

Cold, Glacial, Generic

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I'll try to situate Dominic's work philosophically, by taking up its relation to the work of Quentin Meillassoux and Alain Badiou via three conceptual focal points:

- in Dominic's work, the concept of the cold world
- in Meillassoux's *After Finitude*, the brief reference in the final chapter to the "glacial world" of primary qualities
- in Badiou's work, the concept of a generic procedure

So, very schematically, I want to consider the relations between the *cold*, the *glacial*, and the *generic*.

The best place to start is the passage in *After Finitude* wherein Meillassoux evokes "the world of Cartesian extension" opened to thought by the Copernican revolution and Galileo's mathematical physics:

a world capable of autonomy—a world wherein bodies as well as their movements can be described independently of their sensible qualities, such as flavor, smell, heat, etc. The world of Cartesian extension is a world that acquires the independence of substance, a world that we can henceforth conceive of as indifferent to everything in it that corresponds to the concrete, organic connection that we forge with it—it is this *glacial* world that is revealed to the moderns, a world in which there is no longer any up or down, centre or periphery, nor anything else that might make of it a world designed for humans. For the first time, the world manifests itself as capable of subsisting without any of those aspects that constitute its concreteness for us.

The world of Cartesian extension, in other words, is a world of purely primary qualities made manifest by mathematical formalism. But a paradox also lurks in that description, insofar as that world is at once *independent of* and *revealed to* the human mind. The glacial world is manifest as non-manifest. This is what Meillassoux describes as the *paradox of manifestation*: the paradox of how a world radically unassimilable to human experience can be included within it.

One way to state the question that I see at the root of Dominic's book is: *how does this paradox feel?* The answer offered by the title of his book—an answer also implicit in Meillassoux's evocative phrase "glacial world"—is that it feels cold. And this is a secondary quality. The coldness of the glacial world is the *sensible* trace, within experience, of a world that is *intelligible* as independent of experience. The paradoxical experience of that independence is the experience of what Dominic calls the "cold world." In other words, we could say that Dominic's project in *Cold World* is to investigate the secondary qualities that are attendant upon the *exposure* of primary qualities to thought.

Dominic describes the "cold world" as one "voided of both human warmth and metaphysical comfort. This cold world is the world made strange, a world that has ceased to be the 'life-world' in which we are usually immersed and instead stands before us in a kind

of lop-sided objectivity.” It is the experience of this “lop-sided objectivity” which “stands before us” that ties Dominic’s project to what Meillassoux terms “the paradox of manifestation.” What links Dominic’s work with that of both Meillassoux and Badiou is a rejection of the phenomenological theme of “lived experience” in order to deal with the problem of what we might call “unlived experience,” or the experience of “a world that has ceased to be the ‘life-world.’”

For Badiou, this sort of experience inheres within what he calls a “generic procedure.” Since such a procedure “has nothing to do with the limits of the human species, our ‘consciousness,’ our ‘finitude,’ our ‘faculties,’” it has to be thought through the same mathematical formalism as the “glacial world” of Cartesian extension described by Meillassoux. To quote from *Logics of Worlds*:

If we think such a procedure in terms of its formal determinations alone—in the same way that we think the laws of the material world through mathematical formalism—we find sequences of signs and various relations arranged in a productive or counter-productive manner, without ever needing to pass through human “lived experience.” In fact, a truth is that by which “we,” of the human species, are committed to a trans-specific procedure, a procedure which opens us to the possibility of being Immortals. A truth is thus undoubtedly an experience of the inhuman.

This “experience of the inhuman” poses the same problem as Meillassoux’s paradox of manifestation, or the misanthropic self-projection into the inhuman investigated by Dominic: the problem of *how that which is utterly refractory to experience is registered within experience*. We could state three different questions posed by these thinkers with regard to this problem:

- Badiou: *under what conditions* is unlived experience possible?
- Meillassoux: how can unlived experience be *known*?
- Dominic: how does unlived experience *feel*?

I want to argue that one way to think about the common ground of these questions is to consider the manner in which each of them involves a reactivation of Hume’s problem of induction. This is a strategy drawn primarily from Meillassoux’s work; if you’re familiar with *After Finitude* you’ll know that a reengagement with the consequences of Hume’s problem is at the core of Meillassoux’s project.

Briefly, the problem of induction, as articulated by Hume, is that we can have no knowledge, either rationally or empirically, of a necessary connection between causes and effects. In Hume’s work, this deficit of both rational and empirical knowledge is overcome by the affective supplement of custom or habit. Custom is a “feeling or sentiment” which is inculcated by experiences of constant conjunction between causes and effects, such that we expect the latter to follow from the former in proportion to the regularity of their conjunction. As Deleuze has argued, for Hume this “feeling or sentiment” is “the constitutive root of the subject.” It is the ground of what we could call “lived experience,” and no apprehension of “the life-world” would be possible without it.

As Hume famously puts it,

Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends, or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action, as well as the chief part of speculation.

What Meillassoux, Badiou, and Dominic have in common is that—in one way or another—all three at once affirm and reject this conclusion. All three would likely agree that custom is “the great guide of *human* life.” But instead of attending to custom or habit as the operative synthetic principle of that form of life, all three investigate modes of action and speculation that become possible (contra Hume) in the absence of that principle: forms of inhuman experience.

For Meillassoux, the very ground of philosophical speculation is the realization that although we cannot know—rationally or empirically—any necessary connection between cause and effect, we *can* know—rationally—that there is no such necessary connection.

Meillassoux’s work explores the *speculative* consequences of pursuing such knowledge, through his thinking of absolute contingency.

Both Badiou and Dominic explore the possibility of *action* in existential situations in which the problem of induction is reactivated rather than elided.

For Badiou, it is the event which interrupts the regime of custom by exposing an absence of necessary connection as a positive metaphysical possibility rather than an epistemological deficit. As an alternative to “habit,” what Badiou calls “fidelity” constitutes the synthetic principle of “inhuman experience” proper to a generic procedure. The subject of a generic procedure is cast along an aleatory trajectory on which every term of experience is *encountered* as radically new—shorn of the regularities of habit—and is either included or excluded (in a binary fashion) from the construction of a generic truth.

In Dominic’s work, on the other hand, it’s the affective consequences of the total *absence* of an event that undoes the “feeling or sentiment” of habit. “The cold world is the world in abeyance, in withdrawal,” he writes. In other words, the cold world is a world no longer beholden to the synthetic principle that *unifies* subjective and objective situations. And it is the *terminal* status of this undoing of the synthesis of habit that propels the misanthrope or the depressive—through a focalization of his or her displeasure—into a state of “militant dysphoria”:

The cold world imposes itself as final, terminal, because it is the termination of a world, its metaphorical freezing or blackening. Just as a given ‘life-world’ is

endowed with resources and qualities which make it possible to live well within it, so the experience of the cold world (or ‘un-life world’) is the experience of the exhaustion of these resources and the extinction of these qualities.

Militant dysphoria thus becomes the principle *non-synthetic* action that is operative within the condition of un-lived experience. And as a non-synthetic principle it might be opposed to both habit and fidelity. Rather than synthesizing disjunct experiences into coherent relations toward the accommodation of means to ends, dejection & dysphoria open a manner of relating to the world that renders it terminally segmented and disjoined, and which aims to exacerbate its disjunctions.

To summarize then, in each case, we find a reactivation of the *problem* of necessary connection, rather than the solution to that problem Hume finds in the synthesis of habit:

- Meillassoux: - presumption of necessary connection shattered by a *demonstration*
- affective correlate is astonishment: “What distinguishes the philosopher from the non-philosopher in this matter is that only the former is capable of being astonished (in the strong sense) by the straightforwardly literal meaning of the ancestral statement”
- Badiou - presumption of necessary connection shattered by an *event*
- affective correlate is enthusiasm (politics), pleasure (art), happiness (love), or joy (science)
- Dominic - reversal: not that the shattered presumption of necessary connection *results* in a certain affect, but rather that the presumption of necessary connection is shattered *by* an affect: dejection, disenchantment, dysphoria

- the result of this affect is dislocation, disfiguration *of* a world, and a separation *from* that world *at* which one can then focus the politicized unpleasure of “militant dysphoria”