



## Quentin Meillassoux. Speculative Realism and Narratives from Contingency.

Quentin Meillassoux. Realismo especulativo y Narrativas desde la Contingencia.

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to introduce Quentin Meillassoux's 'speculative materialist realism', establishing a critical stance against the metaphysical tradition of the 'absolute' that has prevailed in post-Kantian Western philosophy, based on the need for contingency that he proposes. This implies making a critique of what has been understood as realism, necessity and existing. To do this, key concepts of Meillassoux's philosophy are broken down, exemplifying its influence -and possible presence back in time- on other thinkers and artists in their respective narratives such as Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, Nick Land, and Florian Hecker, who delve into issues that generate discomfort, amazement, nihilism and pessimism in contemporary societies, such as probability and prediction in financial markets, the Anthropocene and nature, the conflictive relationship between subject and object, truth and chaos, between other things, subtracting ourselves from the humanist discourse on which the scientific, financial and environmental paradigms of our time rest and which have ended up cracking the identity of man, with capitalist production being the most determining geological factor. Let us to reflect on the following questions. What narratives can give an account of the



current condition of the world? What narratives emerge when we stop focusing our attention on man? What habits of thought force us to change the awareness that everything around us is contingent?

**Keywords:** Speculative materialism-Speculative realism. Correlationism. Contingency. Thought-Being. Subject-Object. Hyperchaos.

## RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es introducir el 'realismo materialista especulativo' de Quentin Meillassoux, estableciendo una postura crítica frente a la tradición metafísica del 'absoluto' que ha prevalecido en la filosofía occidental pos-kantiana, fundamentada en la necesidad de la contingencia que propone. Lo anterior implica realizar una crítica de lo que se ha entendido como realismo, necesidad y existir. Para ello, se van desglosando conceptos claves de la filosofía de Meillassoux ejemplificando su influencia -y posible presencia atrás en el tiempo- sobre otros pensadores y creadores en sus respectivas narrativas como Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, Nick Land y Florian Hecker, quienes ahondan en temas que generan malestar, asombro, nihilismo y pesimismo en las sociedades contemporáneas, como la probabilidad y la predicción en los mercados financieros, el Antropoceno y la naturaleza, la conflictiva relación entre sujeto y objeto, la verdad y el caos, entre otras cosas, sustrayéndonos del discurso humanista sobre el que descansan los paradigmas científicos, financieros y ambientales de nuestro tiempo y que han terminado por resquebrajar la identidad del hombre, siendo la producción capitalista el factor geológico más determinante. Reflexionamos sobre los siguientes cuestionamientos. ¿Qué relatos pueden dar cuenta de la condición actual del mundo? ¿Qué relatos surgen cuando dejamos de centrar nuestra atención en el hombre? ¿Qué hábitos de pensamiento nos obliga modificar la conciencia de que todo lo que nos rodea es contingente?

**Palabras clave:** Materialismo especulativo-Realismo especulativo. Correlacionismo. Contingencia. Pensamiento-Ser. Sujeto-Objeto. Hipercaos

*Don Quixote is a contingent book, Don Quixote is unnecessary.  
I can premeditate your writing, I can write it, without incurring  
in a tautology... My general memory of Don Quixote,  
simplified by forgetfulness and indifference, it can very well*



*equivalent to the previous inaccurate image of an unwritten book.*

*Postulated that image (that no one in good law can deny me)  
it is indisputable that my problem is much more difficult than that of  
Cervantes. My complacent forerunner did not refuse collaboration  
of chance: I was composing the immortal work a little à la diable,  
driven by inertia of language and invention.*

"Pierre Menard, author of Don Quixote"

(Borges, 1987)

## Introduction to Speculative Materialism by Quentin Meillassoux

After the exhaustion of the linguistic turn that philosophy gave in the twentieth century, epistemologies, ontologies, ethics and scientific perspectives have been explored where human consciousness is no longer the center of attention. Quentin Meillassoux (1967), sharing an interest in mathematics with his mentor Alain Badiou, who introduces the work of the first After Finitude. Essay on the need for contingency (2015a), written in 2006 and translated into Spanish in 2015, states that mathematics reaches the primary qualities of things, as opposed to the secondary qualities manifested in perception. This discovery comes from the ontology of set theory by mathematician Georg Cantor.<sup>1</sup> After publishing Meillassoux his aforementioned work, he has powerfully attracted

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Ferdinand Ludwig Philipp Cantor (1845-1918). In 1873 Cantor proved that rational numbers are countable, that is, they can be put in biunivocal correspondence with natural numbers. He also proved that algebraic numbers are countable. However, his attempts to decide whether the real numbers are countable proved more difficult. In December 1873 he managed to prove that the set of real numbers was not countable and in 1874 he published it in an article. It is in this article that the idea of a biunivocal correspondence appears for the first time, although it is only implicit in the work. In his 1874 work, Cantor proved that in a sense 'almost all' numbers are transcendent, by proving that real numbers are not countable, while algebraic numbers are. The Cantor set, named for being Georg Cantor's contribution<sup>1</sup> in 1883, is a prominent fractal subset of the real interval  $[0, 1]$ . In addition to a mathematical curiosity, it contradicts an intuition regarding the size of geometric objects: it is a set of null measure, but it is not empty or countable. It is built recursively by taking the following steps: The first step is to take the interval  $[0, 1]$ . The second step is to remove its inner third, i.e. the open interval  $(1/3; 2/3)$ . The third is to remove the two remaining segments from their respective inner thirds, i.e. the open intervals  $(1/9; 2/9)$  and  $(7/9; 8/9)$ . The following steps are identical: remove one-third of all remaining intervals. There is no end to the process. See, Georg Cantor, "On the Power of Perfect Sets of Points (De la puissance des ensembles parfait de points)", in *Acta Mathematica* 4 (1884), pp.381-392. English translation reprinted in *Classics on Fractals*, ed. Gerald A. Edgar, Addison-Wesley (1993).



the attention of philosophers, artists and creators in general, opening a new field of research that from different areas is questioned about the knowledge of the absolute. In the modern era – and we can include the postmodern one – this ambition could have been considered naïve according to realist gnosis and the budding epistemological tradition. Their critical position of materialistic and speculative nature has a rational rigor that decisively attracts many thinkers to some extent frustrated, largely because of the limits of the theories in which modernity pigeonholes them; and in part, because postmodernity did not give them what it never promised them.

The transformation of the worldview it offers us is an important step in moving beyond an anthropocentric view of the Universe. After understanding its ontology one cannot but be surprised by the fact that existence on Earth is not commanded by any real need or by any God; but life is a 'miracle' of its contingent nature. For Meillassoux there is no need to affirm more than contingency: the fact that there are becomings and events beyond the probabilities that the existing allows us to think. His discovery consists, broadly speaking, in having observed that in the numerical sets there are elements that cannot be counted by the mathematical models that precede it, opening a new field in the understanding of infinity and the absolute. Returning to a forgotten aspect of Descartes' thought, but injecting it with mathematical knowledge that did not exist in his time, Meillassoux makes us see that the primary properties of objects, that is, those that do not depend on the subject who perceives them, can be known by means of numbers. The example he gives is the study of ancestry, which, thanks to the numerical analysis of the properties of minerals, geophysicists have been able to determine the eras through which the Earth has passed, despite the fact that there is no human presence that could have witnessed these phenomena.

Meillassoux wonders,

What do astrophysicists, geologists or paleontologists talk about when they discuss the age of the universe, the date of formation of the Earth, the date of the emergence of a species before man, the date of the emergence of man himself? How to grasp the meaning of a scientific statement that explicitly refers to a fact of the world postulated as prior to the



emergence of thought, and even of life, that is, postulated as prior to every human form of relationship with the world? (Meillassoux, 2015, p.36).

Very much in his narrative style of inquiry-exposition, the French philosopher goes on to question: "What interpretation is correlationism capable of giving of ancestral statements?" (Meillassoux, 2015, p.37). By ancestral we mean all the reality prior to all recorded form of life on Earth. "How to interpret an ancestral statement?" (Meillassoux, 2015, p.37). In an article titled "Contingency and Absolutization of the One," Meillassoux explains:

By correlationism I mean, in a first approximation, any philosophy that maintains the impossibility of accessing through thought a being independent of thought. We never have access, according to this type of philosophy, to an object (understood in a general sense) that is not already correlated to an act of thought (cited in Ramírez, 2016, p.73).

If we start from the Cartesian perspective, this would be that statement whose referents, even if they are past, can be raised as real since they enjoy validity by experimental science at some point in their development. However, "for the correlationist, such statements vanish from the moment the self-contradiction is actualized, according to the resplendent, of the definition of the archifossil: donation of a being prior to donation. ' Donation of a being'" (Meillassoux, 2015, p.43). Archifossil or fossil matter is called "not materials that indicate traces of past life, which are fossils in their own sense, but materials that indicate the existence of a reality or an ancestral event, prior to terrestrial life" (Meillassoux, 2015, p.37). Therefore:

An ancestral statement is true, according to the correlationist, in the fact that it is founded on a present experience – made on a given fossil material – and universalizable (verifiable in principle by anyone). It can then be said that the statement is true because it is based on an experience in principle reproducible by all (universality of the statement), without naively believing that its truth will come from an adaptation to the effective reality of its referent (a world without donation of world) (Meillassoux, 2015, p.45).



The distance that Meillassoux takes from Descartes affects the Cartesian cogito, since the 'correlational cogito' differs from the first in at least two aspects:

1) The correlational cogito is not necessarily identified with a metaphysics of representation, because it may refer to a conception of the ser-thought correlation different from that of the subject and the object (such as the Heideggerian co-appropriation of being and man); 2) It is not a solipsistic cogito in the strict sense but rather a 'cogitamus', because it bases the objective truth of science on the intersubjective agreement between consciences. The 'correlational cogito', however, also institutes a certain type of 'species' or 'community' solipsism: because it enshrines the impossibility of thinking about an earlier, or even later, reality to the community of thinking beings. This community only has to deal with itself and with the world that is contemporary to it (Meillassoux, 2015, pp.87-88).

In addition to this concept of ancestry, the French philosopher introduces some other concepts that we will define in the development of this work, such as contingency, correlationism, donation, factuality, irrazón, among others, as part of the core of his criticism 'ante-lo-dado' functioning as 'what-is' 'for-being-given' as universal, absolute, true and proper to factuality. In the work of Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) entitled *Ficciones* (1944), we find a paragraph in the first story that bears the name of "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" in which Borges illustrates -according to philosophical idealism- a world -Tlön- whose inhabitants conceive the real as a product of the mind, of consciousness. Here is an excerpt that may work to illustrate part of the critical-reflective 'spirit' of Meillassoux's speculative materialism:

Tlön's metaphysicians do not seek truth, or even verisimilitude: they seek amazement. They judge metaphysics to be a branch of fantasy literature. They know that a system is nothing more than the subordination of all aspects of the universe to any one of them. Even the phrase "all aspects" is rejectable, because it supposes the impossible addition of the present moment and the past. Nor is the plural "the past" lawful, because it is another



impossible operation... One of Tlön's schools goes so far as to deny time: he reasons that the present is indefinite, that the future has no reality but as present hope, that the past has no reality but present memory.<sup>2</sup> Another school declares that all the time has already passed and that our life is just the memory or twilight reflection, and undoubtedly falsified and mutilated, of an irrecoverable process. Another, that the history of the universe – and in them our lives and the faintest detail of our lives – is the writing that produces a subaltern god to understand with a demon. Another, that the universe is comparable to those cryptographies in which not all symbols are worth and that it is only true what happens every three hundred nights. Another, that while we sleep here, we are awake elsewhere and that every man is two men.

Among Tlön's doctrines, none has merited as much scandal as materialism (Borges, 1987, pp.23-24).

At the beginning of factuality, Meillassoux presents the abandonment of the principle of reason by means of the critical-speculative principle of irreal trying to reach a non-metaphysical absolute capable of piercing the correlational circle of the ultimate reason. Such a principle implies the necessity of the contingency of the entity, whose existence is also contingent and not a necessity in the world. If the entity whatever it was were a fact or a necessity, in addition to denying its contingency in the world, it would confirm a facticity of facticity, being able to grant it a character of absolutization in a sequence that would logically extend to infinity. The facticity of facticity would be explained by laws not only universal but also immutable and according to a given universe, which turns out to be contrary to the speculative ontic absolutization that Meillassoux theorizes in opposition to a hypothetical-causal (Hume) that concerns all entities, which implies among other things as we will see a little later with Timothy Morton, that the stability of nature and the planet could be assumed as a fact independent of thought, which is related to Cantor's Theorem and the 'intotalization of the possible' (Hotel Kafka) or 'of the transfinite', where it is not possible to capture

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<sup>2</sup> Jorge Luis Borges quotes Bertrand Russell from *Analysis of the mind*, 1921, p.159, where the planet is supposed to have been created a few minutes ago, provided with a humanity that "remembers" an illusory past.



in a single set all the possible worlds. If the above were possible, that is, that all possible worlds could be totalized into a single set, we would speak of an ontological absolutization, as happens with 'all aspects', 'the past', 'all the time' that point out 'the metaphysicists of Tlön' of the Borgian account.

In Anglo-Saxon academic circles there has been talk of 'speculative realism'. But, 'speculative realism' is an inaccurate term that is assigned to philosophical perspectives that may turn out to be very different from each other and that have in common the attempt to combat the anti-realist position of phenomenology, structuralism and practically all subsequent schools of Western thought, which think that phenomena depend on the mind to exist. Consciousness here again. For the purposes of this work, we will refer indistinctly to 'speculative realism' and 'speculative materialism' when it comes specifically to the intellectual position of the French thinker, to avoid confusion. But how do we approach narratively the exploration of concepts that transcend human consciousness? For Meillassoux, the central objective of 'speculative materialism' as a critical-philosophical reflection is the discovery of an absolute, which is nothing other than the 'need for contingency', which includes the entities, being the non-necessity of these the only necessary thing. So the absolute can only exist not being an entity, not having been or being, if not, to come, to be. In this way, what lies outside of thought must remain unthinkable. This position has been called by the 'speculative (materialist) realists' -among them Meillassoux-: correlationism. But, says Meillassoux:

Against dogmatism, it is important to maintain the rejection of every metaphysical absolute; but against the argued violence of various fanaticisms, it is important to find again in thought a little absolute, enough, in any case, to oppose the pretensions of those who would like their exclusive depositaries, for the sole effect of some revelation (Meillassoux, 2015, p.85).

The critique against dogmatism is a critique against the facticity formed by correlations that have led to the loss of the absolute and the production of various forms of fanaticism and ideologies in diverse spheres that go beyond religion and politics, such as capitalocentrism and anthropocentrism, both



geological baseboards on which the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene rest as quicksand that threaten to completely engulf life in the planet.

### Fictions beyond science

It is not unwise to consider that the speculative realist position began with Kant; or, what he called: 'Copernican revolution'. However, some philosophers of this current have called it 'Ptolemaic revolution', since the effect it had was to maintain human perception as the center of thought. For most Western philosophies after Kant, the thing-in-itself (noumeno), that is, phenomena beyond human perception are unthinkable. George Harman puts it in these terms:

On the one hand, scientism insists that human consciousness is nothing special and must be naturalized like the rest of things. On the other hand, he also wants to preserve knowledge as a special kind of relationship with the world quite different from the relationships that raindrops or lizards maintain with the world. [...] For all their gloating over the fact that people are pieces of matter like everything else, they maintain that the very status of enunciation is somehow special. For them, raindrops know nothing, lizards know very little, and some humans have greater knowledge than others. This is only possible because thought is given a unique ability to deny and transcend immediate experience, something that inanimate matter is obviously incapable of doing, according to these theories. In short, despite its obscure claims about the non-existence of the human, scientism places the structure of thought at the ontological top (Harman, 2011).

It is important to show that contingency is not the same as probability and chance.<sup>3</sup> The economic crises and financial hecatombs of both individuals and states on the verge of bankruptcy in the last hundred years have led us to a conceptual parenthesis regarding the functioning of financial markets

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<sup>3</sup> See, Elie Ayache, *The Blank Swan. The End of Probability*, United States: Hoboken Wiley, 2010.



and the risk / return ratio over time. No prediction model seems to be able to be applied effectively and considered rationally optimal. Is it the end of probability? What association might this have with the 'need for contingency' that Meillassoux stipulates in *After Finitude*? Elie Ayache (2010) in his work *The Blank Swan. The End of Probability*, argues that it is because the performance of the market by virtue of various contingent factors, some created voluntarily, others unexpected catastrophic or not, that it usually moves periodically outside the prediction intervals to which mathematics and the laws of probability theorized and predicted, thus tracing communicating vessels with the Meillassouxian contingency and the 'metaphysicists of Tlön' of the Borgian account, whose results can never be anticipated.

We could not say that markets behave irrationally because so far at least, they do not think good, bad, or use reason; they have no awareness of time or space, or of the past or the future. In the Borgian story "Pierre Menard, author of *Don Quixote*", it is possible to read "... or *Don Quixote on Wall Street*" (Borges, 1987, p.39). Imagine that Pierre Menard is a stock broker capable of perfectly and without setbacks replicating Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, or even getting ahead of his writing and even producing something even better than what the alcala-born de Henares native arrived in his investment and auction room. That is, that Menard could predict in his investment room the algorithm of perfect replication of *Don Quixote* and managed to list his creation on the stock exchange. The risk in investments as part of the 'ontology' of financial markets, stepchildren of capitalism in its sister versions: virtual, electronic and cybernetics leads to think about contingency beyond the probabilities assigned by reason and science.

Because at the very moment that this vanishing into thin air occurs, we glimpse for the first time that iceberg too solid in the fog. [...] I seriously doubt whether capitalism can carry forward the task of processing hyperobjects. Somewhere else I argued that since the most basic machinery of capitalism is reactive rather than proactive, it has a flaw that makes it incapable of fully addressing the ecological emergency. Capitalism builds from objects as "raw material" (whatever comes through the factory door). The retroactive style of capitalism is



reflected in the ideology of the "consumer" and its "demand" that capital "finds." (Borges, 1987, p.39).

Contingency – something that Meillassoux extracts from the mathematics of Georg Cantor – is that which can happen beyond what exists and, therefore, goes beyond the given possibilities. In a sense, Meillassoux's contingency is what might well justify anthropocene catastrophes uncaused to criticize environmentalists' romantic notion of nature, as much as miracles performed by god and other forms of divine intervention.<sup>4</sup> For him, "the end of metaphysics, by subtracting from reason all its aspirations to the absolute, took the form of an exacerbated return of the religious" (Meillassoux, 2015, p.78).

Meillassoux's solution for thinking about the thing-in-itself is hypercaos. This is the concept that Meillassoux gives us as a weapon to launch ourselves with thought towards the absolute, but without the metaphysical certainties that have governed the West. How to think about this hypercaos? One of the most interesting works that have been done in the field of art on the concept of hypercaos was made by the experimental musician Florian Hecker (who works in the field of

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<sup>4</sup> See, Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, "Timothy Morton: an ecology without nature", in CCCBLAB, *Research and Innovation in Culture*, interview published on December 13, 2016 in <http://lab.cccb.org/es/timothymorton-ecologia-sin-naturaleza/lab> (Morton, 2013). Timothy Morton is a philosopher and author among other things of the concept "Dark Ecology", which proposes to rethink the vision of ecology, anthropocentrism and art. "Timothy Morton is a philosopher and expert on the literature of the Romantic period. His work, provocative and extremely personal, starts from a complex matrix of themes and references – from Shelley to My Bloody Valentine, from Buddhism to DNA chains – through which he articulates ideas about ontology, ecology or aesthetics, among others. Along with Graham Harman, Ian Bogost and Levy Bryant, he is part of the core of the OOO, the *object-oriented ontology*, a philosophical movement promoted by Harman in 1999 that proposes the markedly anti-anthropocentric reinterpretation of our relationship with the world, objects and hierarchies, also resulting in a variant of speculative realism. Morton uses elements of popular culture and a language full of poetic and ironic twists to acidly deconstruct the ecological crisis derived from the Anthropocene, and introduces new philosophical concepts, such as what he calls hyperobjects: objects so extensive in time and space that they are impossible to point out or detect directly, such as the biosphere or global warming. Far from the traditional forms of ecocriticism close to the counterculture of the late twentieth century, the notion of *Dark Ecology* De Morton is a realistic touchstone designed to break the glass dome that still mentally isolates us (in an effort to simplify and alleviate the feeling of collective guilt) from what we call the environment. Thus, bridging the gap between asymmetry, causality, phenomenology, coexistence or temporality, Morton's theories underline the trauma inherent in our era, with the will to awaken, ideally, a consciousness that leads to a re-evaluation of the role and impact of humanity on the planet. His recent books include *Realist Magic, Hyperobjects y Dark Ecology*" (Morton, 2013).



psychoacoustics), whose musical proposal is not easy to digest.<sup>5</sup> The fascinating thing about this work is that it is one of the most successful experiments to create auditory illusions in the viewer. While our ability to achieve this is contingent, at least we have the advantage of knowing how it might be heard. Meillassoux addresses the problem of chaos and the consistency of natural laws in the context of literature. What does this mean for the incipient 'ecological awareness'? It means that human beings are not yet fully ethically approved to enter 'postanthropocentric ecoontology' to hold us accountable and assign meaning and value to events that usually justify their measurable existence in probabilistic or statistical terms.

'Fictions beyond science' is a concept that calls to imagine worlds where science can no longer describe the phenomena that govern our existence. In hypercaos, imagining it as a world, being anything possible, effectively one of those possibilities is stasis, but also incessant change, as he tries to imagine with the concept of 'fiction without science'.<sup>6</sup> The hyperobjects of Timothy Morton, to cite an example, are the 'ecocritical' tool that this intellectual and creator designates to undo the romantic notion that environmentalists have of nature, proposing to take 'nature out of ecology' so that in part the human being stops devastating the planet as a result of the anthropocentric life in which we live. as well as Heidegger's idea -among others- about the existence of a 'world' in which the humans 'thrown' into it, however, had the possibility of overcoming the alienations of modernity. And perhaps the best way to do that is to learn to stop being modern. Morton believes that:

Kant imagines that, although we are limited in this sense, our transcendental faculties are, at least metaphorically, floating in space beyond the edge of the Universe, an argument to which Meillassoux bends by holding that reality is ultimately knowable exclusively by a (human) subjectivity. And this is the problem, a problem called anthropocentrism (Morton, 2020).

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<sup>5</sup> See Florian Hecker, *Octave Chronicles* <https://youtu.be/fkAgEH09r34> (accessed February 12, 2021). Here you can read a conversation between Florian Hecker and Quentin Meillassoux about the concept of hypercaos: <http://www.urbanomic.com/Documents/Documents-1.pdf> (accessed February 12, 2021). It is advisable to resort to *The Meillassoux Dictionary*, Peter Gratton and Paul J. Ennis (ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> See, Quentin Meillassoux, *Science Fiction and Extro-Science Fiction*, Minnesota: Univocal Publishing. (2015b).



In these worlds inhabited by hyperobjects, hypercaos is something contingent in constant change and without laws that can be defined by science. The worlds of the 'metaphysicists of Tlön' and of "Pierre Menard, author of Don Quixote" are worlds crossed by hyperobjects and hypercaos, so it is not possible to ensure results or get hold of all the information either through human reason or artificial intelligence fed by the anthropocentric human mind. For Morton, it is Kant who shows – the others behind him – that, at the very beginning of the Anthropocene, things never or perhaps contingently coincide with their phenomena, so he considers that what must be done is to extend this revolutionary idea beyond the gap between the human being and the world, where there is not a single finitude, but trillions of finitudes, including things, animals, plants, men, women, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, etc. Hence the importance of ending that separation and relationship between subject and object or object and subject, between what is and how it appears. "What ecological thought must do, then, is to bury the human being, returning him to Earth, that is, place him in that gigantic object called Earth within a gigantic entity called the biosphere" (Morton, 2020), a place in which he was by the way at the time when he straightened up raising his upper limbs from then on.

On the other hand, what mechanisms can throw us randomly into reality? In music it is possible because it can be handled as a numerical matter, but can there be mechanisms that do the same in the physical world? What would be the consequence? Reason emphasizes causality for what something happens, in which I agree with Meillassoux that this should be eliminated from thought. For its part, rationality seems to me to have a closer relationship to the use that Meillassoux gives to science, which is one of the main engines of his thought to destroy, precisely, metaphysical reason.

Reading Kant critically, Meillassoux questions:

In the name of what, in fact, could we refute a priori the possibility that there was nothing else here of phenomena, and that our world was surrounded by a nothingness in which everything could finally abyss? It could be argued that the phenomenon is not supported by anything in itself. (Meillassoux, 2015, p.64).



According to speculative materialism we would believe that it is indeed possible to think of a given reality by abstracting the fact that we are thinking. This reflective procedure would be typical of an Epicurean materialism, but according to a correlational perspective, it would not be possible to abstract from the real the fact of a given 'always-already' entity, since nothing is thinkable that it is not 'given-always-already-to', that is, the world without an entity is not thinkable if it has not received this donation, that is, "without an entity capable of 'thinking' that world in a general sense, to intuit it and to talk about it" (Meillassoux, 2015, p.66). From here, it is important to distinguish between contingency and facticity:

1) The intramundane contingency that is said of everything that may or may not be in the world, occur or not occur in the world and this without contravening the invariants of language and representation through which the world is given to me; 2) The facticity of these invariants themselves, which refers to the essential inability in which I find myself to establish their need or their contingency (Meillassoux, 2015, pp.70-71).

Facticity helps us to understand the 'possibility' of the All-Other of the world, and this in the very bosom of the world. Possibility since we are in an inability to establish the effective impossibility of the All-Other. "It is unthinkable that the unthinkable is impossible" (Meillassoux, 2015, p.72). In terms of facticity this means that it is rationally illegitimate to disqualify a non-rational discourse on the absolute under the pretext of its irrationality. For its part, the contingency:

[...] it designates the possibility, for something, of persevering or disappearing indifferently, without one of these two options going against the invariants of the world. Contingency then designates a knowledge, the knowledge that I possess about the effective perishable character of a given thing. (Meillassoux, 2015, p.92).

For its part, chaos, in general, is "that something, which chaos can never produce, is a necessary entity. Everything can be produced, everything can take place, except something necessary. Because it is the contingency of the entity that is necessary, not the entity" (Meillassoux, 2015, p.108).



This is how Meillassoux creates a philosophy that allows us to go beyond what has been called correlationism, a philosophical doctrine that sustains the correlative originarity between consciousness and the world. A way of thinking that has dominated since Kant, according to which we are only able to think about sensible phenomena. The philosophy of Meillassoux invites us to think through science phenomena that are outside the human experience and speculate on events that can modify the context of what we consider possible, that is, radicalizes the criticism about the correlational circle to try to get out of the correlation consciousness-world in such a way that it allows to reach another condition of truth that not because it has been thought as contradictory necessarily implies being thought of as impossible and impossible to think about it. If we make this conception of the world our own, at least as a mental exercise, we find one of the most fascinating challenges that philosophy and science throw at us: transforming our habits of thought, means settling down to think about and about facticity.

The reflection that perhaps we must make is the following: what habits of thought forces us to modify the awareness that everything around us is contingent? Entering into the awareness of the contingency of the laws that govern what surrounds us and even of our own behavior, allows us to accept the randomness of the result of our actions. However, this experimentation leads to questioning aspects of the laws within the social and the artistic. Perhaps there are more regulations in these fields than we generally manage to perceive. For Meillassoux, the contingent does not mean that everything is in constant motion, but that, when there is a change in the apparent order, we realize that we arrive at another type of order and not at 'chaos'. The contingent can also be static at times. That is why perhaps to reach a real chaos one must not think about the elements that are within the chaos – as would be the case with Morton's hyperobjects – but about the mechanisms that generate that chaos. An indeterminacy of indeterminacy, randomly bringing chance. Morton considersthat:

Because at the very moment that this vanishing into thin air occurs, we glimpse for the first time that iceberg too solid in the fog. [...] I seriously doubt whether capitalism can carry forward the task of processing hyperobjects. Somewhere else I argued that since the most



basic machinery of capitalism is reactive rather than proactive, it has a flaw that makes it unable to fully address the ecological emergency [...] Capitalism builds from objects as "raw material" (whatever comes through the factory door). The retroactive style of capitalism is reflected in the ideology of the "consumer" and its "demand" that capital "finds" (Morton, 2020, p.121).

For Meillassoux, the contingent does not mean that everything is in constant motion, but that when there is a change in the apparent order we realize that we have arrived or we are in another type of order and not chaos. I invite you to review his essay published in 2012 "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign", where he speculates on the possibility that there are signs without any kind of meaning. Although their conclusions are ambiguous, what is clear is that to create a sign without meaning it is necessary to access the eternity of contingency.<sup>7</sup> What Meillassoux himself doubts is that if a sign without meaning can be sufficient to have access through thought to the contingent.

In Meillassoux's proposal, the relationship of thought with the absolute is basically at stake. For this one, "[...] The meaning of deabsolutization: thought no longer demonstrates a priori the truth of a certain content of piety, but establishes the equal and exclusive right of any piety to point to the ultimate truth" (Meillassoux, 2015, p.82). For this it will be essential to understand the concept of correlation, since through it we can access the correlation between being and thought, but never in isolation to one of them, leaving out the other, so that correlationism as a current of thought sustains the insurmountable character of correlation as has been exposed here, unlike any naïve realism. Meillassoux states that:

Correlationism consists in disqualifying any pretense of considering the spheres of subjectivity and objectivity independently of each other. Not only must we say that we never apprehend an object 'in itself', isolated from its relationship with the subject, but we must also

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<sup>7</sup> See, Quentin Miellassoux, "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Meaningless Sign" Freie Universität Berlin, 20 April 2012 at [file:///C:/Users/Alberto/Downloads/quentin-meillassoux-iteration-reiteration-repetition-a-speculative-analysis-of-the-meaningless-sign%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Alberto/Downloads/quentin-meillassoux-iteration-reiteration-repetition-a-speculative-analysis-of-the-meaningless-sign%20(1).pdf) (accessed February 17, 2021).



maintain that we never apprehend a subject that is not always-already in relation to an object [...] (Meillassoux, 2015, p.29).

Therefore, it is important to consider that the thought-being correlation cannot be reduced to the subject-object correlation. Also, do not lose sight of the correlationism

It does not hold any a-rational, religious or poetic position: it does not pronounce any positive discourse on the absolute, it is content to think about the limits of thought, since they are for language as a border of which only a single edge would be captured. Correlationism does not positively ground a given religious belief, but effectively undermines any pretense of reason to delegitimize a belief in the name of the unthinkable of its content (Meillassoux, 2015, pp.72-73).

## Conclusions

The philosophy of Quentin Meillassoux, speculative materialist and critical rationalist, offers us a philosophical and critical perspective that comes to refresh the tradition of thought -at least- in the West, not only in Europe. Today that the studies of language -the linguistic turn that we mentioned-, semiotics, the philosophy of science, analytical philosophy, the cognitive 'revolution' and neurosciences, biotechnology and studies on the Anthropocene, among other things, seem to dominate the attention of a large number of researchers in the world, coupled with the above, to the financialization to which technocapitalism has led the economy globally and the rationalization-mathematical optimization of the Nature, to grant a space of opportunity to the philosophical perspective of this thinker of French origin, is also a challenge -by the putting in parentheses of all or a large part of the Western philosophical tradition-, an opportunity in times of darkness and uncertainty in the XXI century to rethink ourselves as humanity -and not as Humanity-, beyond Modernity, postmodernity, Science and Nature as exemplary 'forms' of ontological absolutization and therefore of Necessity as Meillassoux exposes us in his work, in particular in *After Finitude*.

The critique of the critique presented by Meillassoux, regarding the various rules or laws that he exposes to us, may still seem and rightly so, one of the points still to be developed or weak of his



thought, since it does not offer clear and forceful examples about, for example, the possibility that the physical laws of the universe could suddenly be others in our world. We have always believed that giving ourselves our own rules when creating potentiates our creative capacity; or controversial concepts such as a 'virtual God' or 'creation ex nihilo'. Anarchy is rarely productive, for better and for worse. There are several loose ends yet to be developed of his philosophical thought by the French philosopher, but these swim for the moment in the contingency, they are entities that could come or not, because these even having already been thought or not by him or by someone else, are not necessary. His reflections, however, should be useful to us to think about ontology, epistemology, ethics, politics, religious faith, our relationship with the environment and other forms of life on the planet, with scientific work, with research and its various methodologies and methods, fanaticism, among many other things, but perhaps and, above all, metaphysics and the absolute. We cannot afford more naivety, especially when we call ourselves in front of others: realists.

The contingency as he exposes it in his works Meillassoux and the other works of artists and creators that were presented here, regardless of the theoretical-conceptual scaffolding from which they start: Marxism, poststructuralism, etc., present ethical-political reflections, works and aesthetic conceptions of a critical and radical nature that following or reneging on the Meillassouxian philosophy are inserted in the contingency or contingency as a power of thought in the search for another absolute, for hope (non-theological-religious and falsely hopeful) in the midst of darkness, nihilism, the loss of faith (in every sense and with respect to any possibility of existence of absolute) and the becoming (not yet) always better than promised failed first the Enlightenment and then Modernity. Among these actors, technology is a common element that they use to signify and give meaning to their works, being this, another entity, another contingent, another power. Referring to Meillassoux comments the critic Terry Eagleton, "as long as there is contingency, there is hope" (Eagleton, 2016, p.15).

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