



## Imagination and Potentiality: The Quest for the Real

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# The Absolute as the Meeting Point Between Speculation and Fiction

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**Abstract:** The article investigates Meillassoux's notion of the absolute in relationship with the Kantian and Hegelian philosophical systems. The absolute, as independent of subjective consciousness, is showcased as the meeting point of speculation and fiction. By looking into Meillassoux's notions of speculation and some works of weird fiction, it is argued that the significant role of imagination as well as a deferred temporality is what facilitates the discussion of both speculation and fiction as faculties able to transcend the limitations that are projected by the correlationist mind. Through a reading of Lovecraftian fiction, both the strong and weak points of Meillassoux's argumentation in *After Finitude* and *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction* are identified, proving the latter to be a less successful way of grasping the chaotic real.

**Keywords:** Meillassoux, Kant, Hegel, Lovecraft, Speculative Realism, correlationism, absolute, fiction, imagination

## 1 (Re)turning to the absolute: From Kant to Hegel to Meillassoux

Quentin Meillassoux has already secured himself a name as someone striving to gain access to the absolute by revisiting the relationship between thought and reality. In *After Finitude*, he formulates his task as “trying to understand how thought is able to access the uncorrelated, which is to say, a world capable of subsisting without being given”.<sup>1</sup> Such a self-subsisting world is what Meillassoux calls an absolute.

If we look at the tradition of German idealism, of which Kant, along with Hegel, are two of the most prominent representatives, access to the absolute proves to be a complicated issue that needs to be resolved between the understanding and reason. Kant's distinction between the understanding and reason is based on the assumption that the former has its limits since it can only be applied to the objects of possible experience, whereas reason pretends to grasp the infinite and therefore can become the cause of metaphysical illusions when no phenomena correspond to the ideas in thought. For Hegel, the understanding and reason also remain distinct, yet for a slightly different reason. The limits of the understanding arise not because it requires an object of possible experience, but because the categories of intellect are one-sided and incapable of incorporating the infinite objects that would be composed of the contrarities (limited/limitless, one/many, etc.). According to Hegel, reason alone is capable of comprising both contrarities and therefore of stepping outside the limits of intellect: “Just as Reason, in the role of

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<sup>1</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 52.

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observer, repeated, in the element of the category, the movement of *consciousness*, viz. sense-certainty, perception, and the Understanding, so will Reason again run through the double movement of self-consciousness, and pass over from independence into its freedom.”<sup>2</sup> It would be fair to note that Kant also credits reason with an important task, although it is limited to the realm of moral theory, where reason is seen as constituting freedom in the form of categorical imperative grounding any possible moral act. Meanwhile, in Hegel’s system, the freedom of pure reason is active not only in the realm of morality but also within the whole process of *Geist*, since the Hegelian subject ceases to be limited to an individual with cognitive abilities and develops more like an object blooming from the concept of mind. Such dynamics clearly overstep the limited subject making a leap to infinity. Strictly speaking, there is no place for any kind of transcendence in Hegel’s system because a limited subject has been eliminated, and therefore reasoning is no longer bound to *a priori* forms of cognition or the distinction between phenomena and noumena. Here I am following in the footsteps of such thinkers as Slavoj Žižek<sup>3</sup> and Markus Gabriel<sup>4</sup> who, although undoubtedly in a very different manner, both read Hegel as a thinker of change. Therefore from this point of view, the absolute should be understood not as something static and already there in the real where it is waiting for human consciousness to grasp it. Rather, it should be seen as a part of an evolving and constantly changing reality which is never separated from mind and is acting more as self-grasping rather than according to the principle of a subject engaging in a cognitive relationship with an object that is completely separate from it.

One could ask why Hegel’s suggestion to rely on reason when it comes to knowing the absolute is not enough in Meillassoux’s quest. After all, both thinkers are striving to find something that would be able to transcend the limits of an individual subject of cognition and grasp the real as it is. Even though Hegel’s system not only allows but even encourages the dynamics between various contradictory elements, it is always assumed that the overall process of the real is self-reflecting and therefore falls under a certain structure. Meillassoux, however, introduces the notion of hyper-chaos as a principle of necessary contingency, meaning that any order can transform into disorder and vice versa without any sufficient reason. To refuse the principle of sufficient reason is a sufficient reason to look for a faculty that would be able to grasp such a chaotic reality. This is where the notion of speculation enters as a capacity to deal with the *Unground* of the real, which can also be characterized as an ontological uncertainty.

Differently from Hegel, Meillassoux is not talking about the development of the real in the form of an all-encompassing reason – his concern is much more human, maybe even all too human. How do we create a philosophy that would be capable of reasoning beyond the principle of correlation? Meillassoux suggests turning toward speculation as something that would be capable of freeing thought from the burden of correlation. Yet his specification of what speculation means is very sparse. In the following pages, I intend to look into two of Meillassoux’s works, *After Finitude* and *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*, where speculation is employed in different modes. By analyzing a few examples from Lovecraft’s fiction, I am going to demonstrate that the repetitive temporality and the nonrepresentational imagination are employed successfully not only by Lovecraft but also by Meillassoux when it comes to grasping the absolute, whereas the argumentation about the possibility of extro-science fiction is going to be shown to be lacking the same effect as the other two cases.

## 2 Is a noncorrelationist cogito still rational?

Let us first look into Meillassoux’s notion of thought and thinking. It ought to be said that his use of *cogito* stems from Cartesian roots. In *After Finitude*, Meillassoux describes his philosophical endeavor in the

<sup>2</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 261.

<sup>3</sup> Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel And The Shadow Of Dialectical Materialism*.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*.

following way: “Following Descartes’ example, we are attempting to move beyond a ‘cogito’ by accessing an absolute capable of founding science’s (ancestral) discourse. But the cogito in question is no longer the Cartesian cogito – it is a ‘correlationist cogito’ that encloses thought in a reciprocal relation to being, one which is merely the mask for thought’s underlying relation to itself.”<sup>5</sup> Despite stemming from the Cartesian notion of *cogito*, Meillassoux’s project is aimed at deconstructing a different *cogito* – the correlationist one, a Kantian *cogito*. It seems that Meillassoux’s mental experiment on arche-fossils, which mark the manner of existence prior to the emergence of human consciousness or life on Earth at all, is presented in a way that it could blow up correlationist philosophy from inside. “If the ancestral is to be thinkable, then an absolute must be thinkable,”<sup>6</sup> claims Meillassoux. Yet what does it mean to think in such a case? In Kant, we find a rigid distinction between the understanding, reason, and imagination, although the latter can be discussed at length if we bear in mind the changes from the first to the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. For Kant, the absolute is neither thinkable nor perceivable nor imaginable since it escapes the realm of human consciousness. For Meillassoux, apparently, the possibility of thinking the absolute has nothing to do with the capacity of human consciousness and does not even require it for its own constitution. Yet it is still not clear, what (or who) is supposed to think the absolute. In other words, the content of Meillassoux’s *cogito* requires an exposition. In a footnote to his talk *Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition*, Meillassoux makes a significant point:

I hope that it is clear to everybody that I intend the term “thought” not solely in the strict sense of rational, argued thought, but also in the broad (Cartesian) sense encompassing every form of subjectivity (sensation, perception, imagination, memory, will, understanding, etc.) I place my confidence in the reader to understand that the strict sense (argued thought) is intended when I accord to the human subject the capacity to theorise the absolute (“the absolute is thinkable”), the broader sense when I speak of the “closure of thought into itself” (in its subjective representations in general).<sup>7</sup>

If accepted, such a distinction leads to the conclusion that, for Meillassoux, speculative thinking is stripped of any other aspects of *cogitation* (from imagination to will) and therefore functions as a pure rationality. Yet what is rationality for Meillassoux?

In the classic form of realism, rationality is supposed to grasp the truth of the real – its highest order. Such a presupposition has been held since Aristotle and Plato and has been inherited by a number of analytic philosophers. After all, is not the correspondence of human rationality and nature’s order the basis of the mutual relation between ontology and epistemology? Now, if we turn to Meillassoux, the correspondence relation would seem to be broken. Meillassoux’s speculation is to be differentiated from classical rationality since it grasps not the world’s order but its radical *Ungrund*, hyper-chaos. Yet one must not forget Meillassoux’s self-identification as first and foremost a materialist. According to the French philosopher, “materialism holds in two key statements: 1. Being is separate and independent of thought (understood in the broad sense of subjectivity), 2. Thought can think Being.”<sup>8</sup> Interestingly though, Meillassoux’s path toward being is through mathematical expression, which one could be tempted to associate with idealist movements. In his *After Finitude*, Meillassoux takes a speculative path toward noncorrelational reality by putting his trust in mathematical discourse and claiming the following: “Our absolute, in effect, is nothing other than an extreme form of chaos, a hyper-Chaos, for which nothing is or would seem to be, impossible, not even the unthinkable. This absolute lies at the furthest remove from the absolutization we sought: the one that would allow mathematical science to describe the in-itself.”<sup>9</sup> One could ask whether mathematical discourse is seen by Meillassoux as a nonmediated approach to reality. Moreover, the following question could be raised: what ontological role does he give to mathematics? Although these questions are not guiding our quest in this article, it is important to note that for Meillassoux, “all those aspects of the object that can be formulated in mathematical terms can be meaningfully conceived as properties of the object in itself”.<sup>10</sup> By formalizing the

<sup>5</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 87.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>7</sup> Meillassoux, *Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition*.

<sup>8</sup> Meillassoux, “There is contingent being independent of us”, 79.

<sup>9</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 108.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

access to being, Meillassoux takes the first step toward dissociating from the perceptual domain and thus granting his speculative approach formality, which becomes essential for its further quests.

In Meillassoux, any possibility of representing is shut down by an enforced gap between consciousness and reality. Viewed as essentially correlative, representation ought to be ditched from the speculative discourse, which has the ambition to accede to the absolute. This theoretical move is made by accomplishing a shift in the notion of temporality, meaning that the diachrony imposed by speculative discourse can be seen as a form of a crisis of representation. By exposing the correlational approach to the question of ancestral statements as nonvalid, Meillassoux renders dynamic the temporal regime of the “before”. Since ancestral statements are made about the real before any temporal consciousness has emerged, Meillassoux presupposes a temporality that is more fundamental than the phenomenological one. We are no longer talking about “before and after” in the realm of temporally organized consciousness; on the contrary, the “before and after” of phenomenological temporality itself is in question. Meillassoux’s hyper-chaos grounds the real and is the source of the necessity of the contingent. As he states, “time is not governed by physical laws because it is the laws themselves which are governed by a mad time”.<sup>11</sup> The notion of “mad time” or hyper-chaos in Meillassoux’s thinking signifies a shift from the ontology of “what there is” to the ontology of “what there may be”. As the philosopher writes, “hyper-chaotic time is able to create and destroy even becoming, producing without reason fixity or movement, repetition or creation.”<sup>12</sup> Here Meillassoux touches upon a negative side of *το ὄντος*, namely, the negative imprint of being.

By viewing hyper-chaotic time as something that is unthinkable and at the same time generates the static and the dynamic in the real, Meillassoux deprives us of any possibility of grasping the logic of such a temporality. Moreover, if hyper-chaos is neither about the static nor about the changing, there is little reason to think it in terms of temporality, since Meillassoux himself explains the reality of hyper-chaos by relying on the law of noncontradiction, which is atemporal. Perhaps rethinking the notion of chaos exploited in Meillassoux’s work would clarify his stance. For Meillassoux, chaos is not just a mathematical property pertaining to a closed deterministic and nonlinear system – instead, it grounds the system itself. In this way, the temporality of such a structure is reversed and begins to revolve around the factuality of emergence. For hyper-chaos to be temporal, it does not necessarily have to be connected to either the static or the changing. Consequently, hyper-chaotic time for Meillassoux is deprived of (or simply not necessarily connected to) becoming. What about emergence? Is time without becoming also deprived of emergence? I will argue next that emergence *ex nihilo* is what constitutes the temporality of Meillassoux’s hyper-chaos.

Meillassoux is able to account for the emergence of novelty without presupposing any triadic notion of temporality. Instead, he reimagines the notion of virtuality by bringing forth its negative and at the same time generative aspect. Chaos for Meillassoux is to be thought within a tension between the possible and the virtual. While the possibility of something can be measured and is therefore predictable, the virtuality of chaos escapes both the finite and the infinite realms of possibilities. As Meillassoux states, this chaotic virtuality guarantees the world of appearance its stability. Here we have to agree with Graham Harman, who points out the dominance of the virtual over the real in Meillassoux’s thinking,<sup>13</sup> yet the extremely formal character of the virtuality of hyper-chaos is also to be underlined. Unlike the infinitely ontologically rich Deleuzian virtuality which produces actualized reality, Meillassoux’s hyper-chaos plays a formal role in sustaining ontological structure. Strictly speaking, hyper-chaos represents neither plenitude nor radical void, since it is *the law*.

To sum up, for Meillassoux, the temporal shift is expressed as a discrepancy between being and thought when the latter tries to grasp the ancestral reality which is anterior to thought itself. Thus, the temporal shift gains its ontological load in a form of the radical “before”. In a similar way, such examples

<sup>11</sup> Meillassoux, *Time Without Becoming*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Harman, *Quentin Meillassoux*, 63.

of weird literature as Lovecraft's novels perform an analogous temporal shift by presenting a piece of reality which either is rooted in ancestral time (The Great Old Ones) or steps out of human temporality altogether (the realm of necromancers). In both discourses – speculative and fictional – discourses, the imaginary becomes crucial. Where content-full notions collapse and images fade away, speculation and fiction enter the stage of the imaginary of emptiness – be it the *Ungrund* of the real in the necessity of contingency, or nonhuman materiality in the Lovecraftian universe of strangeness and horror. But before we turn to Lovecraftian weird fiction, let us first develop the notion of dissociative temporality, which we will claim is shared by both Meillassoux's speculation and Lovecraft's fiction.

### 3 (Cogito)<sup>3</sup>, or ontologization through formalization

A great case for acts of imagination resulting in discontinuous temporality has been made by Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Dialectic of Duration*. Although Bachelard's reasoning is aimed at refuting Henri Bergson's idea that duration is always continuous, and his stance drifts closer to idealism than materialism in Meillassoux's sense, the structure of cogitation employed by the French epistemologist is very helpful for our research, since it showcases how a gradual change in the levels of the *cogito* results in a complete distancing from phenomenological experience. After claiming that the Cartesian *I think, therefore I am* introduces existence into thought, Bachelard proceeds to multiply the levels of thought: "If however we can rise to the *I think that I think*, we shall already be free of phenomenological description. If, continuing a little further, we reach the *I think that I think that I think*, which will be denoted by (cogito)<sup>3</sup>, then separate, consecutive existences will appear in all their formalising power."<sup>14</sup> Bachelard's reasoning concludes with the statement that our ability to multiply the levels of cogitation is the result of a formed person which, contrary to "flat" psychology, has a deep, multidimensional, temporal constitution through a discontinuous axis which allows us to place such psychological activities as dreaming on the same level as day-to-day rationality. Yet for our purposes, the formalizing and at the same time ontologizing power of temporally employed imagination is what needs to be highlighted here.

There are three steps to the Bachelardian distancing performed by piling the acts of cogito on top of each other: (1) the intentionality of consciousness is transformed, (2) the continuous flux of experience is disrupted, and (3) the brackets of the phenomenological epoché are opened. After the third and most formal act of cogito, consciousness is not only liberated from phenomenological experience, as suggested by Bachelard, but also returns to the ontological dimension. The repetition of the act of thinking leads to a dimming of the object of thought, leaving consciousness with the very act of repetition and a formal identity of  $I = I$ . By turning from its object of intentionality to itself through the act of successive repetition, consciousness is left with more than a simple tautology. Its identity is shown to be achieved by repetition where the previous member is not simply negated, but preserved in a dialectical way. Such a repetition can never be grasped by a synthesizing act of imagination, precisely because it is built on two types of lacunae: the successive piling up of the levels of thought and the gradual fading of the object of thought. The *I* that Bachelard arrives at with the third level of *cogito* is not the same as the Cartesian one: while the latter is closely conjoined to the idea of *material* existence (as something that thinks, desires, dreams, and doubts), the former operates on a formal level and constitutes less of a thing and more of a process. The takeaway from the excursus on Bachelardian *cogito* is the following: formality as dissociation from the phenomenological objects can have a processual character if performed in a layering, repetitive way, which in itself constitutes a temporality that defies the linear causal logic of everyday time. Because of this, the Bachelardian piling up of layers of *cogito* can be seen as a speculative act.

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<sup>14</sup> Bachelard, *The Dialectic of Duration*, 109.

## 4 Horror of the real through dissociation

Let us turn to Lovecraft's texts to see a very similar formal temporality in action. When Graham Harman in his book *Weird Realism* describes Lovecraft as the perfect writer for Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), he does this by showcasing how various works of Lovecraft problematize the connections between any two of the following: sensual object, sensual quality, real object, and real quality. According to Harman, the stylistic world of Lovecraft is one in which "(1) real objects are locked in impossible tension with the crippled descriptive powers of language, and (2) visible objects display unbearable seismic torsion with their own qualities."<sup>15</sup> In this sense, as suggested by Harman, Lovecraft can be viewed as "a Kantian writer of 'noumenal' horror" who at the same time is utterly materialist. While it is true that the Lovecraftian universe is built around a persistent disconnection between the layers of the real (be it between the perceiver and the perceived or between the apparent and the underlying qualities of the same object), what also merits emphasis is his speculative way of achieving such disconnection. If we look into a few examples of Lovecraftian horror while bearing in mind Bachelardian speculative temporality, we will quickly observe a similar distancing from phenomenological objects.

In the story *The Colour Out of Space*, there is a description of color which lacks any descriptive power, resulting in a major dissociation of images instead of any visual imagery: "The colour, which resembled some of the bands in the meteor's strange spectrum, was almost impossible to describe; and it was only by analogy that they called it colour at all."<sup>16</sup> Harman points out that such a description warrants being called "a color by analogy" and presents a challenge to the Humean idea of objects as bundles of qualities.<sup>17</sup> Yet what needs to be stressed is the speculative character of the analogy in question. Normally, analogy functions as a bridging mechanism between two different objects and/or their qualities, yet in Lovecraft's case, the description of the color lacks the bridging power precisely because there are no qualities to be bridged. It seems that Lovecraft tends to take random phenomenal qualities and join them in a way that strips them of their representational character. This results in transforming them into a speculative bundle which is never unified in an object since it cannot be perceived phenomenologically. In other words, without a corresponding category or schema in the Kantian sense, hardly any unification of perception is possible and therefore phenomena cannot emerge.

In the same story, Lovecraft problematizes discursive representation even further when the main character Nahum describes the traces of animals that he discovered after a meteorite landed on his property: "[Nahum] was never specific but appeared to think that they were not as characteristic of the anatomy and habits of squirrels and rabbits and foxes as they ought to be."<sup>18</sup> Here we are witnessing the second level of allusion, "an allusion to an allusion", as noticed by Harman. The thing witnessed is not simply described as unspeakable, but the very affirmativity of the description is put into question by claiming that Nahum "appeared to think". In a similar manner as in the Bachelardian cogito, adding another layer to allusion, which is itself already hard to capture due to its function as a bridge between two objects or qualities, results in deepening the gap in meaning that could be generated from the description. The more speculative the allusion, the less clear the projected image. It is hard to argue with the claim that this is one of the sources of the chilling effect Lovecraft's texts are famous for, yet it is also important not to ignore the formality of such descriptions, bringing us to a very peculiar ontological domain where objects are present by being withdrawn not only from perception, but also from any rational grasp in general. Layering the levels of the real and thus distancing the initial, phenomenological object leads to a new, different dimension of the real. What it is – the underlying structure or simply the void of cognition – is not for us to say. But the undeniable fact is that this new layer, this new dimension, could not be reached in any other way than through the dialectical layering of the previous dimensions.

<sup>15</sup> Harman, *Weird Realism*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*, 598.

<sup>17</sup> Harman, *Weird Realism*, 68.

<sup>18</sup> Lovecraft, *The Colour Out of Space*, 600.

Needless to say, if the phenomenological object is withdrawn, the traditional system of representation falls into crisis, which is the key factor allowing us to draw a bridge between speculative and fictional thinking, since they both function as a response to the crisis of representation. In Lovecraft's novella *At the Mountains of Madness*, the reader is presented with rather specific yet barely informative descriptions whose lack of recognizable content leads to a chilling effect. Once the expedition to the Antarctic first discovers mysterious buildings, the narrator oscillates between a description of a mirage and a complete refusal to describe anything whatsoever: "The effect was that of a Cyclopean city of no architecture known to man or to human imagination, with vast aggregations of night-black masonry embodying monstrous perversions of geometrical laws and attaining the most grotesque extremes of sinister bizarrerie."<sup>19</sup> Once missing people and expedition dogs are added, the narrative seems to be fueled by the Unseen which is hiding from the human gaze or maybe even surpassing human conceptualization. Note that perception is not actually surpassed here, since certain feelings of disgust, awe, or awkwardness are very much present when the narrator recalls his encounters with the weird matter as well as the weird beings. By weirding the matter, the possibility of representation is put in brackets, since for a perception to form in a way which would allow any form of representation (utterance or image), there has to be a correspondence with the conceptual apparatus of the perceiver. As long as the matter and the beings encountered by the characters of Lovecraft remain utterly weird and unknown, no correspondence can arise.

In his analysis of Lovecraft, Harman makes the observation that "any filmed version of Lovecraft would fall short of capturing his allusiveness."<sup>20</sup> The same conclusion can be drawn from our analysis too, even though we do not necessarily subscribe to Harman's belief about each and every object being withdrawn. What Lovecraft achieves is not the illustration of the ever-present withdrawal but the deepening of the crisis of representation. This can be done by forging descriptions which, instead of representing something behind them, work as speculation without any indication toward the outside. Every attempt at visualizing any of the Lovecraftian images results in a failure to grasp it in its entirety, which means that instead of working as a power of synthesis, imagination is employed as a power of dissociation, creating and contemplating the processual presence of gaps within the real.

## 5 Extro-science fiction versus weird fiction

The term "extro-science fiction" coined by Meillassoux designates a fictional path toward noncorrelational reality and is presented as a world "where, in principle, experimental science is impossible and unknown in fact."<sup>21</sup> He states that his goal is "to show the properly speculative benefit of becoming aware of the difference between science fiction and extro-science fiction."<sup>22</sup> In his *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*, followed by Asimov's novel *The Billiard Ball*, Meillassoux offers a thought experiment which involves the act of fictionalizing, and is supposed to support his stance on Hume's problem. Meillassoux reformulates the Humean problem in the context of the possible trajectories of a billiard ball: "According to Hume, the question is: what guarantees that the ball will not adopt a trajectory that is not only unforeseen, but in principle unforeseeable, and which cannot be modeled because it escapes not merely every identified law but every identifiable law?"<sup>23</sup> Moreover, he makes a claim that certain fictional works, which he chooses to name *extro-science fiction* in order to differentiate them from regular science fiction, can be viewed as a speculative exercise in order to test the hypothesis of radical contingency. Although every attempt at a metaphysical or ontological description of the real can be perceived as more or less a

<sup>19</sup> Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, 37.

<sup>20</sup> Harman, *Weird Realism*, 66–7.

<sup>21</sup> Meillassoux, *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*, 5–6.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

wild act of imagination (just think of Leibniz and his windowless monads), Meillassoux is explicit about the fictionality of his argument.

How are we supposed to read Meillassoux's text on extro-science fiction? Is it a digression from the main project of proving the intermediate relation between mind and being, or is it a valid step (if not a separate path) toward the same goal? It is pretty obvious that the discourse on extro-science fiction serves as something more than just an introduction to Asimov's novel, especially given the fact that, according to Meillassoux, Asimov's *The Billiard Ball* falls under the description of regular science fiction. Therefore, one can assume that the possibility of extro-science fiction is presented by Meillassoux not simply as the heuristic means of an illustration of the main argument presented elsewhere. On the contrary, the possibility of extro-science fiction plays the role of an independent path of argumentation. Yet how strong is it?

Both the speculative philosophical argument for the necessity of contingency (*After Finitude*) and the description of the world without science (*Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*) have as their object not entities of some metaphysical reality which exists in the present mode, but that which is absolutely necessary, that is, the contingency of entities and laws of the real. One could say that extro-science fiction presents conditions of thinking as a reality where events do not correlate with thought through the means of science or any other explanatory theories. But how can such extro-science-fiction reality be thought? What images and notions should be applied? The fact that Meillassoux does not provide any examples of pure extro-science fiction is particularly alarming. As long as extro-science fiction remains a possibility, its employment in the broader scheme of argumentation remains purely speculative. To be fair, for the argumentation to work, one does not need to look for concrete cases of extro-science fiction. It is more than enough simply to state what such fiction should be about, that is, a world where no laws or theories can explain its events. A purely narrative and nonvisual model of representation is employed here, and even its narrativity is limited by describing the conditions of its possibility. Therefore, Meillassoux's extro-science fiction functions as a nonrepresenting representation whose very form (as in the case of Lovecraft) and not only content remains speculative. In other words, extro-science fiction represents the necessity of contingency but not the content of such contingent reality.

If we turn to Ben Woodard, who appears to be inspired by Eugene Thacker's trilogy *Horror of Philosophy*, we can view Meillassoux's project as the means to face the madness of the reality. According to Woodard, "Kant's critical philosophy and much of continental philosophy which has followed, has been a defense against horror and madness."<sup>24</sup> He proceeds to demonstrate that while the Kantian critique is directed toward the unleashed world and the unleashed mind, the authors of weird literature, namely, Ligotti and Lovecraft, are working precisely in these margins of madness: "Speculative thought may be participatory in the screaming tumult of the world or, worse yet, may produce its spectral double. Against theology or reason or simply common sense, the speculative becomes heretical. Speculation, as the cognitive extension of the horrific sublime, should be met with melancholic detachment."<sup>25</sup> If applied to Meillassoux's case, Thacker-Woodard's claim that speculation is one of the ways to face the horrific and chaotic real allows us to sketch the possible levels of speculation and discuss their success in dealing with the unsettling real.

Even though after our analysis it is safe to say that when images and notions fail, the nonrepresentational regime of weird literature and nonmetaphysical speculation enters the stage, their illuminative power is not the same. As showcased before, the repetitive temporality and nonrepresentational imagery work equally well in both Lovecraft and Meillassoux, proving that the absolute can be grasped by both literary and philosophical means. Yet neither Lovecraft nor Meillassoux can *think* the absolute precisely because the absolute as hyper-chaos is unthinkable *per se*. Where the discourse on extro-science fiction is lacking is precisely in the treatment of thought when it comes to facing the hyper-chaotic real. Extro-science fiction is still too descriptive, whereas what we need is not just a nonexistent

<sup>24</sup> Woodard, "Mad Speculation and Absolute Inhumanism", 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



science but a nonexistent phenomenology or, more precisely, a nonexistent realm of phenomena as something united. This is why Meillassoux not giving any concrete examples of extro-science fiction only proves the limitation of such a discourse when it comes to grasping the absolute. In this sense, Lovecraft's weird fiction appears to be closer to Meillassoux's original project laid out in *After Finitude*, and one can confidently say that the bridge between speculation and fiction is built on two main pillars – repetitive temporality and the dissociative imagination.

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