeneutics of Gnosticism may uncover of this worldless dualism as I propose to delve into the depths of its abyss.

B. The Abyss and the dualistic closure of the world

A worldless dualism

One widely recognized feature of Gnosticism emphasized by both Jonas and Voegelin is its tendency towards dualism. Although the connection does not seem to have been particularly acknowledged before, I suggest that this cosmological feature is closely tied to the more existential sense of worldlessness previously highlighted. The theme of dualism is significantly present throughout Jonas' study of Gnosticism as well as in the rest of his philosophical thought, identifying it as a core challenge for contemporary philosophy to address. Reflecting upon the philosophical ramifications of the modern political predicament, particularly the technological hubris characterizing our civilization, Jonas pinpoints the issue of cosmological dualism and bridges it with the concern for an ethical inhabiting and a pacified relationship between human beings and their environment:

This situation is magnified by the impact of contemporary humankind's technology on the natural environment. And indeed, as this phenomenon – namely, the threat we pose to the planet's ecology – became more and more apparent during the second half of this century and finally even came to the attention of philosophers, suddenly *one of the oldest philosophical questions, that of the relationship between human being and nature, between mind and matter – in other words, the age-old question of dualism – took on a totally new form.* Now this question is no longer something to meditate on in the calm light of theory; it is illuminated by the lightning flashes of an approaching storm, warnings of a crisis that we, its unintentional creators, have the planetary duty of trying to avert. Thanks to this exceedingly practical aspect of the problem, the *reconciliation* between our presumptuous special status as humans and the universe as a whole, which is the source of our life, is becoming a central concern of philosophy. I see in this an urgent task for philosophy to address, both in the present moment and into the coming century.²³⁸

²³⁸ Hans JONAS, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for Good after Auschwitz*, Northwestern University Press, 1996, p.51. I emphasize.

Jonas suggests here that the present ecological crisis brings back to the fore “the age-old question of dualism”, which he also had diagnosed at the heart of gnostic cosmologies. Both present and gnostic times thus share this common feature of a deep-ingrained dualistic system of thought, infused with the sense of an abyss separating human beings from the world. But as the question of dualism arises again with the advent of a global ecological crisis, it assumes a whole new dimension, namely a very *material* one calling the thinking subject back to their worldly embodiment and close involvement with other earthly beings. The planetary entanglement illuminated by the environmental crisis thus appears to challenge the modern representation of a clean divide between nature and culture, object and subject, actions and ideas, humans and the world etc²³⁹. In a splendid ambiguity, suspended over the abyssal cliff of worldly being, it also brings the gnostic worldlessness of Modernity to a close: by threatening life on earth, it consecrates the gnostic yearning for the end of the world, and yet offers us an ideal opportunity to *reconcile* (to use Jonas’ term) with the world and the many beings populating it.

While Voegelin’s analysis of Gnosticism focused on the dynamic of immanentisation characterizing modern politics and the precious metaxic tension they conceal, it also illuminated their abhorrence of the world and our incarnate condition. In so doing, Voegelin highlighted a particular form of dualism embodied by modern political and ideological movements, namely immanentizing ones, also conveying a polar opposition between the present world and the ones hoped for. We can thus acknowledge a permanent feature of Gnosticism, as it was analysed by Jonas and Voegelin, in the feeling of alienation from the present world, the yearning for a deliverance from it, and the dualistic engagement with the environment such feelings foster. The concept of Gnosticism laid out by Jonas and Voegelin throws light on the unresolved persistence of some cosmological dualism in the modern system of

²³⁹ While this cosmological dualism is grounded in the Cartesian tradition, alternative philosophies were elaborated at the dawn of modern thought by thinkers such as Spinoza or Leibniz, who figure as the heralds of a subterranean heterodoxy of Modernity.

See Michael MACK, *Spinoza and the Spectres of Modernity: The Hidden Enlightenment of Diversity from Spinoza to Freud*, Continuum, 2010.

thought, hypothetically arising from the original experience of an existential estrangement from the world. The existential stance adopted by our two philosophers suggests indeed that a deep-rooted experience of the self over against the alterity of the world was hypostatized into a structural dualism organizing our being in the world. I argue that the hermeneutical perspective of Gnosticism exposes this cosmological dualism as a conceptual structure of thought for the worldlessness or estrangement identified earlier as a feature of Modernity. The gnostic trope of the abyss allows us to bridge these two features of worldlessness and cosmological dualism in that it symbolizes the gap opposing human beings to the world and therefrom systematically segregating worldly being. I mentioned before that the perspective of ecofeminism, in calling our attention to the systematic and intersectional dimensions of our culture, contributes to highlight the enmeshment in modern cosmology of a dualistic structure of thought with a radical estrangement from the world. The dualistic worldlessness illuminated by the concept of Gnosticism and rendered even more acute with the ecological crisis also manifests a cosmological crisis of modernity as it reveals the boundaries of binary structures of thought which fail to contain a perpetually overflowing and apophatically complex world. What characterizes this cosmological crisis? In the following section, I suggest that the dualistic paradigm of modernity is articulated around the repression of an ontological tension similar to that described by Voegelin through the vocabulary of metaxy, thus operating as a closure of the openness of worldly being.

The tension beneath dualism and its concealment

What ties together the cosmological dualism and worldlessness of modernity, and what lies beneath the estranged dualistic structure of our thought? This I regard as one crucial question for contemporary philosophy - one which the perspective of Gnosticism allows us to formulate. I see it lying in abeyance within many metaphysical developments of the philosophy of modernity, pointing toward the underlying presence of an ontological tension which various philosophers, from Hegel²⁴⁰ to

²⁴⁰ Friedrich HEGEL, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Reclam, Ditzingen, 2004 (1807).

Heidegger²⁴¹ through Voegelin and William Desmond²⁴² today, have encouraged us to consider.

Approaching this tension, I would like to draw the reader's attention again to the image of an abyss: an abyss which the Gnostics believed would define our worldly condition, and illustrate the tragedy of our separation from a *divine and absent other*. Let us picture this abyss: it opens a deep, obscure and groundless gap insurmountably isolating human beings from God, God from the world, the world from the beyond, the self from others – it is an abyss that ultimately insulates the self from anything in the world. It also designates the space delineated by these borders of segregation: that which stands between dualistic boundaries and which is simultaneously being obscured by them. Now this abyss might be seen either as hermetically sealed, setting apart, like our interpretation of gnostic dualism has suggested so far, two absolutely impenetrable realms of being; or it might also be thought of as a porous space which, if abyssal, can also be perpetually crossed and dwelt in. This precious space of porosity and translation between edges set apart but also put in relation by an abyss of inbetweenness, is what garners our *ontological tension*. This, Voegelin would argue, is where we stand: in the abyssal inbetweenness of the world, in the metaxic tension of being. I argue that the cosmological dualism common to the gnostic and modern systems of thought, attempting to overcome this tension, segregates the realms of being and hermetically seals the abyss between them: in so doing, it tends to condemn the openness of worldly being.

You may recall that my conclusion to the first chapter had aimed to emphasize the presence of an ontological tension underlying the structural dualism analysed by Jonas - I had then approached the abyss in the Heideggerian sense of an openness of worldly being. I suggested indeed that the gnostic dualism between God and the World was grounded upon an ontological tension whose reduction operates as an *obstruction and sealing of the openness of worldly being*. In the conclusion to chapter II, it was mentioned how Voegelin's thought of the metaxy draws attention to the disastrous

²⁴¹ Martin HEIDEGGER, *Beiträge zur Philosophie. Vom Ereignis*. Vol. 65 of the Gesamtausgabe. Ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, Vittorio Klosterman Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1989.

²⁴² William DESMOND, *Being and the Between*, SUNY Press, 1995.

effects of the segregation, or hypostatization, of the ontological abyss: I suggested that the dualistic paradigm of modernity operates as *a negation of the inbetweenness of worldly being*. This leaves us with the idea of an ontological abyss, and the open inbetweenness of worldly being disclosed by it. Whatever holds the abyssal inbetween open, appears both in Jonas and Voegelin as a pivotal keystone apopathically articulating gnostic cosmologies – hidden by them and yet revealed by them, all the more so present as they are concealed. The gnostic cosmologies studied by Jonas and Voegelin are grounded indeed upon a structural dualism which systematically hypostatizes the poles of an irreducible tension – self and other, divine and worldly, nature and culture...

The hypothesis I would like to raise now is that the dualism illuminated by the perspective of Gnosticism is articulated upon *the obliteration of this ontological tension*: it does not strive, in a dialectical impetus, to overcome it by resolving it. Rather, it seems to obscure it altogether, insisting that being is inescapably divided into two hermetic realms and that, somehow, we are caught in the middle and yet perpetually fail to bridge these two poles. We drowned in the abyss. More precisely, I argue that the concepts of Gnosticism developed by Jonas and Voegelin, by throwing light upon the pervading narrative of humanity's existential exile and the resulting experience of an ontological tension between self and world, enlighten modernity's dualistic engagement with worldly being and the particular kind of pathological inhabiting it fosters. Such an engagement, I suggest, is characterized by a *dualistic closure of worldly being*. Jonas and Voegelin's analyzes of Gnosticism merge indeed into the perception of a *dualistic reduction, or closure, of an ontological tension, an open in-betweenness* constitutive of worldly beings. A synthetic approach to their thought of Gnosticism enables us to conceptualize this modern concept of political philosophy as a ***dualistic reduction of the ontological tension of the world, resulting into a worldless inhabiting***. If Gnosticism is to signify the obstruction of a primordial tension, it is because the movement of hypostatization of the tension leads to its eviction: in the attempt to think the poles independently from each other and essentialize them into two ontologically distinct realms of being, as exemplified in the dualistic structure of its system of thought, it obliterates the tensional, suspended and

yet open inbetweenness of worldly being – on which the next chapter shall expand further. This interpretation of Gnosticism as dualistic reduction of the metaxy of worldly Being would allow us to reformulate the closure by modern metaphysics of the openness of Being theorized by Heidegger²⁴³, and to approach alongside the condemnation of the possible as well as the actual threatening of the perpetual overflowing of the world manifested in an eminently material dimension by the present environmental crisis. The latter event arises indeed as a very literal condemnation of the becoming of worldly being, a sealing of its openness as the most concretely colossal consequence of the dualistic reduction of its ontological tension. The dualistic paradigm of Modernity thus acts as a closure of the ontological openness of worldly being, and the gnostic engagement with the world operates as a pathological concealment of worldly being – a criminal forgetfulness of its metaxic essence, of its perpetual withdrawal, and of our ontological involvement in its processes of becoming. In this process of closure, the world was also silenced, as Jonas witnesses in (the first, existentialist) Heidegger’s objectifying treatment of worldly being as merely present, *vorhanden*, “stripped and alienated to the mode of *mute thinghood*”²⁴⁴. The gnostic concealment of the world is not one that embraces the apophatic nature of worldly being, but rather denies it and obscures its manifestation. Against the concealment operated by the positivist paradigm, Jonas argues therefore that “we must remain open to the idea that natural sciences do not deliver the whole truth about nature”²⁴⁵, claiming thereby a posture of epistemic openness toward the ever-ongoing epiphany of the world. Something inevitably escapes our comprehension, and worldly being perpetually overflows any attempt to seize it.

This tensional structure of worldly being, which dualism, while articulated around it, fails to sustain, is particularly manifest in the polarity between immanence

²⁴³ Around Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics and more specifically the closure of the openness of Being, see also Mary Jane RUBENSTEIN, *Strange Wonder: The Closure of Metaphysics and the Opening of Awe*, Columbia University Press, New-York, 2008.

²⁴⁴ Hans JONAS, *The Gnostic Religion*, p.337. I emphasize.

²⁴⁵ Hans JONAS, *Prinzip Verantwortung. Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation*, Insel Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1986 (1979). p.30.

and transcendence²⁴⁶: as we linger over this particular declination of modern dualism, we soon realize that both terms only bear meaning in relation to each other, and ultimately seem to gravitate around a movement piercing through the boundaries of the self, *overflowing* them. What is transcendence transcending? And what is immanence immanent to? If we remove these terms from their common striving, if we extract them from their inextricable tension and try to define them independently from one another, then we fail and their meaning escapes us. If we try to hypostatize, or essentialize them into strictly hermetic categories, then we lose both. This suggests that immanence and transcendence, united in a radical intimacy, are two sides of the same coin, two ways on a same path running across ontological boundaries.

Alfred North Whitehead proposes a model for thinking immanence and transcendence in which neither realm is full without the other, for both are involved in common creative processes. The Whiteheadian characterisation of immanence and transcendence thus forgoes the traditional separation of the two terms and incriminates their “vicious separation” for the rupture between God and the world. Whitehead refuses to associate transcendence with a divine, static eminence and immanence with a worldly, fluent deficiency:

The vicious separation of the flux from the permanence leads to the concept of an entirely static God, with eminent reality, in relation to an entirely fluent world, with deficient reality²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ In “The Idea of Transcendence” Ingolf Dalferth draws a categorical distinction between theological and non-theological forms of transcendence, where the former surpasses the latter, always confined within immanence. Diverting from his account, my engagement with the concepts of immanence and transcendence eschews isolating theological from non-theological thinking. My understanding of the tension binding transcendence to immanence suggests moreover that the “confinement in immanence” is not a condition that could nor should ever be overcome. By this I suggest, as we shall see further, that being in immanence does not reciprocally imply an exile from transcendence.

Ingolf U. DALFERTH, “The Idea of Transcendence”, in *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, ed. Robert N. Bellah & Hans Joas, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2012, pp. 146-188.

²⁴⁷ Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *Process and Reality*, The Free Press, New York, p.346.

Whitehead considers creative processes of becoming as part of transcendence as well as immanence. Commenting on the Whiteheadian account of immanence and transcendence, James Williams echoes Whitehead's concern for "the denial of the priority of one or the other term in their separation"²⁴⁸ and argues that the two realms ought to be approached as *complementary and therefore inseparable processes*. As Williams reminds us, the Whiteheadian metaphysics is one of essential relation and mutual dependency, where the play of immanence and transcendence mirrors the relationship between God and the world. This thought is also endorsed by Gilles Deleuze, for whom "any thought of a pure or absolute realm" is banished in the "adventure of immanence in transcendence"²⁴⁹. Because they belong together, both immanence and transcendence suffer from their separation and should be considered as essentially and indivisibly related processes. James Williams explains:

For Whitehead, separated transcendence is pure stasis, meaningless because no change whatsoever can take place within it, a timeless and momentum free block. Yet pure immanence is equally nonsensical, since as pure flux we cannot explain its valued forward momentum and novelty, it becomes free of any realities and without sense.²⁵⁰

While the tensional nature of modern dualism shines particularly through this immanence-transcendence dichotomy, the philosophy of Whitehead suggests that this reflection applies to other polarities and culminates in the opposition between God and the World:

In our cosmological constructions we are, therefore, left with the final opposites, joy and sorrow, good and evil, disjunction and conjunction – that is to say, the many in one – flux and permanence, greatness and triviality, freedom and necessity, God and the World.²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ James WILLIAMS, "Transcendence and Immanence as Inseparable Processes: on the Relevance of Arguments from Whitehead to Deleuze Interpretation", in *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, 2010, 4 (1), p.97.

²⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze, « Les plages d'immanence » in *Deux régimes de fous*, ed. David Lapoujade, 2003, Minuit, Paris, p.245.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p.98.

²⁵¹ Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *Process and Reality*, op.cit., p.341.

Because it concentrates the tension I have been striving to highlight in this section, the immanence-transcendence polarity appears archetypal of the modern dualistic structure of thought. It captures indeed an essential movement of *overflowing*, on which we shall expand in the next chapter, an *overflowing of boundaries* between worldly and godly, between self and other, boundaries unable to contain the experience of a world of abundance.

This emphasis on the dualistic hypostatization of an ontological tension disclosed by our hermeneutics of Gnosticism reminds us of Whitehead's diagnosis of the modern "bifurcation of nature", along with his notion of the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness"²⁵². Incriminating the structural dualism of modern science and its segregation between "causal" and "apparent" components of being, the philosopher identifies a crucial fallacy in the reflection that mistakes the abstraction of the concept from the concreteness of worldly being. This fallacy echoes and perpetuates what he identifies in the *Concept of Nature* as the "fallacy of bifurcation":

Another way of phrasing this theory which I am arguing against is to bifurcate nature into two divisions, namely into the nature apprehended in awareness and the nature which is the cause of awareness. The nature which is the fact apprehended in awareness holds within it the greenness of the trees, the song of the birds, the warmth of the sun, the hardness of the chairs, and the feel of the velvet. The nature which is the cause of awareness is the conjectured system of molecules and electrons which so affects the mind as to produce the awareness of apparent nature. *The meeting point of these two natures is the mind*, the causal nature being influent and the apparent nature being effluent.²⁵³

Whitehead pinpoints here a gnostic trope of modern science in the central belief that the human mind stands between the two ontologically distinct realms of spirit and matter. In Latour's words:

²⁵² Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *Science and the Modern World*. Free Press, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1997 [1925], p. 52.

²⁵³ Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *The Concept of Nature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1964 (1920), p.21. I emphasize.

Bifurcation is what happens whenever we think the world is divided into two sets of things: one which is composed of the fundamental constituents of the universe – invisible to the eyes, known to science, yet real and valueless – and the other which is constituted of what the mind has to add to the basic building blocks of the world in order to make sense of them.²⁵⁴

Against modern dualism, Whitehead’s metaphysics describe a world in which *all beings*, all entities – and not only self-conscious or human ones – experience worldly being in a process of entanglement and incorporation, emphasized by his term of “prehension”. His philosophy of nature summons us to resist the dualistic reduction of modern cosmology and to embrace our entanglement within worldly being:

Natural philosophy should never ask, what is in the mind and what is in nature. To do so is a confession that it has failed to express relations between things perceptively known, namely to express those natural relations whose expression is natural philosophy.²⁵⁵

Emphasizing the deep relationality of our perception of nature, Whitehead’s philosophy contributes to unveil the inbetweenness of our being in the world, and invites us to dwell in the tension disclosed by modern dualism. The next chapter shall explore the cosmological and ontological implications of a thought that would embrace this tension, and endeavour to draw the conclusions of our hermeneutics of Gnosticism for a contemporary philosophy of the world. The purpose of this section was to unfold the gnostic trope of an ontological abyss and an existence in between, in order to draw our attention to the presence of something in the world that perpetually resists a dualistic approach to being – something lying beneath dualistic boundaries, an inbetween

²⁵⁴ Bruno LATOUR, Preface to Isabelle STENGERS’ *Thinking with Whitehead*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. xii.

²⁵⁵ Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *The Concept of Nature*, op.cit. p.30.

that “somehow precedes the binaries which it distinguishes²⁵⁶”. Before attempting to unfold this metaxic inbetweenness sensed by the Gnostics, let us suspend our objectifying engagement with the world: let us instead consider the vertiginous idea that that which is being offered to our prehension endlessly overflows it, let us embrace the thought that what is worth being thought in the world is precisely what is being concealed by our present cosmology. In this play of light and shadow mentioned before to qualify our hermeneutical approach, the perspective of Gnosticism unveils precisely that which it intends to escape from: the abyssal groundlessness of our being in the world, which the Existentialists would later also express, along with – and this remains to be thought – the abundant overflowing of such an abyss which no dualistic segregation of being could contain. The gnostic closure of the world thus appears as that which epistemologically obscures and prevents the overflowing of the world, and which translates today into the so urgently concrete threatening of worldly becoming. Therein lies also the exceptional character of the present environmental mutation: in its beautiful incarnation of our being suspended over an abyss of nothingness and possibility, death and birth, despair and hope; and in the consecration of the inbetweenness of our being in the world: in between concerned beings, in between entangled organisms, in between times of transition, in between shifting, collapsing and emerging worlds. In this regard, the environmental crisis outlines the manifold challenge of dwelling in between, both philosophically and ontologically, as we shall see in chapter 4, and politically and existentially, as we shall see in chapter 5. Untied from an obsolete cosmology and summoned to think and inhabit the world anew, as we find ourselves diving into the openness of the world, metaphors appear redeeming. Unlike concepts, they offer the breadth of imagination required by the depth of our being in the world, and the space for poetic and poeitic subversion invoked by the task ahead.

²⁵⁶ Drew HYLAND, “First of All Came Chaos”, in *Heidegger and the Greeks*, ed. Drew Hyland and John Panteleion Manoussakis, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006, p.13.

C. Subverting the tropes of our inhabiting

What is the concrete unfolding of these metaphysical speculations? How could these reflections upon the cosmological and ontological possibly bear any political implications? Any philosophical enquiry and, as the reader may have noted already, ours in particular, arises from the awareness that ideas shape the world. And the world shapes our ideas. Or, to be even more accurate, that ideas and world are so entangled into each other that a dualistic understanding of the ideal and the material, the ethereal and worldly, abstract and concrete... fails to engage with their ontological co-penetration. Surely has the development of phenomenology in the 20th century emphasized our sensory experience of worldly being, and the bio and eco-phenomenological approaches in particular have offered to focus on the material embeddedness of the encounter between our consciousness and the world. But the context of the Anthropocene, or Chtulucene²⁵⁷, namely the advent of a new geological era, suggests that something in the relationship between consciousness and what it encounters remains to be thought. As we become aware of the dramatic entanglement of our destiny with that of the world and the worldly beings inhabiting it, we are summoned to reflect not only upon the material origin of our ideas, but also on their *destination*: namely on their worldly embodiment, now encrusted into the earth's geology, stamped upon the many hearts that have ceased to beat because of the way our civilization chose to inhabit the world.

How do our ideas materialize into the world? How are they embodied in our inhabiting? Our attempt to deconstruct modern dualism through the hermeneutic lens of Gnosticism has thrown light on the symbolic dimension of our culture. The perspective of Gnosticism laid out by the analyses of Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin invites us indeed to elucidate the symbolic expression of the repression of an existential tension – the metaxic structure of our being in the world as being in between. Our reflection

²⁵⁷ Donna J. HARAWAY “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chtulucene: Making Kin”, *art.cit.*

has proposed to enquire about the ways in which the symbolic expression of Gnosticism articulates modern cosmologies, or how the elucidation of the gnostic tropes provides at least a way to approach them in a new, opportune light. Our hermeneutics of Gnosticism thus offers to study the articulation of narratives, symbols and metaphors infusing our engagement with the world – it aims at disclosing tropes of our inhabiting. Because it aims at uncovering the symbolism underlying political rhetoric, cultural narratives and metaphysical structures of thought, all so central in the construction and maintenance of our political agency, this endeavour is in itself political. It suggests identifying the mechanisms at work in the ways symbolic tropes govern our engagement with the world and our ability to envision possibilities.

The environmental issue plunges us into an ocean of metaphors and tends as such to reveal the omnipresence and subconscious power of images in the way we engage with the world surrounding us. As Stefano Velotti notes in his study of Günther Anders' *Weltbilder*: “images (...) do not cover the world, but rather make it visible by discovering features of it that would remain invisible without them.”²⁵⁸ Yet not all images disclose worldly being in the same way. If images are integral to our dwelling and engagement with worldly being, some have come to cover the world more than they discover it: let us therefore try to digest the tropes we are fed and eventually re-appropriate them. I wish to draw awareness towards the politically subversive potential of reversing the tropes conditioning our inhabiting, in the perspective of repopulating our symbolic universe with alternate metaphors – alternate images for alternate thought structures grounding alternate socio-political realities. Our hermeneutics of Gnosticism contributes to uncover the mythical, symbolical or metaphorical dimension of our being in the world, thus shedding light on certain recurring images shaping our engagement with worldly beings. One main challenge that ensues from the identification of these gnostic tropes is to *reverse them* as deep-rooted symbols conditioning our being in the world. Let us now venture into the galaxy of symbols we inhabit as we delve into the gnostic tropes of our inhabiting.

²⁵⁸ Stefano VELOTTI, “Guenther Anders: Weltbilder, “Models of Enticement”, and the Question of Praxis”, *Humana.Mente Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 2011, Vol. 18, pp. 169.

Our hermeneutics of Gnosticism has mentioned many times already the image of an *abyss* to define the gnostic expression of our worldly condition. Studying Hans Jonas' existential analysis of the historiographical construct of Gnosticism, my first chapter identified the trope of the abyss as one allowing us to elucidate the various declinations of a gnostic inhabiting. In the gnostic dramaturgy, the groundless depth of the abyss illustrates indeed the tragedy of our separation from a *divine, absent other*. It represents a chasm fatally insulating God from the world, therefore also the human self from the world, and symbolizes the cosmic anxiety characteristic of the gnostic being in the world: motives of the alienness of worldly being and the yearning for a beyond-the-world further contribute to delineate the figure of an abyss keeping the self away from its true home. The metaphor of the abyss indicates the condition of being thrown into a life experienced as an absence, between the presence of a world felt as alien and the absence of a home so remote. Insofar as it expresses the gnostic condition of an existential as well as ontological exile, the trope of the abyss has enabled us to think both the structural dualism of modern cosmology and the sealing of worldly being it operates in the process of hypostatization of an existential inbetweenness.

Also expressed in gnostic narratives in terms of a cosmogonical "crack" in divine being allowing the creation of the world²⁵⁹, the figure of the abyss bears the additional meaning of an ontological openness, or opening of worldly being as it is being split into two opposite realms. As we saw earlier in this chapter, the metaphor of the abyss not only provides a symbolical way to approach the strong dualism of gnostic cosmologies, but also offers a way to conceive the ontological openness concealed by this dualism. The figure of the abyss embodies indeed the distance between worldly beings – a distance which may be felt as a tragedy, that of the un mournable loss of an original connection, drawing an unbridgeable line between two absolutely impenetrable realms of being. In this first, gnostic interpretation of this distance, the abyss is hermetically sealed. But the metaphor of the abyss also designates a distance, just as bottomless as the first, which could be felt this time as an openness, a redeeming space for creation, resilience and exchange, drawing lines of

²⁵⁹ Éric POMMIER, *Jonas*. Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2013, p.34.

connection that gather worldly beings thirsty for a fertile encounter. In her article “Lines in the Innumerable: Enmity, Exceptionalism and Entanglement”²⁶⁰, Catherine Keller explores the potential of a “theology of entangled difference” for present politics. She reminds us that some lines are lines of separation, and trace divisions, while others are lines of relation and trace affiliations. As she contends that “there is nothing politically innocent about interdisciplinarity”, she invites us to break free from the disciplinary structure imposed upon academic thought and draws our attention to the subversive potential of tracing sandy lines of relation – between disciplines, but also between cultures, people, species, beings... The same applies, I suggest, to the gnostic trope of the abyss: the latter can be subverted if one resolves to dwell in the precious space of inbetweenness opened up by it. The abyss of inbetweenness characterizing our inhabiting, as Voegelin’s analysis suggests, is what garners the ontological tension of the world – a fertile tension of creativity, if difficult to maintain. This metaxic tension unveiled by the perspective of Gnosticism summons us to dwell further, even deeper within the tropes of our inhabiting, so as to pursue or recover what Susanne Claxton calls a “full dwelling”.²⁶¹

Here I have unfolded the gnostic trope of the abyss, whose various declinations we may find again in the leitmotifs of the gap, the rift, the separation, the distance etc, but we could as well identify other gnostic tropes of our inhabiting in the themes of the Fall, the Escape, the Alien, the Home, the Yearning... All of these might be reversed if one intends to dwell in the tension contained in them. In the abyss, we discern an opening. The condition of being-thrown into the world expressed in the theme of the Fall may as well be interpreted as an offering of the world, thus converting the curse of the Fall into an original Gift. The familiar feeling of alienness may be embraced as home, and the absence as indicating an overwhelming presence. Clearing a space for creation and world-making, the distance setting us apart from the elsewhere may be felt as salvatory – “a certain degree of ‘worldlessness’”, Stefano Velotti reminds us, “is a necessary condition for imagining the world”²⁶². There is hope in our

²⁶⁰ Catherine KELLER, “Lines in the Innumerable: Enmity, Exceptionalism and Entanglement”, *Literature & Theology*, 2018, pp.1-11.

²⁶¹ Susanne CLAXTON, *Heidegger’s God. An Ecofeminist Perspective*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, p.150.

²⁶² Stefano VELOTTI, art.cit., p. 165.

languor. In our yearning springs a fountain of possibility, and our abundant thirst is one that overflows. But to be able to perceive this overflowing presence of the world, one must dwell in the feelings of absence expressed in the gnostic complaints. Perhaps William Bronk's approach to worldly inhabiting in his book *The World, the Worldless* could enlighten our way as we wander through this paradox: his poetry begins with an acceptance of the fact that, despite our peregrinations, we are always here – a claim that echoes Levinas' answer to Rimbaud's complaint that life is elsewhere: *and yet we are in the world*. We are in the world amidst other worldly beings and amidst a galaxy of metaphors. These help us inhabit the world as we wander in the pursuit of a full dwelling.

Conclusion

What does Gnosticism eclipse, and what does it reveal? This chapter has attempted to outline the potential contribution of a hermeneutics of Gnosticism for reimagining our inhabiting in a time of environmental mutation. Drawing upon our study of the concepts of Gnosticism in Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin's philosophies, I discerned in the dualistic alienation from the world and in the concealment of an ontological tension, two hermeneutical keys allowing us to bridge the authors' analyses of Gnosticism, and to extend it to the present politico-philosophical context of the environmental crisis. In so doing, I outlined a redefinition of the concept of Gnosticism as a sealing of worldly being, and thus laid out the foundations for a hermeneutics of Gnosticism aiming at the elucidation of our contemporary being in the world. I suggested that the dualistic worldlessness of modern cosmology illuminated by the perspective of Gnosticism results in a *sealing of the openness of worldly being* – a reduction of the ontological tension of the world. Manifest in the condemnation of the possible and the threatening of the creative overflowing of the world, this sealing of worldly being is embodied today in the environmental crisis. What this sealing implies for an ontology of the world, I propose to elucidate in the next chapter. For now, let us

contemplate what a hermeneutics of Gnosticism discloses about the way we inhabit the world.

Here is why we initially summoned the concept of Gnosticism in our philosophical treatment of the ecological issue: because it designates a pathological inhabiting of the world, and as such informs us about the way we ourselves inhabit the world. In Jonas as well as in Voegelin, the concept of Gnosticism involves the diagnosis of a *pathological being in the world*, led by the yearning to escape the present conditions of worldly being, and resulting in a political crisis. Echoing with their political philosophy of Modernity, their analyses of Gnosticism point toward a political crisis of the modern inhabiting. As it emphasizes the worldlessness of modern cosmologies and throws light on the political consequence of this pathological inhabiting, the perspective of Gnosticism thus raises the question of politics as inhabiting. We shall explore in chapter 5 the unfolding of our hermeneutics of Gnosticism for political philosophy, gravitating around the problematic of inhabiting the inbetweenness or, as I propose to call it, the *eschatological liminality* of worldly being.

In this notion of liminality, which the next two chapters will explore in different ways, lies a paramount contribution of our hermeneutics of Gnosticism. The liminal designates the space where we dwell – in the metaxic inbetween, the suspended tension, the abyssal openness of worldly being. The perspective of Gnosticism unveils indeed our being in the world as a standing amidst an ontological abyss, bordering on the familiar alienness of the world as an on the edge of a cliff. A metaxic inhabiting of the world thus arises as an existential-political challenge as well as a philosophical one: how to sustain the tension of worldly being? How to preserve the precarious openness disclosed by our hermeneutics?

In the pursuit of a resilient, ecological dwelling that would embrace the liminality of our inhabiting, rather than perpetually organizing its overcoming, the contribution of poets might prove a saving grace. Fulfilling the challenge of a full dwelling implies a perpetual rediscovery of the world, which a poetic engagement with worldly being incarnates. While the openness of worldly being appears beyond words, poets attempt to say the ineffable and, struggling to express in words what overflows prosaic

language, reawaken the world to its ontological overflowing. The redeeming character of a poetic dwelling in the world thus arises from its standing right within the openness of being and yet resisting the gnostic reduction of the ontological tension of the world – of our being perpetually on the edge of an abyss. Similarly, the subversive potential of poetic-metaphorical language lies in its subversion of the linguistic structure of systems of thought subduing a world that cannot be contained. Poets call us back to the eminently symbolic dimension of our cosmologies, including those grounded in the fanciful claim of their unwavering rationalism. Who are the poets? “Those who correspond to *the wonderfully all-present*”²⁶³, answers Heidegger. Those embracing worldly being in its vertiginous, precarious, chaotic openness, and receiving the waves, successively overflowing and deserting, of our inhabiting. Those who perpetually feel and re-feel, tell and re-tell the world, as if born anew every time it is felt. Those who, like the Gnostics, feel the ontological abyss, the cosmic anxiety, the eternal unrooting and the yearning for a home – but choose to dwell in it. The danger of the gnostic yearning lies in the illusory attempt to resolve the tension by overcoming it: the gnostic hypostatization of a beyond the world confines indeed the latter into a closed system, thereby negating its ontological openness. In his poem “The Raising of Lazarus”²⁶⁴, Rainer Maria Rilke calls those experiencing the gnostic yearning and summons them to embrace their existential thirst instead of vainly attempting to quench it – as if worldly being could ever cease to overflow: “That you should thirst. Submit to it.” And drink the waves of a world that overflows.

²⁶³ Martin HEIDEGGER, *Elucidations on Hölderlin's Poetry*, Translated by Keith Hoeller. New York: Humanity Books, 2000, p.78.

²⁶⁴ Rainer Maria RILKE, *Selected Poems* with parallel German text, trans. Susan Ranson and Marielle Sutherland, Oxford University Press, 2011, p.109.

CHAPTER 4

ROOTS, WAVES AND FOLDS OF THE WORLD: TOWARDS AN ONTOLOGY OF ENTANGLED OVERFLOWING

Humans and the earth are unexhausted
and undiscovered.
Wake and listen!
Verily, the earth shall yet be a source of recovery.

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

The world always overflows nature.
Nature is what is established; the world, what comes.

— Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia*.

I am rooted, but I flow.

— Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*.

Introduction

A flood of the world

Let us contemplate again the idea that the ecological crisis arises as a disclosure, an apocalyptic epiphany throwing light upon a world we had not yet perceived. A phenomenology of the environmental crisis would reveal our deepening attachment to the earth, along with the precarious contingency of our inhabiting, and summon us to exercise greater modesty in relation to the non-human beings of this world. Doing so, the environmental issue would present us with a chance for a Remundanzation – a re-encounter with the world confronting the Gnosticism of modern cosmology. In order to recover a philosophy alive to the earth, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari propose to assemble in a *Thousand Plateaus* a “Geophilosophy” that would acknowledge the earth as the real *topos* of philosophical inquiry and reorient philosophical thought to the contingencies and complexities of terrestrial life²⁶⁵. Latour similarly defines the political task imposed by the ecological mutation as one of *landing* – *atterrir* –, coming down to earth to meet the earthlings and, with them, inhabit a common space²⁶⁶. Deconstructing the modern concept of nature as central foundation of an obsolete cosmological structure²⁶⁷, Latour argues that the present climatic mutation challenges our understanding of the world as monolithic globe:

the old idea of the earth conceived as globe, the old idea of matter, has nothing left to do with the world we have to inhabit.²⁶⁸

Rising from the ashes of the concept of nature and appearing in the new light of the Anthropocene, the world facing us now is one to be encountered. It requires a

²⁶⁵ Gilles DELEUZE, Felix GUATTARI, *Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2 : Mille Plateaux*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1980.

²⁶⁶ Bruno LATOUR, *Où atterrir? Comment s'orienter en politique*, La Découverte, Paris, 2017.

²⁶⁷ Bruno LATOUR, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, op. cit.

²⁶⁸ Bruno LATOUR, “Sur une nette inversion du schème de la fin des temps », paper for a conference on *Les défis écologiques à la lumière du bien commun*, Institut Catholique de Paris, April 2018, my translation.

thought able to articulate the recent discovery, variation of the Galilean claim, that “the earth is crying”²⁶⁹, that “the earth is moved”²⁷⁰ by our inhabiting. In other words, what a philosophy of the present world needs to process is the realization that the gnostic abyss, which modern dualism had dug between humanity and the world, was crossed: suddenly we find ourselves deeply involved within an astounding web of worldly beings from which there is no escape, “with thousand rootlets reaching deep into the soil of life”²⁷¹. If the ecological crisis rises as a flood, it is the flood of a world overflowing in an abundance, complexity and intensity which the modern philosophy of nature could not seize, and to which we must now render ourselves sensitive. In *Facing Gaia*²⁷², Latour explores ideas and figures to embrace multiple modes of existence, experience and agency which the modern concept of nature has thus far failed to acknowledge within earthly beings. As we shall see in the present chapter, the development of a Gaian thought of the world involves a shift in perception, a reversal of the gnostic dynamic of “plus extra” [further beyond] exhorting humanity to emancipate itself from the world, and engages indeed a movement of “plus intra” [further inward] towards the recognition of our earth-boundedness. Back to the earth, in with the old world of the immanence as we enter a new geological era, discover the unprecedented dimension of its emergence, and endeavor to dwell in an entangled infinity.²⁷³ What our preliminary analysis of Gnosticism may teach us in this journey towards the world, this fourth chapter intends to articulate.

²⁶⁹ POPE FRANCIS’ Encyclical letter « Laudato Si », 2015.

²⁷⁰ Michel SERRES, *The Natural Contract*, Translated by E. Macarthur and W. Paulson, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1995, p.86.

²⁷¹ Rainer Maria RILKE, *Selected Poems with parallel German text*, op.cit. « Das ist mein Streit », from *Advent*, p.2. My translation.

²⁷² Bruno LATOUR, *Face à Gaïa: Huit Conférences sur le Nouveau Régime Climatique*, La Découverte, 2015.

²⁷³ Emilie HACHE (ed.), *De l’Univers Clos au Monde Infini*, Editions Dehors, 2014.

From the hermeneutics of Gnosticism towards a philosophy of the world

How may our hermeneutics of Gnosticism contribute to the philosophical renewal called upon by the present environmental crisis? How may alternative metaphors of our inhabiting inspire an alternative perception of worldly being? This chapter explores the cosmo-ontological unfolding of the reflection outlined in the first part of this dissertation, and focuses on the ways in which our hermeneutics of Gnosticism could inform an alternative thought of worldly being. A thought that would avoid the gnostic pitfalls of modern cosmology – namely, its *dualistic worldlessness* and the resulting *sealing of worldly being*. The previous chapter has suggested that the present ecological mutation discloses something which *cannot be contained* by the cosmology witnessing its advent, thereby requiring new mental tools, new categories of thought, new images, new philosophical approaches offering to embrace the ontological tension of the world and therefore supporting an alternative way of dwelling. It has pointed towards a twofold movement of *sealing and overflowing*, a wide cosmological enterprise of subjection and domestication of a worldly being resolutely untamable and irreverent.

In this chapter, I propose to elucidate the meaning of this “ontological tension” obscured by modern dualism and offer conceptual as well as metaphorical ways to undo its sealing. This implies unfolding the tension which both Jonas and Voegelin had sensed would lie beneath modern Gnosticism, and delving into the *metaxic* dimension, or ontological inbetweenness of worldly being. The Voegelinian notion of metaxy allows us to reflect upon the interconnectedness of earthly beings evolving in-between various poles of the world, thus informing a thought of worldly entanglement. To this extent, the metaxy of worldly being might provide a conceptual framework to approach a deep ontological complexity which appears to *overflow* from a common space of in-betweenness. A key-issue of this chapter shall then be to bridge, drawing upon the notion of metaxy, these two essential ideas of planetary entanglement and

overflowing of the world. The reflections unfolding in this chapter should ultimately uncover the ethical and political concern of dwelling in-between, to be examined in chapter five.

What does the environmental crisis disclose of worldly being, which had until then remained unthought by modern cosmology, and which our hermeneutics of Gnosticism might help uncover? Which philosophical, symbolic and metaphorical tools might support this recovery? The reflection I propose to conduct in this chapter unfolds along three key ideas, sustained by three sets of metaphors, to contribute towards a renewed philosophy of the world in times of ecological mutation. The first, led by the trope of the *openness*, examines the promising contribution of process thought for a philosophy of the world that would engage the precarious, contingent and eventful processes of creation at work within an emerging worldly being. The second delves into Gaian ontologies of planetary entanglement, and leans upon Glissant's term of *créolité* to think the luxuriant ramifications of worldly beings and the plural rootedness of their creative agency. The third explores the Deleuzian metaphor of the *origami universe* and attempts to bridge the openness of worldly being with its entanglement. I then propose to approach, through the metaphor of the *overflowing* of the world, the process by which worldly beings are both entangled in each other while involved in an open becoming. The reflections gathered in this chapter towards a renewed philosophy of the world arise from the overarching metaphors of the roots and the waves. They are indebted to Virginia Woolf's prophetic, aquatic consciousness of our being rooted in the world, ineluctably embedded in and with other beings, and of the uncontainable overflowing of our being. Her experience of the waves of the world, I argue, provides an inspiring reversal of the gnostic being in the world.

A. Process thought for an ecology of the openness

“Everything flows”

— Heraclitus

“There is no harmony in this contingent stream of unforeseen events.”

— Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia*.

The Gnostics inhabit the world haunted by the anxious awareness of its volatility: their being in the world is infused with an acute sense of the inconstancy and restlessness of worldly processes. As we journey through a time of environmental crisis and witness a global ecological and civilizational collapse involving drastic processes of eco-systemic disruption, geological mutation and mass extinctions, we might ourselves feel the groundlessness of a world crumbling beneath our feet. Emphasizing becoming over static being, event over entity, movement rather than substance, the tradition of process thought captures the impermanence of the world and its propensity for perpetual change. In this regard, the philosophy of process, and the work of its defining figure Alfred North Whitehead in particular, provides environmental philosophy with interesting tools to sustain the renewed thought of the world called upon by the advent of the Anthropocene. This philosophy of the world should acknowledge the precariousness, contingency and eventfulness of worldly being such as unveiled by the present ecological mutation. In his *Natural Contract*, Michel Serres crystallizes the paradigmatic break induced by environmental change around the pivotal realization that “the earth is moved”. Herald of the unprecedented scope of the environmental crisis, the realization of the instability and vulnerability of the Earth echoes the approach of process thought:

In our turn, we are appealing to an absent authority, when we cry, like Galileo, but before the court of his successors, former prophets turned kings: "the Earth is moved." The immemorial, fixed Earth, which provided the conditions and foundations of our lives, is moving, the fundamental Earth is trembling.²⁷⁴

The trembling of the immemorial soil described by Serres reflects the findings of process philosophy all the more so as it is accompanied by the acknowledgement of the profound reciprocity and reactivity characterizing our relationship to the "natural world" – on which the next sections shall dwell further. The term Anthropocene articulates indeed the awareness that the earth is affected by human actions and answers to it in unpredictable ways. To this extent, it invites us to think the historical contingency of the world, along with the instability of planetary processes which the modern concept of nature had conceived as fundamentally immutable. The environmental crisis thus ultimately reveals worldly being as a *worldly becoming*: intensifying and accelerating some processes, it opens the world to vertiginous perspectives of becoming and non-becoming, possible beings and possible unbeings.

Within Jewish mysticism, the medieval tradition of the Lurianic Kabbalah – which inspired Hans Jonas' theological reflections around the concept of God after Auschwitz²⁷⁵ - offers a seminal contribution to the theology of process. The Kabbalah developed by Isaac Luria presents a doctrine of creation unfolding in the three stages of divine being: its primordial contraction (*tzimtzum*), the shattering of the vessels (*chevrat ha-kélim*) with the chaotic eruption of divine light into the world, and the final repair of the world (*tikkun*). The notion of Tzimtzum is paramount to the theo-cosmogonic process described by the Lurianic Kabbalah. Jonas explains:

²⁷⁴ Michel SERRES, *The Natural Contract*, trans. E. Macarthur and W. Paulson, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1995, p.86.

²⁷⁵ Hans JONAS, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz: a Jewish Voice", in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Jan. 1987), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp.1-13.

Tzimtzum means contraction, withdrawal, self-limitation. To make room for the world, the *En-Sof*, (Infinite; literally, No-End) of the beginning had to contract himself so that, vacated by him, empty space could expand outside of him: the “Nothing” in which and from which God could then create the world. Without this retreat into himself, there could be no “other” outside God, and only his continued holding-himself-in preserves the finite things from losing their separate being again into the divine “all in all”.²⁷⁶

The primordial contraction of the divine at the origin of cosmic creation may be approached both as a withdrawal into the depths of her interiority and as a concession to the openness of cosmic being. The first dimension of the *Tzimtzum* thus presents creation as a fold within, a deepening towards the inside rather than an emanation or a dispersion. Gershom Scholem thus describes a God who “descended deeper into the recesses of His own Being, who concentrated Himself into Himself, and had done so from the very beginning of creation.”²⁷⁷ This divine contraction is perpetually renewed in the process of creation, so much so that the becoming of the world is defined and conditioned by this primordial fold within: “every new act of emanation and manifestation is preceded by one of concentration and retraction”²⁷⁸. In this regard, the *Tzimtzum* recounts a substantive connection between God and the world, an ontological dance where each creative emergence of the world arises as an inner folding of the divine.

God’s withdrawal may also be apprehended as an eclipse where the divine, conceding room for otherness to emerge, opens herself up to a world of possible. This connection between God’s creative withdrawal and the emergence of the other resumes interestingly the themes of the open and the alien, emphasizing the *open entanglement* of creative processes of becoming with the emerging presence of others. For creation to occur, room must be made for an unknown other to emerge. God’s withdrawal in the *Tzimtzum* is also consubstantial of a radical exposure conceding the possibility of non-being and therefore putting divine being at stake. From the *Tzimtzum* on, creation totters on the edge of an abyss, a primordial space freed for the

²⁷⁶ Ibid, p.12.

²⁷⁷ Scholem p.296

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

universe to unfold. For God to put herself at stake in the chaotic course of cosmic creation, for her to give birth to unpredictable trajectories of becoming, there must be a place of openness. With this primordial withdrawal, God concedes in creation the possibility of her negation. The Tzimtzum thus arises as an inspiring tale of openness combining the idea of an ontological intimacy between God and a creation that emerges within her, with the sense of a primordial abyss, a mysterious chaos and creative depth within her. Breaking with the traditional attribute of God's omnipotence, the doctrine of the Tzimtzum also bears a potential for thinking God's presence in her absence from the world, the latter's perpetual emergence being conditioned by a sustained act of loving withdrawal.²⁷⁹

In *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*²⁸⁰, Catherine Keller deviates from the dominant theory of *creation ex nihilo* and explores the hypothesis of a *creation ex profundis* for an alternative representation of the cosmic creative process. Her understanding of the watery depths of creation draws too upon Hebrew myths of creation and discloses *tehomophobic* tendencies (fearful of the deep) in Western Christian tradition, which she connects to the repression of feminized abysses and divine maternity. Keller argues that this fear of a beginning out of chaos, of darkness, of wild nature and of the feminine depth infuses the patriarchal paradigm and motivates the systematized oppression of the feminine. This cultural repression of an impenetrable depth at the heart of the divine creative process reminds us of what discloses itself as we lean over the edge of the abyss described in gnostic narratives: an obscure openness, an unfathomable entanglement in the world, and the untamable creative overflowing of the deep.

Drawing attention to worldly processes of emergence and extinction that had been suspended, petrified in the realm of nature, the ecological mutation also illuminates how such chaotic processes involve human actions, which were contained as an empire

²⁷⁹ This idea of a loving withdrawal from Being conditioning the unfolding of the world is also present in Jean-Luc Marion's *God without Being*. See Jean-Luc MARION, *Dieu sans l'être*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 2013 (1982).

²⁸⁰ Catherine KELLER. *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*. Routledge, London, 2003.

within an empire under the aegis of the realm of culture. Doing so, it brings to light the complexity of worldly processes overflowing the framework of dualist ontology. John Cobb, a major figure of process philosophy who has consistently explored its links with environmental philosophy while emphasizing ecological interdependency, argues that the recognition of the “intimate interconnectedness of all things”²⁸¹ brings together environmental consciousness and Whiteheadian philosophy. The architecture of Whitehead’s process metaphysics provides indeed illuminating insights to the contemporary thought of planetary entanglement and worldly becoming. The notion of “concrecence” expresses the process of creative internalization, feeling and expression by worldly beings of their relatedness to other event-like entities of the world, units of worldly becoming which Whitehead names “actual occasions”. This dual process of internalization and externalization of the world by the world appears to articulate perfectly the metaxy of worldly being which gnostic cosmologies had failed to integrate. Drawing upon Whitehead’s thought of the chaotic emergence of events, political philosopher William Connolly contends that we live in a world of becoming²⁸² and contribute to the processes of its emergence, co-creating it as we dwell in it. The philosopher presents the attunement to a world of becoming as an eminently political issue and argues that the acceptance of the contingency of worldly being would prevent the hegemonic imposition of a monolithic worldview upon plural horizons of becoming. Likewise, the acknowledgement of our being intimately involved in processes of worldly becoming would command an ontological responsibility towards such processes and the many beings involved in and affected by them.

The account by process philosophy of the contingency of worldly being and of our involvement within worldly processes of becoming is set against approaches which

²⁸¹ John COBB, “Deep Ecology and Process Thought”

URL: <https://www.religion-online.org/article/deep-ecology-and-process-thought/>

Accessed 23.01.2019.

²⁸² William E. CONNOLLY, *Pluralistic Sense-Making: A World of Becoming*, Duke University Press, 2011.

tend to freeze these processes. While a world of becoming holds within itself an elusive, ever-flowing transcendence sustaining the perpetual emergence of worldly processes – therefore unable to ground any fixed ideology –, gnostic cosmologies tend to reduce this immanent transcendence – which we analyzed in the preceding chapter as constitutive of the ontological, metaxic tension of worldly being. Through promoting an approach of the world as becoming rather than being, the philosophy of process dwells in the fluidity of processes which overflow dualistic partitions between being and non-being, thereby embracing the dynamic tension that infuse worldly processes of becoming. Process thought thus allows us to articulate the ontological tension of the world identified in our analysis of Gnosticism, and to integrate it within a philosophy of the world which engages the possibilities of becoming and non-becoming arising from worldly being. Following Hegel’s dialectic or Nietzschean philosophy, process thought provides a philosophical way to espouse the movement inherent to life and resist the gnostic “mummifying”²⁸³ of worldly being. If the present ecological crisis unveils the Gnosticism in modern cosmology, the philosophy of process appears as an answer to the challenge of an alternative perception of the world. Captured in the idea of the Anthropocene, the environmental mutation engages indeed a transition from an ontology of substance to an ontology of process which focuses on becoming and movement as radical dimensions of worldly being, rather than perpetuating the gnostic depiction of a world condemned to the cage of the eternal here below. Exposing the precariousness and contingency of eco-systems and terrestrial life, the Anthropocene manifests the impermanence of processes of worldly becoming continuously emerging and fading. It also brings to the fore the interconnectedness and interdependency of this worldly becoming, thereby pointing toward the ultimate responsibility that binds us to processes of perpetuation and renewal of the world: in so doing, process thought defies the gnostic divorce of the human self from the non-human world. A third potential contribution of process philosophy for a philosophy of the world resisting the

²⁸³ See Friedrich NIETZSCHE, *Twilight of the Idols*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968 (1889), p.35. He writes of philosophers, draining life out of ideas while they should extract ideas out of life: “There is [...] their hatred of even the idea of becoming, their Egyptianism. They think they are doing a thing *honour* when they dehistoricise it, *sub specie aeterni*—when they make a mummy of it. All that philosophers have handled for millennia has been conceptual mummies; nothing actual has escaped their hands alive. They kill, they stuff, when they worship, these conceptual idolaters—they become a mortal danger to everything when they worship. Death, change, age, as well as procreation and growth, are for them objections—refutations even.”

gnostic stance lies in its unfolding of the idea of openness of worldly becoming, which might allow us to approach the eventfulness of the environmental crisis.

It might seem surprising at first, if not indecent, to propose to think the environmental crisis in terms of openness. Is not the global environmental degradation we are presently witnessing rather about irreversible loss? Do not phenomena of eco-systemic collapse, mass extinctions, depletion of resources, loss of biodiversity, habitat destructions... point towards some kind of condemnation, a closure of the manifold processes of worldly becoming? Drawing upon the philosophy of process, I suggest that the present environmental mutation might be approached in terms of an *ambiguous openness* – a metaxic clearing of possibilities that we might benefit from engaging with as we stand on the abyssal edge of worldly becoming. Threatening the perpetuation of many life-forms on earth and witnessing the irreversible disappearance of species at the unprecedented rate of 1,000 to 10,000 times the background extinction rate²⁸⁴, the present environmental crisis acts as a phenomenal reminder of the precariousness and impermanence of worldly becoming. The manifold processes of worldly becoming involve dynamics of both destruction and creation, extinction and emergence, death and birth. The image of the abyss mentioned in the previous chapter illuminates again this metaxic dimension of processes of worldly becoming, and the world's wandering amidst a profusion of possible horizons whose actualization is never guaranteed, only ever enabled or threatened – always open.

The philosophy of openness I advocate for, while indebted to Martin Heidegger's intuitive awareness of the self-emergence of Being, insists that openness should not be understood as an existential prerogative of the human Dasein – thrown into the world and consecutively projecting itself onto the possible trajectories open before it. I rather propose to approach openness as an ontological disposition of all multispecies trajectories of becoming. Heidegger's lexical field of the clearing and the concealing might still lead us as we reflect upon this ontological openness of the world. In an essay on

²⁸⁴ E. CHIVIAN, A. BERNSTEIN (eds.), *Sustaining life: How human health depends on biodiversity*. Centre for Health and the Global Environment. Oxford University Press, New York, 2008.

the Origin of the Work of Art, Heidegger draws a distinction between the world and the earth which, I suggest, echoes the profoundly metaxic dimension of our inhabiting:

The world is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people. The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing. World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth just through world. But the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites unconcerned with one another. The world, in resting upon the earth, strives to surmount it. As self-opening it cannot endure anything closed. The earth, however, as sheltering and concealing, tends always to draw the world into itself and keep it there.

The opposition of world and earth is a striving.²⁸⁵

Heidegger depicts a twofold movement of self-disclosure and self-sheltering, where “the world” opens and “the earth” conceals, describing an organic relationship between poles of being intimately drawn to another and thus engaged in an active, tensional, birth giving metaxy. Heidegger’s metaxic thought of the world points toward the necessity for contemporary philosophy to distance itself from the modern concept of nature in order to acknowledge the *striving complexity* that is the world. The tension which Heidegger describes between the clearing and the concealing, the delicate dance of sheltering and disclosure shines a light upon the unthought of the modern concept of nature, which crystallizes overflowing processes of becoming into the fiction of an eternal, immovable materiality. Engulfing its dynamic tension along with its ontological openness, the concept of nature does not enable us to think the world as what “strives to surmount” or “cannot endure anything closed”. It eclipses the haunting concern for its precarious becomings, the longing that moves within its depths and the yearning that infuses its wandering. The “self-opening” of the world described by Heidegger is in gnostic cosmologies a prerogative of the human-self, of the existential

²⁸⁵ Martin HEIDEGGER, *Basic Writings*, “On the Origin of the Work of Art”, 1st Harper Perennial Modern Thought Edition, ed. David Farrell Krell, New York, Harper Collins, 2008, p. 174.

and divine pole of being. Ontologically closed, hermetically sealed, nature does not yearn. It is not moved by encounters with fellow trajectories giving birth to burgeoning possibilities of becoming, nor does it ever wander amidst flourishing and sinking horizons of becoming. The unthought openness I wish to emphasize characterizes the world in its diverse processes of becoming, in the intimate enmeshment between earthlings and their environment which makes it difficult to even distinguish them. For all earthlings, being in the world means to be engaged in manifold processes of becoming-with the world – of worlding – which are fundamentally open. *Worlding is an enmeshment in the open*. For the Pacific Walruses, for Tigers, Giant Pandas and Mountain Gorillas, for Antarctic glaciers, seeds non-patented by Monsanto corporation as well as for collapsing capitalist societies, becoming means being open to their not-becoming-anymore.

Far from merely disclosing the abyssal nothingness that threatens the becomings of the world, the ontological openness of our worldings is also the condition for their advent. While gnostic metaphysics leave no room to think the perpetual and immanent self-creation of the world, environmental philosophy requires a thought of emergence which the idea of openness might initiate. The trope of the openness allows us indeed to think both the arising and evanescence of multispecies processes of worlding, both the emergence and extinction of beings described by Jonas as “ontological surprises”²⁸⁶. In the present environmental crisis, it bridges the world’s end with its possible birth, and echoes the image of an abyss to clear a space for what is not yet, what is not anymore, what comes and might not arrive, what is becoming. Translating a Turkish saying into French, the philosopher of complexity Edgar Morin writes that « les nuits sont enceintes, et nul ne connaît le jour qui naîtra » - *the nights are pregnant, and no one yet knows the dawns to break*²⁸⁷. The world is pregnant with an abyssal openness giving birth to ontological surprises whose becoming, arising or extinction, we are ontologically involved with. The acknowledgement of the openness of the world might thus prevent any ideology from claiming the end of history and

²⁸⁶ Hans JONAS, *The Phenomenon of Life*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001, p.79.

²⁸⁷ Edgar MORIN, « Les nuits sont enceintes, et nul ne connaît le jour qui naîtra », *Le Monde*, 08.01.2011.

URL: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/01/08/edgar-morin-les-nuits-sont-enceintes_1462821_3232.html

Accessed 22.01.2020

thereby jeopardize processes of becoming together. Calling upon our faculty to care for the emergence of the world and preserve a space of resilience, a blank space for creation, it ensures that *the end is always where we start from*.

The end we start from, disclosing the openness of worldly being and the many beginnings that arise from plural perspectives of becoming. The provisory, ever-postponed end of times. The end of the world as we knew it, the end of the Holocene, the end of species, the end of a civilization – all porous entities enmeshed in other trajectories of becomings – and the beginning of what in the world, from this ontological openness of being, *overflows*. Outlining the finitude of our precarious being in the world, the environmental mutation also throws light on the porous boundaries of our selves: they too are open, overflowing in each other. The image of the openness thus conveys a thought of the world as contingent event and untamable becoming, as well as it opens up a thought of our deep ontological entanglement with worldly processes of becoming. In this light, the openness appears indeed as the very condition of our encounter with other worldly becomings. Being, or becoming in the world is *being opened* by other becomings, penetrated and fecundated by their alterity. Shifting from the gnostic posture of a divorce from the world, and its emphasis on the abyssal gap insulating the human self from the radical ontological alterity of the world, the idea of openness embraces the metaxic in-between of worldly being as a space of encounter and creation. What kind of ontology might allow us to dwell in the openness of the world and account for such a process of fecundation?

B. The ontology of Gaia for a créole world

Our lives extend beyond our skins,
in radical interdependence with the rest of the world.

— Joanna Macy, *Working through Environmental Despair*.

Each is a crowd
— Mona Chollet²⁸⁸

The roots of the waves: worldly entanglement as blurring of dualistic boundaries

Emphasizing the perpetual and dynamic emergence of the world, process philosophy conveys a perception of worldly becoming as waves and allows us to approach the ontological flood arising with the environmental mutation. But this fluidity is anchored, the watery dimension of the world rooted: the streams of worldly becomings perceived by process thought are embedded in a web of connections, a fertile soil of encounters, and can only overflow what they are rooted in. Drawn from the eponymous hypothesis formulated by atmospheric chemist James Lovelock and evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis, the development of the figure of Gaia in environmental humanities marks the progressive articulation of a complexified thought of the rootedness of worldly beings. Before delving deeper into the Gaia hypothesis and the consequences of its introduction for environmental philosophy and the ontology of the

²⁸⁸ Mona CHOLLET, “L’emploi du temps”, *Périphéries*, 2007.
URL: <https://www.peripheries.net/article309.html>
Accessed 22.01.2020.

world, I would like to pause and draw some preliminary reflections from the contemplation of the trope of the root.

In her book *Rootedness*, Christy Wampole investigates the omnipresent metaphor of rootedness throughout the history of Western thought and how it pervades today's philosophical, cultural and political narratives. As she contends that "figurative language is the outlet for a *deep-seated apprehension about permanent estrangement* from the context whence we came" and unfolds "the chronicle of a species at odds with itself"²⁸⁹, Wampole channels the gnostic trope of an existential estrangement resulting from an original rupture from Humanity's true home. From the metaphor of the roots, she draws the primordial myth of a lost connection, a broken link: "if people think of themselves as rooted beings, it is due to an *umbilical memory of an attachment to the earth*, a memory that has been severed in more ways than one."²⁹⁰ The author thus identifies in the image of the root "a figure of vital will and yearning – as it pushes through the soil, reaching for what it needs"²⁹¹ prone to express the "nearly universal" longing for one's home and the wandering towards an ultimate reunion. But as she perceives in the image of the root an *integrating* metaphor, Wampole proceeds to an interesting inversion of the gnostic trope of the unrooting. The image of the root, she argues, serves not only to express the drama of an estrangement from the world, but also weaves a wide web of belongings that "allows for connections to be made between past, present, and future, between remote geographic spaces, between neighbors, between the human and its ecosystem."²⁹² Thus, the trope of the root may express both the existential alienation from one's true home, so deeply felt by the Gnostics, and the umbilical connections binding one to the world through a plurality of ties. Wampole's analysis even appears to echo the insights fostered by process thought, as she bridges the depiction of an arborescent structure of attachments with the complex entanglement of trajectories of worldly becoming:

²⁸⁹ Christy WAMPOLE, *Rootedness: The Ramifications of a Metaphor*, University of Chicago Press, 2016, p.15. I emphasize.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.18. I emphasize.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, p.22.

²⁹² *Ibid*, p.15.

the root may serve as a metaphorical anchor to a geographic space ...
*its structure approximates a map of countless unexploited possibilities latent in each set of circumstances a person encounters.*²⁹³

Wampole suggests here that the metaphor of the root may describe a subterranean network of attachments sustaining processes of worldly becoming. In this light, coupled with the consciousness of the fluidity of processes of worldly becoming, the botanical metaphor challenges modern notions of selfhood and agency as conceived within the framework of atomic individuality. Unfolding Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's intuition of the "rhizomic"²⁹⁴ nature of worldly being, philosophers Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour have developed the figure of Gaia as a subversion of a dualist ontology unfitted for addressing planetary processes of becoming²⁹⁵. As it reformulates a thought of the world away from the dualist cosmology of Modernity, Gaia also appears to solicit and reframe the metaphor of the root. Let us now examine this idea more closely.

For Bruno Latour, "at first sight, nothing is simpler than the Gaia hypothesis: the living do not only reside in an environment, they shape it ... the Earth's whole biochemistry is the product of living organisms"²⁹⁶. What are the implications of this claim? Sébastien Dutreuil explains that the progressive acknowledgement of Gaia as a new scientific entity presides over the constitution, from the 1980s onwards, of the Earth system science. He writes:

²⁹³ Ibid, p.16. I emphasize.

²⁹⁴ In their project *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972 – 1980), the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have developed the botanical concept of rhizome to oppose Modernity's dualistic structure of thought and apprehend multiplicities in a non-hierarchical way. The rhizomic process thus designates an ecology of beings not subordinated to a higher entity, not organized by a set of transcendent laws, or gravitating around a center.

²⁹⁵ See Isabelle STENGERS, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, trans. Goffrey A. Ann Arbor, Open Humanities Press, London, 2015 (2009).
and Bruno LATOUR, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, Harvard University Press, 2017.

²⁹⁶ Bruno LATOUR, "Comment j'ai rencontré l'homme qui a inventé Gaïa", in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 5th May 2018.

the label “Earth system science” designates an important and profound reconfiguration of earth sciences, aiming at bringing together disciplines which had thus far been kept separated – such as geochemistry, climatology, global ecology, oceanography etc. –, by gathering them around the study of a same object: the Earth system.²⁹⁷

Gaia therefore appears as a figure of connection, bringing together processes and entities set apart from each other – most notably, organisms and their environment. Doing so, it undermines the dualist edifice upon which modern sciences are erected – which Whitehead had diagnosed as a “bifurcation of nature” – and proposes to approach life phenomena in their overflowing complexity. To this extent, the framework provided by the Gaia hypothesis may offer a scientific articulation of Whitehead’s claim according to which, in natural philosophy, “we may not pick and choose”. The author of *the Concept of Nature* writes indeed:

For natural philosophy everything perceived is in nature. We may not pick and choose. For us the red glow of the sunset should be as much part of nature as are the molecules and electric waves by which men of science would explain the phenomenon. It is for natural philosophy to analyze how these various elements of nature are connected.²⁹⁸

Whitehead defines here the task of philosophy of nature as an *analysis of connections*, an indepth inquiry into worldly processes and modes of existence entangled in one another. The responsibility of natural philosophy resembles one of translation that would allow the red glow of the sunset and the electric waves to correspond with each other. This work of translation echoes Latour’s AIME project²⁹⁹ – An Inquiry into

²⁹⁷ Sébastien DUTREUIL, "James Lovelock and the Gaia hypothesis: 'a new look at life on Earth' ... for the life and the Earth sciences." in M. Dietrich & O. Harman (Eds), *Dreamers, Romantics and Visionaries in the Life Sciences*, University of Chicago Press, 2017. I translated from the original manuscript in French.

²⁹⁸ Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *The Concept of Nature*, p.29.

²⁹⁹ See the AIME website : <http://modesofexistence.org/>

Modes of Existence –, which aims at displaying the diversity of types of “veridiction” and expressions of experiences cohabiting within Modernity itself. Latour’s approach points toward an untamable tendency for connection – singular modes of existence, modes of expression and experience resolutely waving towards each other, fecundating each other as they evolve around each other. Latour identifies this yearning for connection in the “endless blurriness” of living organisms – the latter manifesting a strong objection to the bifurcation of nature. In the foreword to Stengers’ *Thinking with Whitehead*, he writes:

if nature really is bifurcated, no living organism would be possible, since being an organism means being the sort of thing whose primary and secondary qualities – if they did exist – are *endlessly blurred*. Since we are organisms surrounded by many other organisms, nature has not bifurcated.³⁰⁰

In *Facing Gaia*, Latour interprets Whitehead's bifurcation of nature as a diagnosis of the dis-animation of one section of the world, declared objective and inert, and the sur-animation of another section, declared conscious and free.³⁰¹ He presents Gaia as a figure of subversion that, overflowing Modernity's ontological dualism, summons us to think the connections between the plural agencies of the world without thereby yielding to a holistic conception of totality.³⁰² In this sense, Gaian philosophy channels an ontological pluralism acknowledging the coexistence of a plurality of modes of existence, or ways of inhabiting overflowing the frontiers of modern dualism. Embodying the Deleuzian realization of the rhizomatic interconnectedness of worldly beings, Latour's Gaia furthermore articulates the idea of a *dispersion of worldly agency and intentionality*, and the dissolution in this process of the distinction between organism and environment.³⁰³ In this sense, the figure of Gaia submerges the distinction between

Accessed 11.03.2019

³⁰⁰ Bruno LATOUR, *Foreword to Isabelle Stengers' Thinking with Whitehead*, p.xiii. I emphasize.

³⁰¹ Bruno LATOUR, *Face à Gaïa*, op.cit, p.107.

³⁰² Ibid, p.129.

³⁰³ Ibid, p.133.

inside and outside, culture and nature, organism and environment, individual and system, thereby subverting the dualistic structure of modern cosmology: “there is no Earth superior to its Parts. And there are no Parts either.”³⁰⁴ These words from Latour may remind us of Whitehead's oxymoronic litany on the relationship between God and the World:

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.

It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.³⁰⁵

As we can see, Whitehead's constant emphasis on relatedness in his philosophy of the organism also infuses his doctrine of God, where God and the world are described as two unalienable, interdependent poles of a common process of creative prehension. Isabelle Stengers, who brilliantly analyzed the centrality of Whitehead's theological speculations in his wider thought, seems to echo his antithetical insights as she describes Gaia as an “unprecedented or forgotten form of transcendence”³⁰⁶ and presents the brutal intrusion of ticklish planetary processes as stemming from within the immanence of the world. Thus, for Stengers too, the ontological entanglement and blurring of boundaries figured by Gaia subverts traditional conceptual polarities, including theological ones. Gaia appears indeed as that which garners both the roots and the waves of worldly being, that which conditions its overflowing, a “constant improvisation”³⁰⁷ from the many processes of worldly becoming, a primordial and chaotic force of openness, connection and eventful creation. She designates *a plural rootedness that dissolves the modern narrative of nature and culture* and discloses an unsettling propensity for connections underlying worldly entanglement.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, New York, Free Press, 1978 (1929).

³⁰⁶ Isabelle STENGERS, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, op.cit.

³⁰⁷ Bruno LATOUR, *Face à Gaïa*, op.cit., p.144

Before dwelling further on the *créolité* of Gaia, fed by her yearning for connection, let us shortly summon the contribution of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's bio-phenomenology for a Gaian thought of the intertwining of worldly beings. The project of phenomenological inquiry envisions the possibility of disclosure of being as embedded in the relationship between consciousness and phenomena – in other words, between the self and the world. Phenomenology proposes to think the ontological entanglement of consciousness, its self-transcendence stemming from its being enmeshed in the consciousness of others, and the immanence of an alterity that is always experienced and thus internalized. By establishing the primordially of one such entanglement with other co-inhabitants and suggesting that there is no escape from this ontological relationship, which we have to confront and from which we must proceed, it points toward *the embeddedness of consciousness in other processes of worldly becoming*. In an article about the “living body”³⁰⁸, Carl B. Sachs confronts the intuitions of Hans Jonas developed in his philosophy of life with Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on the embodiment of consciousness. He shows how the perspective of bio-phenomenology articulates the inter-subjectivity of worldly beings with their inter-corporeality, thereby offering a serious way to bypass the Cartesian dichotomy between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. Against this legacy, the coincidence of inwardness with outwardness manifested in the living body compels indeed an alternate way of thinking the world. This essential intuition of phenomenology, which Merleau-Ponty formulated in terms of the entanglement of the open life with the alien life³⁰⁹, I suggest, is crucial for the philosophical reflections initiated by the environmental crisis. One of these was formulated by Bruno Latour, whose analysis of the ecological issue indicates that there is no Nature outside of Culture – a realization which had also been expressed in phenomenological terms as “there is no phenomena outside consciousness” – *and vice versa*. We dwell in between and amongst each other. In this light, the environmental crisis

³⁰⁸ Carl B. SACHS, “Thinking of the Living Body in Hans Jonas and Merleau-Ponty”, The University of New Mexico.

URL: <https://philosophy.unm.edu/news-events/sw-seminar/seminar/files/living%2520body.doc&sa=U&ved=0ahUKEwiaybbPlb3bAhWCW8AKHYskBnEQFggEMAA&client=internal-uds-cse&cx=002339348054261203620:nmul0lyyfju&usg=AOvVaw3LKW1ZXFxWGlqmS1XUpYxM>
Accessed 05.06.2018.

³⁰⁹ Maurice MERLEAU-PONTY, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, New York: Routledge, 2002, p.412.

would signify the dissolution of boundaries and any ultimate authority contained in their confines, borders of sovereign empires to which we could have surrendered the unbearable course of our becoming. This dissolution of the boundaries discloses a worldly entanglement, a process of swarming³¹⁰ characterized by a profusion of roots and trajectories. To this extent, the environmental crisis compels us to no longer philosophize about the world, but *within* a plurality of worldly becomings. What remains once frontiers of worldly being are tumbling down, and old ontological boundaries are proclaimed obsolete? It seems that processes of becoming do not have anywhere to dwell but in the liminality of the world.

The créolité of the world: inhabiting in-between the world

Manifesting the obsolescence of modern dualistic cosmology, the ontological entanglement disclosed by the environmental crisis points toward the challenge of *dwelling in-between*. Dwelling in between worldly beings, their compelling presence and haunting absence, in between geological eras, times, continents, national borders, ecosystems, cultures and languages, to inhabit the world and embrace its manifold processes of becoming. Particularly sensitive to the overwhelming presence of the other, the Martiniquais poet and philosopher Edouard Glissant developed a Poetics of Relation³¹¹ which attempts to think the complexity, hybridity and nomadity of our relationships, along with the particular sense of belonging that proceeds from them. Glissant's thought of the *créolité* thus engages with the event of the encounter as arising within the littoral, or liminal zones of being – across cultural and territorial frontiers, here and elsewhere, inside and outside, and across the porous boundaries of the self. In a particularly fruitful formulation, Jean Bernabé, a seminal figure of the *créolité* literary movement, writes:

³¹⁰ William CONNOLLY, *Facing The Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming*, 2017.

³¹¹ Edouard GLISSANT, *Philosophie de la Relation. Poésie en étendue*, Gallimard, Paris, 2009.

the literature of *créolité* is a literature that unveils the Here from the inside, without cutting it from its relationship to the Elsewhere.³¹²

Unveiling the Here through the immanent presence of the Elsewhere, the *créolité* movement echoes the Gnostic yearning for an Elsewhere, a beyond only determined by the desire to overcome the Here. Dominated by anxieties of place and belonging, the Carribean poetics of location and dislocation appears indeed to channel the gnostic being in the world. For Glissant, the trope of the island provides the symbol of home as a floating inbetweenness, surrounded by the threat of estranging seas. The *créolité*, however, seems to answer the nihilism of the Gnostic lament with an ethics of relation that teaches us to dwell in the sandy, intermediate space between island and sea, amongst worldly beings as well as in the liquid borderland between the here and the elsewhere. “Originally stamped with the wish of being domiciliated in the here of our being”³¹³, the Créoles radically distinguish themselves from the Gnostics in that they aim to recover an alienated sense of situatedness, hanging on to the specific density and opacity of the *locale*³¹⁴. Emphasizing littoral zones, the thought of *créolité* deconstructs the idea of an absolute belonging and suggests that identity is constructed in relation – in the encounter with others. Edouard Glissant draws upon Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of « rhizome » to think the diversity of our rootedness and the entanglement of our identities: the poet defines the rhizome as a root that grows towards other roots, without repressing them but rather strengthening itself in the company of others. This image fosters an understanding of identity as a sharing rather than an iso-

³¹² Jean BERNABE, « De la Négritude à la Créolité : éléments pour une approche comparée », *L’Amérique entre les langues*, Volume 28, numéro 2-3, automne–hiver 1992, p.37.
« La littérature de la créolité est une littérature qui dévoile l’Ici de l’intérieur sans le couper de sa relation avec l’Ailleurs. » My translation.

³¹³ Jean BERNABE, Patrick CHAMOISEAU & Raphaël CONFIANT, *Eloge de la Créolité*, 1993, Paris: Gallimard, p.20.

« Originellement saisie du vœu de nous domicilier dans l’ici de notre être » My translation.

³¹⁴ J. Michael DASH in “Farming Bones and Writing Rocks: Rethinking a Caribbean Poetics of (Dis)Location”, p.67.

URL : <http://www.shibboleths.net/1/1/Dash,Michael.pdf>

Accessed 11.01.2019.

lation and prepares us to approach the intense complexity unveiled along the creolization of the world³¹⁵. The authors of *Eloge de la créolité* describe the latter as "an annihilation of false universality, monolinguisism, and purity."³¹⁶ The idea of créolité thus points towards an ethics of belonging rooted in relationality and hybridity, which J. Michael Dash calls a « relational rootedness »³¹⁷, and which shall inspire our political reflection in chapter 5. If we dwell in littoral zones associated with indeterminacy and exposure, and if, for Glissant, the sense of place is uncircumventable³¹⁸, then “où at-terrir?” asks Bruno Latour³¹⁹. Where should we dwell? Which land should we inhabit? We shall go back to this question as we engage in our next chapter with the political dimension of dwelling in-between. For now, let us focus on its philosophical unfoldings.

As Glissant identifies a process of “archipelization of the world”, he describes the world as a profusion of islands floating amidst an ocean of inbetweenness. Being in the world as in an archipelago would thus imply to embrace its oceanic, abyssal inbetweenness. This thought echoes Voegelin’s analysis of Gnosticism, which suggested that the cure to the gnostic pathological being in the world should include a rediscovery of our metaxic being in the world, that is, of our being in-between, with and within the world. Such a recovery involves bridging the gnostic abyss separating God from the world, as well as embracing our dwelling in the metaxic gulf, so as to mend the Voegelinian *anoia* – the forgetting of our ontological participation into the process of worldly being. This pursuit of a dwelling in-between in order to inhabit the world points toward the idea of wandering, so often praised in philosophical thought. Edouard Glissant conceives of wandering not as a boundless dispersion, but rather as the becomings and encounters we had not foreseen:

³¹⁵ Institut du Tout-Monde, *Mondialité – Répertoire vidéo E. Glissant*, 08.01.2013, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ttqh1iIk_pc
Accessed 11.01.2019.

³¹⁶ Jean BERNABE, Patrick CHAMOISEAU & Raphaël CONFiant, op. cit., p.28.

³¹⁷ J. Michael DASH, art. cit., p.67.

« La créolité est une annihilation de la fausse universalité, du monolinguisisme et de la pureté. » My translation.

³¹⁸ Edouard GLISSANT, *Tout-Monde*, Gallimard, 1993, p.29 : « Le lieu est incontournable. »

³¹⁹ Bruno LATOUR, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, Polity Press, 2018.

*The thought of wandering is not the distraught thought of dispersion, but that of our unforeseen rallies, through which we migrate from the absolutes of Being to the variations of Relation, where Being reveals itself as beings, and where essence and substance, dwelling and movement are undistinguished. Wandering is not exploration, colonial or not, nor it is the abandoning to misguided ways. It knows how to be immobile, and how to carry away. Through the thought of wandering we refuse the unique roots that kill around them: the thought of wandering is that of solidary rootings and rhizomic roots.*³²⁰

Edouard Glissant offers here a compelling reflection tying together the thoughts of créolité, rhizomic rootedness and an apophatic philosophy of wandering. Wanderers are uncanny: unknowable, unclassifiable, undisciplined, they dwell in-between and perpetually overflow the borders of being as they overcome their origins and embrace the paths of their becoming. From their perpetual dwelling in-between, and from their créole resistance to identitary confinements, we might learn that worldly becoming discloses itself as an oceanic wandering and an overflowing of ontological segregations.

C. A baroque world of overflowing

Between the folds: the origami universe

The reflections which inaugurated the present chapter focused on the potential contribution of process thought for a philosophy of the present environmental mutation, and how the idea of openness might inform an alternative ecological thought for present times. The second section has explored the resources of Gaian ontologies to

³²⁰ Edouard GLISSANT, *Philosophie de la Relation*. op.cit, p.61-62 : « La pensée de l'errance n'est pas l'éperdue pensée de la dispersion mais celle de nos ralliements non prétendus d'avance, par quoi nous migrons des absolus de l'Être aux variations de la Relation, où se révèle l'être-comme-étant, l'indistinction de l'essence et de la substance, de la demeure et du mouvement. L'errance n'est pas l'exploration, coloniale ou non, ni l'abandon à des errements. Elle sait être immobile, et emporter. Par la pensée de l'errance nous refusons les racines uniques et qui tuent autour d'elles : la pensée de l'errance est celle des enracinements solidaires et des racines en rhizome. » My translation and emphasis.

think the planetary entanglement disclosed by a global ecological crisis: we thus went from the openness of worldly becoming to its entanglement. From the manifold processes of becoming, ontologically open to unforeseen trajectories of being, to their creolization, their fertile or infecund encounters, ambiguous enmeshment with each other. Are not these two ideas of open becoming and Gaian creolization both about openness? The former manifests a processual openness to trajectories of becoming, while the latter sanctifies an ontological openness to other beings or becomings of the world. Both the processes of becoming and the creolizing encounters with others are indeed conditioned by an openness which appears absolutely primordial to worldly being. How to articulate both movements? Which metaphor, which image might allow us to bridge the créole entanglement of the world, with its precarious, contingent, wavering processes of becoming?

Contemporary environmental scientists as well as philosophers of the ecological mutation have pointed toward a shared process of creation at stake in the world. The evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis has thus coined the term of *holobiont* to designate ecological units as a superposition of beings folded into one another, all entangled into a common process of symbiosis³²¹. More recently, Eric Bapteste has argued in his book *Tous entrelacés*³²² that biological entities are all intertwined in each other, thereby challenging the notion of individual and even species. Pointing toward a complex process of collective evolution, Bapteste's work implies to recompose disciplines around these collaborative networks and thus to redefine the terms of the evolution theory. In *Facing Gaia*, Bruno Latour lays the groundwork for a political philosophy of the world embracing this pivotal realization of a shared, intermingled agency of worldly beings, which no figure of totality nor individuality could ever capture. In a lecture on the body politic, he writes:

living forms are folded many times over because they have engulfed the outside world inside the provisional border of their selves. Fold is another name for overlap.³²³

³²¹ Lynn MARGULIS, *Symbiosis as a Source of Evolutionary Innovation*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 1991.

³²² Eric BAPTESTE, *Tous entrelacés*. Paris, Belin, 2018.

³²³ Bruno LATOUR, "Does the Body Politic Need a New Body?", Yusko Ward-Phillips lecture, University of Notre Dame, 3rd of November 2016.

Before him, Gilles Deleuze had drawn upon the legacy of Leibniz's thought and argued in *The Fold* that Baroque philosophy provides tools for analysing contemporary arts, politics and sciences. Deleuze argues that Leibniz anticipates contemporary developments of philosophy, notably those in process thought and the philosophy of the event – Alfred North Whitehead indeed was inspired by the works of Leibniz. I suggest that the Leibnizian metaphor of the fold might enrich a reflection on the process of creation happening in the liminal space between entangled worldly beings. The image of the fold articulates indeed the idea of a littoral interface between inside and outside, thereby echoing the debate on modern dualism and the irreducible process of co-penetration disclosed by the ecological crisis. In the first pages of *the Fold*, Deleuze thus calls for the contribution of someone “who can at once account for nature and decipher the soul, who can peer into the crannies of matter and read into the folds of the soul.”³²⁴ He contends further that *the Fold* intends to “fashion a way of representing what Leibniz will always affirm: a correspondence and even a communication between the two levels, between the two labyrinths, between the pleats of matter and the folds in the soul.”³²⁵ In this perspective, the Deleuzian-Leibnizian enterprise appears to merge with Whitehead's wish to mend the bifurcation of nature, as well as with Latour's dedication to bypass the modern nature-culture cosmology. As a metaphor of connection, the fold “radiates and ramifies everywhere in the geography of experience, such that we can imagine movement of light and sound, together, as folds of ethereal matter that waft and waver”.³²⁶ This omnipresence of the fold, leading Deleuze to describe the world as an origami universe, was also felt by the origami artist Paul Jackson, who notes in the Peabody Award-winning documentary *Between the Folds* that:

If you look around the room or out of the window, and list how many things fold: this sweater, the skin, if I talk to you then the air is folding, even the galaxy wheeling around and folding itself over years

³²⁴ Gilles DELEUZE, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*, Continuum, 2006 (1988). p.3.

³²⁵ *Ibid*, p.4.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, xiii.

as it goes around. Mountains and valleys go through the same process, even DNA is folded. You and I were born from folding.³²⁷

For Deleuze too, the earth moves in flows and folds: the whole universe is a process of folding, unfolding and re-folding where inside and outside co-penetrate each other in a baroque process of creation. He sees in Leibniz a philosopher of habitat and ecology, winding through organic and inorganic worlds. Through the Leibnizian metaphor of the fold, “an exquisitely sensuous view of the world”³²⁸ is thus obtained, or recovered: it fosters indeed a sense of the world particularly sensitive to the creativity of beings folding each other into an “origami universe”, as well as an understanding of creation as arising from the porous space where inside and outside collide. The art of origami illustrates a direct engagement with this process, embracing the creative articulation of inside and outside and revealing its metamorphic dimension. Origami simultaneously exhibits the facts that all is tied together, and creation is entangled. In a revealing manner, the artists and scientists interviewed for *Between the Folds* consistently draw upon the lexical fields of the possible, creation, complexity, chaos and co-penetration as they reflect on the art of origamis. One of them observes that “the paper wants to fold itself”, noting the immanence of the creative process and the entanglement of agencies in such a process. Throughout the documentary, and from the opening quotation by Henri Matisse³²⁹, it is repeatedly suggested that limits, boundaries, entanglement are liberating and even condition the process of creation itself, folding and unfolding its way from nothing to something.

The metaphor of the fold thus provides a way to think the twofold experience of an ontological entanglement and of an open, perpetual and reciprocal movement of

³²⁷ Paul JACKSON in *Between the Folds*, dir. Vanessa GOULD, PBS Independent Lens, 2:12. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFrDN5eYPOQ>
Website : <https://www.betweenthefolds.com/>
Accessed 23.01.2019.

³²⁸ Gilles DELEUZE, *The Fold*, op.cit, xiii.

³²⁹ “Much of the beauty that arises in art comes from the struggle an artist wages with his limited medium.” Henri Matisse.

creation. It also appears as a particularly fruitful tool to articulate the form of connections woven by worldly beings and arising from the liminal, metaxic space of inbetweenness in which they gravitate. The image of the fold points indeed toward an entangled process of co-creation occurring in between, within or beyond boundaries of the inside and the outside. Doing so, it echoes the blurring of dualistic boundaries witnessed by thinkers of the ecological crisis and outlines a dynamic of *overflowing* of such boundaries – just picture the movement of a sheet of paper folding itself and suddenly liberating an unforeseen dimension, disclosing a side which had until then remained hidden. In *Clouds of the Impossible*³³⁰, Catherine Keller bridges the awareness of our planetary entanglement with the idea of an apophatic open, articulating the knowledge of a possibly catastrophic outcome with the haunting hope of an alternative and convivial inhabiting. An apophatic thought might indeed support our understanding of the metaxic tension between entanglement and openness in which we find ourselves. Keller’s approach reminds us of Glissant’s thought of a wandering conditioned by our créole rootedness. The metaphor of the overflowing, I suggest, ties together the density of our vernacular entanglement to the world with the open, indeterminate trajectories of our becoming. Perpetually, indomitably, we overflow our roots as much as we are overflowed by them.

Telling the world as rooted overflowing

“The world always overflows nature”³³¹ writes Bruno Latour. In *Facing Gaia*, he argues against the cosmology of nature as a holistic reduction of worldly beings’ agency. The concept of nature, as well as the whole cosmology built around it, would prove incapable to seize worldly processes of becoming and the creation at stake in them. The modern technicist and mechanist metaphors were indeed applied by modern cosmology to qualify the being of the earth, the living organisms and all life processes.

³³⁰ Catherine KELLER, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, Columbia University Press, New-York, 2014.

³³¹ Bruno LATOUR, *Facing Gaia*, op.cit., p.122.

For Latour, the climate mutation calls for an alternative thought of the world, away from the dualistic pitfalls of the modern concept of nature. More precisely, the advent of a new climatic regime would summon us to think anew the connections between worldly agencies without thereby giving in to a holistic thought of totality. What is there more to the world than nature? What overflows in the world, and wherefrom?

Other philosophers have pointed toward a thought of the overflowing before. Drawing from his thought of the *créolité*, Edouard Glissant contends that we are “un-circumventable”, and thus cannot be contained. Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy of dis-enclosure similarly describes a process of “dismantling and disassembling of enclosed borders, enclosures, fences” waving toward a “deconstruction of property – that of man and that of world.”³³² The French *débordement* literally designates a movement of going beyond the borders, of overcoming them, thereby indicating an irrepressible crossing of boundaries. In the introduction to this chapter, I proposed the metaphor of the flood to approach the present environmental crisis as an event overflowing our conceptual boundaries and submerging us with worldly beings and processes we had insulated ourselves from. The metaphor of the overflowing echoes and prolongates these introductory reflections. It flows from our analysis of the newly disclosed openness, then *créole* rootedness of the world, and outlines alongside them a metaphorical trio for an alternative thought of the world: *rooted in créolité, the world overflows through its ontological openness*. A philosophy of the rooted overflowing, I argue, would reverse a gnostic being in the world primarily characterized by *unrooting* and *thirst*.

As we learnt in the three previous chapters, the gnostic drama of being in the world is led by an unquenchable yearning for a beyond-the-world and is embodied by the existential posture of a devouring thirst. The gnostic narratives thus illustrate an *incapacity to dwell* in a world perceived as ontologically deficient – the gnostic theology depicts indeed a world doomed by an original rupture from God and therefore

³³² Jean-Luc NANCY, *Dis-Enclosure. The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Fordham University Press, 2008. p.160-161.

agonizing under the absence of divine being. The gnostic cosmogonies recounted by Jonas and Voegelin are thus dominated by the lexical and metaphorical fields of the thirst, the yearning, the absence, the beyond, the elsewhere – as well as that of the strange and hostile. Yet, as Levinas noted with much perceptiveness, if « real life is elsewhere », « we are in the world »³³³. In the strange we must dwell, and from this groundless engenderment we were born. Emmanuel Levinas' endeavor to locate the romantic desire for a beyond within the world itself echoes the gnostic expression of an existential in-between, which Voegelin proposes to illuminate through the classical concept of metaxy. Stuck between the world and the home, the gnostic wandering illustrates what Voegelin defines as “the existence in the tension of the in-between”³³⁴. Insofar as it manifests the pitfalls of cosmological dualism and expresses a metaxic experience of an existence in the abyss, stuck in between isolated poles of being, it might point the way out of the dualist reduction while maintaining a sense of being in the world as tension and mediation. Both Jonas and Voegelin emphasize in their analysis of Gnosticism, as well as in the rest of their philosophical thought, a duality which should not be reduced but rather bypassed: between god and the world, spirit and matter for the former, between immanence and transcendence, time and eternity for the latter. Bruno Latour's philosophical treatment of the nature-culture, object-subject, individual-whole, and even global-local polarities appears to fall within the same pattern. All three philosophers suggest that dualism simultaneously obscures and discloses a metaxic tension which resolutely overflows dualistic boundaries. In this light, far from expressing a thirst, the metaxic being in the world illustrated by the Gnostics manifests a metaxic overflowing: an overflowing of the in-between, a flood of the world submerging the borders of being. This reversal of the gnostic being in the world, this simple transition from the trope of the thirst to that of the overflowing might turn out fruitful. It immediately unveils the world as an overwhelming presence rather than an excruciating absence. But then again, what overflows in the world?

³³³ Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totalité et Infini*, Éditions Le Livre de Poche, Paris, 1961, p. 21

³³⁴ Eric VOEGELIN, *Anamnesis*, op. cit, p.294.

As he expands on the imperative of finding home amidst the present disorientation and the problems of scale arising with the ecological mutation, Bruno Latour writes in *Down to Earth* that “we all are overflowed twice: by the too large as by the too small”³³⁵. Both the infinite complexity of our entanglements with the world and the perspective of its precarious becoming are overflowing the cosmological boundaries of nature. Just as the Gnostics and their modern Existentialist siblings had sensed, the abyss of the world leaves no ground, no essence, no eternal landscape or still-life, no ultimate authority to which one could surrender – in a word, *no nature*. Being in the world is vertiginous in at least two ways: we are simultaneously rooted in a network of attachments and belongings, overflowed by the unrenderable *créolité* of our entanglements, and open to unprecedented trajectories of becoming. We are rooted and overflowed. The thought of such a rooted overflowing might enable us to better approach an environmental crisis which confronts us to a planetary entanglement and an utter openness in the possibility of the collapse of capitalist civilization or the extinction of life on earth. The ecological mutation manifests indeed at the same time our engenderment and co-dependency with worldly beings, as well as the openness and contingency of worldly becoming, standing on the edge of non-being as we approach global catastrophes.

This emerging tension between two poles which I propose to name “rootedness” and “overflowing” draws upon the words of Virginia Woolf, who expressed this dwelling in-between as she wrote in *The Waves*: « I am rooted but I flow »³³⁶. Unfolding the metaphor of the liquidity of worldly existence, *The Waves* breaks down boundaries and blurs distinctions in quest for a fuller dwelling in the world: between worlds organic and mundane, between the characters’ lives entangled in one another, between childhood and adulthood, between natural and cultural rhythms. As the characters’ lives unfurl, framed by depictions of coastal scenes, Woolf illuminates with the metaphor of the waves the porosity of consciousness and deconstructs modern conceptions of self and community, along with the segregation between natural and cultural worlds.

³³⁵ Bruno LATOUR, *Où atterrir ? Comment s’orienter en politique*, La Découverte, 2017, Paris. p.27.

³³⁶ Virginia WOOLF, *The Waves*. Cambridge Press, New York, 1987 (1931), p.259.

Johnny Flynn leans upon the same watery metaphor as he sings in *The Water*: « the river is always my home », thereby conveying the sense of finding home amidst the fluidity and impermanence of worldly existence. This echoes again with the symbol mobilized by Romain Gary's Goncourt winning novel, *The Roots of Heaven*, relating the story of a crusading environmentalist which takes on the dimension of a quest for the salvation of humanity: against the gnostic intuition of the otherworldliness of the divine, Gary's novel suggests that the numinous takes roots in the world and distillates hope amidst the destructions left behind the procession of Modernity. While he presents the romantic yearning for an elsewhere as ingrained in the "human soul", Romain Gary suggests that such aspirations – the roots of heaven – stem from the world:

The roots were countless and infinite in their variety and their beauty, and some were deeply ingrained in the human soul – an unremitting and tormented aspiration oriented towards the heights – a need for the infinite, a thirst, a sense of elsewhere, an unlimited yearning.³³⁷

Unfolding the metaphor of the root, the symbol of the tree furthermore appears to be particularly expressive: while its roots tend to entangle themselves around each other, the tree, rooted in the soil of the earth, overflows these roots as its spores are led to impregnate other beings beyond the porous boundaries of its own being. The roots of heaven might thus also symbolize this metaxic tension newly disclosed by the environmental crisis – the rooted overflowing we have been reflecting on.

To land, as we are summoned by Bruno Latour, in a world bathed in the new light of the environmental crisis, and thereby mend the gnostic alienation from the world, implies to preserve this metaxic tension which I propose to approach as a rooted

³³⁷ Romain GARY, *Les Racines du Ciel*, Paris, Gallimard, « Folio », 1972 (1956), p.266.

My translation. « Les racines étaient innombrables et infinies dans leur variété et leur beauté et quelques-unes étaient profondément enfoncées dans l'âme humaine – une inspiration incessante et tourmentée orientée en haut et en avant – un besoin d'infini, une soif, un pressentiment d'ailleurs, une attente illimitée. »

overflowing. A tension which, as I hope to have shown in chapter three, gnostic cosmologies tend to hypostatize into two separate entities – God and the World, Culture and Nature, Spirit and Matter, Object and Subject, Eternity and History, etc. Latour thus identifies the necessity to be bound to a soil while preserving and cultivating the abundance of our attachments. The *créolité* of our attachments, connections and rootedness oversteps the boundaries of the self, nations, species or cultures: it overflows an engenderment that cannot be contained within the monolithic borders of a single origin, but is perpetual and plural. Mending the alienated gnostic being in the world thus frames the challenge of a resilient inhabiting as that of dwelling in a rooted overflowing: to simultaneously root ourselves in the overflowing of worldly becomings, and to be overflowed by our *créole* rootedness. A rooted overflowing designates therefore the type of metaxy unveiled by the present environmental crisis: a being suspended amidst a multiplicity of modes of existence, interlaced with worldly beings, interwoven with their trajectories of becoming, a worldly entanglement blended with a worldly openness, a being penetrated and fecundated by beings who sow the world with us, a being in the world disclosed as a being and creating with the world. Ultimately, the ecological mutation also indicates the overflowing of sterile ontological categories which had intended to seize and crystallize a process of creation of the world by the world.

Conclusion

What worlds are coming with the flood of the world? The reflections unfolded in this chapter have drawn upon the idea that the environmental mutation uncovers something about the world which has until then remained unthought by modern cosmology. Through the lens of a hermeneutics of Gnosticism, I have intended to draw from the phenomenological potential of the ecological crisis and approached the latter as an event embodying a mutation in the way we conceive of, and therefore also are in the world. The pivotal idea I attempted to articulate about the cosmological mutation induced by the environmental crisis arose as a paradox: something major about worldly being and our being in the world is being eclipsed by modern cosmology, which has intensified, if not engendered the advent of the present ecological crisis, the latter reveals precisely what had been obscured by the cosmology which gave rise to it. This cosmology, which I refer to as modern dualism, finds itself overflowed by what the ecological crisis so concretely manifests: the end of an ontological segregation which justified a monolithic, hegemonic and imperialist inhabiting, the dissolution of the frontiers of being between the self and the world, nature and culture, inside and outside, immanence and transcendence... and, through this dissolution, the opening to a *créolité* of worldly beings amidst whom we must inhabit. How can we learn to encounter all the beings which modern dualism had reduced and cohabit with them? Edouard Glissant claims that the contemporary “creolization of the world” is such that it requires a change of narratives. Because the complexity of our entanglements is inextricable and, to a certain extent, ineffable, the Martiniquais philosopher convokes the poets to work towards alternative imaginaries. A poetic dwelling might indeed preserve the tension of our rooted overflowing, for poets encounter worldly beings and merge with their becoming without thereby diluting and losing themselves to the alterity of the world.³³⁸ The cosmological challenge of preserving the metaxy of the world against the gnostic tendencies of Modernity thus appears closely tied to the act

³³⁸ Institut du Tout-Monde, *Mondialité – Répertoire vidéo E. Glissant*, 08.01.2013, URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ttqh1iIk_pc
Accessed 11.01.2019.

of inhabiting the world, and thereby unveils the political dimension of an ontological system.

In an article on the Inquisition and the Disenchantment of the World, the historian Andrew Keitt suggests that the development by religious and political authorities of an ontological segregation between natural and supernatural realms coincided with a socio-political order committed to enforcing discipline upon its members:

[The] conflation of the natural and the supernatural was a standard complaint of the Inquisition as well. The religious enthusiast was in essence guilty of a category mistake; by confusing causal categories the enthusiast threatened an ontological order increasingly dedicated to policing the boundary between the natural and the supernatural realms and at the same time a social order increasingly dedicated to policing the behavior of its members.³³⁹

This observation reveals the theologico-political dimension of the modern concept of nature, arising from a theological segregation between worldly and divine realms of being, and thereby compelling an inhabiting of the world characterized by a sense of boundaries, rupture and disconnection – a being in the world previously referred to as gnostic. Mending the dualist rift between nature and culture, building bridges across the abyssal openness of worldly being and weaving the web of our planetary entanglements thus appear as an eminently political task. Likewise, the consciousness of the contingency and precariousness of worldly processes of becoming compels an ethics of responsible inhabiting in the open, informed by the realization that being in the world is also becoming and creating with the world. What might be the contribution of alternative metaphors of worldly being like those presented in this chapter for a concrete, alternative inhabiting? What political potential bear metaphors of the openness, the Gaian créolité, the fold or the rooted overflowing? For Bruno Latour, the

³³⁹ Andrew KEITT, “Religious Enthusiasm, the Spanish Inquisition, and the Disenchantment of the World”, in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol.65, No. 2, April 2004, pp.231-250, University of Pennsylvania Press, p.246.

figure of Gaia abolishes the idea of kingdom and shakes modern representations of power, order and authority:

After Gaia, literally, there is no kingdom left: no living or animated being obeys a superior order which would dominate them or to which they ought to adapt – this is true of bacteria, lions as well as human societies. This does not mean that all living are free in the simplistic sense of individualism, for they are interlaced, folded, intricated in each other. This means that the key-question of freedom and dependency *equally concerns* humans and the other partners of the natural world.³⁴⁰

Gaia thus rises as the conveyor of a political as well as cosmological anti-imperialism. The sense of anarchist equality it carries, along with the subversive energy channelled by metaphors such as those of openness, créolité or overflowing, challenge not only modern perceptions of the world, but also the way we inhabit: “it is not about ecology: merely about the politics of the living”.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ Bruno LATOUR, « Comment j'ai rencontré l'homme qui a inventé Gaïa », *Bibliobs*, May 2018. Own translation.

« Mais après Gaia, littéralement, il n'y a plus de royaume : aucun vivant, aucun animé, n'obéit à un ordre supérieur à lui et qui le dominerait ou auquel il lui suffirait de s'adapter – cela est vrai des bactéries, comme des lions ou des sociétés humaines. Cela ne veut pas dire que tous les vivants sont libres au sens un peu simplet de l'individualisme puisqu'ils sont entrelacés, pliés, intriqués les uns dans les autres. Cela veut dire que la question clef de la liberté et de la dépendance *vaut également* pour les humains comme pour les partenaires du ci-devant monde naturel. »
URL : <https://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/idees/20180504.OBS6207/comment-j-ai-rencontre-l-homme-qui-a-invente-gaia-par-bruno-latour.html>

Accessed 22.01.2019.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

**HOW TO DWELL?
POLITICS OF THE INHABITING AND
LOVE OF THE WORLD**

*“The love in the world passes into the love in heaven,
and floods back again into the world.”*

— Alfred North Whitehead,
Process and Reality.

“Love is a touch and yet not a touch”

— J.D. Salinger,
The Heart of a Broken Story.

“The world is a verb”

— Donna Haraway,
SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far.

Introduction

Gnosticism and the political task of inhabiting

How might our hermeneutics of Gnosticism inform present politics in the context of the environmental crisis? Our reflection has thus far focused on the cosmological dimension of Gnosticism, emphasizing how certain metaphors condition our perception of the world, and thereby also our being in the world. Both in the analyses of Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin, Gnosticism embodies an alienated relationship between humanity and the world, and designates a pathological inhabiting of the world. Drawing upon their understanding of Gnosticism, I have suggested in chapter 3 that the lens of Gnosticism illuminates the way Modernity inhabits the world – throwing light upon one amongst many ways to inhabit, and articulating many dimensions of our inhabiting: existential, spiritual, cosmological, poetic, ethical, political... Maintaining this focus on the inhabiting provided by the perspective of Gnosticism, I have then proposed in chapter 4 some alternative metaphors of worldly being, this in the purpose of approaching the world through a lens different than Gnosticism and opening other horizons of thought, perception and experience that might nurture an alternative inhabiting. This last chapter intends to uncover the eminently political dimension of Gnosticism, by articulating the modalities of this alternative inhabiting. It presents itself as the political development of the cosmo-ontological approach proposed in the previous chapters, unfolding into a reflection on the consequences of a hermeneutics of Gnosticism for contemporary political philosophy and for a politics of the present. I argue that the hermeneutics of Gnosticism, focusing on the liminal, tensional and kaleidoscopic nature of our inhabiting, also reminds us of its inalienable political dimension, thereby redefining the art of politics as one of proper inhabiting of the common world. In this light, the environmental issue appears archetypical of the political: it raises indeed in the most acute manner the challenge of composing and inhabiting a world of precarious becomings amidst an overflowing alterity of worldly beings. I therefore

propose to explore the ways in which the advent of the present ecological crisis summons us to redefine the conceptual framework of politics, and how our hermeneutics of Gnosticism might support such a redefinition.

This mutation of political philosophy can be broken into three main ideas which proceed from our ontological reflections: firstly, the environmental crisis unveils the apocalyptic scope of politics, laying emphasis on its profound liminality, its eschatological density and pointing toward the delicate task of *inhabiting the event*. Secondly, the imperative of an ethical thought and action amidst the entangled openness of worldly beings calls out for politics as the art of responsibility, seizing the challenge of *inhabiting with(in) others*. Lastly, the gnostic complaint of a worldless wandering indicates the concern of finding home amidst the aquatic processes of worldly becoming, and ultimately uncovers politics as the art of *inhabiting the world with love*.

Inhabiting the event of the environmental crisis, with other beings of the world and with love, all appear as attempts to dwell in the liminality of the world. In this chapter, I propose to explore different meanings this notion of liminality may take on, and examine its potential contribution for a political thought of the inhabiting. I shall prolong our reflection on the inbetweenness of worldly becomings and approach the political challenge of inhabiting the world as one of dwelling in transitions: between shifting times, places, borders, civilizations, species, beings of the world. A political thought of the liminal suggests that politics arises within a space of open inbetweenness allowing the encounter with an alterity – the space between worldly beings, between us and the world. It thereby also frames the challenge of metaxic inhabiting as a political task, where it falls upon the political to sustain the precarious tension of being in the world, and to secure a space of openness for this tension to abide. We may find in Bruno Latour’s notion of critical zones a variation of this idea. Referring to “a

spot on the envelope of the biosphere”³⁴², ticklish spots on Gaia’s skin reacting promptly to our actions, critical zones might offer a less paralyzing account of political processes than an essentializing notion like the Anthropocene. Insofar as they redistribute the fluxes and cycles of various heterogeneous agencies without unifying them into single entities, critical zones “open politically many alternative courses of action that the face-to-face of Human and Nature does not allow.”³⁴³ The notion of critical zones also “entails an attention, a capacity to feel what happens and the necessity to be cautions, careful, clever and informed in a way that would be different if the zone was just a chunk of “space”.”³⁴⁴ The question of how to live in these critical zones and how to inhabit them could thus redefine the issue of political action in a context of environmental mutation with dominant political systems resistant to addressing it. Learning to inhabit critical zones with resilience and embrace the metaxic inbetweenness of the world in the catastrophic times of the ecological crisis situate political action in the *here and now* of an event summoning us, against the gnostic worldlessness, to inhabit the world.

³⁴² Bruno LATOUR, “Some advantages of the notion of “Critical Zone” for Geopolitics”, Geochemistry of the Earth’s Surface meeting, GES – 10.

URL: <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/P-169-GAILLARDET-pdf.pdf>
Accessed 11.01.2019.

³⁴³ Ibid. p.2.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

A. Politics of the ecological Apocalypse

“*The end is where we start from*”

— T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*.

The Apocalypse seems a widespread mytheme in the narrative structure of civilizations, of which modern cosmology offers many variations. In environmental literature, ranging from environmental humanities to political ecology and sci-fi, the trope of the end of the world is omnipresent and allows us to bestow a cosmological meaning upon the contemporary political context. Which meaning does the trope of the Apocalypse convey for present politics? Why should we approach the present times through the lens of the Apocalypse, and how could a hermeneutics of the ecological Apocalypse contribute to the political philosophy of the environment? The theme of the Apocalypse articulates an organic link between politics and religion, and entails many possible configurations – some more reactionary than subversive. To this extent, and following Carl Schmitt’s famous claim according to which “*all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts*”³⁴⁵, it invites us to mobilize the potential resources of the theologico-political for approaching the present ecological crisis.

While the etymology of the word crisis, from the Ancient Greek *κρίσις*, indicates both a disruption and the paroxysmal instant of judgement and decision, the term “apocalypse”, from the Ancient Greek *ἀποκάλυψις*, refers to an event of unveiling and revelation. Endemic to the narratives of modernity, the theme of the crisis conveys the widespread idea that crises open opportunities in disruptions, resilience in

³⁴⁵ Carl SCHMITT, *Political Theology*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1985 [1934], p.36.

collapse³⁴⁶. In her *Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein thus argues that capitalism exploited national crises and disasters such as the Iraq war for the pursuit of controversial measures and to ensure the implementation of neoliberal free-market policies³⁴⁷. In this light, the contemporary ecological crisis seems to bear a rich potential for our politico-theological hermeneutics. What does the ecological crisis reveal when approached through the apocalyptic prism? What could a hermeneutics of the Apocalypse allow us to understand about the political landscape surrounding the ecological crisis? A hermeneutics of the ecological Apocalypse, I argue, might notably contribute to restore the present as ultimate political time and as framework for political action. It summons us to renew the thought of how we inhabit the present world and dwell in events and transitions. To this extent, the apocalyptic and eschatological themes confer to politics an ethical dimension which is radical in that it stems from the eschatological density of the present. The ecological apocalypse also redefines the temporality in which politics takes place, described by Günther Anders as endless end-times. In *Theses for the Nuclear Age*, the German philosopher called on his readers to “fight this man-made Apocalypse” by “doing everyting in our power to make the End Time endless”³⁴⁸. In his *Endtime and the End of Times*, Anders even presents the scope of political action and human freedom as condensed in a perpetual deferral of the Apocalypse: “To delay the end, to win the fight against the end of time again and again, that is to say, to make the *end times endless*”³⁴⁹. From now on, such is the political task. How to do politics in an ending world?

³⁴⁶ Willem SCHINKEL, “The image of crisis: Walter Benjamin and the interpretation of ‘crisis’ in modernity”, *Thesis Eleven* 2015, Vol. 127(1) 36–51.

³⁴⁷ Naomi KLEIN, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Knopf Canada, 2007.

³⁴⁸ Günther ANDERS, “Theses for the Nuclear Age”, in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol.3, No.3, Spring 1962, p.493-494.

³⁴⁹ Günther ANDERS, *Endzeit und Zeitende*, München: C.H. Beck, 1993, p.205.

How late is it? According to the Doomsday Clock, we are two minutes away from the end of the world. The conceptual clock was created in 1947 by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists to represent the threat of global nuclear war. While originally focused on the threat linked to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the clock has since evolved to also reflect the ecological crisis along with recent techno-scientific developments threatening to inflict irrevocable harm to humanity – ranging from climate change to the hydrocarbon industry and the geopolitics of oil, through developments in life-sciences and biotechnologies. The Doomsday Clock uses the analogy of the countdown to midnight to symbolize and denounce the growing danger of an anthropogenic global catastrophe. Since January 2018, the clock is set at two minutes to midnight, the closest it has ever been to Doomsday, following “the failure of world leaders to address tensions relating to nuclear weapons and climate change issues”³⁵⁰.

How to act with the urgency required? The Doomsday clock seems to bear witness to a global political inertia, an incapacity to act and adapt to a fiery context that compels large-scaled actions. Francis Fukuyama had anticipated this state of political lethargy in the *End of History and the Last Man*³⁵¹, in which he argued that the worldwide advent of neo-liberal democracy and free market capitalism realizes the ultimate stage of humanity’s sociocultural development and the final form of political government. The end of history he describes, insofar as it repeals historical contingency, thereby also abolishes the horizon of all political action: it represents an apocalypse of the political. And yet burning events require our immediate political and ethical involvement to prevent a global catastrophe. Isabelle Stengers’ *In Catastrophic Times* captures her concern to resist the violence of the “coming barbarism” that rises with the convergence of illegitimate governance and political impotence towards the

³⁵⁰ Science and Security Board Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Ed. John Mecklin, “It is two minutes to midnight”, 2018 Doomsday Clock Statement. P.7.

URL: <https://thebulletin.org/sites/default/files/2018%20Doomsday%20Clock%20Statement.pdf>
Accessed 11.01.2019.

³⁵¹ Francis FUKUYAMA, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin Books, 1992.

organization of a global impasse. For Stengers, the expansion of capitalist regimes of extraction and private accumulation, along with the collateral destruction of ecosystems and societies, constitutes the real barbaric catastrophe. “That things are ‘status quo’ is a catastrophe”³⁵² claims Walter Benjamin. But if the world is ending, its end seems to have no end: “the end times have come, but that time is lasting!”³⁵³ The Apocalypse is coming and everything goes on.

In *End-time and the End of Time*, Günther Anders analyses the temporality of the nuclear era as a perpetual end-time, unappealable condition under the irreversibility of the atomic threat. According to the German philosopher, the pending threat of the nuclear bomb interrupts the process of history and, by preserving eternally the possibility of the Apocalypse, puts humanity forever “just in the deadline of the end-time”. He writes:

“Permanently” means that the time that remains is forever an end-time: it can no longer be relieved by another time, only by the end.³⁵⁴

This Apocalypse, which Anders radically differentiates from the original theological concept, is realized, “verweltlicht” – literally *mundanized*, “worldified”. Engendered by men, it is an “Apocalypse without a kingdom”³⁵⁵, which fails to open any new horizons – neither the way forward of modern progress, nor the perspective of a revolutionary utopia. For Anders, the only alternative offered by the nuclear era is a world or no world: the absolute threat of the nuclear holocaust reduces indeed the diversity of the possible worlds arising from the world, standing today on the edge of an abyss of non-being. Anders’ focus on the end-time and the ubiquitous threat of the annihilation of worldly being does not leave any room for hope, nor even for the life that abides

³⁵² Walter BENJAMIN, *Das Passagen-Werk. Gesammelte Schriften*, Band V - I & II. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1982.

³⁵³ Bruno LATOUR, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, Harvard University Press, 2017, p.173.

³⁵⁴ Günther ANDERS, *Endzeit und Zeitende*, München: C.H. Beck, 1993, p.116.

³⁵⁵ Günther ANDERS, *La menace nucléaire* (1981), trans. Christophe David, Le Serpent à plumes, Paris, 2006 (1981), p. 294.

in the end-time³⁵⁶. The condition for practical resistance to the advent of the end lies in a concerned fear for the world, which inspired Jean-Pierre Dupuy's enlightened catastrophism as a tool to absorb the presence of the Apocalypse and delay its occurrence³⁵⁷. Living in the end-time of a prophylactic apocalypse thus means caring for the indefinite postponement of the end of history.

Walter Benjamin, Günther Anders' cousin, finds in history the "angel" that comes from the present to break with the status quo: for him, redemption is possible in the preservation of history³⁵⁸. Against the mechanized, unidirectional conception of time disseminated by Modernity and the evolution of the modern procession along the hegemonic itinerary of progress, Benjamin pleads for a deliverance from the catastrophe of an unending crisis as unsurpassable modern condition. The return of the apocalyptic theme in the political sphere, first with the threat of a nuclear holocaust and then with the intensification of ecological issues, thus seems to bear a re-enlivening potential for the realm of politics. The scheme of the end of the world has indeed borne a wonderful dimension of liberation and emancipation, and movements such as liberation theology, permaculture or transition towns can illustrate an ending world's swarming potential for resilience. Away from Anders' enlightening pessimism, Stengers' and Benjamin's reflections simultaneously suggest that the end of the world sometimes appears disguised as a continuation, and that the end of a world and the disruption of the temporality sustaining it might prove a saving grace allowing for the emergence of resilience and creation. In this light, the horizon of politics in the end-time would arise from the restoration of history as emergence and the immersion in the events born from it.

³⁵⁶ Margret LOHMANN, *Philosophieren in der Endzeit: zur Gegenwartsanalyse von Günther Anders*, 1996, Fink Verlag, München. p.44-46.

³⁵⁷ Jean-Pierre DUPUY, *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé: quand l'impossible est certain*. Seuil, 2002.

³⁵⁸ Walter BENJAMIN, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte, Gesammelte Schriften*, Band I - 2. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1982. Translated by Dennis Redmond.

Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>
Accessed 25.01.2020.

The time that remains

If we do live in an apocalyptic as well as ecological crisis – in the disruption, the assault that suspends a precedent continuity –, then it would seem like we are in history as Walter Benjamin conceived it, and that the end-time described by Anders, while offering a welcome insight on the present temporality, is not definitive in the sense of an absolute end of history. Against the modern conception of a “mythical history”, reducing history to a continuity, factuality and a “mortified past knowable only by its surviving victors”³⁵⁹, Benjamin offers an idea of history as single events and experiences which could not be essentialized or rationalized, a collection of here-and-nows gathered by the angel of history:

Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet [...] That which we call progress, is *this* storm.³⁶⁰

A single storm, a catastrophe repeating itself over and over again and bringing about new here-and-nows and new disruptions. Amidst this apocalyptic process, Benjamin’s messianism consists of a preservation of creation and revelation, of the multiplicity and discontinuity within history. “It is grounded in an awareness of ‘in-betweenness’”, as William Schinkel puts it, the metaxic intuition “of existing in-between revelation and redemption”³⁶¹. This in-betweenness of our historical existence further echoes Giorgio Agamben’s reading of Paulinian messianism, where the Italian philosopher describes the gap opened by the resurrection of Christ as a time in-between, a

³⁵⁹ Walter BENJAMIN, *Das Leben der Studenten.*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band II – 1, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, p.75.

³⁶⁰ Walter BENJAMIN, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, op.cit., p.697-698.

³⁶¹ Willem SCHINKEL, art.cit. p.40.

threshold which he also refers to as the “time that remains”³⁶². In *The Time that Remains*, Agamben investigates the metaphor of the threshold to articulate two temporalities – the time preceding Jesus’ resurrection and the time of the Second Coming – around a third one – the “remnant”, the messianic time of the present:

The remnant is, according to Agamben, an indefinite and indeterminate portion of life in which what is at stake is nothing other, and nothing less than the reconstitution of a life which can only be fully experienced in another time.³⁶³

Agamben’s analysis of the remnant does not fail to evoke our own time of ecological crisis, stamped by an enhanced sense of responsibility towards the perpetuation of life for future generations. It alludes indeed to a life that stands beyond our time and yet which we must enable, revealing the crucial agency characterizing life in the remnant.

In between what do we stand? What time shall our time engender, what world shall our world give birth to? Between past and present, a border and another, creole beings of the world, ecological thresholds, planetary boundaries and critical zones...: as the environmental crisis summons us to dwell in liminal times and spheres, it reminds us of the metaxic tension described by Voegelin, who struggled to embrace the perpetual in-betweenness of our existence. The concept of *liminality* expresses a similar tension and might also assist us as we reach the spheres of transition and in-betweenness characterizing the present environmental mutation. Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner first explored the idea of liminality during his fieldworks on rites of passage within the Ndembu tribe in Zambia, before delving into the importance of liminal experiences for a broader anthropological context. Turner argues that certain

³⁶² Giorgio AGAMBEN, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*. Trans. Patricia Dailey, Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005.

³⁶³ Paolo BARTOLONI, “The Threshold and the Topos of the Remnant: Giorgio Agamben”. *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 13(1), 51-63, Taylor and Francis, 2008. p. 57.

rituals or celebrations put participants in liminal states insofar as they interrupt routinized spheres of everyday life and suspend their social status, thus allowing to either reaffirm or reorganize social relations (this is the case for instance of Carnival customs). In contexts of political or cultural changes, the concept of liminality describes a similar process of temporary dissolution of social hierarchies and structures clearing space for either the reinforcement of the established order, or the emergence of alternate organizations. Laying emphasis on these precious times of transition as constitutive of social phenomena, the concept of liminality calls into question the traditional representation of a linear development of societies and the myth of a great course of history. It allows us indeed to conceive of change not as a pathology of social order, nor as the exceptional interruption of a linearity which should have been preserved, but as an integral part of social and political life. Liminal times and spaces thus fulfil a social function of re-organization and re-integration, and the dissolution of order appears in this light as a fluid process, reminiscent of Zygmunt Bauman's idea of liquid Modernity^{364, 365}. Turner's analyses of the liminal might therefore inform the thought of our own transitional experience as we wander in a cultural limbo amidst the dissolution of former ideological and institutional structures, between decomposition and emergence. The unprecedented dimension of the present ecological crisis plunges indeed contemporary societies into an anomic situation where no rule applies, and no ethical norm has anticipated the present dilemma: it falls to us to elaborate new reflections to sustain new ways of inhabiting in common.

Liminal states shelter beings in transition and becomings in creation which cannot be contained within fixed, pre-established structures and thus come to subvert them. To this extent, liminality takes on the fundamental, potentially fertile ambiguity of the interim between the not-anymore and the not-yet, clearing a space for the emergence of what overflows categories and institutions. In *Tools for Conviviality*, the philosopher Ivan Illich explores the potential for vernacular resilience in the pathological

³⁶⁴ Zygmunt BAUMAN, *Liquid Modernity*, John Wiley & Sons, 2013 (1999).

³⁶⁵ Here it must be noted that, while Victor Turner attributed a rather univocally positive connotation to liminal situations, perceived as ways of renewal, Zygmunt Bauman's reflections on the liquidity of late Modernity recount increasing feelings of uncertainty, disorientation, a fleeting sense of self, and the unbearable burden of individual responsibility caused by a chaotic Nomadism.

context of an alienated institutionalization of society where technocratic elites have come to exert a radical monopoly, thus freezing the fluid liminality of life in society³⁶⁶. In this light, a rigid institutionalized society would prevent an apocalyptic dwelling in the event as *kairos* – the opportune time for action – and inhibit an engaged inhabiting of the present: staying in the openness of worldly being requires the perpetual break-down of socio-political institutions, in order to clear a space of vernacular commonality and resilience in which politics are embedded.

If the ecological mutation appears as one such liminal state of transition, then what does it end? What is the environmental apocalypse breaking down, and what is it bringing about? The present crisis is named as such – a crisis – because it arises as an event which disrupts established processes and suspends unrestrained rhythms of extraction, production and consumption. How can we dwell amidst this disruption, and engage political actions rooted in the present event, within the time that remains? For Bruno Latour, the environmental mutation raises the radical question of durability and sustainability, and how to dwell in that which ends and continues:

How can we manage to last, to maintain ourselves through existence, how can we master the time that flows?

If there is a secret everyone desperately tries to solve, it is that of how to manage to dwell, to maintain, to obtain a continuity, a sustainability of societies against the end of the world.³⁶⁷

How to last in that which passes, and dwell in the time that remains? Such seems to be the present political challenge. In *A World of Becoming*, William Connolly describes the “human predicament” as the condition, both tragic and redeeming, whereby human

³⁶⁶ Ivan ILLICH, *Tools for Conviviality*, Boyars, 1973.

³⁶⁷ Bruno LATOUR, “Sur une nette inversion du schème de la fin des temps », paper for a conference on *Les défis écologiques à la lumière du bien commun*, Institut Catholique de Paris, April 2018. « Comment parvenir à durer, comment se maintenir en existence, comment discipliner, dompter le temps qui passe. » « S’il y a des secrets que tout le monde cherche un peu désespérément à trouver, c’est celui de parvenir à durer, à maintenir, à obtenir une continuité, une soutenabilité des sociétés contre la menace d’une fin du temps. » My translation.

agency is driven by a feeling of an inert restlessness amidst the unpredictable becoming of the world. Against this paralysis of our agency, Connolly reasserts the “urgency of today” and proposes developing our ability for “creative suspension”³⁶⁸ as a way to inhabit the unsettling pace of the perpetual apocalypse of the world. He thereby suggests embracing the disruption introduced by the environmental crisis as a welcome space of resilience and creation, whose disclosure is enabled by the advent of the present.

For an eschatology of the present

What type of eschatology do contemporary politics incarnate? Following the theologico-political postulate, modern secular political systems are the heirs of theological systems, the latter include eschatological developments concerned with the final ends of history and the ultimate purposes of human actions. In both theological and secular cosmologies, eschatology is often closely linked to soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin’s analyses of Gnosticism indicate for instance that gnostic eschatologies situate redemption in the annihilation of the present world, preceding the final advent of the realized eschaton – the post-historic world of God’s apocalyptic reign. The two philosophers highlight the tendency of gnostic eschatologies to escape the present world, and their failure to anchor the advent of the final ends in it.

In *The New Science of Politics*, Voegelin notoriously conceptualized Gnosticism as the drive to *immanentize the eschaton*, that is, the desire to implement a policy in the purpose of overcoming the disorder of the world and fulfilling history. Voegelin identified indeed the root of the Gnostic impulse in the belief that lack of concord within society is the result of an inherent evil in the world, and that the disorder of the world can be transcended and finally overcome by the implementation of a certain policy or the consecration of a specific political realm. While the understanding of the

³⁶⁸ William CONNOLLY, *A World of Becoming*, op. cit., p.104.

immanentization of the eschaton as an attempt to “bring heaven down to earth” has served politically conservative purposes, as its popularization by conservative spokesman William F. Buckley can illustrate³⁶⁹, there seems to be more subtlety to Voegelin’s insight than what the latter formulation suggests. The Voegelinian claim expresses the diffuse feeling that modern politics, reduced to the application of a transcendent plan onto reality, has become the substitution of a non-world, a utopia, for the present world. But what exactly is wrong in the immanentization, the becoming-immanent of something transcendent such as the Christian eschaton? For Voegelin, whose political philosophy is infused with a concern for the preservation of the metaxic tension of existence, the immanentization of the eschaton is another name for the pathological belief in an *eidōs* of history, a meaning of history as an objectified whole³⁷⁰. For him, the problem of the *eidōs* of history lies in the reduction of a matter of faith – the unknown course of history, the Christian transcendental fulfilment – to an immanent rationalization, thereby subjugating the mystery of existence and losing the metaxic tension between immanence and transcendence. As we have seen in chapter 2, the immanentization of the eschaton aborts the metaxic tension insofar as it absorbs the transcendent in the immanent, thus putting an end to the tenuous tension of worldly existence.

As we engage with this difficult insight of Voegelin’s, we should avoid at all costs the gnostic pitfall of interpreting the fallacy of the immanentization of the eschaton as lying in the movement of immanentization itself: incarnation, embodiment, worldly being *is not evil*. It is an inescapable grace and miraculous condition, of which immanence and transcendence are two irreducible and *indivisible* dimensions. The immanentization of the eschaton is indeed fallacious because it annihilates the transcendence in the eschaton: but the transcendentization of the eschaton would be as fallacious in subsuming its immanence! The illusion in the immanentization of the eschaton is thus precisely the belief that it needs to be immanentized, which implies that *it is not*

³⁶⁹ See William KRISTOL, “The Indispensable Man”, New York Times, 3.03.2008. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/03/opinion/03kristol.html> Accessed 11.01.2019.

³⁷⁰ Eric VOEGELIN, *The Collected Works, Vol.5: Modernity without Restraint, The New Science of Politics*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 2000, p.185.

immanent yet. But the eschaton, the ultimate end is immanent as much as it is transcendent to the world: it is eternally, perpetually *present*.

Hans Jonas' critique of modern nihilism, enriched by his perception of the lingering spectrum of ancient Gnosticism, also draws upon an analysis of the eschatology of modern politics. His need for a reflection on the meaning of worldly being – *why should there be a world and how should it be?*³⁷¹ – leads him to foster a philosophy of finality maintaining the presence of ends within nature. The Jonassian teleology of nature thus proceeds from a critique of modern dualistic eschatology, which he believes was inherited from a gnostic temporality opposing past fall and future redemption and resulting in an escape from the present.³⁷² Jonas' ethics of responsibility forces us to break with a nihilist temporality pervading modern philosophy and systematically opposing present and non-present, whether the latter is idealized into a glorious past or a future redemption. Such an eschatology, Jonas suggests, insofar as it perpetuates an understanding of human existence as projected into a non-present, prevents us from perceiving the eschatological openness of the present world, and thereby also from experiencing the imperious sense of responsibility binding us to it. The dualistic eschatology of modern cosmology thereby sanctions a rupture between the sphere of an incomplete present and the horizon of a future – necessarily non-present – redemption. It thus situates the *telos*, the ends in a future world whose only determination is to *not-be*. But this eschatological temporality opposing a vitiated present to a redemptive future is not inherent to all eschatological reflection on the final ends of worldly being. Jonas pleads for an eschatological thought which would not surrender to a gnostic conception of time, and summons us to bypass the binary opposition between present and non-present through a thought of eternity. In his lecture on “Immortality and the modern temper”, Jonas maintains that an eschatological thought of eternity conditions the necessary revalorization of the present against the contemporary “evanescence of

³⁷¹ Hans JONAS, *Philosophische Untersuchungen und Metaphysische Vermutungen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1994, p.136.

³⁷² According to my analysis of Gnosticism as the dualistic reduction of the metaxic tension of the world, the gnostic eschatology conveys a dualistic temporality opposing past and future, thereby subsuming the category of the present.

the present as the holder of genuine content”³⁷³, for “the loss of eternity justifies the loss of an authentic present”³⁷⁴. The Jewish philosopher aims to maintain the imperative of an eschatological thought while overcoming the nihilistic, inherently gnostic temporality of modern eschatology exemplified in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger³⁷⁵.

This modern eschatological dynamic highlighted by Jonas is particularly manifest in utopianism, which the philosopher assimilates to the modern ideology of progress and therefore analyses as the pursuit of a fundamentally technicist and totalitarian enterprise. Jonas criticizes above all the paralyzing effect of utopianism which, perpetually projecting fulfilment into an idealized future, renders it unable to anchor one’s existence in, and to exert one’s responsibility towards, the present world. Utopian ideologies not only situate the eschaton in the future, that is, in *a world non-present*, a non-place, but also approach the final ends of worldly being as projected and implemented by human agency, thereby displaying a twofold nihilistic stance. Jonas denounces the danger of utopian idolatry in its blindness to the presence of the eschaton within the world, as well as in its totalitarian tendencies obscuring the fundamental openness and perpetual emergence of worldly being. This idea can be found again in the philosophy of Jacques Ellul who, drawing upon Gabriel Vahanian’s critique of technique, compares the techno-scientific utopia to a “fraudulous ersatz of eschaton”³⁷⁶ hindering its irruption in the present. In substantializing the yearning for

³⁷³ Hans JONAS, “Gnosticism, Existentialism and Nihilism”, Epilogue to *The Gnostic Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston, 2001, p.338.

³⁷⁴ Hans JONAS, « Immortality and modern temper: the Ingersoll Lecture, 1961 », *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 55, No.1, Jan. 1962, pp.1-20. p.6.

³⁷⁵ Jonas argues that Heidegger’s existential analysis, borrowing its temporality from an eschatological scheme characteristic of modern thought, contributes to an escape from the present and ultimately leads to its annihilation:

“The same cause which is at the root of nihilism is also at the root of the radical temporality of Heidegger's scheme of existence, in which the present is nothing but the moment of transience from past to future. If values are not beheld in vision as being (like the Good and the Beautiful of Plato), but are posited by the will as projects, then indeed existence is committed to constant futurity, with death as the goal; and a merely formal resolution to be, without a nomos for that resolution, becomes a project from nothingness into nothingness.”

Hans JONAS, “Gnosticism, Existentialism and Nihilism”, op,cit, p.338.

³⁷⁶ Jacques ELLUL, *Théologie et technologie*, Labor et Fides, Genève, 2014, p.240.

another world and situating the latter in a future beyond, utopianism would condemn the metaxic openness of worldly being and subsume the tension between immanence and transcendence. The mistake of utopian ideologies would lie in their failure to perceive, behind the realm of injustice dissimulating it, the hopeful eschatological presence of the world. Jonas' insight suggests that modern utopianism is driven by a gnostic hatred of the present world rather than by a loving concern for the world or a thirst for justice towards it. Utopianism embodies in Jonas' eyes the gnostic yearning for a beyond-the-present-world, which he analyses as an escape from the responsibility towards a world thirsty for our caring inhabiting. As we elucidate Jonas' critique of utopianism as an instance of modern nihilism, it becomes clear that his opposition to Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope is not radical, but rather suggests that the principle of responsibility conditions the hope for future generations, and that no better world could ever arise without the committed exercise of an ethical responsibility towards the present world.

In "Immortality and Modern Temper", Jonas unfolds an eschatological thought conferring upon human action an eternal reach which transcends a merely linear perception of history. He thereby goes against a certain historical conception of eschatology, as promoted by Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Hegel or Karl Marx, who all situate the irruption of the eschaton in the horizon of a future time.³⁷⁷ In asserting the eternity of historical action, Jonas' eschatology dissolves the dualistic opposition between time and eternity and unveils the eschatological tension of the present. Jonas proposes in his lecture an understanding of the present as emerging at the crossroads between a horizontal, immanent time and a vertical, transcendent eternity. For the philosopher of the ethics of responsibility, the contemporary context of the end-time offers an unprecedented opportunity to seize this *eschatic* dimension of the present:

And in [the agony of infinite risk], eternity and nothingness meet in one: that the 'now' justifies its absolute status by exposing itself to the criterion of being the last moment granted of time. To act as if in

³⁷⁷ Hans JONAS, *Prinzip Verantwortung*, op. cit., p.227.

the face of the end is to act as if in the face of eternity, if either is taken as a summons to unhedging truth of selfhood.³⁷⁸

The only moment granted of time – the present –, as the vertiginous moment of revelation, decision and action, is *the eschatological event*. While the experience of the banality of absolute evil abolishes the idea of providential justice, Jonas takes on the urgent task of conceiving an eschatology of the present committed to *this present world* by unveiling its eschatological tension.³⁷⁹ This revalorization of the present in Jonas' eschatological thought directly leads to a heightened sense of ethical responsibility towards the world and the preservation of one such tension. We find in the theological thought of Jacques Ellul the same idea of an « eschatic present »³⁸⁰ invested with an eschatological eminence and imminence in light of the unprecedented reach of our technical power. Unfolding the Jonassian legacy, Jean-Pierre Dupuy's "enlightened doomsaying" also pleads for a rupture with Modernity's linear temporality, rendered urgent by an ecological crisis summoning us every day to clear space for an eschatological action within an apocalyptic present³⁸¹.

Drawing upon Hans Jonas and Eric Voegelin's analyses, my reading of Gnosticism shines a light on contemporary political phenomena as variations of a common negation of the eschatological presence of the world, in the wake of the modern manifestations of Gnosticism identified by our two philosophers in utopian and totalitarian movements. While progressist utopias tend to externalize the eschaton into a transcendent beyond disengaged from the present world, as exemplified in the ideology of

³⁷⁸ Hans JONAS, « Immortality and modern temper: the Ingersoll Lecture, 1961 », *art.cit.*, p.8.

³⁷⁹ Caterina REA, « Retrait de Dieu et question du mal, une lecture éthique du mythe de Hans Jonas. » in *Revue*

Philosophique de Louvain. Quatrième série, Tome 100, N°3, 2002, p.546.

³⁸⁰ Jacques ELLUL, *Théologie et technique*, op. cit., p.242.

³⁸¹ Jean-Pierre DUPUY, "Enlightened Domsaying and the Concern for the Future" URL: http://www.ritsumeai.ac.jp/acd/re/k-rsc/lcs/kiyou/pdf_24-4/RitsIILCS_24.4pp.7-13DUPUY.pdf Accessed 11.01.2019.

"The prophet of doom is not heard because his words, even if they issue from sound knowledge and true information, do not manage to penetrate the system of beliefs held by those to whom they are addressed. It is not enough to know in order to accept what one knows and then to act on it."

growthism, other forms of modern totalitarianism internalize it within the rationalized course of a strictly immanent history, as manifest for instance in the liberal dogma of development. I have highlighted the gnostic repression on a political level of a tension concurring with its existential and cosmological correlates, which I argue both Jonas and Voegelin's accounts of Gnosticism emphasize in their respective ways. This politico-ideological repression of the metaxic tension lying at the core of Gnosticism, I suggested, reveals itself in the eschatological narratives conveyed in contemporary politics – for instance in the political ideologies of progress, development, or economic growth³⁸². Contemporary political eschatologies, I argue, are motivated by and articulated around a radical yearning to escape the present world and the eschatological presence of the world. As such, they cultivate a numbness towards the wild and perpetual emergence of worldly beings which results in an existential, cosmological and political alienation from the world. But such worldless ideologies thereby also wave toward the perspective of *dwelling* within a tensional present, embracing its apophatic unveiling and rooting ourselves deep into the obscure wilderness of the world as an alternative, subversive, potentially resourceful and resilient way of inhabiting, grounded in the fertile soil of the here and now.

³⁸² The post-development theory provides a critical perspective upon the ideology of development, exhibiting the colonial origins of development policies and analysing the imperative for countries to “develop” as an imperialist dynamic aiming at the expansion of a western, neo-liberal agenda.

See: Aram ZIAI (dir), *Exploring Post-Development: Theory and Practice, Problems and Perspectives*, 2007, Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Arturo ESCOBAR, *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995.

James FERGUSON, “The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development””, *Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. 1990, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Wolfgang SACHS, *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, 1992, London: Zed Books.

Dwelling in the open present

“You have no right to despise the present” wrote Charles Baudelaire as a precept in his famous essay “The Painter of Modern Life”³⁸³. As he advises his contemporaries not to succumb to a modern temperament of disdain for the present world, the poet appears to capture the very existential stance of Modernity. This modern spleen of the present, as well as what it entails for contemporary politics, I have been striving to approach throughout this dissertation from the symbolic framework of Gnosticism. I have argued that gnostic forms of eschatology condition a political inhabiting determined by the longing to escape present worldly being, and that one such longing shines a light on our involvement in the present ecological crisis. I have further suggested in the first section of this chapter that a return to the theologico-political category of the Apocalypse might enlighten our engagement with contemporary political mutations and inform an alternative inhabiting of a world of becoming focused on the present.

“Proche est l’instant” – *near is the moment that comes*: in his translation of the Apocalypse of St John³⁸⁴, Jean-Yves Leloup interprets the revelation of the Apocalypse as the unveiling of what comes amidst the destructions, what arises in the collapse. His reading of St John’s Apocalypse highlights a hopeful and untameable presence in the ever-nearing catastrophe, ever-advancing apocalypse of the present ecological crisis. This presence revealed by the Apocalypse, I wish to illuminate as the *topos* and *telos* of politics. The question of belonging to this present is one that arises from the gnostic *mal-être au monde*, and the failure to dwell within worldly being and embrace its metaxic becomings. Reflecting on Michel Foucault’s project to capture the task of modern philosophical thought, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari observe that

³⁸³ Charles BAUDELAIRE, *Le peintre de la vie moderne*. Œuvres complètes, tome III : L’art romantique, Calmann Lévy, 1885.

³⁸⁴ Jean-Yves LELOUP, *L’Apocalypse de Jean*, Albin Michel, 2014.

when Foucault admires Kant for posing the problem of philosophy in relation not to the eternal but to the Now, he means that the object of philosophy is not to contemplate the eternal or to reflect History but to diagnose our actual becomings: a becoming-revolutionary that, according to Kant himself, is not the same thing as the past, present, or future revolutions.³⁸⁵

What is this « becoming-revolutionary », distinct and irreducible to past, present or future revolutions? « What becomings pass through us today? ³⁸⁶ ». Dwelling in the open presence of the world implies at once to embrace this interrogation while accepting that the answers to such questions shall always elude us. It therefore implies renouncing the gnostic appetite to conquer revolutionary becomings of worldly being – to rationalize, anticipate or implement them. A politics of the open present would rather summon our capacity to care for the perpetual collapse, advent and blooming of the world. Therein lies the revolutionary character of its becomings: in its perpetual ending and emerging. Dwelling within the revolutionary processes of worldly being would thus foster an apocalyptic openness to the presence of the Now – the *Kairos* which eschews the sequential, historical *Chronos* – and might thereby restore a dignified, eschatological dimension of our inhabiting. For Bruno Latour, the apocalyptic turn of the ecological mutation brings us back to an eschatological present as it summons us to “be in time and therefore in a condition of possibility”, to reclaim the present as time of the action, “against the idea of duration imbedded in practices of progress.”³⁸⁷ The eschatology of the ecological mutation thus not only brings us *down to earth*, but also back to the present.

Acting nonetheless

Following his critique of Gnostic nihilism as generating an ethical disengagement and a tendency to escape the world, Jonas’ philosophy faces the major challenge

³⁸⁵ Gilles DELEUZE and Felix GUATTARI, *What is Philosophy?* London: Verso, 1984. p. 112-113.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.* p.113.

³⁸⁷ “Anthropologists are Talking – About Capitalism, Ecology and Apocalypse”, in Bruno LATOUR, Isabelle STENGERS, Anna TSING & Nils BUBANDT, *Ethnos*, 2018, 83:3, pp. 587-606. Here p.18. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00141844.2018.1457703>
Accessed 11.01.2019

of elaborating an ethical thought that includes a reflective confrontation of evil without thereby falling into a rejection of the world. Namely, how to think an “ought” without denying the “is”, and how to condemn the evil deeds of this world without falling into the utopian pitfall that would celebrate an alternate world? Such is the challenge that arises from the Jonassian critique of dualistic eschatology mentioned earlier. Jonas intends indeed to think the immanence of the eschaton so as to grasp the intrinsic value of the earthly. The ethical transcendence of the eschatological imperative sketched in Jonas’ reflections roots itself indeed in the immanent presence of the world. The thought and implementation of one such ecological eschatology appears conditioned by a posture of caring openness towards the unceasing emergence and fulfilment of the ultimate purposes of worldly agency, this openness preventing the imposition of a monolithic ethics disengaged from the presence of the world and at odds with the always unprecedented conditions of worldly being.

Now – how to act and what to do? How to not despise the present, and how to resist the urge to break with it in order to escape a vitiated world? In a *World of Becoming*, William Connolly presents the postmodern project as an effort to reach what Frank Chouraqui terms “an ambiguous awareness”³⁸⁸, and which we could understand as the metaxic experience of our inability to ground our actions into certainty, while gathering the strengths and hope necessary to *act nonetheless*. So how do we maintain such an awareness and move from our eschatology of the present to practical ethics informing a concrete inhabiting? The politics of the Apocalypse laid out in the first part of this chapter points toward a reconfiguration of the modern dialectic of immanence and transcendence. For Bruno Latour, the task is to “combine anew the figures of immanence and imminence, the ancestral sanctity of the world and the new urgency of not letting it disappear.”³⁸⁹ This recombination of the figures of immanence and transcendence in an eschatology of the present arises along a blurring of the inside-

³⁸⁸ Frank CHOURAQUI, Review of “Pluralistic Sense-Making: A World of Becoming”, by William E. Connolly, *The Agonist, Journal of the Nietzsche Circle*, Fall 2011. p.3.

³⁸⁹ Bruno LATOUR, « Sur une nette inversion du schème de la fin des temps », art.cit.
« Combiner à nouveaux frais les figures de l’immanence et celles de l’imminence, la sainteté ancestrale du monde et l’urgence nouvelle de ne pas le faire disparaître. » My translation.

outside polarity manifested with a particular intensity by the environmental crisis. Revealing acutely the deep entanglement of our actions and horizons of becoming, present ecological phenomena challenge the categories of our ethical thought – such as what defines the individuality and freedom of an agency, or how to frame the perimeter of its repercussions. With his imperative of responsibility, Jonas thus presented an ethical framework for the entangled agencies of worldly being. His contribution to an ethics for the technological age anticipates some of the challenges of Gaian politics in the ecological apocalypse: what should we do when the spectrum of our actions overflows our capacity of representation, and the framework of traditional ethics is rendered obsolete by the unprecedented magnitude of our actions? How to act ethically from within an entanglement that overflows us?

B. What we are bound to: ethics and politics of the earthbound³⁹⁰

While embracing the ethical imperative stemming from worldly being, the idea of the apocalyptic presence of the eschaton in the world does not evict the unbearable ethical question of how to inhabit the latter. Rather, it radicalizes it by perpetually renewing it. The politics of the apocalypse laid out in the previous section contains indeed the twofold challenge of avoiding both:

-the temptation of a gnostic parousianism, understood as the expectation of the deliverance from evil through the advent of a superior state of immanent being – a second coming that would absolve the sins and sufferings of the present world, but also justifying a posture of apathy towards the latter.

³⁹⁰ In his Gifford Lectures, Bruno Latour coins the term « earthbound » to designate those beings whose attachments lie in the Gaian processes of the earth. He thereby aims to bypass the cosmological segregation between humans and non-humans, and unveil the political divisions and conflicting concerns dissimulated behind the notion of a unified humanity. See *Face à Gaïa*, op.cit, p.320.

-and the moral indeterminacy that follows from the abyssal openness of the present, as incarnated in the experience of an existential vertigo and threatening to descend into an ethical relativism.

Both possibilities exemplify a common ethical nihilism rooted in a disentanglement of the self from the rest of the world, an alienation conveyed in the gnostic trope that worldly being is ontologically flawed, lacking goodness, structure or meaning. This dilemma outlines the eminent challenge of recovering the ontological generation of ethics within the openness of worldly being – in other words, of recovering a sense of ethical responsibility, an ethical bond across the abyss separating the modern self from the world, bridges built upon an endless river.

Again, a major risk in this colossal enterprise would be to crystalize worldly becomings into an immutable ground for ethics, thus ignoring the latter's radical openness and perpetual overflowing. Hypostatizations of the world and of a "non-world" alike exemplify variations of a same nihilism: some justifying the current state of the world as standing beyond all moral consideration, for the "laws of nature" provide themselves a standard of ethics, thereby falling into a blind and corrupted inertia solely preoccupied with the perpetuation of a deceptive worldview; others driven by the dream of a world that does not exist and committed to its advent – all failing to perceive the ethical call of the present world. This offers a glimpse of the difficulty of Donna Haraway's injunction of "staying with the trouble"³⁹¹ – of not escaping the ethical tension whilst the interpellation of worldly beings reaches through us. In this light, the grounding of ethics simultaneously appears as its failure for it also means its closure, a mummification draining all life out of an unremitting process of tying ethical bonds. And yet the omnipresence of the callings – irrepressible, which cannot be kept quiet. How to respond to them? What can we possibly answer to the funerary procession of the bereaved orca who relentlessly carried the corpse of her dead infant for weeks through a sea of shameful indifference? How to honour the memory of the Argentine farmworker Fabian Tomasi, who succumbed on the 7th of September 2018 to

³⁹¹ Donna HARAWAY, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. op.cit.

the severe toxic polyneuropathy he contracted after a life-long exposure to agrochemical agents, including the popular glyphosate-based herbicide “Roundup” widely commercialized by the agrochemical firm Monsanto? How to accept the judgment pronounced by the International Criminal Court of LaHaye, condemning Ecuador to indemnify the multinational oil corporation Chevron as the latter refuses to claim responsibility for the irreversible environmental and social damaged caused by oil spillage and the contamination of water in Amazonia? The Constitutional Court of Ecuador had indeed endorsed a court decision in favour of a collective of indigenous villagers engaged in a legal fight against the oil company for 25 years.³⁹² Examples of calls like these summoning our responsibility abound and pour every day.

For William Connolly, responsibility arises as the only response to this prevailing moral nihilism. The political theorist summons us to face the planetary so as to “counter the “passive nihilism” that readily falls into place after people reject climate denialism”, by which he means “the formal acceptance of the fact of rapid climate change accompanied by a residual, nagging sense that the world ought not to be organized so that capitalism is a destructive geological force.”³⁹³ Connolly does not fail to emphasize the organized dimension of such a nihilistic posture, interwoven into a web of various systematized strains as he indicates that “passive nihilism folds into other encumbrances already in place when people are laden with pressures to make ends meet, pay a mortgage, send kids to school, pay off debts, struggle with racism and gender inequality, and take care of elderly relatives.”³⁹⁴ Strains and alienations which turn us away from our worldly entanglements and prevent us from recovering a vernacular inhabiting. Connolly denounces the political organization of an estrangement from worldly processes along with the institutionalized obliviousness of our planetary entanglement through systematized mechanisms of distraction: “it is easy to become

³⁹² *Courrier International*, “L’Equateur perd la bataille contre la multinationale Chevron”, 10.09.2018. URL: <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/lequateur-perd-la-bataille-contre-la-multinationale-chevron>

El Telégrafo, « Corte de La Haya falló a favor de Chevron en laudo contra Ecuador », 07.09.2018. URL: <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/politica/3/chevron-fallo-favorable-ecuador-lahaya> Accessed 11.03.2019.

³⁹³ William CONNOLLY, *A World of Becoming*, op. cit., p.9.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

distracted from the implacable imbrications of capitalist and planetary processes as TV scandals, terrorism, action films, economic meltdowns, electoral circuses and ugly imperial wars draw attention away.”³⁹⁵ Connolly thereby reports a process of colonization of our capacity for moral judgment and action – our response-ability –, an estrangement similar to the mechanism of alienation and exploitation Marx described in the “reserve army of labour”, ensuring the workers’ submissive obedience to the capitalist organization of labour. Connolly suggests here that the imperative of responsibility follows from our planetary entanglements, and that a recovered sense of these entanglements conditions a morally responsible inhabiting of the world.

For an ethics of Entangled Responsibility

I propose to consider the notion of responsibility as a potential resource in the immense challenge of responding to the moral interpellation stemming from our fellow worldly beings in the contemporary context of the Anthropocene. I argue that the idea of responsibility might prove an essential pillar for Gaian politics, and point toward a cardinal virtue to be cultivated in our times. Hans Jonas’ ethics of Responsibility follows indeed from a realization of the extended scope of our actions and from a recovered sense of both the interconnectedness and precariousness of life on earth. For Bruno Latour, the “irruption of Gaia” in the Anthropocene acts as a colossal interpellation by heterogenous beings reminding us of our entanglement and stating their claim to existence. Furthering this perspective, Donna Haraway’s notion of *response-ability* expresses the urgency for us to become able to respond to what we add to, or take away from this Gaian world. Her emphasis on the overlapping subjectivities of the multi-species beings of a “wounded Terra”³⁹⁶ suggest an alternative ethical paradigm articulated around the imperative of co-presencing, remaining open and responsive to the sufferings of the others. Haraway’s ethics of response-ability thus implies to cultivate

³⁹⁵ Ibid, p.13.

³⁹⁶ Donna HARAWAY, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016, p.115.

sensitivity towards the others, a “praxis of care and response”³⁹⁷ in the fragile contingency of our plural encounters. Donna Haraway summons us indeed to “make kin”³⁹⁸ – to become and compose with, tying ties with other earthlings.

In this light, the ethics of responsibility appears as an ethics of alterity, approaching the uncanny presence of unexpected Gaian others by embracing their transcendent immanence, the entanglement of their alterity with our identity, and the strange intimacy arising from our encounters. Like in Emmanuel Levinas’ philosophy of alterity, which explores the empirical experience of a transcendence stemming from face-to-face encounters and approaches it as transcendence-in-immanence³⁹⁹, the transcendence of the ethical imperative of responsibility is alive and arises in the interpersonal confrontation with worldly others. Embracing the immanence of the other and the transcendence of the self, the Gaian ethics of responsibility proposes to dwell further in the abyssal depth of our worldly entanglements without succumbing to their reduction in polarities of immanence and transcendence, inside and outside. Amidst the abyssal openness unveiled in the Anthropocene and the climate of “indecisive agitation”⁴⁰⁰ it arouses, the ethics of Gaian response-ability ties bonds, weaves the earthlings closer together and celebrates the ontological surprises of their embroideries. Such Gaian ethics might thus bridge the overwhelming ontological interdependency of worldly beings with their vertiginous openness, espousing in our engagements with other earthlings both the *intimacy, alienness and openness of Gaian becomings*. I wish to suggest that this idea of the joint intimacy, alienness and openness of Gaian entanglements offers a refuge to the junction between eco-philosophy and theology. It resonates indeed with an approach to the religious in terms of connection, embracing one of its potential etymological roots in the Latin “religare” – to bind, to tie together. Michel Serres proposes adding to this meaning another etymology in the Latin “religiens” – care, as opposed to neglect –, thus orientating religion towards a concern for

³⁹⁷ Ibid.

³⁹⁸ Donna HARAWAY “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin”, *Environmental Humanities*, vol.6, 2015, pp.159-165.

³⁹⁹ Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*, La Haye, Martinus Nijhoff, 1974.

⁴⁰⁰ Kim Stanley ROBINSON, *2312*, London: Orbit, 2012.

the worldly.⁴⁰¹ This concern for worldly entanglements thus convoked by the term religion – the concern to bridge the gap and mend the intimate distance firstly experienced in our engagements with worldly beings, and simultaneously caring for that very distance as the condition for a vital alterity – seems to concentrate the problematic of Gnosticism as I have proposed to approach it throughout this dissertation. The Gnostics faced the task of inhabiting a metaxic world of open entanglements as much as the Gaian beings of the Anthropocene now do. As they attempt to clarify the yet-to-be acknowledged complexity and originality of Gaia, Bruno Latour and Timothy Lenton qualify Lovelock and Margulis’ invention as *apophatic*⁴⁰² – a term usually employed to express the ineffable and yet so intimate, so deeply felt distance from the divine. It appears that the same question of the link to the world, and how to inhabit this entanglement, haunts the Gnostics as much as it haunts the Gaians. Much of the ethical question arises from this interrogation – how am I to act when I am entangled? Latour and Lenton suggest that the figure of Gaia renews the dialectic between freedom and necessity, thereby reframing traditional debates in ethics:

Any human trying to situate oneself as “part” or “participating” in [the history of Gaia] can no longer be defined only as “free”, but, on the contrary, as being dependent on the same sort of intricate and intertwined events revealed by Gaia. *More freedom in the domain of necessity is fully matched by more necessity in the domain of freedom.*⁴⁰³

In the light of Gaian entangled becomings, free and dependent do no longer appear as antonyms. Like any modern dualism targeted by Latour’s philosophy, they are one. Consequently, “freedom” can no longer be understood as a burden weighing upon the shoulders of the humans, alone emancipated from the realm of necessity. The paradigmatic shift introduced by Gaia lies indeed in its confluence of what I have proposed to think in terms of *entanglements and their overflowing* – a rooted openness merging

⁴⁰¹ Michel SERRES, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson, 1995, pp. 47-48.

⁴⁰² Bruno LATOUR and Timothy M. LENTON, “Extending the Domain of Freedom, or Why Gaia is so hard to understand”, to appear in *Critical Inquiry*.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid*, p.22. My emphasis.

intimacy with distance, inside with outside, alterity with identity. Only their conjunction justifies the ethical imperative of responsibility in our entanglements: without a link, without an echo to our being, nothing to be responsible for – without a distance, no one to respond to. In their article, Latour and Lenton depict the distance between Gaian life forms not as the one, hermetic and paralyzing, erected between the realms of nature and culture, but the delicate, shifting and creative distance allowing for earthlings to meet and do politics.⁴⁰⁴ I propose that an ethics of entangled responsibility – an ethics embracing the metaxic experience of our interdependent freedom and intimate distance – might bridge the apocalyptico-political imperative of an eschatology of the present with the rooted overflowing of Gaian becomings. Emphasizing a freedom that blossoms upon our entanglements and along the extended scope of our agency – no longer approached in terms of individual entities but rather as ever unfolding connections – the ethics of entangled responsibility unleashes a breadth of action, and thus also of moral accountability, unanticipated by traditional ethics. It restores the abyssal depth and apocalyptic meaning of our inhabiting – without paralyzing us with the existential burden of an unbearable responsibility, but spreading it onto all earthlings and thereby empowering us as the fellow weavers of Gaian becomings. The threads we contribute to weaving – we are responsible to. It is a collective, entangled responsibility. It is an ethics that proposes to redraw the connection, to mend the segregation of Gaian becomings interwoven into each other, to build bridges across worldly processes, and to care for the roots of the overflowing. In a reflection in moral philosophy published in the anthology *Responsibility and Judgment*, Hannah Arendt argues that evil has no roots. More specifically, it is the absence of roots and the failure to sustain and nurture a link which would allow evil to arise:

The greatest evildoers are those who don't remember because they have never given thought to the matter, and, without remembrance, nothing can hold them back. For human beings, thinking of past matters means moving in the dimension of depth, striking roots and thus stabilizing themselves, so as not to be swept away by whatever may occur - the *Zeitgeist* or History or simple temptation. *The greatest evil is not radical, it has no roots*, and because it has no roots it has

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, p.23.

no limitations, it can go to unthinkable extremes and weep over the whole world.⁴⁰⁵

Arendt points here towards an ethics of the roots as what binds, what grounds and “stabilize”, what imposes limits to our actions. Surely the consideration of other Gaian becomings and the consequences of our trajectories upon them would provide certain ethical limits to our agency. Like the present day’s evils, the “greatest evil” Arendt struggled to think was a political one, one that still engages a collective responsibility. What kind of politics could assume the responsibility of entangled becomings – sustaining the roots of their overflowing?

From Gnostic towards Gaian politics

In many regards, Gaia inaugurates a new definition of politics and polity, raising anew some of its fundamental questions: what constitutes a political entity, what cohesive force brings its participants (human and non-human) together, to what extent fellow citizens of the world are bound to each other, which processes should we be attentive to? What is to be cared for, and by whom? The founding interrogation of political philosophy always revolves around the challenge of *inhabiting a common world*. Today the figure of Gaia revives such an interrogation. The task of unfolding the political meaning of a Gaian paradigm and its diverse consequences for the way we think and do politics goes way beyond the ambition and scope of this doctoral research. However, I do sense that the intrusion of an alternate cosmological paradigm, along with the proclamation of a new geological era, has to do with the unsustainability of the gnostic way of inhabiting the world which has been prevailing throughout Modernity. The metaphor of Gaia shakes indeed modern representations of power, order and authority in so far as it abolishes the idea of dominion often conjured in modern

⁴⁰⁵ Hannah ARENDT, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn, Schocken books, New York, 2003. p.95. My emphasis.

systems of thought. Latour and Lenton thus remind us that the trope of the *global* is integrated into a political cosmology articulated around the medieval metaphor of the Body Politic:

Any allusion to the Global is immediately fused with a social and political metaphor of the Body Politic. To see the polity as a big organism made of parts obeying the dictates of the whole, will be conjured at once in every description of order and system.⁴⁰⁶

Against this backdrop, Gaia disseminates the anarchist and radically democratic sense that living beings, while intricately with another, neither *obey nor tend toward any superior order*. In Gaia, living beings are proclaimed free and interdependent all at once, and are left to navigate the subtle and profound distance between each other. According to its originator Lovelock, Gaia summons us to learn how to be “partners in a very democratic entity”⁴⁰⁷ – a very *non-anthropocentric* democracy. Gaia puts an end to man’s dominion over the earth and suggests instead a politics of the earthlings informed by an ethics of entangled responsibility and infused with the awareness of the *créolité* of worldly processes of becoming which untameably overflow borders of beings, species, nations, territories. Lynn Margulis fought relentlessly against the idea of isolated individual life forms, arguing with her *holobionts* that life forms cannot be separated from their outside, nor can life be approached as an atomic entity within its own distinct boundaries.⁴⁰⁸ Subverting political boundaries as well as cosmological segregation, Gaia as a figure of anti-imperialism provides a conceptual resource for cultural resistance to what erects walls and enforces an order that thrives on enclosures and confinements. As it unveils the presence of an overflowing profusion of complexity and alterity in the world, Gaia dismantles the construction of uniformity institutionalized in modern societies, along with the repression of alterity, the dis-animation of worldly being and the prosecution of all deviances. It invites us to sustain the presence of an unsettling alterity and to maintain the creative tension of our entanglement with

⁴⁰⁶ Bruno LATOUR and Timothy M. LENTON, art.cit., p.19.

⁴⁰⁷ James LOVELOCK, *Gaia: A new look at life on Earth*, Oxford University Press, 1979, p.145.

⁴⁰⁸ Lynn MARGULIS, *Symbiosis as a Source of Evolutionary Innovation*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 1991.

them. Doing so, the figure of Gaia echoes the anticolonialism of Glissant's philosophy of creolité, as well as his critique of the monolithism of European civilization⁴⁰⁹: against the monolithic hegemony of the Global spreading a diffuse alienation from the world, Gaia inspires a politics of belonging and inhabiting rooted in hybridity and relationality. The approach of micro-politics might notably assist those committed to mobilize such entangled agencies to recover their vernacular political power and subvert a centralized, uniform and unrooted source of authority.

Summoning us to “immerse ourselves in instead of emancipating ourselves from the world”, Gaia rises as a metaphor of the anti-Gnostic as it reverses the gnostic yearning for a deliverance from our worldly entanglements and calls us to “learn to depend”⁴¹⁰ on such processes. Unveiling an “emerging attachment to a multiplicitous world that exceed the stories” narrated in Modernity, Gaia entices a “creative rebellion”⁴¹¹ against the gnostic narratives which debilitate our engagement with and impoverish our inhabiting of the world.

⁴⁰⁹ On Edouard Glissant's critique of Europe's monolithism and its systematic failure to integrate the other, see his interview by Rue89, 26.05.2008.

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCMvmY7qaRA>

Accessed 11.01.2019.

⁴¹⁰ Bruno LATOUR, “Sur une nette inversion du schème de la fin des temps », art.cit.

⁴¹¹ William CONNOLLY, *A World of Becoming*, op.cit., p.8.

C. Politics of radical love: the subversion in reclaiming a loving inhabiting of the world

"Do not love the world or anything in the world.

If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them."

— John 2:15-16

"Love will save this place"

— Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*

Dwelling with the trouble: embracing the world as home

In this final section I wish to elucidate a hypothesis that has been emerging from the present research: the idea according to which the love of the world, in a cultural landscape so influenced by Gnosticism, is insurrectional insofar as it reverses the pervasive gnostic being in the world described in the first three chapters of this dissertation. I suggest that loving the world and weaving an intimacy with it across the gnostic estrangement appears as a condition for reclaiming a resilient inhabiting. This love of the world may take on diverse forms. I propose to see one of them in the commitment to *dwell* – a verb I summon multiple times in this chapter: dwelling amidst worldly becomings, dwelling in transitions, dwelling in the endtimes... Dwelling in the sense of finding home in a world of estrangement, depletion and exile, in an earth which Donna Haraway describes as “full of refugees, human and not”, awaiting the

times that shall “replenish refuge”⁴¹². In her account of the pioneering rewilding project that took place in West Sussex, Isabella Tree echoes this claim as she writes that “our skies have emptied” and “we are living in a desert”.⁴¹³ To dwell, also, as becoming present to an ongoing Gaian process of inhabiting as co-penetration, as becoming sensitive to what we are inhabiting and what is inhabiting us. The verb itself appears to contain a certain polysemy. The meaning I propose to explore here lies in the action of *staying*: staying with the trouble, staying and accepting to be overflowed by the vertiginous openness of unknown worldly becomings, between the not-anymore and the not-yet. This kind of dwelling echoes the metaxic being in the world described by Eric Voegelin, one that resists the temptation to seize, to conquer, to reduce, to petrify and thereby escape the mystifying wilderness and confounding alterity that characterize processes of worldly becoming. According to William Connolly, “the challenges of today solicit both an embrace of this unruly world and new political assemblages to counter its dangers.”⁴¹⁴ – I submit that a major challenge to our contemporary inhabiting lies precisely in the urgency of our involvement in the world and the simultaneous surrendering to its overflowing trajectories of becomings. This echoes the reflections on the apocalyptic configuration of contemporary politics laid out in the first section of the present chapter: if the ecological apocalypse calls us to action, it also summons us to some extent to *stop acting*, to suspend some of the processes we have been involved in so as to clear a space for what is being unveiled. This idea, to which I will return later, sheds light upon the tension contained in the kind of dwelling that is being called for. This tension, I suggest, is to be dwelt in: namely, the urgency to act and stop acting. The necessity of our active commitment to the cessation of destructive behaviours and of our complicit involvement in them. In this venture, dwelling with the trouble – to echo Donna Haraway’s invitation to stay with the trouble and making kin in the Chthulucene – also means resisting the gnostic urge to escape this unruly world by substituting for its enduring presence the quest for another world. Through consciously deciding to dwell within tumultuous worldly becomings, we might find that we need not domesticate, master, or subdue the world in order for another world to

⁴¹² Donna HARAWAY “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin”, *Environmental Humanities*, vol.6, 2015, p.2.

⁴¹³ Isabella TREE, *Wilding. The return of nature to a British farm*. Picador, 2018. p.4&10.

⁴¹⁴ William CONNOLLY, *A World of Becoming*, op.cit, p.9.

arise: rather, the world is already full of the many worlds it contains, awaiting our involvement, full of an insurrectional love for the world, to blossom. Eschewing the gnostic ecophobia manifested in a globalized distrust for anything earthbound, environmental thinkers and activists have unanimously called for a re-localization of our inhabiting, a “coming down to earth” notably in our agricultural activity, as the permaculture model illustrates. Based on an ethics of care and fair share, the core tenet of permaculture is to cultivate a sustainable, self-sufficient and harmonious engagement with local ecosystems. The model developed by David Holmgren and Bill Mollison thus provides a concrete example of an inhabiting fuelled with a love for the world and the diverse life forms that bloom with it. Ecovillages and transition towns offer further examples of an alternative inhabiting anchored in grass-roots community projects and aiming to achieve resilience and self-sufficiency in the fulfilment of fundamental needs such as housing, food-and energy- sovereignty, social interaction, work and leisure while preserving natural ecosystems. Their inhabitings represent fruitful attempts to reclaim a peaceful and sovereign engagement with worldly processes across the gnostic estrangement from the earth and the pervasive conception of the hostility of nature.

Weaving an intimacy with the world

“I only went out for a walk and finally concluded to stay out till sundown,
for going out, I found, was really going in.”

— John Muir,

John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir

How to inhabit the world without thereby falling into an objectifying reduction of overflowing processes of worldly becoming into a monolithic and petrified concept? The pitfalls of the modern concept of nature warn us against one such temptation. The

figure of Gaia, on the other hand, proposes to take again into account the complex agencies of earthlings which the concept of nature had dis-animated as a prelude to the modernization project. One crucial challenge arising from the confrontation of the cosmology of nature with a Gaian perspective thus lies in the renegotiation of our inhabiting and the deployment of our agencies now that the agency of others is to be acknowledged and *respected*. It is not only a matter of finding a sense of home and belonging amidst the abiding strangeness of worldly processes of becoming, in a world suddenly filled with the enduring presence of others. It is rather a deep movement of co-penetration and co-inhabiting which the figure of Gaia reveals. Of this world of becoming, William Connolly writes that it is “neither our oyster nor our servant. Rather we inhabit it, and *we are inhabited by its multiple stabilities and volatilities*”⁴¹⁵. In the Chtulucene, Gaia is not only asking: “what and who do we inhabit?” but also “what and who inhabits us?”. What does it mean to find ourselves contained in and overflowing planetary processes which are reciprocally also contained in and overflowing our own trajectories of becoming? How to dwell in this chaos? Edouard Glissant argues that the modern colonial enterprise of globalization is driven by the fear of the dissolution and absorption of the self into the other. He proposes to subvert the subjugating dynamic of the *mondialisation* through the idea of *mondialité*, or worldliness, which dismantles the myth of a monolithic self and embraces differences and diversity as what brings us together in the Tout-Monde. Glissant thus claims that “we will have to come to this idea that, going to the others and changing with the others is not losing oneself, is not corrupting oneself”, before adding: “I believe the poets are leading this fight”.⁴¹⁶

Inhabiting the créolité of a Gaian world suggests a form of mutual inhabiting somehow reminiscent of the relationship between the divine and the world described by process philosophers and theologians as one of creative co-fecundation bypassing the traditional polarity between immanence and transcendence. Whitehead expresses

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.7. I emphasize.

⁴¹⁶ Edouard GLISSANT, interview with Laure Adler, 2004.

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ttqh1ilk_pc.

Accessed 11.01.2019.

this tension inherent to cosmological dualism in his famous formulation of the ultimate contrasts characterizing the relationship between the concepts of God and the world:

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World. It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.⁴¹⁷

I submit that the figure of Gaia today translates Whitehead's intuition about the mutual inhabiting of God and the World into the terms of planetary, intra-worldly processes: this may appear even more clearly if the reader substitutes "God" by "the self" in the former quotation (which per se does no more than simply unveil the repartition in modern cosmology of divine attributes to the human self). Like Whitehead's philosophy of process, the Gaia hypothesis provides a way out of the traditional issues of modern dualism, the latter struggling to characterize the miraculous interactions between the hermetic realms of nature and culture, necessity and freedom, visible and invisible, rationality and morality etc. It suggests that these difficulties stem from the erroneous postulate of an estranged relationship, an estranged cohabitation between concepts perceived as antithetical. Hans Jonas thus advocates for an unsuspectedly "more intimate relationship between inside and outside which has to be imagined at the root of modern dualism"⁴¹⁸. Likewise, when Donna Haraway imagines her Terropolis, she creates a world in which "*natures, cultures, subjects and objects do not pre-exist their intertwined worldings*"⁴¹⁹ – a world in which Terran processes of "becoming with", of "kin-making" are freed from such segregational conceptual structures. The multi-species worlding she describes thus appears as a commitment to embrace an ontological intimacy with all things and attune to processes of world-composing, to "the old-art of terraforming"⁴²⁰ in which companion-species are engaged.

⁴¹⁷ Alfred North WHITEHEAD, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, New York, Free Press, 1978 (1929). p.348.

⁴¹⁸ Hans JONAS, *Organismus und Freiheit: Ansätze zu einer philosophischen Biologie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1973, p.184.

⁴¹⁹ Donna HARAWAY, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, op.cit., p.13. I emphasize.

⁴²⁰ Donna HARAWAY, *SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far*, Acceptance speech for the Pilgrim Awards, 07.07. 2011. P.10.

The “always too much connection”⁴²¹ of Donna Haraway’s Terrapolis directly confronts the sterility of a segregational structure of thought articulated around a cardinal abyss, a primordial rupture at the roots of dualism. Hers is an inter- and intra-inhabiting bridging the estranged being in the world of the Gnostics and echoing Virginia Woolf’s account of the fluidity and permeability of being in the world.

According to Alan Chih-Chien Hsieh, Woolf’s first novel *The Voyage Out* imagines an alternative mode of inhabiting set against the colonial context of the early 20th century and the ambient narrative of Western triumphalism. The literary critic analyses in the protagonist Rachel and her relationship to the world the embodiment of an “estranged intimacy with the world”⁴²²:

By estranged intimacy, I mean a close relationship with the world, a togetherness, that is at the same time estranged because this being-in-the-world, emerging from encounters with others, is never an enclosed space but an open whole. Rachel’s estranged intimacy with the world thus anticipates the unexpected possibilities of life arising from our being-in-the-world, our situatedness within the living-world, our embodied experiencing of the world.

It is always an intimacy, a coming-together, and at the same time an estrangement, an openness, that keeps the singularity of each being and retains contingency of every encounter. In her novels, Woolf is always in search of an interpersonal (even transcendental) connection that does not curb the singularity of each being, a connection that I term an estranged intimacy with the world.

Alan Chih-Chien Hsieh suggests that Rachel’s experience of life and her quest for connection registers a planetary love which embraces the process of becoming with the others, of both affecting and being affected by them, and remaining open to the

URL: <https://people.ucsc.edu/~haraway/Files/PilgrimAcceptanceHaraway.pdf>

Accessed 11.03.2019.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

⁴²² Alan CHIH-CHIEN HSIEH, “An Estranged Intimacy with the World: The Postcolonial Woolf’s Planetary Love in *The Voyage Out*”, in *Virginia Woolf: Writing the World*. Ed. Pamela L. Caughie and Diana L. Swanson. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2015. pp.116-21. p.119.

contingency of these becomings. Rachel's initiation into colonial civilization expresses the irreducible experience of the indissolubility between interior and exterior: as she walks through a native village, Rachel's encounter with the natives collapses the self-other binary. The planetary love Alan Chih-Chien Hsieh describes goes beyond the restraints of traditional romantic love and the suffocating conception of bourgeois marriage: it arises rather from the estranged intimacy with the world, an "interconnected yet indeterminate relationship with the world"⁴²³. Chih-Chien Hsieh draws upon the notion of "planetary" proposed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose *Death of a Discipline* urges us to imagine ourselves as planetary creatures rather than unrooted global agents. She writes: "the globe is on our computers. *No one lives there*. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan."⁴²⁴ *Mais nous sommes au monde*⁴²⁵. Spivak's thought of the planetary affirms the ineluctable alterity of that which we inhabit and which inhabits us in return, a transcendental alterity which "remains underived from us" but "contains us as much as it flings us away"⁴²⁶. Her approach thereby reverses the gnostic posture of an ontological estrangement of the self, isolated amidst the radical strangeness of the world, and reasserts our embeddedness in the strangeness which contains us, which we contain and to which we belong. Inhabiting the planetary is to be "intended toward the other"⁴²⁷, and the planetary love Alan Chih-chien Hsieh suggests is binding Rachel to the world is one rooted in her indeterminate relationship with other beings and the *radical openness* of worldly becomings emerging from it. It is indeed a metaxic love embracing the twofoldness of our open entanglement with other planetary becomings and summoning us to maintain an estranged intimacy with those we inhabit.

⁴²³ Ibid, p.220.

⁴²⁴ Gayatri CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, *Death of a Discipline*, 2003, p.72. I emphasize.

⁴²⁵ Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Totalité et Infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*, Poche, 1987, p.21.

⁴²⁶ Gayatri CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, *op.cit.*, p.73.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

“We can have hope only in what is without remedy”

— Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*.

On January 17, 2018, French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe officially announced that the French government had given up on pursuing the highly controversial project of building a new airport in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, western France. This decision came as the crowning achievement of five decades of a political, economic, legal and environmental struggle to protect a 2,000 acres-land of preserved forests and wetlands from awaiting colossal urban development projects. The site became a *Zone a Défendre (ZAD)*— *zone to defend*: what began as a small protest camp grew into a rural space of resistance and autonomous experimentation around a self-sufficient and sustainable inhabiting. Kept at bay for years by the collective movement, unprecedented operations of destruction of the ZAD and eviction of its residents were launched by the government during the night of the 9th April, deploying an immoderate apparatus of militarized state violence illustrated in interminable lines of armored vehicles, tear gas, and some 11,000 offensive grenades thrown by the police within less than a week. The police announced that reporters were strictly forbidden throughout the operation and blocked their access to the site.

What might possibly legitimate the deployment of such a disproportionate violence against a thriving community drawing upon permaculture to harvest the land and restore a flourishing biodiversity? How could a grassroots community with its own bakery, cheesemonger, brewery, a weekly pay-what-you-want market, theatre spaces, newspaper, library and even a pirate radio station, represent such a threat to the state authority that it required to be repressed through one of the largest military operations deployed on the French territory since the students-protest of 1968? According to Da-

vid Graeber, what emerged from the ZAD was unbearable for it manifested the persistence of hope. A symbol of resistance to infrastructural projects and centralized power, the ZAD developed a laboratory of social experimentation on what a post-capitalist inhabiting could look like. In the violent repression of this peaceful and resilient inhabiting, the French state exhibited the totalitarian magnitude of its intolerance to any alternative form of inhabiting. Reciprocally, the commitment to live freely in a disciplinary society uncovers the pervading omnipresence of oppressive structures. In “Hope in Common”, David Graeber describes the organized destruction in our cultural imaginary of all alternative trajectories to that consistently pursued by the global neoliberal governance for the past few decades. The anthropologist claims that the failure to imagine an alternative to the present status quo draws upon the edification of a vast bureaucratic and ideological apparatus ensuring the permanence of hopelessness.⁴²⁸ Against this institutionalization of hopelessness, the ZAD sowed hope and bloomed like weeds inside the walls of bureaucratic governance – resilient, persisting, local, versatile, free. Other weeds like the ZAD swarm everywhere, relentlessly overflowing the web of standardization and uniformization which, maintaining that there is no alternative, struggles to repress their presence. In praise of weeds, their manifesto calls for the spirit of resilience to spread with “the desire to open cracks everywhere”, embodying thereby the politics of the apocalypse which had introduced this final chapter:

Cracks in the frenzy of security measures, cracks in the ecological disaster, cracks in the tightening border regimes, cracks in the omnipotent surveillance, cracks in a world that puts everything up for sale. In these disenchanted times, the ZAD and all that it represents, like the struggles of yesteryear and elsewhere, is *a glimmer of hope in the here and now*.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ David GRAEBER, “Hope in Common”, 2008.

URL: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/david-graeber-hope-in-common>
Accessed 11.03.2019.

⁴²⁹ “Defending the ZAD”, digital booklet written by the inhabitants of the ZAD. My emphasis.
URL: <https://mauvaisetroupe.org/spip.php?article143>
Accessed 11.01.2019.

The hope sowed by the resilient inhabiting of the ZAD is a hope that bloomed in what was without remedy, mending an alienated relationship with the world in the face of the irreparable and reinventing horizons of possible in the absence of alternative. The love of the world embodied in their inhabiting appears as a faith in the world, a “loving openness” in Voegelin’s words, an unyielding hope trusting worldly becoming to recover and create again. In *Wilding: the return of nature to a British farm*, Isabella Tree recounts the leap of faith cardinal to the “Knepp experiment”, the pioneering rewilding project of her farm in West Sussex using free-roaming grazing animals as a way to restore an extraordinary flourishing wildlife. Stepping back from unsustainable practices of intensive farming degrading the land’s biodiversity, Isabella Tree proposes to explore alternative forms of inhabiting informed by a posture of letting be, withdrawal and surrendering. “Rewilding”, she explains, “is restoration by letting go”, a process the author describes as “full of surprises”. “Extremely rare species, including turtle doves, nightingales, peregrine falcons, woodpeckers and purple emperor butterflies, are now breeding at Knepp, while populations of other species are rocketing. The degraded agricultural land has become a functioning ecosystem again, heaving with life – all by itself.”⁴³⁰ Isabella Tree’s *Wilding* presents the love of the world as a posture of trust, faith and hope in its capacity for resilience, a love embracing the estranged intimacy of our inhabiting and clearing a space for other worldly becoming to emerge. In chapter 10 of *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*, Naomi Klein investigates local communities’ growing distrust towards the fossil fuel industry, sustained by a cultural concern before the extractive threat and the damages it would inflict to the ecosystem. She quotes a goat-rancher from Montana, working together with indigenous people for the anti-fracking movement and their fight to protect south-eastern Montana from mining companies such as Arch Goal:

that connection to this place and the love that people have for it, that’s what Arch Goal doesn’t get. They underestimate that. They don’t understand it, so they disregard it. And that’s what in the end

⁴³⁰ Isabella TREE, op.cit.

will save that place. It is not the hatred of the coal companies, or anger, but love will save that place.⁴³¹

As she engages with local communities involved in the fight for divestment, Naomi Klein uncovers a common concern arising across traditional political boundaries, a land-care pledged to the place they inhabit, and finds that what drives the people united against the oil pipeline project is a *radical love for the world*. Realizing the subversive power of this love, she warns those who might underestimate our attachment to the world: “when the extractive industry’s culture of structural transience bumps up against a group of deeply rooted people with an intense love of their homeplace and a determination to protect it, the effect can be explosive.”⁴³² Politics begin in this love of the world, in the commitment not to resign from it: love is where we start from.

⁴³¹ Naomi KLEIN, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2014, p.296.

⁴³² *Ibid*, p.297.

CONCLUSION:

**COUNTERSPELLS FOR A RESILIENT
INHABITING OF THE WORLD**

The counter-spell is simple: tell a different story

— Starhawk, *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*

In a talk about the potential contribution of ecofeminism to the thought of the Anthropocene⁴³³, Emilie Hache affirms the need to relate differently the world we inhabit, what is happening to us, how we came to this point. With ecofeminism, she proposes to tell different stories. Stories, she claims, weave the world, constitute our inner architecture, make us stand. But sometimes stories fail to make us stand or believe: they sometimes prevent us from moving as they distillate the belief that “there

⁴³³ Emilie HACHE, « Se réappropriier le champ de la longue durée. Contribution écoféministe à une histoire après l’anthropocène ». Séminaire « Esthétiques et pratiques de la terre » organisé par Thierry Drumm et Aline Wiame (GECof, ULB), Bruxelles, 23th of February 2017.

URL : [http://www.academia.edu/32922365/ Se_r%C3%A9appropriier le champ de la longue dur%C3%A9e. Contribution %C3%A9coféministe %C3%A0 une histoire apr%C3%A8s l anthropoc%C3%A8ne Bruxelles ULB 2017](http://www.academia.edu/32922365/Se_r%C3%A9appropriier_le_champ_de_la_longue_dur%C3%A9e_Contribution_%C3%A9coféministe_%C3%A0_une_histoire_apr%C3%A8s_lanthropoc%C3%A8ne_Bruxelles_ULB_2017)
Accessed 23.01.2019

is no alternative”, no way but forward, no other path than the one we have been walking. Stories paving our imaginary tell us that history is over⁴³⁴ - that there will be no more stories, that everything has been told. Doing so, they dictate a posture of obedience, conformity and resignation. As we are prevented from recounting or inventing other stories, we are also prevented from inhabiting the world as well, as fully and as freely as we could aspire to.

This thesis embraces the belief that new narratives and practices can arise from and through thought. It emerges as a celebration of poiesis, the creative potential of our intertwined worldings, unexpected encounters becoming fecund, resilient wanderings. It has sought to investigate the significance of this creative potential for political life. Karl Marx taught us to always consider the primordially of the material structure of society, social change being conditioned by specific modes and relations of production. His dialectical materialism emphasizes the radical entanglement of historical processes of emergence in a practical network of socio-economic ties. It thereby also reasserts how much of our individual as well as collective trajectories is affected by the diverse constraints imposed upon us by a politico-juridical superstructure serving the interests of the dominant class. Yet this indisputable entanglement, our metabolic rootedness in worldly processes, as I have suggested in this thesis, is one that overflows dualistic thought patterns and could not as such discriminate the material from the ideal⁴³⁵. In *The Ecological Thought*, Timothy Morton thus contends that ecology disturbs the old regime of mind and matter.⁴³⁶ The dialectical dance between the concrete conditions of our inhabiting and the stories that both weave and recount them unveils a radical intimacy between the cultural and the ecological – an ontological hybridity

⁴³⁴ Francis FUKUYAMA, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin Books, 1992.

⁴³⁵ The Marxist theory of social change identifies a dialectical relationship between structure and superstructure, or between matter and ideas, which is perpetually overflowed by the advent of transformation. Far from describing a deterministic and unidirectional relationship between discrete entities, where the economic base would exclusively dictate the political and cultural superstructure, Marx and Engels analyse a dialectical process of historical change involving “innumerable intersecting forces” in a *reciprocal causality* : as violent as our enslavement to material conditions of subsistence may be, it remains nonetheless, at least to some extent, open to the contingent emergence of things that have never been.

Friedrich ENGELS to Joseph Bloch in Königsberg, *London, September 21, 1890*, in *Historical Materialism (Marx, Engels, Lenin)*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972, p. 295.

⁴³⁶ Timothy MORTON, *The Ecological Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2010.

that resists modern practices of purification. A reduction of this playful intimacy to the idealism – materialism debate would reveal a failure to appreciate the entangled complexity and creativity of processes of becoming, where thoughts arise *with* matter: through their surprising and enmeshed unfolding. Emphasising the immanence of spirit in matter and refusing their opposition in the binaries of Cartesian metaphysics, the New Materialist approach invites us to explore the monism of Baruch Spinoza as a fecund philosophical way. My engagement with the environmental transition proposes to dwell amidst the ruins of collapsing dualisms – including the one between idea and matter – and embrace the inextricable mystery of our metaxic worlding. Analyzing the complex interrelations between discourse and matter, the discipline of Material Ecocriticism thus postulates that “all matter is a storied matter” and argue that material phenomena can be read and interpreted as stories⁴³⁷. The world both inspires our stories and emerges from them, as manifested in the way modern tales of progress are now inscribed in the sedimentary layers of the earth⁴³⁸. In this regard, the environmental crisis illuminates the kaleidoscopic dimension of our inhabiting in-between realms, where ideas meet matter, and summons us to explore unpaved roads in thought as well as on earth.

What have we learnt from this hermeneutical journey in Gnosticism? Throughout this dissertation, I hope to have suggested something similar to what Emilie Hache is pointing toward in her talk: that *it is possible to tell other stories*. As it bathes our present cosmologies in an unexpected light and emphasizes the importance of metaphors and narratives in our engagement with the environmental crisis, my hermeneutics of Gnosticism indicates that it is possible to renew the structures and categories of our thought. The perspective of Gnosticism contributes indeed to unveil both the

⁴³⁷ Serenella IOVINO and Serpil OPPERMANN (ed.), *Material Ecocriticism*, op.cit, p.1.

⁴³⁸ Jan ZALASIEWICZ, Colin N. WATERS, Juliana IVAR DO SUL, Patricia L. CORCORAN, Anthony D. BARNOSKY, Alejandro CEARRETA, Matt EDGEWORTH, Agnieszka GALUSZKA, Catherine JEANDEL, Reinhold LEINFELDER, J.R. MCNEILL, Will STEFFEN, Colin SUMMERHAYES, Michael WAGREICH, Mark WILLIAMS, Alexander P. WOLFE, Yasmin YONAN, “The geological cycle of plastics and their use as a stratigraphic indicator of the Anthropocene”, in *Anthropocene*, 13, 2016, pp. 4-17. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ancene.2016.01.002>
Accessed 02.02.2020.

strength and the contingency of the narratives ordering our inhabiting of the world. Throwing light upon a cultural imaginary of contempt for and estrangement from the world organized around a dualistic cosmology, my hermeneutics of Gnosticism invites us to reclaim the power of tropes both in uncovering present narratives and creating ones able to subvert the present order. If, as Bruno Latour and Timothy Lenton note while contemplating “why Gaia is so hard to understand”⁴³⁹, it appears as difficult to invent objects as it is to dis-invent them in order to repopulate the earth with new ideas, such seems to be the task of philosophy: to invent, dis-invent, and invent anew, to un-think and then start thinking again. The Gaian philosopher and the professor of Earth System Science write together:

That we have no good concepts to describe [the present] situation is a proof that we relied too much on the usual repertoire coming from older amalgamation of political and biological order.⁴⁴⁰

The frustration that comes with the difficulty of telling new stories from within the tales of an obsolete order signals the limits of these narratives and the presence of a looming idea that is arising with the ecological mutation. In Gnosticism as in Gaia, what is worth thinking is precisely what eludes us: the fluttering tension, the unspeakable riddle. *In this chiaroscuro arise the monsters*⁴⁴¹, Gramsci tells us. But what do

⁴³⁹ Bruno LATOUR and Timothy M. LENTON, “Extending the Domain of Freedom, or Why Gaia is so hard to understand”, art. cit.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Antonio GRAMSCI, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoared, trans. Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York, International Publishers, 1992. p.175-176.

This popular quote by Gramsci is a liberal translation from the original Italian: “La crisi consiste appunto nel fatto che il vecchio muore e il nuovo non può nascere: in questo interregno si verificano i fenomeni morbosi più svariati”. A more literal translation would read as such: “Crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born, in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appears”. While Gramsci’s reflection was written between 1926 and 1935 during his incarceration by the Italian fascist regime in Turi’s prison, his words do not fail to evoke the present ecological transition arising along contemporary phenomena of collapse and burgeoning, of lingering fascist tendencies across the world, declining state authority and rising popular protests, environmental loss and resilience, decomposition and recomposition. The open horizon described by Gramsci in a time of political inbetweenness echoes the liminality of the present times, as environmental destruction suspends the trajectory of many worldly beings over an abyss of uncertainty. The term “monsters” is particularly evocative of the tentacular creatures of the Cthulucene, uncanny more-than-human companions of chaos with whom we must learn to dwell within the precarious multi-species worldings left open by the environmental crisis.

these monsters tell us between an old world and the new? My approach to the present ecological mutation through the mythological perspective of Gnosticism is also a way to divert from a certain tendency to hold on to reason as the only way to possibly engage with the world. Taking one step back from the rationalist paradigm infusing modern approaches to the environment, my hermeneutic approach to the ecological issue suggests embracing another type of engagement with the world, informed by an apophatic posture. Latour and Lenton thus observe that studying Gaian phenomena parallels the study of God, notably in the feeling of awe-inspiring ignorance they might arouse:

Strangely, defining such a phenomenon requires a sort of “negative geology” reminiscent of the apophatic ways that theologians had recourse to when trying to probe God’s uniqueness.

Just like God, the Gaian world disclosed along the environmental mutation cannot be quite said, nor can it be exhausted. A major profanation of the gnostic cosmology I hope to have at least instigated in this dissertation is thus to bring together these two unreconcilable poles that are God and the world. This radical dualism between God and the world is indeed one main tenet of Gnosticism which I argue needs to be deconstructed and overcome. As Latour’s study of Gaia shows, when opponents to Gaia discard Lovelock’s invention for adding life, agency or even divinity to earth processes, they betray their own preceding operations of *dis-animation and de-divinization of the world* – what Voegelin described as a beheading of being. What makes the divinization of the world so blasphemous to the contemporary opponents of Gaia? Could it be the ethical imperative that would directly flow from this reconciliation, that of a radical responsibility binding us to the world? In her foreword to the French translation of John Baird Callicott’s *Genesis*⁴⁴², environmental philosopher and ethicist Catherine Larrère mentions Modernity’s estrangement from both the ideas of God and the world. She suggests that the contemporary reluctance to engage with these two ideas indicate the explosive and subversive potential held by

⁴⁴² John Baird CALLICOTT, *Genèse. La Bible et l’écologie*, Wildproject, 2009.

the possibility of their union. For Gilles Deleuze, the remedy and “our most difficult task”⁴⁴³ is “to discover and restore belief in the world, before and beyond words”⁴⁴⁴. A transcendental belief in the miracle of life on earth, a faith, an intimacy, a hope, a love of the world that was lost somewhere along the way. My research raises this question: how did we lose faith in the world? How might the hermeneutics of Gnosticism provide an answer?

Against a gnostic culture of rupture, distance and estrangement, a systematic devaluation of the world and a permanent, insatiable longing for an elsewhere, I have proposed to embrace what is overflowing in the world through a resumption of the modern dialectic of inside and outside. « A more intimate relationship between outside and inside has to be imagined at the beginning of dualism⁴⁴⁵ » advises Hans Jonas. In *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Transparence et l'Obstacle*, the literary critic Jean Starobinsky formulates the hypothesis that western Modernity is driven by a *hatred of mediation*, of the abyss separating the meaning from the sign.⁴⁴⁶ This hatred of mediation resembles the Gnostics' fear of the opacity, of the space left open, the distance between things and the liminality characterizing our inhabiting of the world. I have suggested in this thesis that what is repressed in Gnosticism indicates the potential resources of the in-between, of the metaxic, the queer – everything that overflows and subverts modern binaries. The significance of the hermeneutics of Gnosticism presented in this research unfolds right there, hinges on the gnostic aversion to our metaxic entanglement in the world. Proposing to elucidate the gnostic obsession with dualistic segregations, with a systematic practice of purification between the sacred boundaries of being, the hermeneutics of Gnosticism dives in the abyss of metaxy and offers to delve in the obscure liminality abhorred by the Gnostics. The hermeneutics of Gnosticism thus becomes creative and resilient when it offers to explore what gnostic narratives

⁴⁴³ Gilles DELEUZE and Felix GUATTARI, *What is Philosophy?* London: Verso, 1994 (1991), p.75.

⁴⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, London: Athlone Press, 2000, p.172.

⁴⁴⁵ Hans JONAS, *Evolution et liberté*, Payot & Rivages, Paris, 2000, p.236. My translation.

⁴⁴⁶ The biography examines the life and writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau through the prism of the tension between the quest for transparency and the necessity of obstruction, that is, between the openness towards the other and the withdrawal within, between the pull towards social life and the familiar exile into inner life.

tend to obstruct, when it lingers over the cosmological repression disclosed in Gnosticism. What I have termed the hermeneutics of Gnosticism investigates gnostic tropes which reveal as they conceal, asks how they might cooperate, lending themselves to perpetual reinterpretation to perhaps illuminate the present allegories of our inhabiting.

The Hermeneutics of Gnosticism presented in this research aims to offer an interpretation of Modernity where the gnostic tropes of a radical estrangement from the world reveal *an obsessive fear of the in-between and our intimate involvement in it*. A major contribution of my analysis is to connect the gnostic contempt for the world with a cosmological dualism organizing a structural estrangement between worldings, traditionally isolated in polarized realms (such as nature/culture, object/subject, organism/environment, self/other etc). I have suggested that the segregative tropes pervading modern dualism disclose the ever-present challenge of *inhabiting in-between* these realms, in other words, of dwelling in the watery trajectories of becoming through which the world is being created. In this regard, the reflections unfolded through the prism of Gnosticism inquire into the depth of the dualistic abyss and what it gathers – revealing as it aims to conceal the depth of a world of chaos and creation. Gnosticism invites us to a mirror game, a play of light and shadow around polarities and what they both disclose and obstruct: with Jonas, it draws our attention to the issue of dualism as one of inhabiting the world; with Voegelin, it helps us to diagnose a cultural repression of the “metaxic tension”, shedding light upon a cosmological inhibition which also arises as an obsession. The hermeneutics of Gnosticism thus tells a story of the queer, a deeply-felt in-betweenness, omnipresent in the modern imaginary – albeit under the mode of repression. Following Catherine Keller, who dwells upon the watery depths of creation and exposes a cultural fear of the deep pervading the western Christian tradition⁴⁴⁷, I suggest that gnostic narratives disclose a fear of the in-between. Leaning over the edge of an abyss, mesmerized by an obscure openness, Gnosticism draws our attention to our unfathomable entanglement in the world and the creative overflowing of the deep in-between.

⁴⁴⁷ Catherine KELLER, *Face of the Deep: a Theology of Becoming*, op.cit.

The movement embraced by the Hermeneutics of Gnosticism is therefore not a beyond, nor an overcoming: rather, it digs deeper within, chooses to stay with the trouble, to dwell further in the tension and inhabit this ubiquitous in-between. It commits to explore a chaotic openness as the dark side of modern dualistic cosmology, to venture in the obscure and embrace the repressed.

I regard the figure of Gaia as one eminent example of the alternative stories which can arise to embrace a radical experience of entanglement which Gnosticism abhors. Gaia offers an alternative to the gnostic narratives of estrangement from the world: an enthusiastic decomposition of the traditional categories of dualism, it tells the dissolution of the boundaries between life and its environment. For Bruno Latour, Gaia is a figure of pluralism superseding the nature-culture dichotomy with the proliferation of non-human and hybrid agencies. Dispersing intentionality and eventfulness beyond the human realm, Gaia embodies the resistance to the dis-animation of the earth. Doing so, it collapses the political cosmology of nature along with its truncated vision of the alterity of the world. The tale of Gaia therefore provides a prominent illustration of a narrative that dwells in the chaotic inbetween and embraces the liminality approached in our hermeneutics, specifically unraveling the organism-environment, parts-whole and inside-outside dichotomies. It articulates the queerness, the confuse profusion of our attachments and the hybridity of our entangled worldings. An allegory of heterarchy – an organization where the elements are unranked or possess the potential to be ranked different ways –, Gaia also allows to politically navigate this liminality through weaving anarchist reflections into the collective challenge of an ecological transition.

The hermeneutics of Gnosticism and Gaia are thus complementary narratives. The former modestly presents a diagnosis, points toward a few cosmological mechanisms that hinder the unfolding of a sustainable inhabiting, suggests the ubiquitous challenge of inhabiting in-between and summons the cardinal dimension of metaphors for thinking through this perpetual challenge. The prism of Gnosticism also teaches us to dismantle unmoveable certitudes and appeals to a collective and continuous movement of creation renewing the modalities of our inhabiting at the edge of uncertainty. Gaia

initiates a cosmological reconstruction through a reconfiguration of the figures of earthly agency, away from the modern order of nature. The treatment of Gaia by authors such as Bruno Latour or Isabelle Stengers exemplifies what a metaphor or a mythological figure can summon in terms of philosophical and political reflections around the ecological transition. Through the metaphor of a rooted overflowing, I also submit my own trope in the hope of expressing the tensional condition from which and through which we emerge and inhabit these Gaian trajectories of worlding – in a cloud of possible, deep entangled and wide open.

I have also argued that a transdisciplinary approach to a complex world of overflowing was required to subvert the disciplinary structures dictated by modern dualism and resist the pervading ways in which we are being continuously divided. Disciplinary confinements are political, insofar as they sustain segregational infrastructures of power. One of these confinements, as we have seen, isolates the religious from the secular. I have suggested throughout this thesis that religious and spiritual modes of inhabiting assume a cardinal role in generating new narratives and practices in response to the ecological transition. Committed to a re-sacralization of the world – human and non-human – and embracing the language of metaphors, contemporary paganism cultivates diversity in the perception of the divine. Goddess-centered religions subvert for instance the templates of patriarchal oppression through the celebration of a divinity that divert from the traditional attributes of patriarchal authority – unique, distant, abstract, disciplinarian, transcendent – to offer a figure of abundance, healing, nurturing, diversity, immanence and sensuality. In her *Gaia and God*⁴⁴⁸, Rosemary Radford Ruether draws upon the legacy of the Christian cultural heritage to illuminate an “ecofeminist theology of earth healing”, summoning the transformative and biophilic elements in this heritage as a precious legacy that should be isolated from the fall into patriarchy and sacralized domination. When they engage morally and politically for the ecological transition, contemporary spiritualities as well as mainstream religious traditions bear the potential for a substantive subversion to the secular order. The

⁴⁴⁸ Rosemary Radford RUETHER, *Gaia and God. An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, Harper-Collins Publishers, New York, 1992.

Alliance of Religions and Conversation was thus founded in 1995 with the aim of fostering collaborations between the world's major faiths and key conservation organisations, encouraging the development of faith-based environmental programmes reflecting a diversity of beliefs and practices. Empowering religious institutions and people of faith to advocate for the changes they wish to implement in society, the Greenfaith coalition claims furthermore that “*protecting the Earth is a sacred act, and that environmental stewardship is a moral responsibility*”.⁴⁴⁹ Initiatives like these illustrate the potential for resilience held in religious and spiritual modes of inhabiting: they display a recovered sense of our common earthboundness and operate at the junction between ideas and practices. As the ecological transition opens a space for dialogue where opportunities arise for fecund encounters between beliefs contained on the fringe of the secular order, it also summons a diversity of traditions and modes of inhabiting – as illustrated in multi-faith climate gatherings – to crusade for that to which they hold dear. Their ecospiritual commitment to “reconnecting with the sacred and the earth”⁴⁵⁰, provided it sustains a dedicated care to preserve a diversity of ways of inhabiting and resists the modern tendency to unify the earth, appears as a vow to Gaian worldings.

Ecofeminism arises as another successful attempt to address the gnostic suspicion toward mediation through its dedication to weaving knots and building bridges across a culture of distance. The Women's Pentagon Action in November 1980 is emblematic of this movement of mending, as some 2.000 women peace activists marched to the Pentagon to weave yarn across the entrances of the building to symbolically reweave the web of life. This peaceful weaving constituted an ultimate act of defiance to the workplace of an imperial and nuclear power threatening life on earth through a predatory relationship to the world. In their aptly named unity statement, the women who rose to defend and protect an endangered world declare: “we understand that all is connected... we are connections made of blood and bone. We women are gathering because life on the precipice is intolerable.”⁴⁵¹. The women of the Pentagon Action

⁴⁴⁹ Greenfaith website.

URL: <https://greenfaith.org/mission#>

Accessed 02.02.2020

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Unity Statement of the Women's Pentagon Action, November 1980.

URL: <http://www.wloe.org/WLOE-en/background/wpastatem.html>

appear to have fully embraced the subversion of reclaiming their connection to the world and their caring love of life. Rising to celebrate and defend what binds us together and to the world, they sought to literally heal the rupture organized from within the Pentagon and recover from an alienated relationship to the earth. “Life on the precipice is intolerable” – life on the edge of the abyss, in the ruins of capitalist destruction, life in the end-time. As she reflects on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins and the modalities of inhabiting these ruins through collaborative survival within multispecies landscapes, Anna Tsing proposes to see the present environmental collapse as a love affair gone bad between humans and plants⁴⁵². What a perfect depiction of the impossible love affair between Gnosticism and the world! Our dwelling in the world is a continuous love affair – one that can be resumed and mended, one we can grow from.

How to “create hope on the edge of the abyss”⁴⁵³? Uncovering the gnostic time of progress as one of constant projection into the non-present, my reflections culminate into a call to heal our estranged inhabiting through reconnecting to the world we inhabit here and now. This call is echoed today notably by ecofeminists and people identifying as witches. The ecofeminist witches presented by Emilie Hache⁴⁵⁴ as a figure of redemption for our times propose to reclaim a connection with what was separated by capitalism in order to dissolve its power, finding and recreating a proximity with the world we live in. She writes:

reactivating the history of the burning of witches during the Inquisition as a way of engaging the Anthropocene reminds us that the double denigration of women and nature lies at the heart of th[e] changing world [of Modernity]. It reminds us that capitalism does not like women – free, independent, powerful; nor does it like us to sacralise the earth – the whole earth, not only a few spaces deemed “virgin” or “wild”⁴⁵⁵

Accessed 26.01.2019.

⁴⁵² Anna LOWENHAUPT TSING, *The Mushroom at the End of the World. On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015.

⁴⁵³ Isabelle STENGERS, « Fabriquer de l'espoir au bord du gouffre. A propos de l'œuvre de Donna Haraway », *La Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées* n°10, mars-avril 2009.

⁴⁵⁴ Emilie HACHE, « Tremblez, tremblez, les sorcières sont de retour! Ecrivaines, philosophes, activistes et sorcières écoféministes face au dérèglement climatique. Récit écoféministe de l'anthropocène », Colloque *Comment penser l'Anthropocène?*, 5-6 novembre 2015.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid, p.6. I translate.

For Emilie Hache, the figure of the witch embodies the survival of a resistance against the stories and practices imposed upon us, namely against the modern imaginary enforced by the Inquisition and the alienated relationship to the world it dictates. In her words, the ecofeminist witches claim that « the phobias of the Moderns and of Capitalism are not ours, and do not correspond to anything anymore. Everything is to invent again in the new ecological situation that is ours. ⁴⁵⁶» With her and with them, I summon us to resist the barbarous becomings of today and create other possibles by casting counter-spells against the gnostic imaginary that pervades a toxic inhabiting of the world: by reclaiming our power to think, create and tell other stories.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, p.7. I translate.

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For more clarity and consistency, I chose to organize this bibliography by chapters. References are only mentioned once in order of appearance, even when quoted successively in different chapters.

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