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Inhoudsopgave

Editorial	7
<i>Max Schmermbeck</i>	
Het applaus en de schilder	11
<i>Hannah Ox</i>	
Telling Non-human Stories	15
<i>Coen Pompstra</i>	
Philosopher Abroad - Philosophies of Life	27
<i>Ilse Meijer</i>	
Franz Kafka's <i>Vor dem Gesetz</i>	31
<i>Joris ter Beek</i>	
Book Review - The Little Prince	45
<i>Mirte Debats</i>	
Philosopher on the Job Market - Lisa Doeland	51
<i>Sophie Ingle</i>	
The Privatization of the Future and Human Essence	57
<i>Samuel Peelen</i>	

Editorial

A Word of Goodbye

Even though I am not an avid sentimentalist, I do enjoy a good emotional moment in the right place, at the right time. I do not feel any shame in admitting that a perfectly timed last-goodbye-tear can really move me. Such a moment, whether in a movie, television show or literature, usually gives me a sense of melancholy, rather than catharsis; I am always a bit startled by what I just experienced, and I do not really know what to do next. For me, this final goodbye in *Splijtstof* resonates with the former, but not with the latter. I do say goodbye with a sense of melancholy because leaving *Splijtstof* means leaving a group of kind, talented, and interesting people with whom I had the fortune of working over the past year. But the sentiments I feel upon leaving are overwhelmingly positive, rather than negative. When I think about the times lying ahead of us, a sense of curiosity, enthusiasm, and relief befalls me. Curious, because I have no idea how *Splijtstof* will develop in the coming months, who will join and leave the team, and how the new projects and initiatives that we started will play out in practice. Enthusiasm, because I know that every editor on the team not only has the talent to come up with interesting ideas, but also has the willingness to turn them into thought-provoking texts. Relief, because I know that the leadership of the magazine is in good hands with the new editor-in-chief Sophie, who will run *Splijtstof* together with Mireille, my colleague over the past year.

When I reflect on my past year at *Splijtstof*, I have to conclude that it somehow serves as a metaphor for life as a student more generally: chaotic, difficult, lively, challenging, and (most importantly) fun. I know it is a cliché to write that you have learned a lot from these kinds of experiences, but in this case, I simply have to do it, because it is absolutely true. Perhaps working at *Splijtstof* taught me more about myself and the people around me than about actual publishing or editing, but that does not really matter. All that actually matters, is that we, as a team, produced work that I am really proud of, and that we had a lot of fun doing it. Not only did we create some interesting publications, but we also organized a symposium, re-evaluated and updated our publishing structure, built a new website, and welcomed new members to the team. *Splijtstof* is an institution of Radboud University, and deservedly so; it has been a great joy to continue that tradition with a group of amazing people.

On a more personal note, the coming year will be my final year as a student, not just in Nijmegen, but in general. I will focus on completing my

degree, try to create and publish new texts, and slowly start to peer around the corner of that scary world where serious adults work to pay the bills. I hope I can find a place in that world where I can do the two things I love the most: writing and teaching. Only time will tell where I'll end up, but I embrace my fate with the same kind of curiosity and enthusiasm that accompanies my departure from this lovely little magazine. So, without further ado, I thank everybody at Splijtstof, the faculty of Philosophy at Radboud University, all the writers and artists who contributed, and all our readers for a year of creative ideas, great laughs, and kind words. I only have one last favour to ask: please shed that final, sentimental tear as you scroll through the pages of this edition. I know I definitely will.

Max Schmermbeck

Editor-in-Chief





Het applaus en de schilder

Geïnspireerd op de filosofie van het applaus van Cornelis Verhoeven

Hannah Ox

*Welk dier is de mens toch, dat het zijn voorste poten tegen elkaar slaat,
wanneer het iets mooi vindt?* (Verhoeven 1969, 139-154)

Wat achterblijft als het applaus uitblijft is leegte. Stukgeslagen verlossing. Een aangapende ruimte die aarzelt. De stilte moeten verduren. Het slot als open vraag. Uitdovende extases. Een uitstel van volmaaktheid. Het is verschrikkelijk. Verschrikkelijk als het slot niet sluit, niets besluit. De speler op het toneel zit zonder applaus gevangen. Onvoltooid en onvolmaakt staart zij roerloos het publiek aan. Het slot mooi gemaakt, beladen met de betekenis van een mogelijk geheel. Maar zonder applaus geen geheel. Het hele stuk kleeft aan de speler, benauwd haar. Kleine stapjes voorwaarts, laat het stuk niet meer van mij zijn.

- Publiek, roept de speler.
- Verlos mij.

“Men beziet zijn handen en denkt: waartoe dit ritueel?” (154)

Eerst is er het begin. Dan het slot. En dat wat ertussenin ligt, de grote eenheid van het stuk. Aan weerskanten het applaus. Eerst om de aanvang in te luiden. Uiteindelijk om het geheel af te sluiten. Om begin en einde bij elkaar te kunnen voegen. Om massa aan dat wat er tussenin ligt te geven. Een vergeten massa, want wie schoonheid in de slotzin brengt, laat achter wat ervoor kwam. Een wegvloeiend einde? Een harde breuk? Een abrupte onderbreking en dan met geweld het einde inzetten. Nog een kleine vlucht terug, samenvattend. Wij spelers staan klaar, ontvangen uw daverende voltooiing. Zonder jullie zijn wij niets. Zonder de vlakke hand geen dankgebaar.

- Publiek, roepen wij.
- Applaudisseer toch.

Troostend is het applaus voor de gewone mens. Het harde kabaal overstemt de naaktheid van haar menselijkheid. Haar diepe goddeloosheid, haar aardse onvolmaaktheid. Naast het podium is alles miezerig en vuil. Klappen is instemming geven, de grootsheid bevestigen. Het is klaar. Er hoeft niet meer bekritiseerd of verwonderd te worden. Het applaus is de collectieve aanvaar-

ding van wat de schamele niet-creatieve mens niet kan. Scheppen, tot leven brengen, van niets naar voltooiing. Applaus is danken voor de grootsheid. Een liefdevol gebaar voor het gebroken hart.

- Dank u, roept het publiek.
- Wij zijn getroost.

Die eenzame kunstenaar die schildert. Mijmerend in tevredenheid verkeerd. Voor haar geen slot dat leegte achterlaat. Er was immers nooit sprake van chronologie, van tijd. Bij aanvang voor het doek brak zij de tijd en bracht zo nooit einde aan de ervaring. Zij hief de horizon op, dwong haar verder te zien. In volle vreugd trok zij de tijd uiteen en bracht haar terug in een enkele veeg over het doek. De continuïteit tussen schilder en publiek is van fragiele aard, losjes zwiert zij over onmetelijke afstand. Afgebrokkeld. Zij wordt niet verlost door het collectief, afgesneden van de ritus van het applaus. De schilder besluit haar eigen einde, zij geeft de wereld het werk terug.

- Wereld, fluistert zij.
- Alsjeblieft.

Applaus is de bevestiging van ontvangst. Maar het schilderij geeft niets. Er valt niets te ontvangen.

Stelt u eens voor. Klappend voor het geschilderde doek. De virtuositeit van de schilder bedankend. Perfectie, niets anders dan perfectie! Eenmanspubliek, gesloten in de individuele ervaring. Juichend, joelend, bravo! Maar de schilder is al vroegtijdig gevlucht, nog voor de aanvang van een individu. Nog voordat iemand het werk kon aanschouwen. Het applaus huldigt het werk, groeit uit tot een ovatie. Schepper van schoonheid! Het individu kan de stilte van het doek niet langer aan, daarom klapt zij, daarom ziet zij niets! Het kabaal overstemt het zicht. Begrijpt u toch, daarom kijkt zij niet langer dan een paar seconden naar het doek en waggelt zonder aandacht van het ene naar het andere.

- Individu, smeekt het doek.
- Blijf toch staan nu.

Klappend voor het geschilderde doek, dat zou toch wat zijn! Het kijkende individu stelt dat zij dat ook had gekund, dat schilderen. En dat is omdat zij het doek niet rond krijgt, niet gegeven krijgt. Wat moet ze er mee? De schilder werpt het doek slechts in de wereld en alleen zij met een ontvankelijk oog voor ritme zal haar eenvoud en schoonheid zien. Het schilderij biedt geen

troost. Het schilderij brengt voort waar het individu niets mee kan. Applaus is de bevestiging van ontvangst. Maar het schilderij geeft niets. Er valt niets te ontvangen. Er is niets geruststellends aan. Dat is wat troostend is, stevigheid, massa, densiteit van het voltooide werk, dat ik, als individu, heb mogen voltooien. Daarom klap ik!

Maar ik vraag, redt de schilder.

Ik vraag...

Het podium bevrijdt speler en publiek. Brengt samen, bevriest mogelijkheden, laat voor even, gedurende de klappende klanken, het kunstwerk van iedereen zijn.

Die stilstaande doeken, die geverfde objecten. Zo ver weg. Zo ver weg. Men is er stil van.



Telling Non-human Stories

Coen Pompstra

Writing and reading narratives show us what other possible ways of encountering the world are possible, thereby potentially transfiguring our own ways of engaging with the world around us. Implicated in narrative, therefore, we find a transformative potential.

Few problems faced by humanity require such a drastic change in engaging with the world as climate change. As a true multitude of authors from all sorts of disciplines now assert, climate change is only resolvable when we venture out of the confines of the purely human, into the breadth of an ecology that both encompasses and transcends us (Chakrabarty 2018, 6; Ghosh 2016, 82; John 2018; Kohn 2013; Morton 2012; Trexler 2015, 13-14; Ustler 2009, 173). Perhaps we can capitalise on the transformative potential of narrative to change the way we deal with climate change as well? Can we use narrative to escape our all-too human way of interacting with the world? To answer this question, we first need to have a clear conception of what narrative can do and how it works as a transformative instrument.

In his *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) offers precisely such an analysis. To understand the transformative aspect of narrative, he introduces the term 'mimetic circle'. This philosophical tool describes the way in which the reading of a novel – for simplicity's sake I use the example of written narrative in this text, but Ricoeur's theory is applicable to various other ways of experiencing narratives – presents a narrative world to the reader, which then potentially influences the reader's own world, thereby transforming the way the reader encounters the world around them.

So, does that mean we can simply take Ricoeur's mimetic circle and start creating narratives that effectuate more climate friendly behaviour? Sadly, no. For all its philosophical depth, the mimetic circle always centres on *human* actions and narratives – it is quite literally anthropo-(human)-centric. This is a problem, because these narratives were supposed to help us overcome the anthropocentrism that led to climate change in the first place. We therefore need narratives that capture not only human, but also non-human, material forms of action, communication, and temporality. Only then can we expect of narratives the transformative potential to help us change our behaviour as drastically as is needed now.

Hence, if we want to use Ricoeur's mimetic circle to help combat climate change, his philosophy needs to be 'stretched out' to also encompass the non-human. In this paper, I attempt such a broadening by consulting various concepts proposed in Levi Bryant's *Onto-Cartography* (2014). More precisely, the primary question this paper poses is whether Bryant's concept

of non-human action can be used to widen the scope of Ricoeur's narrative theory. I tackle this question in the following way: first, I examine Ricoeur's theory of narrative by discussing his mimetic circle. Second, I introduce Bryant's alien phenomenology as a conceptual framework for conceiving non-human action. Third, I incorporate Bryant's non-human action into Ricoeur's mimetic circle, thereby establishing a framework for the transformative potential of a non-anthropocentric narrative.

Narrative Time and Anthropocentrism

Ricoeur's theory of narrative and the way it influences human consciousness is, for a large part, carried by his idea of mimesis. To understand what form this influence takes, and how it displays Ricoeur's anthropocentrism, the mimetic circle itself needs to be elucidated. Afterwards, its anthropocentric elements can be distinguished.

Mimetic Circling

The mimetic circle is constituted by a "single continuous process" that is the rotation of mimesis. It is made up of three parts: mimesis₁, mimesis₂, and mimesis₃. A rotation through these three sections describes three respective situations: a person before reading a book, the process of the person actually reading the book, and then the person changed by this reading. To understand the expanse but also the limitations of Ricoeur's argument, the three steps are discussed separately.

We therefore need narratives that capture not only human, but also non-human, material forms of action, communication, and temporality. Only then can we expect of narratives the transformative potential to help us change our behaviour as drastically as is needed now.

Mimesis₁ refers to the fact that we are always already capable of understanding actions. We have a so-called 'preunderstanding' of action. This preunderstanding becomes more well-defined in its three different elements: structure, symbol, and temporality. Structurally, mimesis₁ means that we can differentiate between action and mere physical movement (Ricoeur 1984, 55). We do this using a certain "conceptual network of action" that is given to us through a combination of factors hailing from both the nature and the

nurture register (56). Symbolically, mimesis1 refers to the fact that actions have an inherent readability, that is given through action always being “symbolically mediated” (57). This means that action is never done outside a sphere of “signs, rules, and norms” (57) – an action always already *means* something. Temporally, mimesis1 is largely defined by the Heideggerian idea of within-time-ness (62). Within-time-ness is a kind of preoccupied experience of time; time as the ‘thing’ in which our goals and plans are formulated (63). Mimesis1 is, then, “first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality” (64).

Upon this preunderstanding of action, Ricoeur says, a narrative is constructed by means of *emplotment*. The process of emplotment – to which mimesis2 refers – is the organisation of the as of yet unorganised events distinguished in mimesis1 (64). Emplotment mediates between the *preunderstanding* of action of mimesis1 and the ‘*postunderstanding*’ of mimesis3 (65). This mediation occurs in three ways: first, as already discussed, it mediates between the individual “incidents and a story taken as a whole” (65). Second, it mediates between the discordance of a heterogeneous set of elements of “agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, [and] unexpected results” (65), and the concordance of the plot (66). This mediation operates, third, on a temporal plane: a temporally ordered configuration is extracted from a temporally meaningless succession (66).

This threefold mediation of mimesis2 allows for the creation of a narrative from the preunderstanding of action registered in mimesis1. This creation of plot, however, does not come forth solely from the individual human being’s preunderstanding. It also bases itself on a certain *tradition*, on the one hand characterised by novelistic paradigms that have sedimented into the tradition (68), on the other hand made up of the innovative potential of each and every unique narrative work (69). Mimesis2, therefore, is the fact of the production of a story by the mediation between incident and story, discordance and concordance, and succession and temporal order, using the input and rules inherited by a tradition.

The narrative created in mimesis2 does not exist in a vacuum, of course; it is *read*. The encounter between reader and the work Ricoeur calls mimesis3 (Dowling 2011, 14). This confrontation is a conflict of the actual, practical world of the reader, and the formal, fictive world of the text. The interaction between these worlds is constituted by the fact that both worlds are, by genesis, built on the same preunderstanding of action Ricoeur argues is mimesis1 (15). A preunderstanding of action is needed to construct our own world of experiences but also to construct any narrative in general.

With mimesis3 the world of the reader collides with that of the narrative, the latter exhibiting its different possible ways of experiencing the world to

the former. What then occurs in the reader – if she is influenced by the text, of course – is a change of consciousness (16). This process thus *refigures* the *prefigured* consciousness of the reader through the mediation of a *configured* narrative work.

Non-human Action

Now that Ricoeur's mimetic circle has been expanded upon, we are ready to understand in what ways the non-human does not fit into the constraints set on narratives by Ricoeur. The problem of anthropocentrism discussed in the introduction resurfaces here: it is hard to conceive of a climate-friendly refiguration – an eco-refiguration, if you will – while only considering the human perspective (Ghosh 2016, 82; Trexler 2015, 13-14; Ustler 2009, 173). The threat of anthropocentrism is carried most urgently by the first stage of mimesis. This is because mimesis¹ dictates which events in general are (pre) understood as an *action*. When the non-human is allowed into this category, it can be taken up in the process of emplotment that is mimesis² and subsequently influence the reader's world by letting it collide with the world of the narrative.

The categorisation of non-human 'happenings' or "mere physical movement" (Ricoeur 1984, 55), as action is no self-evident manoeuvre for Ricoeur. His way of conceptualising action is implicitly and explicitly anthropocentric: structurally, he distinguishes between human action and its "goals ... motives ... [and] agents" and 'mere' physical movement (55); symbolically, actions are always mediated by an implicitly human plane of expression that includes "signs, rules and norms" (57); and finally, mimesis¹ literally refers to a preunderstanding of "what *human* acting is" (64, my italics). Ricoeur clearly is not interested in non-human action.

At the same time, I share Ustler's (2009) optimism for a Ricoeurian eco-philosophy – provided it succeeds in shedding its anthropocentric limitations. To make eco-refiguration possible, the reader needs to be confronted with a configured narrative world that is composed of non-human agents and the accompanying non-human action. To incorporate these elements in mimesis¹, I now turn to Bryant's *Onto-Cartography*.

Machines All the Way Down

In *Onto-Cartography*, Bryant puts forward a world view in which all entities – whether they be bureaucracies, volcanoes, human beings, symphonies, or forests – are seen as machines. To differentiate between all these machines, Bryant introduces two theoretical tools: the dual face of machines, and alien phenomenology. In the following, I discuss both tools and explain their role in imagining non-human agency and action.

Dimensions of the Machine

In contrast to traditional philosophy, machinic philosophy is hardly interested in the qualities an entity *has*. It is mostly focused on what the machine *does*. Fundamentally, “[a] machine is a system of operations that perform transformations on inputs thereby producing outputs” (Bryant 2014, 38). Every entity that exists, therefore, has a certain set of transformations it operates on (flows of input), and a set of outputs constituted by these operations.

To make eco-refiguration possible, the reader needs to be confronted with a configured narrative world that is composed of non-human agents and the accompanying non-human action.

This structure sets up a dichotomy between a machine’s operations and its outputs (40). The capacity a machine has for its specific array of operations is called a ‘power’ (a leaf’s power to photosynthesise, for instance). The outputs created by the machine’s actual operations are called ‘manifestations’ (42). These manifestations do all sorts of things for the machine: they can be the machine’s qualitative appearance (the leaf’s greenness, for example); they can transform the behaviour of the machine itself (its shrinking when there’s little water); and they can be a material output flow (the oxygen produced by photosynthesis) (44-45). The powers a machine has dictate which operations it undertakes, which subsequently generates the entity’s observable facts.

Machines are not open to all inputs, neither do they possess an endless array of powers. To illustrate this, Bryant talks of how machines are respectively ‘structurally open,’ and ‘operationally closed’ (55). The leaf acts as an example again: in terms of the inputs it is receptive to, it is structurally open to the specific part of the electromagnetic spectrum leaves use for photosynthesis (Heliospectra 2012). A machine’s operational closure refers to the finite selection of powers a machine has (Bryant 2014, 56). It also comprises the fact that an input flow is never encountered by a machine ‘as it is’, it is always encountered “in terms of how its operations transform it” (57). According to Bryant, the input flow ‘as it is’, that enters the leaf is a photon with a certain vibration length. By contrast, the leaf encounters it as fuel for internal energy production.

By combining the abovementioned facts – machines have a ‘power-face’ and a ‘manifestation-face,’ and are open to a selection of flows and work

on these flows in specific ways – Bryant argues it is possible to infer how a machine encounters and experiences its world (62). His method for this procedure is discussed below.

Alien Phenomenology and Action

The inference of such an encountered world first entails questioning to which flows a machine is structurally open and how the machine structures these flows; second, how the machine operates on these flows and what functions the transformed flow has in the machine; and finally, how the machine encounters the world around it (62).

Bryant's aspirations must remind readers familiar with phenomenology or philosophy of mind of Thomas Nagel's seminal essay 'What is it like to be a Bat?' (1974). In this paper, Nagel argues that we cannot reduce the "subjective character of experience" to simple physical terms – something Bryant definitely seems to be doing when he wants to describe the phenomenology of all machines (Nagel 1974, 436-37). To speak with Nagel: 'we cannot possibly know what it is like to be a leaf!' Bryant readily accepts this critique; indeed, his kind of "second-order phenomenology" does not enjoy the same level of epistemic reliability that traditional 'first-order' phenomenology does – the fact that we cannot 'move' into the point of view of other machines makes all statements about the content of these other points of view merely inferential. But, Bryant argues, "[o]ur alien phenomenologies will always be imperfect, but as we will see, as imperfect as they are, they are nonetheless preferable to the epistemic closure of humanism that approaches all of being in terms of what it is for us" (64). Put more simply: it is better to have an imperfect understanding of the world of plants, couches, and bureaucracies, than to have none at all.

Put more simply: it is better to have an imperfect understanding of the world of plants, couches, and bureaucracies, than to have none at all.

The Nagelian critique can perhaps be further suspended with a short example of the alien phenomenology of one unassuming protagonist: a patch of grass. When a gardener mows down half of this patch, the mown down grass produces a plant stress hormone called GLV (Green Leaf Volatiles) (Dombrowski et al. 2019). These GLV-molecules enter the rest of the grass patch machine. The GLV-flow is canalised into the receptor kinase of the grass leaf cells (Dombrowski et al. 2020). There, the transformed GLV-flow primes certain "wound stress pathways" in the cell – putting the plant in a

sort of ‘defence mode’ (Dombrowski et al. 2020, 780). Put in Bryantian terms: the grass patch is selectively open to GLV-flows, through the receptors in the grass’ cell membranes the flow is structured into the right cellular mechanisms. The grass cells have a multitude of powers for operating on this flow – together constituting the operational closure – that are far too complex to be discussed here, the eventual result of which is that the grass ‘readies itself’ for being wounded – the GLV-flow has become a warning signal to the grass. Finally, we may now carefully conclude that the patch of grass encounters a world populated by all sorts of plant hormones, one of which is GLV, to which it can react defensively.

How does this conclusion imply non-human, plant-action? The answer is quite simple with Bryant: the grass patch machine, like every other machine, *operates* in accordance with a combination of environmental input flows it takes in, and the specific powers it has – thereby producing a multitude of manifestations. The production of a manifestation by the exercise of powers on flows of input – that is action in both a human and non-human sense.

Non-human Mimesis

The problem this text has come to is the following: is the description Ricoeur gives of action in mimesis¹ compatible with – stretchable to – Bryant’s machine-action? If it is, non-human actions can be emplotted into narratives, these narratives eventually eco-refiguring the minds of their readers. This final section discusses this problem.

As became clear in the section on Ricoeur, mimesis¹ grasps those events as actions that have structural “goals ... motives ... [and] agents” (Ricoeur, 1984, 55) and that are symbolically mediated by a plane of meaningful communication of “signs, rules and norms” (57). The problematic bifurcates, consequently, into a problem of non-human ‘goals’ and ‘motives,’ and a separate problem of ‘meaningful communication.’¹

1 The question of agency is a separate and incredibly complex problem that can and should be discussed in a more spacious text than this one. The problem is, however, not at all insurmountable: as we can read in Dauenhauer (2013, 523), Ricoeur in principle uses ‘agent causation’ instead of the ‘distributive agency’ of Bryant (2014, 180). Although these two positions, when taken to their extreme forms, do most definitely contradict one another – extreme agent causation places the source of action fully inside the entity, while extreme distributive agency places next to no source of action inside the entity – I believe they can be synthesized quite elegantly. This should be done in two steps: first Bryant’s insistence on the unity of a machine (while at the same time being a part of a world of other machines, and being made up of endless machines itself) and his subsequent alien phenomenology proves the distribution of agency implied by his theory

To start off with the second problem, the idea that only humans are capable of meaningful communication is wholly alien to Bryant. He claims that “it is likely that planes of expression [fields of meaningful communication] are to be found throughout the animal kingdom” (133). Bryant can say this because a machine never encounters an input flow ‘as it is,’ but always “in terms of how its operations transform it” (57). Especially in highly complex machines like organisms and groups of organisms, input flows can – by repeated reinterpretation by the machine – become meaningful *signs*. A signal that is utterly meaningless to other machines can thereby become full of meaning for other machines configured to operate on it – for grass plants, the GLVs are a *sign* of danger, for humans, they just smell good (Ford 2022). Examples of non-human, meaningful communication are virtually endless, moreover: “Acacias alert other acacias to prowling giraffes. Willows, poplars, alders: all are caught warning each other of insect invasion across the open air” (Powers 2018, 176-77).

Hence, it is very possible to imagine complex motives behind non-human action. The only problem that remains, and seems insurmountable, is the fact that we may never know about these motives with the same certainty as we know about our own and other humans’ motives – that is the upshot of Nagel’s barrier.

Bryant’ plant-action thus fulfils the symbolic exigency of action in mimesis¹. This redirects us to the first problem: the structural requirement for goals and motives behind an action. Alien phenomenology shows that any given machine can be seen as a whole that encounters the world in a certain way. This tremendous broadening of ‘subjecthood’ is accompanied

is not boundless – the source of a machine’s actions is always also internal. Second, Ricoeur’s agent causation is not boundless either: the source of a person’s actions is never fully internal (as is clear from the effect sedimented tradition has on the types of novels people can and do write). Moreover, as is clear from Potter & Mitchell (2022, 3) for agent causation to be naturalised, it needs, among other things, to take account of both endogenous, and exogenous activity of the organism. A synthesis, hence, is possible, but we naturally need more space to develop this point in its entirety. For now, a discussion of non-human action will have to suffice.

by Bryant's insistence that organic machines *do have* goals: ranging from the goal to "preserve their organization" to the complexity of being "intentionally goal-directed" (Bryant 2014, 30).

These new, strange subjects have their own goals and motives: according to Bryant we may intelligibly speak of the goal of the patch of grass to mitigate the damage done by the grass mower; we may intelligibly think that the plants in our home have the goal to capture as much light as is internally useful to the plant. Hence, it is very possible to *imagine* complex motives behind non-human action. The only problem that remains, and seems insurmountable, is the fact that we may never *know* about these motives with the same certainty as we know about our own and other humans' motives – that is the upshot of Nagel's barrier. Whether we are convinced of Bryant's insistence that accepting this limitation and prolonging our efforts to imagine these non-human worlds is better than closing ourselves off to them, in the end, seems a question of intuition, more than one of philosophical argumentation.

Conclusion

Lastly, to return to the problem that spawned this text, is it possible to perform a non-anthropocentric Ricoeurian mimetic circle – to create non-anthropocentric narrative worlds that influence people into changing their stance towards climate change? I started this investigation by discussing Ricoeur's mimetic circle. The ontological understory of mimesis consisted of first localising the anthropocentrism in the prefigurative part of mimesis. This mimesis¹ excluded non-human action on both structural and symbolic grounds. Bryant's concept of non-human action was a structurally open and operationally closed production of manifestations by the exercise of powers on flows of input. With this, the symbolic grounds for dismissing non-human action could be rejected. The structural grounds proved harder to counter for Bryant – plant-machines can indeed be thought to have motives and goals, but due to the epistemic uncertainty of alien phenomenology we may never know these for sure.

Overcoming this problem can perhaps only be done by making it practical – something we as philosophers have a tendency to refrain from. What are the practical implications of refusing to believe that non-human machines may have goals and motivations – or put more technically: to go along with Bryant's epistemic uncertainty regarding non-human phenomenology? Most importantly for this paper, they are that non-human 'actions' cannot be categorised as real actions because of Ricoeur's structural requirements. This would, furthermore, mean non-humans cannot be taken up in the mimetic circle, meaning non-anthropocentric narratives that influence human ways of engaging with their world cannot be conceptualised in any

serious way. Finally, our own anthropocentrism is therefore made inescapable, we cannot flee from it through telling stories and creating narratives – climate change becomes insurmountable.

So perhaps, indeed, we must remain epistemologically pure and reject non-human actions; with such dire practical consequences, however, this epistemological purity comes at a very serious ethical cost: the evaporation of our ability to create real change in real people. It may come as no surprise that I myself look forward to new, inventive non-human narratives.

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SPLIJTSTOF

Philosophies of Life

Philosopher Abroad - Laos

Ilse Meijer

In Luang Prabang, Laos, I first learned that the word philosophy does not have a universal meaning. I was in Luang Prabang for an internship for about five weeks in 2019. During this time I regularly visited a center where travelers, expats and English-speakers went to speak with young locals. The purpose of the center was for these young people to practice their English free of charge and at the same time for everyone to engage in a cultural exchange through conversations. Every time I went to this center I discovered new things – both about the people I was speaking with, the culture I was immersing myself in and about myself.

During the first few visits I learned about the different possible interpretations of the word philosophy. When asked what I studied, I always answered Philosophy and Cultural Anthropology (I was doing a double bachelor's at Radboud University at the time). Most people that I spoke with immediately passed me the question 'What is your philosophy of life?' Every time I would stare at them blankly. I sort of grasped what they were asking, but I did not understand it completely. I asked them several times, but it was only through hearing other people's philosophy of life that I came to understand – over time – what it entailed. These people referred to philosophy as a way of living, as a practice or process that is constantly in development.

Since I studied Philosophy and Cultural Anthropology, this was exactly what I was interested in learning: how philosophies of life differed or were similar from person to person, and from culture to culture. Throughout my studies I tried to follow as many intercultural and non-western philosophy related courses as possible – at Radboud that included Intercultural Philosophy; outside of university I joined a Zen Buddhism meditation center. When I was choosing the university for my minor I wanted to follow subjects on Ubuntu and other 'African philosophies'. I looked at the courses taught in several universities in Southern Africa and spoke with the study advisors. As I expected, what I was looking for did not really exist: philosophy is not a self-evident field of study outside of western academia. Perhaps university, which teaches in a *mind-based* way, was not even the place to learn about philosophies as a *practice*. For me to learn about philosophies of life across people and cultures I had to learn through conversation and experience.

I ended up doing my minor on O'au, Hawai'i (yes!!) and did follow subjects on Philosophies of Hawai'i and the Pacific, and Hawaiian Language and Histories. However, where I learned most about Hawaiian philosophies was

on a weekly spiritual event called Soulday. Soulday brought together people from various religious backgrounds and spiritualities. During the activities we made sure we took care of the *āina* – which is usually translated as ‘land’ but implies a reciprocal relationship with the land. In other words, we take care of the land and the land takes care of us. Through conversation, practice, experience, and example I learned about such untranslatable Hawaiian concepts that for me formed puzzle pieces of Hawaiian philosophies.

I learned that language is an important tool through which we learn to understand our worlds, but it is also limiting. I think that everyone who speaks more than one language knows that some words are simply not translatable – in Dutch the most known example is ‘gezellig’. In Hawaiian language I encountered words, such as *āina* and *aloha*, that were not only untranslatable but also influenced my understanding of the world. What if a word like land was not a thing, but a relationship? How does that change our worldview and how does that change our ‘philosophy of life’?

Until the discipline of philosophy changes I will keep learning about philosophies of life mostly outside of academia.

Several months ago I encountered the same questions when doing anthropological fieldwork in Udaipur, India to finish my Cultural Anthropology bachelor. Whereas my research topic was initially on ‘human-nature’ relationships, I soon found out that there is no translation to Hindi for the English ‘nature’. I had somewhat anticipated on this by asking Paul van der Velde how many translations or variations exist in Hindi for the English ‘nature’. There was only concept one that came close, which was *prakriti*. However, *prakriti* also meant ‘manifestation of the whole cosmos’. In Udaipur, I explored the understanding and interpretation of this concept further. Through various methods, including conversations, interviews, participant observation, participant sensing, and arts-methods, I learned that the philosophies of my Hindu research participants did not include strict categorizations of nature, people, and spirit as separate entities. Instead, the ‘categories’ that my research participants would make or experience seemed to be fluid and interdependent. This meant that my Hindu research participants had an entirely different relationship to their environment and each other: their philosophy of life was shaped by language, and their language shaped their philosophy of life.

These various experiences abroad and encounters with different cultures, languages, and spiritualities have sparked an infinite curiosity

for learning about philosophies of life. While western academia offers a structured approach to doing so, it is also limiting. Western academia has confined the dynamic and embodied character of philosophy as a *practice of life* to a structured discipline that focuses on the mind and is separated from other disciplines. This means that until the discipline of philosophy changes I will keep learning about philosophies of life mostly outside of academia. A question that lingers within me, however, is whether western academia is fluid enough to open up for learning through practice, experience and embodiment. To answer that question, perhaps it is necessary to first pose another one. What is the philosophy of western academia?



Franz Kafka's *Vor dem Gesetz*

Een ambigue notie van verzet

Joris ter Beek

1. Ten geleide

Weinig¹ parabels² zijn zó sprekend en bekend als Franz Kafka's *Vor dem Gesetz*.³ Hoewel dit fragment uit Kafka's illustere opus *Der Prozess*⁴ slechts een luttel tal woorden bedraagt, zijn de literaire kritieken en beschouwingen van dit stuk welhaast ontelbaar,⁵ en is de invloed van deze beknopte moralisatie ongeëvenaard (Liska 2012, 176). Ik meen dat *Vor dem Gesetz* enige rechtsfilosofische lessen in zich draagt over aard en wezen van 'wet' en 'verzet' die een behandeling van deze parabel de moeite waard maken. Welnu, waar gaat *Vor dem Gesetz* over? En waarom fascineert juist dit verhaal menig lezer zo?

De parabel handelt van een man, de zogeheten *Mann vom Lande*, die toegang zoekt tot de Wet. Voor de ingang van de Wet staat echter een deurwachter, de *Türhüter*.⁶ Op de vraag of de man mag passeren, opdat hij de Wet kan bereiken, antwoordt de wachter kortweg: "*Es ist möglich, (...) jetzt aber nicht*" (Kafka 1925a, 86).⁷ Doordat de poort openstaat, weet de man langs de *Türhüter* naar binnen te gluren, waarop laatstgenoemde zegt: "*Wenn es dich so lockt, versuche es doch trotz meines Verbotes hineinzugehn. Merke aber: Ich bin mächtig. Und ich bin nur der unterste Türhüter. Von Saal zu Saal stehn aber Türhüter, einer mächtiger als der andere. Schon den Anblick des dritten kann nicht*

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- 1 Mijn dank gaat uit naar Prof. dr. R.B.J. Tinnevelt voor de constructieve tips bij het schrijven van een eerdere versie van deze bijdrage.
 - 2 Een parabel is volgens de Dikke van Dale een 'zinnebeeldig verhaal om een zedelijke waarheid aanschouwelijk te maken'. Onder parabel versta ik een kort(er) verhaal met een focus op (een) moraal.
 - 3 Voor de Nederlandse vertaling verwijs ik naar Kafka (1925b).
 - 4 Hoewel opgenomen in het 'Dom-hoofdstuk' van *Der Prozess*, postuum gepubliceerd in 1925, gaf Kafka *Vor dem Gesetz* reeds in 1915 uit als losse bijdrage in het Joodse weektijdschrift *Selbstwehr* en tevens als verhaal in de bloemlezingenbundel *Ein Landarzt* in 1920. Zie de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vor_dem_Gesetz met verdere verwijzing.
 - 5 Voor een klassieke interpretatie zie Emrich (1958). Vgl. Teubner (2019, 84-102). De parabel wordt daarenboven getransponeerd naar allerlei wetenschappelijke disciplines en onderwerpen. Zo wordt *Vor dem Gesetz* aangegrepen om de notie van (geografische) grenzen te duiden in Houtum (2010, 285-297).
 - 6 Het is vanwege de centrale positie van deze figuur in de parabel dat *Vor dem Gesetz* ook wel de *Türhüterlegende* of *Türhüterparabel* wordt genoemd.
 - 7 Vertaald: "Het is mogelijk, maar nu niet."

einmal ich mehr ertragen”(86).⁸ De *Mann vom Lande* besluit aldus het zekere voor het onzekere te nemen; hij neemt plaats op een door de wachter verschaft krukje en wacht af, hopen de dat hem op een later moment de toegang tot de Wet verleend wordt. De man wacht echter lang. Hij slijt ‘dagen en jaren’ en volhardt: keer op keer vraagt de man aan de wachter of hij mag passeren; keer op keer wordt hem de toegang geweigerd. Op den duur vergeet de man dat deze wachter niet de enige is, en dat er tussen hem en de Wet nog meerdere en machtigere wachters staan. De *Mann vom Lande* is gefixeerd geraakt, omdat zijn aandacht nog uitsluitend uitgaat naar het obstakel dat recht voor hem staat; de gedachten van de man zijn niet meer bij de Wet, maar enkel bij de wachter. Ten slotte neemt het zicht van de man af. De man wordt oud en heeft niet lang meer te leven. Met een handgebaar roept hij de wachter bij zich en vraagt: *“Alle streben doch nach dem Gesetz, (...) wie kommt es, daß in den vielen Jahren niemand außer mir Einlaß verlangt hat?”* (87)⁹ De wachter ziet in dat de man ieder moment zijn laatste adem uit kan blazen en schreeuwt tegen hem, omdat ook zijn gehoor inmiddels aanzienlijk is verslechterd: *“Hier konnte niemand sonst Einlaß erhalten, denn dieser Eingang war nur für dich bestimmt. Ich gehe jetzt und schließe ihn”*(87).¹⁰ Kortom, de *Mann vom Lande* wachtte zijn hele leven op toegang tot de Wet en sterft tevergeefs.

Het mag niet verbazen dat de parabel velen intrigeert; zij werpt talloze vragen op. Wat is de Wet waarvan de parabel spreekt? Is dit een goddelijke wet of een seculiere wet? Wat is de aard en functie van de wachter? Waarom was de poort voor de *Mann vom Lande* bestemd, maar is hem nooit de toegang verleend? Over deze en andere vragen bestaat een uitvoerige discussie in zowel de politiek-filosofische literatuur als in de literatuurkritiek.¹¹ Ik laat al deze vragen hier echter rusten. In deze bijdrage richt ik mij slechts op één vraag. Had de man – in plaats van op toestemming tot toegang te wachten – het heft in eigen handen moeten nemen, dat wil zeggen actief zijn recht moeten halen? Leert deze parabel ons dat verzet zinvol is, althans voor de

8 Vertaald: “Als het zo verleidelijk is, probeer dan ondanks mijn verbod naar binnen te gaan. Maar denk erom: ik ben machtig. En ik ben slechts de laagste deurwachter. Voor iedere zaal staat een deurwachter, de een nog machtiger dan de andere. Reeds de aanblik van de derde kan ik niet eens meer verdragen.”

9 Vertaald: “Iedereen streeft toch naar de wet? Hoe komt het dat in al deze jaren niemand behalve ik om toegang heeft verzocht?”

10 Vertaald: “Hier kon niemand anders toegang verkrijgen, want deze ingang was enkel voor jou bestemd. Ik ga nu en sluit de ingang.”

11 Denk bij filosofische beschouwingen aan de analyses van Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida en Giorgio Agamben. Zie Liska (2012, 175-194) met verwijzing naar (Benjamin 1992); (Benjamin 1998); (Agamben 1999); (Derrida 1992).

Mann vom Lande zinvol was geweest? Of wijst Kafka ons in *Vor dem Gesetz* en *Der Prozess* veeleer op de zinloosheid van verzet tegen onrechtvaardigheid (*in casu* en wellicht ook *in abstracto*)?¹²

Om deze vraag te beantwoorden bespreek ik in het navolgende twee interpretaties van *Vor dem Gesetz*. Allereerst zet ik een literaire benadering uiteen die erop neerkomt dat verzet tegen onrechtvaardigheid zinloos is, zowel voor de *Mann vom Lande*, als voor iedere protagonist in Kafka's oeuvre (par. 2). Vervolgens behandel ik een wezenlijk andere benadering. Ik bespreek een interpretatie die pleit vóór verzet, zowel voor de *Mann vom Lande* als voor anderen (par. 3). Deze twee diametraal tegenovergestelde interpretaties benadrukken de bestaande discussie omtrent Kafka's denken. Ik sta hierom tot slot stil bij deze ambiguïteit van, althans de onduidelijkheid omtrent, de notie van verzet die in Kafka's parabel van de Wet aan de orde is en ik draag een eigen interpretatie aan. Ik meen dat onduidelijk en onbeslist is of verzet in *Vor dem Gesetz* zinvol of zinloos is, althans voor de *Mann vom Lande* zou zijn geweest, doch dat dit niet in de weg staat aan de noodzaak van hoop en overtuiging (par. 4). In conclusie geef ik antwoord op de onderzoeksvraag van deze bijdrage: wat betekent *Vor dem Gesetz* voor een Kafkaïaanse notie van verzet (par. 5)?

De kenmerkende motieven en thema's in de werken van Kafka zijn vervreemding, verwarring en frustratie, al dan niet in combinatie met het beangstigende en vooral controlerende systeem van een bureaucratische dystopische samenleving, dat het individu ondersneeuwt of vergeet.

2. Verzet is zinloos

De kenmerkende motieven en thema's in de werken van Kafka zijn vervreemding, verwarring en frustratie, al dan niet in combinatie met het beangstigende en vooral controlerende systeem van een bureaucratische dystopi-

12 Ik spreek in deze bijdrage van 'het heft in eigen handen nemen', 'verzet' en 'onrechtvaardigheid' in de meest abstracte en onbepaalde zin. Naar mijn mening kan een parabel als *Vor dem Gesetz* immers niet geconcretiseerd worden, omdat een parabel in beginsel een algemene moraal beschrijft die op meerdere situaties van toepassing is of moet kunnen zijn. Zo ook valt naar mijn mening de vraag wat 'de wachter', 'de wet', en de 'toegang tot de wet' in concrete zin betekenen niet te beantwoorden.

sche samenleving, dat het individu ondersneeuwt of vergeet. Men zou de *Türhüterlegende* als een allegorie of metafoor kunnen zien voor het lot dat de hoofdfiguur van *Der Prozess*, te weten Josef K., in de betreffende roman beschoren is: hij wordt aangehouden voor een hem onbekende misdaad en veroordeeld door een rechtbank die geen vastomlijnde procedures of locatie lijkt te kennen. Plaatst men de parabel van de Wet in dit licht, dan kan men niet anders dan concluderen dat *Vor dem Gesetz* erop wijst dat verzet tegen onrechtvaardigheid zinloos is.

Zo menen ook Herbert Deinert en Ingeborg Henel. Beide auteurs (Deinert 1964, 196; Henel 1963, 68). benaderen *Vor dem Gesetz* vanuit het grotere geheel en concluderen dat Kafka met zijn parabel wijst op de absolute zinloosheid van verzet voor de karakters in zijn universum. De parabel moet hoofdzakelijk begrepen worden vanuit *Der Prozess*, zo begrijp ik Deinert (1964, 193) en Henel (1963, 52).

Beiden zoeken naar de bescherming van het recht om hun respectievelijke onrechtvaardige impasses te doorbreken, maar zij komen bedrogen uit.

De strekking van *Der Prozess* is kortweg als volgt. Op een dag wordt Josef K., medewerker bij een bank, aangehouden. Hij weet niet waarvoor en dit krijgt hij ook nooit te horen. Hij weet evenmin wie hem heeft aangeklaagd en hij wordt nooit voorgeleid. Hij blijft echter, zo wordt hem medegedeeld, vrij om te gaan en te staan waar hij wil en zijn dagelijkse beslommeringen en werkzaamheden voort te zetten. Niettemin loopt er intussen een proces tegen hem. Een proces dat Josef K. koste wat kost beoogt te winnen. De arrestant laat zijn dagelijkse bezigheden meer en meer voor wat zij zijn en wijdt zijn tijd in toenemende mate aan het proces. Alle moeite blijkt echter tevergeefs. Josef K. verliest uiteindelijk zijn rechtsstrijd en wordt om het leven gebracht. De aanklagers, de misdaad, de grondslag en de aanleiding voor zijn veroordeling blijven gedurende het hele verhaal echter geheel onduidelijk en onbekend. Josef K.'s strijd was zinloos.

De parabel van de Wet, die in het 'Dom-hoofdstuk' van *Der Prozess* door een geestelijke aan Josef K. wordt verteld, betreft in wezen niets meer dan een allegorie voor het leven van de protagonist van *Der Prozess* zelf, aldus Deinert (1964, 195) en Henel (1963, 52). De *Mann vom Lande* is Josef K. (Deinert 1964, 195) Beiden zien niet in dat hun respectievelijke ondernemingen van alle zin ontdaan zijn. Zowel de *Mann vom Lande* als Josef K. zoeken naar principes van rechtvaardigheid, terwijl deze in hun lotgeval(len) niet bestaan. Beiden zoeken naar de bescherming van het recht om hun respectievelijke onrecht-

vaardige impasses te doorbreken, maar zij komen bedrogen uit. Zij geloven dat het recht hen wel beschermen zal, maar dat doet het eenvoudigweg niet. Het verlangen zichzelf te bevrijden uit de onrechtvaardige situatie en het recht te doen zegevieren berust op de foutieve vooronderstelling dat dit überhaupt mogelijk is. Deinert (1964, 196) verwoordt dit treffend: “*What is depicted is futility itself, universal and of unlimited applicability, and we should not read into it the futile efforts of one particular group or the clandestine presentation of one particular problem.*”¹³ Door zich met hart en ziel vast te klampen aan de uitblijvende toestemming van de *Türhüter* respectievelijk de veronderstelde rechtvaardigheid van het onzichtbare proces – zonder te weten wat de randvoorwaarden en spelregels zijn voor het daadwerkelijk bereiken van de Wet of het winnen van het proces – doen de *Mann vom Lande* en Josef K. in wezen afstand van hun menselijkheid; hun leven wordt zinloos (Henel 1963, 52). Beiden klampen zich immers vast aan een bij voorbaat uitzichtloos en zinloos project en – niet minder belangrijk – vergeten ondertussen het eigen leven te leven. Deinert: “*And is not the man from the country “dead” for all practical purposes from the moment he abandons all just to sit beside the entrance to the Law? And cannot the same be said about K. who leaves his customary course of life to devote himself increasingly to his own justification?*” (Deinert 1964, 195-196).

Bovenstaande interpretatie sluit nauwkeurig aan op het eerdergenoemde centrale thema van Kafka's werken. Het oeuvre van de auteur staat bekend om zijn dystopische motieven. De hopeloosheid van het individu (met name tegenover het almachtige en onbevattelijke staatsapparaat) staat centraal. Dit vormt een argument voor een negatieve interpretatie van *Vor dem Gesetz*. Zinloosheid van verzet is immers typisch Kafkaësk. Anders gesteld: een negatieve interpretatie sluit aan op het oeuvre. Anderzijds kán men natuurlijk betogen dat een interpretatie van *Vor dem Gesetz* vanuit *Der Prozess* niet per definitie de aangewezen benadering is, omdat *Vor dem Gesetz* al voor de publicatie van *Der Prozess* het levenslicht zag, en dus ook een eigen zelfstandige moraal in zich draagt, of althans in zich zou kunnen dragen. Dat een negatieve interpretatie van de parabel goed aansluit op het oeuvre houdt

13 Volgens Deinert hadden de *Mann vom Lande* en Josef K. dan ook niets kunnen ondernemen om hun hopeloze situatie ten goede te keren: “[The parable] is not concerned with the question of right or wrong, it makes no suggestion as to what effort to undergo in order to reach a given goal, but it pictures the futility of all efforts” (Deinert 1964, 195).

volgens dit tegenargument dus slechts in zoverre stand en betekent geenszins dat *Vor dem Gesetz* niet op 'op zichzelf' beoordeeld en geïnterpreteerd kan worden.¹⁴

Henel wijst in haar interpretatie bovendien op een belangrijk element dat tevens een bouwsteen kan zijn voor een positieve interpretatie van *Vor dem Gesetz*: zowel de *Mann vom Lande* als Josef K. ontduiken volgens Henel (1963, 53-54) de verantwoordelijkheid voor hun eigen handelingen. Eerstgenoemde meent dat de uitzichtloosheid van zijn situatie te wijten is aan de *Türhüter*, laatstgenoemde verwijt op zijn beurt het proces en de rechtbank. Geen van beiden vertrouwt echter op de eigen potentie en mogelijkheden; zij maken zichzelf moedwillig afhankelijk van externe omstandigheden (Henel 1963, 53). Wellicht had in dit kader verzet juist uitkomst kunnen bieden. Wat zou er bijvoorbeeld gebeurd zijn als de *Mann vom Lande* de *Türhüter* eenvoudigweg zou zijn gepasseerd? Had de *Mann vom Lande* de woorden van de wachter in de wind moeten slaan? En wat had het betekend als Josef K. zich niet had verlaten op adviezen van allerlei (al dan niet dilettante) figuren voor raad en bijstand in het proces? Wat als hij evenmin al zijn tijd, gedachten en moeite aan zijn rechtszaak had gewijd, maar zijn aanklacht simpelweg van zich af had laten glijden, heilig overtuigd zijnde en blijvende van zijn eigen onschuld? Door 'niet mee te doen' aan een uit de lucht gegrepen proces, had Josef K. zich wellicht met vrucht kunnen verzetten. Deze vragen werpen een opening op voor een positieve notie van verzet.

3. Verzet is zinvol

De tweede te bespreken invalshoek van de parabel van de Wet berust niet zozeer op een plaatsing van de parabel in het oeuvre, meer specifiek in *Der Prozess*, maar is veeleer een autobiografische. Jürgen Born (1970, 158) meent dat *Vor dem Gesetz* in wezen te herleiden is tot de persoonlijke ervaringen van Kafka zelf. Onder meer op basis van Kafka's *Brief an den Vater* komt Born (1970, 157-158) tot de conclusie dat de parabel óók kan worden geïnterpreteerd als een positieve oproep: verzet is niet zinloos. Zo had de *Mann vom Lande* de *Türhüter* moeten passeren. Born (1970, 162) wijst de negatieve interpretatie van de parabel van de Wet niet expliciet van de hand en spreekt in het kader van zijn positieve autobiografische interpretatie dan ook van een 'second understanding'.

14 Of volgens Kafka *Vor dem Gesetz* inhoudelijk in verband moet worden gebracht met het thema van *Der Prozess* kan men op basis van chronologische publicatiedata simpelweg niet vaststellen. Natuurlijk sluit een eerdere publicatiedatum van *Vor dem Gesetz* nooit volledig uit dat Kafka voornemens was deze tekst in *Der Prozess* op te nemen of hierop te doen aansluiten.

Welnu, hoe construeert Born dit argument? De auteur (1970, 157) vertrekt vanuit de aanname dat de Wet toegankelijk is voor iedereen. Ook de *Mann vom Lande* wist dit en was hiervan overtuigd toen hij voor het eerst bij de poort van de Wet aankwam. Hij verloor echter zijn hoop en geloof in dit belangrijke gegeven door de enkele ontmoediging van de wachter. Nota bene: de parabel sluit af met de les dat de poort tot de Wet uitsluitend voor de *Mann vom Lande* bestemd was. De *Türhüter* impliceert dus dat óók voor de *Mann vom Lande* gedurende zijn leven toegang tot de Wet bestond. Born (1970, 157-158) meent dat de man eenvoudigweg nooit zijn geloof in de toegankelijkheid van de Wet had moeten verliezen, zich blindstarend op het eerste het beste obstakel. Hij had een doorbraak moeten forceren, ondanks de waarschuwingen van de *Türhüter* (Born 1970, 157, 159). Met de opmerking “*Wenn es dich so lockt, versuche es doch*” heeft de wachter de *Mann vom Lande* weliswaar ontmoedigd, maar wees hij tegelijkertijd op een mogelijkheid voor de man om de Wet te (kunnen) bereiken.¹⁵ Desalniettemin koos de man ervoor zijn toegang – en zijn hele leven – afhankelijk te maken van de toestemming van de wachter. Dit had hij niet moeten doen, aldus Born. Het leven moet niet worden geleefd in dienste van de obstakels die men onderweg tegen het lijf loopt, zo luidt deze lezing. Hetzelfde geldt *in extenso* voor Josef K: hij had zich door het proces niet van de wijs moeten laten brengen en vast moeten houden aan de overtuiging van zijn eigen onschuld.¹⁶

Het leven moet niet worden geleefd in dienste van de obstakels die men onderweg tegen het lijf loopt.

Zoals gezegd acht Born deze interpretatie onder meer steekhoudend op grond van de *Brief an den Vater* van Kafka. In zijn brief schrijft Kafka namelijk: “*Es gab einzelne Hindernisse wie überall, aber im Nehmen solcher Hindernisse besteht ja das Leben*” (Kafka 1883, 18).¹⁷ Born stelt dat indachtig deze woorden de parabel van de Wet zo gelezen kan worden dat zij aanspoort

15 Vgl.: “Thus it is actually not the doorkeeper who denies admittance, but personal fear and the doubt and indecision which follow it” (Born 1970, 159)

16 Of de overtuiging van zijn eigen onschuld daadwerkelijk verschil had gemaakt voor de uitkomst en afloop van het proces blijft natuurlijk een onbeantwoorde vraag. De vraag of Josef K. überhaupt iets had kunnen doen om de gang van zaken te beïnvloeden is mijns inziens dan ook de centrale en onbeantwoorde vraag die ten grondslag ligt aan Kafka’s der Prozess.

17 Vertaald: “Er waren enkele horden, zoals altijd, maar in het nemen van deze horden bestaat nu juist het leven.”

(om) obstakels, hindernissen en met name angsten onder ogen te zien: “If we apply Kafka’s words, “Life consists in overcoming obstacles,” to the parable, then the way into the interior of the Law, depicted by the doorkeeper, corresponds to the way of life itself. The Law about which the parable speaks need not, therefore, be an ultimate which one must necessarily attain. It seems rather that the law of life enjoins striving for this ultimate, that is, overcoming the obstacles, which are too numerous to comprehend [onderstreping door auteur] and, in the final analysis, quite possibly invincible. Had the man from the country set out upon this way, we conjecture, the Law would have become his portion” (Born 1970, 158).

Begrijpt men de parabel in deze zin, dan kan men concluderen dat het niet zozeer de wachter, maar eerder de angst en onzekerheid van de *Mann vom Lande* waren die in de weg stonden aan de toegang tot de wet (Born 1970, 159). Analooq geredeneerd veronderstelt deze lezing eveneens dat Josef K. het tegen hem lopende proces had moeten laten voor wat het was – iets onbegrijpelijs – en had moeten streven naar hetgeen hij begeerde: een ongestoorde voortzetting van zijn levensloop.

Juist deze onbeslistheid maakt de parabel zo Kafkaësk: het onbegrijpelijke is bij Kafka immers altijd onbegrijpelijk.

Ook op deze lezing valt vanzelfsprekend het een en ander af te dingen. Hoewel Born in zijn bijdrage nog enkele andere citaten uit Kafka’s werken aanhaalt om zijn interpretatie te vesten, blijft de basis van het betoog redelijk fragiel. Op grond van enkele uitspraken van Kafka – die al dan niet uit de context zijn geplukt en met een doel voor ogen (lees: de formulering van een positieve interpretatie) worden geponeerd – plaatst Born de parabel van de Wet met de minste moeite in het licht van het persoonlijke leven van de auteur. De tweede interpretatie is hiermee in wezen aan dezelfde kritiek onderhevig als de eerste: dat zij goed aansluit bij het grotere geheel – ditmaal niet op het oeuvre, maar op de auteur – sterkt weliswaar de aannemelijkheid, maar maakt deze lezing mijns inziens nog niet volledig afdoend.¹⁸

18 Ik wens hier dus enkel op te merken dat mijns inziens het feit dat een interpretatie van een tekst goed aansluit op overige werken of het leven van de auteur een interpretatie weliswaar kracht bij kan zetten, maar een interpretatie op zichzelf nog niet kan dragen. Een gedegen interpretatie berust mijns inziens óók (en voornamelijk) op een inhoudelijke(r) basis, dat wil zeggen een nauwlettende uitlegging van de te interpreteren tekst zelf.

Welnu, gezien de twee besproken interpretaties dunkt het mij dat de stelling, dat de notie van verzet in *Vor dem Gesetz* meerduldig is, niet langer mag verbazen. In het navolgende sta ik hierbij stil en draag ik een eigen interpretatie aan voor de parabel van de Wet.

4. Verzet is ambigu

In deze bijdrage heb ik twee interpretaties van *Vor dem Gesetz* besproken. Plaatst men de parabel in de lijn van Kafka's werken, dan ligt een negatieve interpretatie voor de hand; verzet is in dit kader zinloos. Plaats men de parabel daarentegen in het licht van Kafka's leven, althans in het licht van een interpretatie van Kafka's leven, dan bestaat ook ruimte voor een positieve lezing; verzet is in dit kader zinvol. Tegen beide interpretaties heb ik ingebracht dat het 'goed aansluiten' van de interpretatie op het grotere geheel in ieder geval geen beslissend argument voor of tegen deze of gene lezing is.

Hoe de notie verzet in de parabel van de Wet moet worden begrepen is mijns inziens simpelweg onduidelijk, althans onbeslist (en wellicht onbeslisbaar). Een sluitende en definitieve lezing is immers niet te geven. Zeker gezien de mate van abstractie van de parabel en het ontbreken van een duiding van Kafka zelf. Dit maakt tal van interpretaties mogelijk. Het is in dit kader dat ik de Kafkaiaanse notie van verzet ambigu oftewel meerduldig noem. Zowel de interpretatie van Deinert en Henel als de interpretatie van Born kunnen overtuigen – en zij sluiten elkander niet uit, daar zij zich ieder beroepen op andere facetten van Kafka's teksten en levenswandel. Bovendien zijn er daarnaast nog oneindig andere lezingen mogelijk.

Gelukkig hoeft een eenduidig antwoord ook niet te worden gegeven. Een interpretatie blijft een interpretatie en het staat uiteindelijk iedere lezer vrij zijn eigen betekenis en waarde aan de parabel – en elementen daarvan – toe te dichten. Juist deze onbeslistheid maakt de parabel zo Kafkaësk: het onbegrijpelijke is bij Kafka immers altijd onbegrijpelijk (Born 1970, 161). Duiding is aantrekkelijk en gewenst, maar ook deze duiding zelf is wellicht zinloos en vergeefs. Kafka's werk draagt immers nooit antwoorden aan; het stelt enkel vragen (Henel 1963, 70). Ik meen daarom dat een goede lezing van Kafka meerduldigheid per definitie moet insluiten. Of de *Mann vom Lande* de wet had kunnen bereiken, zullen wij nooit met zekerheid kunnen zeggen.

Niettemin formuleer ik in het navolgende een eigen interpretatie. Ik poog hierbij zo dicht mogelijk bij de tekst van *Vor dem Gesetz* zelf te blijven en de ambiguïteit van Kafkaiaans verzet te onderkennen. Ik sluit in wezen aan bij de interpretatie van Born, met dien verstande dat ik mijn lezing uitsluitend grondvest op de basisaanname dat toegang tot de Wet (uiteindelijk) een mogelijkheid is. Dat Kafka's leven nauw aansluit bij deze interpretatie is gunstig, maar niet dragend.

Ik vertrek evenals Born vanuit de aanname dat de toegang tot de Wet voor de *Mann vom Lande* (gedurende zijn leven), al dan niet onder voorwaarden, bestond. Deze mogelijkheid volgt mijns inziens zowel uit de woorden van de wachter “*Es ist möglich, (...) jetzt aber nicht*” en “*Wenn es dich so lockt, versuche es doch*” – die de man als ontmoedigend ervaart, maar hij ook als aansporing of uitdaging had kunnen interpreteren – als uit het gegeven dat de poort in kwestie voor de *Mann vom Lande* bestemd was, zoals blijkt uit het slot van de parabel. De reden dat de parabel zo intrigeert en tegelijkertijd zo wrang aanvoelt, is omdat de bestaande mogelijkheid tot toegang een ‘wat nou als’-sentiment opwekt. De parabel creëert hoop, die niet wordt ingelost. Wat nou als de *Mann vom Lande* geen toestemming had afgewacht, maar het heft in eigen hand had genomen? Dit sentiment bestaat bij gratie van enige mogelijkheid (lees: geen absolute zekerheid) tot toegang, die tot het overlijden van de man daadwerkelijk bestond; de poort was immers voor de man bestemd. De toegang tot de Wet bestond hoogstwaarschijnlijk, maar de *Mann vom Lande* heeft zijn recht – zijn toegang – niet opgeëist, en verspeeld, omdat hij de hoop verloor.

Hier zit naar mijn mening de crux. Het enige obstakel dat tussen de Wet en de *Mann vom Lande* in stond was niet zozeer de wachter, maar de twijfel van de man, zoals ook Born stelt. Evenals Josef K. verloor de *Mann vom Lande* de overtuiging van hetgeen hij zeker wist. Josef K. wist dat hij onschuldig was, de *Mann vom Lande* wist dat de Wet voor eenieder toegankelijk was, maar door de onduidelijkheid en uitzichtloosheid van hun situatie vergaten zij deze uitgangspunten en verloren door het obstakel het eigenlijke doel uit het oog. Verzet was in zoverre geraden geweest, dat de *Mann vom Lande* en Josef K. door het heft in eigen hand te nemen niet in afhankelijkheid van deze externe omstandigheden zouden hebben geleefd en de eigen autonomie en subjectiviteit zouden hebben behouden. De waarschuwing van de *Türhüter* respectievelijk het proces als zodanig te erkennen zonder het vertrouwen in de eigen overtuiging te verliezen, vormt mijns inziens de ambivalente moraal van de parabel.¹⁹

19 Of het behoud van vertrouwen in de eigen overtuiging ook zou hebben geleid tot het bereiken van de Wet respectievelijk het winnen van het proces is een vraag die mijns inziens niet kan worden beantwoord. Kafka zet ons juist door deze onzekerheid aan het denken. Zie ook mijn opmerkingen in eindnoot 35. In wezen is deze vraag ook niet relevant, zoals ook hierna nog te betogen: de moraal van de parabel moedigt juist aan om ongeacht de omstandigheden hoop te (be)houden. Het bereiken van de Wet respectievelijk het winnen van het proces mogen volgens deze lezing geen voorwaarden zijn voor het (be)houden van hoop en overtuiging.

De confrontatie met obstakels mag dan nog zo afschrikwekkend zijn – en wellicht blijkt verzet *in fine* ook daadwerkelijk zinloos in die zin dat het uiteindelijke doel tóch niet behaald wordt – zij mag er echter nooit toe leiden dat men bij de pakken neer gaat zitten, zijn rechten niet claimt en overtuiging en hoop verliest, zo versta ik de parabel. Ongeacht de mogelijke zinloosheid van het verzet, rechtvaardigt de enkele mogelijkheid van slagen (lees: van het bereiken van de Wet respectievelijk het winnen van het proces) dat men zijn primaire overtuiging (lees: “de wet is voor eenieder toegankelijk” respectievelijk “ik ben onschuldig”) en de daarop berustende hoop nooit of te nimmer mag verliezen.

Ondanks obstakels en de onduidelijkheid van de gevolgen daarvan, spoort Kafka naar mijn mening aan de hoop te behouden en overtuigingen waar men heilig in gelooft niet te verliezen door angst, die voortkomt uit onduidelijkheid en onzekerheid.

Deze interpretatie van de parabel van de wet laat de meerduideligheid van de notie verzet onverlet; verzet kan in mijn lezing van *Vor dem Gesetz* zowel zinvol als zinloos zijn. Dit is om het even; wij zullen immers niet weten of verzet (zijn) vruchten afwerpt. Ik verleg daarom de focus in wezen van zin naar hoop. Mijn interpretatie wijst erop dat wanneer een enkele mogelijkheid (en dus geen absolute onmogelijkheid) bestaat om rechtvaardigheid te bereiken, verzet vol hoop moet zijn en – door vast te houden aan een initiële overtuiging – ook hoopvol moet blijven, ongeacht de vraag of verzet uiteindelijk zinvol of zinloos zal blijken te zijn geweest.

5. Conclusie

In deze bijdrage heb ik gepoogd antwoord te geven op de vraag wat *Vor dem Gesetz* betekent voor een te formuleren Kafkaïaanse notie van verzet. Plaatst men de parabel in de lijn van Kafka's werken, zoals Herbert Deinert en Ingeborg Henel doen, dan ligt een negatieve interpretatie voor de hand. Plaats men de parabel daarentegen in het licht van Kafka's leven, althans in het licht van een interpretatie van Kafka's leven, zoals Jürgen Born doet, dan bestaat ook ruimte voor een positieve lezing. Tegen beide interpretaties heb ik ingebracht dat het ‘goed aansluiten’ van de interpretatie op het grotere geheel in ieder geval geen beslissend argument is. Om deze reden heb ik mij bij mijn interpretatie uitsluitend gericht op de (bewoordingen van de) parabel zelf.

Ik kwalificeer de Kafkaïaanse notie van verzet als meerduidig. De parabel van de wet kan niet uitsluitend worden gezien als een metafoor voor absolute zinloosheid, zoals Deinert en Henel bepleiten, maar bevat ook een hoopvolle boodschap, zoals Born stelt. Ondanks obstakels en de onduidelijkheid van de gevolgen daarvan, spoort Kafka naar mijn mening aan de hoop te behouden en overtuigingen waar men heilig in gelooft niet te verliezen door angst, die voortkomt uit onduidelijkheid en onzekerheid. Of men nu onterecht beschuldigd wordt of door strenge bewoordingen in verlegenheid wordt gebracht, het vasthouden aan hoop en overtuiging is (op de lange termijn) een voorwaarde om rechtvaardigheid te bewerkstelligen.

Kortom, *Vor dem Gesetz* is met recht een veel gelezen en besproken tekst en leert dat uitzichtloosheid nooit in de weg moet staan aan overtuiging en verzet. Niettemin blijft een interpretatie slechts een interpretatie. Ik raad eenieder dan ook aan *Vor dem Gesetz* eens op te nemen en zich een eigen mening over deze prachtige parabel te vormen.

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What You See, When You Close Your Eyes

Book Review of *The Little Prince*
by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Mirte Debats

I would have liked to begin this story in the manner of a fairy tale.

I would have liked to write:

Once upon a time there was a little prince
who lived on a planet scarcely bigger than himself,
and who was in need of a friend...'

To those who understand life,
that would have a much greater air of truth.

(De Saint-Exupéry 1995, 18)

Come on, come on, hurry, or we might miss it! Take bigger steps than you ever thought possible, push back against the wind slowing you down, and set your lungs on fire! Let us run barefoot through tall grass and over warm sand until every inch of our body aches, feel the pain and laugh out loud, because you know, we know, we will not be late. There is no time to catch your breath. This is important and we cannot miss it: the sunset. We are here! The sun paints the sky in the most magnificent oranges, yellows, blues and pinks. Rays of light write words in the clouds that read like poetry, grass tickles our toes and the sun kisses, caresses our skin. Let your eyes drink in the sight, as the day draws its last breath. The day has to die to make space for a new one to be born. During such a moment, you can either mourn the day that was, wish it to come back, or you can find joy and excitement in the day that will soon arrive. Can you even imagine that there is a planet where the sun sets forty-three times a day? Where you do not have to make haste as we just did? Where you only have to move your chair a little to see the next one? Believe it or not, it exists.

Now that the sun has gone to sleep, we might be able to catch a glimpse of this planet. Light makes space for darkness waking up the moon. The stars wipe the sleep from their eyes to show their faces. If you lay down on your back you can see them better. The world disappears from view, all you see is the sky showing off its glittering treasures. There it is, the planet I was talking about. It's a tiny planet, not much bigger than a house. If you squint your eyes you can spot it. The little prince lives there, with his rose, his three volcanoes, and the baobab trees. "Asteroid B 612" (15) is what the planet is called, or at least it is what grown-ups call it, since they just love numbering, systemising and explaining beautiful things that have no number, do not fit in a system and are inexplicable. The little prince did not always stay on his

asteroid. He left it for a while to travel to other planets, one of these was our home planet: Earth. That is where he met Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who was a pilot stranded in the Sahara desert after his plane had crashed during a record flight. While he was trying to fix it, he heard a little voice saying: "If you please draw me a sheep!" (5). This is how he met the little prince. Six years later, in 1942, De Saint-Exupéry wrote a book about his experience, named after the little prince himself.

I can only describe it as a poetic modern fairy tale with an incredible philosophical depth to it. The story warms my heart, time and again.

De Saint-Exupéry writes about what the little prince tells him about his life on Asteroid B 612, about the rose he has to protect, about the volcanoes he has to clean to stop them from erupting, about the baobabs he has to uproot to make sure they do not destroy the planet, and about the countless sunsets he can watch by just moving his chair a little. He also talks about how he has travelled to other planets. On the first planet he visited, he met a king with no subjects, then he continued to a planet inhabited by a conceited man without any admirers, his journey took him further to a planet where a drunk was drinking to forget how ashamed he was for his drinking. Again on different planets, he met a businessman, who fancied himself the owner of the stars, a lamplighter, who could never rest, and a geographer, who has never travelled. After visiting these planets, he came to the planet Earth, inhabited by "one-hundred-and-eleven kings [...], seven thousand geographers, nine hundred thousand businessmen, seven-and-a-half million drunks, three-hundred-and-eleven million conceited men... In other words, approximately two billion grown-ups" (77).

During his visit he met several animals and people, who showed him what life on earth is like. The first animal he met was a snake, a small animal, who wields greater power than any king. The snake explained this power to the little prince: "Whomever I touch [...] I return them to the earth from whence they came" (82). Moreover, the little prince met two people, first he crossed paths with a railway pointsman, who told him about the people in the trains, rushing from one place to the next, never satisfied with where they are, never knowing where they are going, always on the go. "Only the children are flattening their noses against the window panes. [...] They're the lucky ones" (104). After this encounter, he met a fox who taught the little prince how to tame him. A process which transforms something, or someone

from being ordinary to being unique and one of a kind. Now, in the Sahara desert, after all his travels, the little prince longs to go back home, to his planet, to his rose, to his sunsets. He remembers what the snake told him and asks the animal to bring him back home. He will go back, leaving behind the old shell that is his heavy body. The pilot is sad to see the little prince go, therefore he ends his narration with a request for anybody who meets a boy with golden curls, a boy that never answers any of your questions, to alert him that the little prince has returned.

This story about the little prince fits well among classics like Aesop's and Jean de la Fontaine's fables, Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and more recent works like Carlie Mackery's *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, James Norbury's *Big Panda and Tiny Dragon* and Toon Tellegen's fables. I can only describe it as a poetic modern fairy tale with an incredible philosophical depth to it. The story warms my heart, time and again. I certainly recommend reading and rereading it, not only because it is a short book that does not take too long to read, but especially because it provokes its reader's thoughts and pushes them to reflect on it. *The Little Prince* wants to be shared and discussed. I myself have read it several times now, and every time I read it I discover something new: a new quote I had not really noticed before, a new meaning hiding just behind the words, a new thought I had not yet stumbled upon.

Once you have read *The Little Prince*, it will take hold of you and never let you go. Time and again, I realise just how strong the hold of this story on one's heart is. When I worked in a bookshop, customers, many a time, bought a copy of the book and told me with proud smiles on their faces that they collected copies from the different languages of the places they had visited. They showed me pictures of their *The Little Prince* bookshelves, which were way more than just a display of different copies of the book in different languages. These shelves, told stories of the journeys these proud owners had been on, what they had seen, the people they had met along the way. There is so much more beneath the surface, for those who are willing to look further than a picture, further than a children's story about a little prince, for those who actually see that this book is trying to teach us a certain way of life.

This way of life is important for all grown-ups. De Saint-Exupéry dedicated this book to children and to the grown-ups that can still remember they once were children, even though he thinks few of them do. *The Little Prince* teaches us to tap into our inner child, the child that has been silenced over the years, but that is still alive in each of us. The child that can forget all the systems, numbers, figures, and binaries we have forced our world into. The child that keeps asking questions without giving up, without preformulating the answers, without prejudice, without reasoning from an existing

paradigm. The child that does not simply put labels on the people, animals, nature and other entities in this world, but actually looks at them with wonder, curiosity, and imagination. It sees everything as if for the very first time since it can still be in awe of the world. On page 101, De Saint-Exupéry (1995) lets us in on a secret: “very simply: you can only see things clearly with your heart. What is essential, is invisible to the eye” (101). There is so much more than our eyes can see, there is more behind the numbers, definitions, systems, divisions and binaries. The world is more complicated and more beautiful. Let us close our grown-up eyes that have been shaped by paradigms, prejudices, and labels in order to enable our children’s eyes to be opened. Those are the eyes of our hearts that look at the world with wonder and without judgement. Let us take the time to fill the pockets in our heads and in our hearts with the sights these eyes give us.

De Saint-Exupéry dedicated this book to children and to the grown-ups that can still remember they once were children, even though he thinks few of them do.

The stars shine bright tonight. The skies are clear and Asteroid B 612 is visible. If one day, in the future, you look up at the night sky and you cannot see it, that is fine. Now you know it exists, you will see it everywhere, even when it’s invisible. If you listen closely you will hear the little prince’s voice: “At night, you will look up at the stars. Mine is too small to point out to you. It is better that way. For you, my star will be just one of many stars. That way, you will love watching all of them” (122).

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SPLIJTSTOF



Photo: Noemi Perez

Lisa Doeland on Careers in Academic Philosophy

Philosopher on the Job Market

Sophie Ingle

It is that time of year again when many students are graduating and thinking about their next steps into the world of employment, taxes, and other aspects of life after university. By now, I ought to be used to the jokes I hear about philosophers struggling to find their place in the world after their bachelor's or master's degrees. To many philosophy students, continuing their research may seem like an obvious and straightforward path. If an academic career is something you are considering, I strongly recommend talking to your lecturers and professors about their experiences.

As a philosophy student interested in political ecology and climate ethics, I reached out to a number of lecturers and researchers in relevant fields. I wanted to hear about the paths they had taken to work on these topics in the realm of academic philosophy. This project started as part of a course I followed during my bachelor's degree, titled Philosophy in Practice. Throughout this course, I investigated some potential careers, hoping to be swayed towards following one path or another.

However, as I neared the end of that degree, I quickly realised that there is no fixed path for everyone in navigating a particular career, academic or otherwise. A particular conversation that sticks with me is one I had with Radboud University lecturer and PhD candidate, Lisa Doeland.

I open our discussion with some questions I had been pondering for a while: "How did you decide to pursue a career in academia? Did you always know that this was the right career path for you?"

"No, I didn't always know," Lisa admits, smiling as she joins me at the table in her office. "I began with my bachelor's degree in Literary Studies, but I became interested in philosophy before I completed it. During my first year, I followed a course on the Philosophy of Culture, and I really liked it." Soon after, Lisa enrolled as a philosophy student, too. After seven years, she had completed two bachelor's degrees and her master's degree in philosophy.

Upon learning this, I wondered whether Lisa had moved from her master's degree to a PhD position in relatively short succession. Throughout the final year of my bachelor's degree, I questioned whether I wanted to spend the next several years in academia. A big part of me wanted to explore other interests and see what would await me in the near future outside the university.

While I am still undecided on what path I will follow after my master's degree, Lisa shows me that it is alright to take the time to focus on other aspects of life and figure out what comes next.

“I had my first child when I finished my bachelor’s thesis in Literary Studies,” she comments. “It wasn’t long after that until I wrote my master’s thesis, too. It worked out well because I had good focus, especially when my daughter was young. I would think, ‘alright, now you’re sleeping, I can write’. Within four or five months, I finished the thesis. I was amazed by that, but it happened.”

Shortly after completing her master’s degree, Lisa started working at the university as a programmer of lectures and debates. She already knew that she would like to do a PhD but was not sure about the topic yet. “I really like doing philosophy - theorising - but I wanted to make sure that there was some societal relevance to my research. I hadn’t found my niche yet,” Lisa resumes. “I was about 30 by then. I had worked as a programmer for around three years when I finally found a topic that was both societally relevant and interesting from my philosophical perspective: waste.”

“I really like doing philosophy - theorising - but I wanted to make sure that there was some societal relevance to my research. I hadn’t found my niche yet.”

The natural follow-up question is how she entered her PhD position in the Department of Philosophical Ethics and Political Philosophy. As Lisa has been researching the topic she found most intriguing, I was curious to hear how she got there.

“I didn’t apply for a PhD position. It all started with Angela Roothaan, whom I met through a Filosofisch Café in Amsterdam,” she explains. “I did an interview with her, and afterwards, we got talking. She asked, especially because I’m a woman, ‘Why are you not doing a PhD?’ - I was asked this question many times over the years, mainly from women in academia. With Angela, I wrote the first draft of my research proposal. However, I knew I still needed a full professor as a supervisor. I thought, ‘alright, who would share my fascination with waste?’ This is where I was happy to have René ten Bos as my guide. Finally, I asked Cees Leijenhof too, for day-to-day supervision.”

“What does your day-to-day supervision entail?” I wonder, curious about the difference between thesis supervision at the bachelor’s or master’s level and PhD research.

“Cees has been very important throughout my research process. This is not because he’s particularly interested in the topic of waste, but because he’s a good and critical reader. He would keep asking questions.”

“What kinds of questions?” I wonder, especially since the ontology of waste is not Cees’ specific area of expertise.

“Why are you making an argument in this way and not in that way? Where are the summaries? Where are the introductions? - I had become accustomed to writing for a more general audience, less so for academic audiences. Cees Leijenhorst has been a very helpful supervisor,” Lisa shares, appreciative of the advice she receives.

I was particularly intrigued by the idea of formulating a research plan and proposing it to a potential supervisor. Lisa continues, “I needed some time to digest everything and complete my proposal, leading to my official enrolment as an external candidate. That was in 2018, so I am now five years into my PhD.”

Curious to learn more, I ask, “what is it like being an external candidate at the university?” I wonder whether Lisa’s PhD experiences vary from those of an internal candidate.

“I’m enrolled in the Graduate School for the Humanities. It is not just Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies - other humanities studies are a part of it too. The Graduate School hosts many events, but I don’t often attend them. Perhaps I would attend if I was younger. I think I’m quite old compared to other PhD students. Though, I want to emphasise that even if you’re an external candidate, the university finds ways to include you. There are also reading groups at the university. Finding and becoming a part of a community can be important as an external candidate. Otherwise, it might be a lonely project if it’s just you, your laptop, and your supervisors. I don’t think that would be healthy.”

“How did you go about finding your sense of community?” I question, pondering Lisa’s earlier remarks on often not attending the Graduate School events.

“For me, it’s been helpful to be a part of the philosophical cafe in Amsterdam. That’s a community in itself. It’s not an option, then, to limit yourself to your own research or interests because there are always other people’s lectures. You quickly find yourself reading, doing an interview, and then researching a philosopher that you hadn’t heard of before. It broadens your scope because you spend a lot of time developing and connecting philosophy to other themes - societal issues. Reading groups and philosophical cafes like that have helped me out a lot. Though, of course, you can also find this sense of community at the university. If you’re part of a PhD project, you will be inspired by other researchers that you’re working with.” Lisa sheds light on her experiences, and we continue to discuss the importance of building a network of people working as academic philosophers.

Reflecting on her network before entering her PhD position, I ask, “how did you find the shift from lecture programming to working as an academic in the university?”

"I already knew many professors and researchers at the university through my work as a programmer. They didn't know me as an academic yet, but they knew I read their books and engaged with their work. As a result, the academics I have been working with already knew what they could expect from me and knew that I was capable."

"Was anything different than you expected?" I wonder, thinking about how her place of work remained the same while Lisa's new position was quite different.

"I always knew it was going to be hard work - especially teaching. Perhaps I could say, 'I only have one or two hours to prepare, and that's all'. But that's not how I roll. For example, I lead a course called Classical Texts, where I read philosophical literature together with students. Last week, I thought I had a good understanding of a text until a student asked some interesting questions about it. When there are many students asking questions, I can't always answer them all. I try to be upfront about it - 'I'm sorry I haven't got a proper answer for you right now'. Next week, I want to be able to explain it to them. This means reading up on Kant for a day and a half - it is important. It helps me out in my own research, and I feel obliged to guide the students properly. Some extra work needs to be done, but I create a healthy work-life balance for myself anyway. I try to make sure that I have enough time for everything, especially for my family, though I'm also intrinsically motivated to put in the work. I don't mind reading up on Kant and putting in the extra hours."

This time, I meander to the topic of starting a family and being a woman in academia. Many higher-function academic positions are still male-dominated today. "Do you feel like women are still underrepresented in your field of philosophical research?"

We take a moment to reflect, and Lisa shares her thoughts. "I think there are a lot of women in interesting positions today. When I think about the research and the literature that I draw on, I made a conscious decision to engage with certain authors. At one point, when I was 3 or 4 years into my PhD, I felt like I was working in a male-dominated field. From that moment onwards, I focused on reading published research from women, but now I don't really have to think about it anymore. These women are still on my radar, but I feel like things have changed. It is also really changing at this faculty, and I'm very happy about that. It's important to make sure that everyone is included and that there's a good balance of different identities." Lisa continues, "I think things are getting better for women in academia. Yet, for everyone, it's harder to find academic positions abroad since you could

find yourself filling precarious positions for a long time before landing a permanent position. Meanwhile, it's not always possible to move to other cities for new positions when you have children and a partner."

I may not have decided whether to pursue an academic career yet, and I may sway to one path before jumping back to another many more times. Nonetheless, this conversation has been incredibly useful in understanding the many elements that need to be considered if I were to pursue a PhD position later. With this thought in mind, I ask one final question: "What advice would you give to a current student considering a career in academic philosophy?"

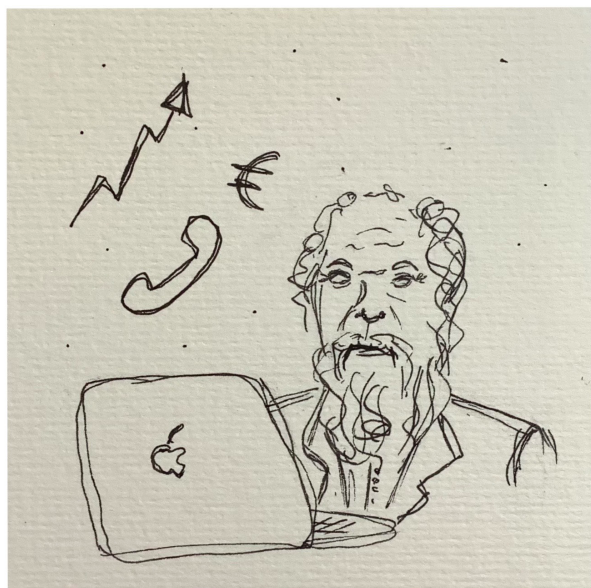
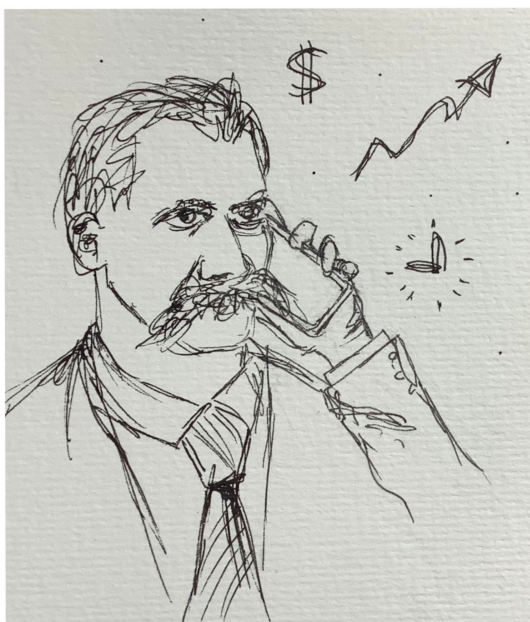
"You can flourish when you find passion for your field and discover your sense of community."

Lisa takes a short moment to ponder my question before answering with a smile. "Do not simply focus on wanting to do a PhD and finding a position. Make sure that you engage with subject matter that lights your fire. You need to be intrinsically motivated, engaged, and feel like your research is important. There must be something at stake, and your heart needs to be in it, so to speak. The right way to go about this could be to do a PhD as an external candidate, but if you find a good position in a good research group, I imagine that's amazing, too. You can flourish when you find passion for your field and discover your sense of community."

We exchange a few last words and wish each other luck in our future endeavours. Although I do not know what awaits me in the near future, I find a sense of comfort in knowing that there is no singular, fixed path to a career in academia or another field. The conversations I had with Lisa and other academics have been extremely valuable. If you find yourself questioning your potential place in academic philosophy, find a moment to enjoy a cup of tea with some of your lecturers.

Shortly after our interview, Lisa published her book, *Apocalypsofie*, and is now working on the completion of her PhD. More information about this publication can be found following the link below:

<https://www.uitgeverijtenhave.nl/boek/apocalypsofie/>.



The Privatization of the Future and Human Essence

Samuel Peelen

Introduction

In his work *Neuromancer* (1984, 17), William Gibson explains that the economy of the future is experienced as “a constant subliminal hum, and death the accepted punishment for laziness, carelessness, lack of grace, the failure to heed the demands of an intricate protocol.” This approach to capitalism seems to be a staple when it comes to the Cyberpunk genre, a sub-genre of science fiction that explores the integration of technology into different aspects of life in an urban, dystopian setting, often elucidated through the motto “High tech, low life.” (Abreu 2022). The incorporation of technology can be observed through characters often sporting technologically advanced prosthetic limbs, eyes and even organs. While physical alterations in merely, say, phalanges may seem a big step, Cyberpunk also introduces hypothetical technology with the ability to plunge us straight into a realm known as Cyberspace. Cyberspace or The Net is “a vast telecommunications network that joins all of the computers and telephones on earth. It is formed by radio, telephone, and cellular phone links, with microwave transmitters beaming information into orbit and beyond” (Pondsmith 1990, 127). The Cyberpunk 2020 manual goes on to state that in the early 20th century, Cyberspace was only accessible through a specific device, but in 2020 it can be entered through merely the brain (ibid.). Clearly, a contemporary phenomenon pointing toward the manifestation of a Cyberpunk-esque future is exemplified through the development of virtual reality and the Metaverse.

While the most famous breakthrough of the genre stems from Ridley Scott’s 1982 film *Blade Runner*, Cyberpunk has delivered eerily accurate prophecies concerning the current state of the world since the New Wave science fiction movement of the 1960s and 70s (Duran 2020).

This shift from using technology as a tool to the complete integration of it in both society and the body itself will be explored through a case study of the dystopian sci-fi work of Mike Pondsmith. The works analyzed are Pondsmith’s *Cyberpunk 2020*, and the work it was based on, *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson. These works, along with works such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), show us the possibility of our projected future. Through an exploration of postmodernity through Mark Fisher’s work, *Capitalist Realism* (2009), a modification on Hannah Arendt’s conceptualization of the human condition, and various science fiction authors, this case study will analyze how the Cyberpunk genre succeeded in projecting

our future. Through further exploration of how the neoliberal revolution has affected our use and dependence on technology this essay will, finally, aim to answer the question: *is capitalism becoming part of the human essence?*

Clearly, a contemporary phenomenon pointing toward the manifestation of a Cyberpunk-esque future is exemplified through the development of virtual reality and the Metaverse.

Part 0.5: Welcome to Night City

An important aspect to roughly grasp the feel of the genre is the commonly used setting. Both Pondsmith's *Cyberpunk 2020* and *Neuromancer* are set in Night City, also referred to as "the Ninsei," specifically in *Neuromancer*. Night City, in Pondsmith's work, was founded in 1994 by a land developer called Richard Night. Initially the city was a mere clustered section of suburbia on the American west coast, so a harbor city, which later encompassed San Francisco and Los Angeles. Night City was planned as a clean city, free of crime, and "by offering lucrative tax packages to several major corporations, he was able to establish a strong economic base as well as an instant population of corporate employees." (Pondsmith 1990, 216). This plan was interrupted, however, as Night used his own resources, thereby excluding major unions and construction firms all controlled by organized crime syndicates, which, in turn, assassinated Night and took over. In the period that followed, the city turned into a sprawling war zone, run rampant with drugs, prostitution, and crime. In 2009 the corporations on which backs' the city was built decided they had had enough of this; they "eliminated most of the gang leaders and established a corporation-controlled City Council." (Ibid.). This city council secured its status as an autonomous Free State; while considered part of the United States, it had the option to declare its own federal laws (Ibid.). In the 'present', Night City is a rapidly growing metropolis teeming with both crime and economic growth, which is almost impossible to leave: "Nobody ever leaves Night City. Except in a body bag." (Ibid., 217). While this fantastical city is rich with lore, the most crucial aspect is that it was originally meant as a so-called "everycity," or a city that could be found anywhere in projected futuristic America, exemplifying the neoliberal revolution the genre expected.

Part 1: Capitalist Futures and Hyper Commodification

Such “everycities” are merely a projection of how the genre recognizes late-stage capitalism to be changing the current state of society. In the Cyberpunk genre, this state of being is magnified to the point of societal integrity, including ‘non-partisan actors’, and even governments are privatized, formulating a hyperbolic neoliberal framework. Philosophers Fredric Jameson and Mark Fisher explore the, albeit, less dramatic, realistic conception of this societal stage.

Fisher draws heavily on American literary critic and fellow philosopher Jameson, who speaks on the conception of the postmodernist movement in his 1991 work *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. The beginning of this movement finds its roots in globalization, and the commodification capitalism spurs on in international finance, mass communication and multinational corporations (Jameson 1991). Nevertheless, postmodernism remains a contested phenomenon in terms of definition, and the term in of itself implies that modernism “possessed revolutionary potentials by virtue of its formal innovations alone”. What Jameson saw happening instead was the incorporation of modernist motifs into popular culture (suddenly, for example, Surrealist techniques would appear in advertising)” (Fisher 2009, 8). While Fisher prefers, for these reasons, the term *capitalist realism*, he also states that “what we are dealing with now, however, is a deeper, far more pervasive, sense of exhaustion, of cultural and political sterility” (Ibid, 7). Fisher’s interpretation of the term capitalist realism is defined as capitalism being so ingrained that we can see no economic or political alternative, referring to Margaret Thatcher’s infamously pro-market slogan “There is no alternative” (Krämer 2013). Our current stage of being is seen by Fisher, as an ontology rooted in business. In this ontology, we cannot exist in separation from capital, including mental states such as the feeling of nostalgia and depression, which is why the Cyberpunk genre may prove yet again to be a realistic and inevitable scenario.

The capitalization of nostalgia and culture is a theme found throughout Fisher’s later work *Ghosts of my life*, in the form of the Derridean concept of ‘hauntology’. In Fisher’s work, this term refers to a “melancholic refusal to give up on the days of popular modernism where everything seemed possible, and a refusal to yield to capitalist realism and postmodern finitude” (Diaz 2021). In layman’s terms, Fisher’s definition of hauntology can be explained as the gripping-onto of past cultural phenomenon and reproducing them to monetize nostalgia, leading to a complete Avant-guardian halt. Through hauntology, what Fisher calls ‘the slow cancellation of the future’ is introduced. He notes that this phenomenon is best observed through the transformation of musical trends throughout the last century:

Rather than the old recoiling from the ‘new’ in fear and incomprehension, those whose expectations were formed in an earlier era are more likely to be startled by the sheer persistence of recognisable forms. Nowhere is this clearer than in popular music culture. It was through the mutations of popular music that many of those of us who grew up in the 1960s, 70s and 80s learned to measure the passage of cultural time. But faced with 21st-century music, it is the very sense of future shock which has disappeared. (Fisher 2014, 7)

Fisher argues that at the point where everything becomes retro, “we lose our grasp on history – and, without a sense of why the past happened the way it did, our anything.” (Hsu 2018). Capitalism keeps us in constant cultural stagnation as the feverish hunt for nostalgia is turned to a motive for profit. This hunt forces humanity to turn art, music, and anything we produce as an expression of ourselves into a hypercommodified sphere; keeping in mind that the price paid for sentimentalism is exuberant.

Aside from this analysis of the relation between consciousness and capitalism, cyberpunk, also lays huge emphasis on how capitalism *physically* affects humanity. A pillar of Cyberpunk as a genre, alongside the nearing rabid thirst for profit, is cybernetic augmentation and the theme of the body invaded by technology. Such bodily ‘invasions’ as prosthetic limbs, cosmetic surgery, and ways to ‘jack in’ to cyberspace are most common. Not only does technology become an extension of the body, but also of the mind, through said cyberspace. Through the gradual bodily takeover by such innovations, it becomes less and less a vessel for experiences such as sensations and thoughts, considering this is now no longer human. As such, the parts of the body that have died off in favor of using technology are now revived, resulting in “futureshocked zombies.” For science-fiction author Bruce Sterling, this branch of Cyberpunk is post-humanist, spurring on “technological destruction of the human condition [that] leads not to futureshocked zombies but to hopeful monsters.” (Sterling 1987, 4-5). This quote, as used by post-humanists, refers to the type of change technology brings to human nature.

In both Sterling and Gibson’s works, characters are regularly subjected to a scenario likened to a futuristic ship of Theseus. The thought experiment centers around a ship of which every plank is slowly being replaced one-by-one. The question resulting from this is: once every component of the ship is replaced, can it still be considered the same ship it started out as? In this soon to be contemporary version of the well-known thought experiment the subjects are continually reshaping their bodies. Thus, notions of human nature through a purely physical essence lose credibility, and a redefinition of what it means to be human becomes necessary (Hollinger 1990, 8).

Such a discussion of the ship of Theseus is, however, incomplete. As the classic experiment goes, it merely involves the vessel it discusses, and not the ship's characteristics and purpose. Considering the application of this investigation on humans, another layer must be added through Hannah Arendt's work on the human condition.

Thus, notions of human nature through a purely physical essence lose credibility, and a redefinition of what it means to be human becomes necessary.

In exploring this added layer of how the human condition affects our behavior, the resulting feeling of alienation in the context of the Cyberpunk genre will be further discussed.

Part 2: The Human Condition and Its Dichotomies

Hannah Arendt introduces us in her work *The Human Condition*, first and foremost, to the term *vita activa*, and distinguishes between three forms of activities: labor, work, and action. Each form “corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man.” (Arendt 1958, 7). ‘Labor’ refers to biological processes concerning the human body; its human condition is life itself. ‘Work’ is the opposite of labor, with a definite beginning and end, representing the creation of a product, such as a work of art. Yet, what makes work different from labor is the desire to create, and not the need for survival as observed in labor. The human condition for work, according to Arendt, is worldliness: the possession of tangible references in the world and the partaking in a political world. What sets both labor and work apart from ‘action’, is that for Arendt it specifically takes place in the web of human relations through both speech and action, and it is what we both use to set ourselves apart from others and to build relationships. Arendt describes this to be the ultimate expression of freedom one can partake in. Action adheres to the human condition of *plurality*: we are shaped by those around us and our environments, which we shape in turn (ibid., 7-8). To define plurality, in this sense, *distinction* is a necessity as “if people are not distinct, then a person would only be like everyone else, there will be no need for neither speech nor action to manifest him/herself.” (Bas 2013, 13). Along with distinction, another characteristic of plurality is *equality*. This condition of equality is not inherited through birth but through speech and action. Employing these methods, humans can create the *polis*, a public sphere through which distinction and equality can be enabled (ibid.).

A central thesis in her work is that, opposite to earlier epochs, labor has been glorified, contrasting with its earlier and significantly lower status (Beiner 1990, 360). This glorification is the consequence of John Locke discovering labor to be the source of all property. This claim, followed by Adam Smith's assertion of labor leading to wealth, found its zenith through Karl Marx's "system of labor" (Arendt 1958, 101). In said system, labor became the ultimate method of wealth accumulation and expression of humanity (Ibid.). These three thinkers,

Though Marx with greatest force and consistency, held that labor was considered to be the supreme world-building capacity of man, and since labor actually is the most natural and least worldly of man's activities, each of them, and again none more than Marx, found himself in the grip of certain genuine contradictions. (Ibid., 101)

Arendt notes that such contradictions arise from the fact that these authors equated work with labor, bestowing labor with attributes only found in her definition of work. Marx claims labor to be the measure of all human productivity, whereas Arendt finds distinction within labor being unable to produce anything eternal, only able to maintain perishable human life. However, while definitions differ, both philosophers seem to agree on Locke's dichotomy of "the labor of his body, and the work of his hands," referring to the body constantly laboring to keep itself alive, and the hands working to create a durable result (Locke 1980).

Action adheres to the human condition of plurality: we are shaped by those around us and our environments, which we shape in turn.

Part 3: Alienation and reconciliation

While Arendt and Marx consider different definitions of work and labor to be correct, they find agreeance in the concept of alienation resulting from glorifying the accumulation of an end product and wealth. Arendt opens the *Human Condition* by discussing the launch of Sputnik in 1957, which was met with an immediate reaction of joy that "expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first "step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth."" (Arendt 1958, 1). This reaction troubles Arendt, forcing her to pose the question as to why humankind has such a strong desire to 'escape' its home, in exchange for an unexplored, largely empty, void. She believes that

we have made our planet inhospitable, causing an alienation from it. Arendt believes that our world has been lost to modernity, which is emphasized by Arendtian theorist Ring:

It [the world] contained needs that Arendt believes are universal: the need for permanence and structure that survives beyond the lifetime of a single generation. The creation of permanence, which she refers to as the creation of objectivity, constructs an essentially human activity. (Ring 1989, 433).

I propose that Arendt's conceptualization of the human condition can be used as a model to show how technoscientific and economic developments of capitalism have alienated us from both the world and from ourselves. This is achieved through the literal invasion of the human body and mind, as observed in the Cyberpunk genre. In an attempt to cling to the conditions listed and to reconcile ourselves with our home, we try to adapt through the concept of *the world*. Arendt's concept of the world is meant not as a reinterpretation of nature but as a product of human work, the products produced are the realization of models or hypothetical blueprints (Arendt 1958, 139-144), "they include institutions as well as material things such as buildings, tables and computers." (Chapman 2007, 435). While humans inhabit the world, Arendt also argues that the world is lived on, creating a human "artefact", and created from what we are given by nature (ibid.). The world is meant as a place that humans inhabit, seeking to understand each other. For this, Arendt introduces the metaphor of the table; the table acts as an analogy for worldliness, perpetuating a hypothetical space over which people can relate to one another and a shared cause while remaining individually in their own chairs (Bas 2013, 2). As Arendt writes:

In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of "who" in contradiction to "what" somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does. (Arendt 1958, 179)

If this table, and so the world, are abstractions for a common political sphere in which humans form each other, it is only natural that current political, and thus economic, ideas become embodiments of their abstractions. In

the current iteration of the world, in which everything must be efficient and function as a well-oiled capitalistic machine, the body can no longer compute. This could be interpreted, as for Arendt's version of alienation, that the overwhelming joy felt once interplanetary escape became an option stems from an extreme technological advancement housed only in the world while the body lags further and further behind. Yet, in an Arendtian framework, the conclusion of technology breeding reconciliation could never be accepted. This is, of course, unless the only option is to remain stagnant in an ever-changing world, where to reconnect, humans must also become more technologically advanced. This rise of technology promises to free humanity of any limitations as upheld by the human condition, and so the Cyberpunk genre would, through cybernetic prosthetics and augmentation of the body, provide both further alienation from our bodies, but an option for reconciliation with a more and more technologically advanced planet as well.

Still, we lose everything in doing so: belonging in the world and the ability to fantasize about a reality where we are indeed free from the whims of merely an economic system.

However, it can be noted that if, for humanity to be reconciled with its home, both the planet and humanity must keep developing technologically, capitalism will forever remain unable to escape. The environment keeps changing, forcing its inhabitants to do so as well, spurring the idea of the human body not being utopian but dystopian. We want to free ourselves from the human condition through progress. Still, we lose everything in doing so: belonging in the world and the ability to fantasize about a reality where we are indeed free from the whims of merely an economic system.

Conclusion

While in Cyberpunk, late-stage capitalism and all its consequences are vastly magnified, the works of Mark Fisher and Hannah Arendt allow an interpretation that provides a scope of the future that runs rampant with everything the science fiction genre has to offer. This specific branch of sci-fi is often elucidated through the motto of "high tech, low life," exemplified predominantly through its extreme focus on highly advanced technology and the accumulation of wealth. A pillar of the focus on technology lies within the exceedingly easy, even encouraged, installation of cybernetic augmentation and prosthetics. Through this invasion of capitalistic ideals, such as

efficiency through the human body, and a study of Arendt's conceptualization of the human condition, this essay aimed to answer the question: "Is capitalism becoming part of the human essence?"

From Fisher's works, *Capitalist Realism* and *Ghosts of My Life* could be gathered that we presently find ourselves under ingrained and inescapable conditions induced by capitalism, for which humanity is unable to even ponder an alternative. Even abstract concepts such as nostalgia and depression are wrung out for profit through the regurgitation and remaking of art and culture, obstructing the creation of anything new. As humans apparently yearn for the feeling of a simpler time, the production of avant-garde expressions is just not profitable enough. Human existence has become ensnared deep within the maul of capitalism, forcing humans to abide by an ontology rooted in business. Living by this ontology forces society to turn anything that results from Arendt's interpretation of action into a monetizable commodity or service.

Along with Arendt's conceptualization of the conditions for being human, work, labor, and action, a compelling aspect considering humanity's future is her iteration of alienation. This is first mentioned in her work, when discussing the launch of Sputnik: "In 1957, an earth-born object made by man was launched into the universe, where for some weeks it circled the earth according to the same laws of gravitation that swing and keep in motion the celestial bodies" (Arendt 1958, 1). For Arendt, alienation is the estrangement of humans as fundamentally "earth-bound creatures" from a world we have made inhospitable. Through her metaphor of the table, a common sphere where humans seek to understand each other through a common cause, it becomes a necessity for abstractions to become part of our lived-upon "human artefact". As our "artefact" has technologically hyper-progressed, humans have realized that this will soon become a hostile environment for the human body, alienating us from our home. This essay argues that the Cyberpunk genre has seemingly provided humans with a hypothetical opportunity for reconciliation with the world through means of the adaptation found within the abstract bounds of cybernetic augmentation, but in reality has done quite the opposite. In our frivolous search for adaptation, humanity has entered an unescapable cycle of "progress", leading to the further breeding of alienation.

In a state of Fisher's capitalist realism and through a reinterpretation of Arendt's human condition, it has, unfortunately, become a realistic possibility that capitalism has become an overwhelmingly prominent aspect of what it means to be human.

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