

ANOTHER ORDER OF TIME: TOWARDS A VARIABLE INTENSITY OF THE *NOW*¹

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How soon is now?
The Smiths

THE GREAT PHILOSOPHICAL ORDERS OF TIME

The phenomenology of subjective time, the dialectic of becoming, and the analytic of objective time

Many philosophies of time have as their purpose the reduction of time to only one of its modalities (the present, for example), or to assimilate it to an illusion invoking a most profound reality (eternity or pure duration). Considering that to understand time is to conserve the concept of it, we propose rather to maintain both the idea of time and all the modalities which it can have—notably, the future, the present and the past. We would not want to make a project of thinking time and recover at the end of our effort anything other than time: nor would we appreciate only achieving the representation of the reality or the existence of a part of this time, to the detriment of all the others.

Which actual models could clearly allow us to conceive of *only* time, yet *completely* time?

When it is a matter of defining time, what is at stake is the status that is accorded to the present and the relative degree of presence that is acknowledged in the other times: the future and the past. Since Saint Augustine at least, who tried to understand time and its modalities only to provoke his own astonishment: the past is not, since it is no longer present; the future is not, since it is not yet present, and both only have an apparent

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existence through the present:

What is now clear and unmistakable is that neither things past nor things future have any existence, and that it is inaccurate to say, "There are three tenses or times: past, present and future," though it might properly be said, "There are three tenses or times: the present of past things, the present of present things, and the present of future things." These are three realities in the mind, but nowhere else as far as I can see.²

Three traditions will assume the heritage of this Augustinian interrogation of the relations between the present and the other modalities of time. The first—faithful to the Augustinian reduction of the past or future to a "present of the past" or a "present of the future", which then reduces this present to an activity of the mind—dedicates itself to a series of phenomenological questions on the time of consciousness. The second—dialectic—will find the key to becoming and its process in the contradictions secreted by the different parts of time: the synthesis of being and of non-being. The third—analytic—will, on the contrary, seek to resolve these contradictions by the adoption of temporal models that redistribute being between the future, present, past, and eternity. The first tradition will blossom in Husserl's *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, which opens with a homage to Saint Augustine, and will later be cultivated by Heidegger, Sartre, and Ricoeur. The second tradition, rather, is of a Hegelian persuasion. At the end of the *Philosophy of Spirit* (Jena lectures, 1805-6)³ Hegel reclaims in his own way another famous Augustinian argument, according to which eternity could not exist "before" time: it is rather an absolute present. Yet this is in order to better conceive how this absolute deploys itself in time, by posing an identity between the negativity of time and that of concept. Discussed and turned over, this vision of time as the history of eternity will pollinate the Marxist tradition, from Ernst Bloch to Walter Benjamin.

It is the third tradition in the reinterpretation of the Augustinian problem, less well-known in France, which we will confront here. Being analytic, it is clearly opposed to the dialectical tradition that John McTaggart both introduced and buried in the Anglo-Saxon world. This tradition does not seek to conceive of time as a movement whose engine would be contradiction, but to deactivate the contradictions that threaten any representation of time. On the other hand, unlike the phenomenological tradition, it will purport to think objective time and not simply the manner in which the activity of an intentional consciousness can structure temporality.

Husserl, in his lectures from the years 1905-1910, begins by undertaking "the complete exclusion of every assumption, stipulation, and conviction with respect to objective time"⁴. Justifiably, he admits that the study of the relations between real objective time and time which is valued as an objective time for a consciousness could prove to be an "interesting investigation"⁵. But he only envisages a study of the *relation* between objective time and the time of consciousness—which is itself an orientated relation—and never the study of objective time itself. In principle, this time finds itself "put out of play".

In essence, this residue of phenomenology became the object of the tradition of analytic thought of time which is opened by a famous article of John McTaggart⁶, then driven by the critique of McTaggart by Charlie Dunbar Broad, reader of Bergson and Whitehead. Subsequent theoreticians will gradually erase the Hegelian lineage of McTaggart and the Bergsonian readings of Broad in order to delimit a resolutely non-idealist field of study: the conception of consistent positions, non-contradictory with respect to the nature of time, existence, or the reality of the present, past and future. These positions, in so far as they concern "clockwork time" rather than the time of consciousness, often resulted from debates with Einsteinian relativity, first special and then general, yielding to the metaphysics of new materials in order to conceptualise objective and cosmological time: a space-time in four dimensions, a neat connection between temporality and causality.

Two grand theses are themselves progressively freed from these debates: on the one hand "presentism", defended today by Markosian, Zimmermann, and Merricks; and on the other hand "eternalism" (or sometimes "quadrimensionality"), which is advocated by Quine in *Word and Object* or by Lewis in *On the Plurality of Worlds*.

Analytic order I: Presentism, Eternalism

This polarity structures the analytic field of reflection on time. It is never a question of dialectizing these theses, of accepting that there would have to be something contradictory in time, which would make it happen and become. One considers rather that it is necessary to take a position and to attribute reality to certain modalities or aspects of time to the detriment of others, in order to avoid all contradiction. Either the past, present and future are equally real, in which case the present is no longer truly present; or the present is really present, in which case the past and the future are no longer truly real. One never wins the theoretical stakes every time.

Merricks thus writes:

Eternalism says that all times are equally real. Objects existing at past times and objects existing at future times are just as real as objects existing at the present. Properties had at past times and properties had at future times are had just as much as properties had at the present. [...] With all this in mind, let's say that the eternalist believes in a subjective present.⁷

By contrast:

Presentism says that only the present time is real. Every object that exists, exists at the present time. Objects that exist only at other times—like objects that exist only in fiction or objects that exist only in other “possible worlds”—simply do not exist at all. [...] With all this in mind, let's say that the presentist believes in an objective present.⁸

In an analytic of time there are therefore two cases.

If I identify the present with presence and presence with being, I can barely understand how a past exists (which is not present, and therefore is not) or a future (which is not present, and therefore is not): only the present exists, and there is no before or after, other than the subjective projection that I can effect by the retention of memory or the anticipation of imagination—since Saint Augustine this has been renewed in the phenomenology of subjective time.

On the other hand, if I try to understand time without invoking the present, by contenting myself with the order of events according to “before” and “after”, I can surely conceive a series organising what is anterior and what is posterior, but not, as John McTaggart's “B-series” shows, the connection between “past”, “present” and “future” predicates, reserved for the “A-series”. What is then present and *eternally* present is the order of events. The “now” is only ever an effect of my limited position in space-time; it is an indexical effect, that is to say, in which meaning holds to the subject in its circumstances and enunciation—which only returns us to the shores of subjective time.

In one case as in the other, time—that is, the connection of the present with a future and a past—finds itself split into two. One part always finds itself rejected on the side of subjectivity: either it is retention of the past and protention towards the future, or it is the perception of a present within the endless order of events supposedly past, present and future.

Yet, as Merricks points out—in order to better critique it—for almost a century there has been a third position between *presentism* and *eternalism* which strongly conceives of time at an equal distance from presentism and from eternalism: this is what, in the Anglo-Saxon world, is today called “Growing Block Universe Theory” (GBUT). Taking Merricks' terms, one could affirm that this third position, which is not a dialectic but rather an attempt to accommodate, considers the past as eternalist (the past is as present as the present, it really exists), but the present as presentist (the present has a status of exception, a privilege: it exists eminently; in this case, it is the very last moment of time).

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Analytic order II: Growing Block Universe Theory

The first consistent formulation of GBUT, which still did not carry this rather inconvenient name, is found in a work of Charlie Dunbar Broad dating from 1923, in the course of which, amongst a host of other epistemological problems, the British philosopher tries to respond to the arguments of John McTaggart, of whom he shows himself to be a meticulous commentator.

This work concerns a dynamic conception of the universe inspired by the recent efforts of Einstein, which will soon lead to general relativity. This dynamic conception does not reduce the temporal modalities of the past, present, and future to the operations of subjectivity (the Kantian form of internal sense or the Husserlian operations of protention and retention by consciousness). The past and the present really are, while the future does not exist. The universe is endlessly augmented by presence, as one block in perpetual expansion:

[W]hen an event becomes, it comes into existence; and it was not anything at all until it had become.⁹

The present is therefore the coming to existence. And the universe can only inflate presence: everything becomes and nothing ever disappears:

There is no such thing as ceasing to exist; what has become exists henceforth for ever. When we say that something has ceased to exist we only mean that it has ceased to be present.¹⁰

With this basic text, Broad therefore demands that the present, which is the coming to presence, is represented in the manner of a fixed beam of light which would bring things into existence—so that things can leave presence, the beam of light, but not the field of existence. Having been, they will never return to nothingness, but simply to absence. Broad, in order to philosophically respond to the emerging conception of relativist space-time, therefore describes a sort of universe that would have its own memory, but also an active border transmuting the nothing into something:

[W]e imagine the characteristic of presentness as moving, somewhat like the spot of light from a policeman's bull's-eye traversing the fronts of the houses in a street. What is illuminated is the present, what has been illuminated is the past, and what has not yet been illuminated is the future.¹¹

From this model Broad draws a criticism of McTaggart according to which “to be future” cannot be a predicate applied to an event: “The first thing that we have to say with regard to McTaggart's argument is that no event ever does have the characteristic of futurity”¹². Broad's position is the following: the future does not exist, and no event comes before being present. Broad's heirs, in order to limit their genealogy of the philosophy of time to the lineage of McTaggart (as in Nathan Oaklander's anthology¹³), will readily forget that he takes this conception from Bergson and Whitehead: there is the radically new in the universe, and actuality exceeds the field of the possible, which chases the actual without managing to contain it, to forestall it. Thus, the sum total of all that is present is continuously augmented: “The process of becoming [...] continually augments the sum total of existence and thereby the sum total of positive and negative facts”¹⁴ (that is to say, that which has been and that which has not been, which can only appear as soon as what has been *was*). In effect, at each moment there is a new present which is added to the past and does not cease to be—it continues to objectively exist, even if it dies or loses intensity for us.

But it is only at the end of the 1990s, in the texts of Peter Forrest and especially Michael Tooley, that current GBUT is formed. In *Time, Tense and Causation*, three quarters of a century after Broad, Tooley defends the idea that “the world is a dynamic world, and one, moreover, where the past and present are real, but the future is not”¹⁵. Tooley thus reclaims the principle of a present which is “the point at which what was hitherto non-actual becomes actual”¹⁶.

Consequently, GBUT clearly fulfils its intention of thinking an objective time:

Time, understood as involving the coming into the existence of events, is a totally objective feature of the world that is not dependent in any way upon the experiences of humans, or other conscious (or self-conscious) beings.¹⁷

Tooley believes that this objective time can be analysed in non-temporal terms, without recourse to adverbs or verbs in past or future tenses, and without using the indexical (“now”, “here”, “this”). He therefore rejects eternalism, which reduces the present to an indexical effect: for the present would then not be objective, but reduced to some subjective effect indicating a localisation of the speaker in space-time. And he equally rejects presentism, according to which the present would be all that exists: for in that case the present would be objective, but the past returned to non-being.

Like presentism, Tooley’s GBUT gives the future to nonexistence—against eternalism; but, like eternalism, GBUT assures the objective existence of the past—against presentism. GBUT is not a dialectic, but a seesaw: leaning on one position in order to attack the contrary position, then leaning on this last position in order to turn against the first. Yet there is always a strategic disadvantage to such double alliances.

Merricks therefore points out that, in the framework of GBUT, an event is not changed from what is present or past. From the time that something commences to be it never stops existing, since it is present or past: it is integrated into space-time. Yet, Merricks asks himself, what happens to certain thoughts—for instance, Nero telling himself that he is *now* seated in the Coliseum. He plucks, so to speak, the thorn of indexicality from the foot of GBUT. This proposal (“I, Nero, am currently seated”) *has been* true, when Nero *was* seated in the present—it has since become false. However, in the eyes of GBUT, Nero’s thought, present or past, remains unchanged: it has commenced to be, consequently it will remain the same.

This is the tenor of Braddon-Mitchell’s sceptical argument¹⁸: if all those who in the past have thought they lived in the present are henceforth wrong, then there is equally every chance you are deceived in considering yourself in the present *at this moment*. More precisely, Braddon-Mitchell challenges GBUT in this way: what proves that your “now” is even now? GBUT secretes two presents: a subjective present, the “now” that I can enunciate, and an objective present, to the extreme border of space-time. GBUT, denounces its detractors, will never bridge the gulf which separates one from the other.

Surely the Achilles heel of a theory such as GBUT is that it considers the present to be a *fixed* beam of passage to presence, to existence. Therefore, the present moment always remains equally present for it. As Braddon-Mitchell reproaches of Forrest, one can then no longer know if “now” is even now, or if “now” is the now of yesterday: an objective order of the past is well-distinguished, but the “now” of now (one could say a straight-forward now) is no longer distinguished from the “now” of yesterday, from the “now” of 1644, from the “now” of the formation of the Earth, etc.

Craig Bourne highlights this schism between the objective privilege of being present and the indexicality of “this moment”: if this moment always objectively exists in the universe, the sensation of being present which I had yesterday remains the indexical sensation which indicates “this moment”; but it no longer corresponds to the objective present, which would no longer be the “today” of yesterday, but the “today” of today.

I am convinced that my present time is **present** [Bourne indicates the objective present in bold, and the indexical present in normal style]. But wasn’t I just as convinced yesterday [...]? So, there I am as I was yesterday [...] believing that I am **present**, and thinking pretty much the same things then about my previous selves as I think today. Yet I know now that my earlier self was mistaken; so how do I know that I now am not?¹⁹

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GBUT, by wanting to succeed against presentism and eternalism without dialecticising them—that is, by remaining an analytical position—produces two presents in the place of one: the present that each moment has been and always is; and the present of these presents, the objective and punctual present. But in leaving the present of my present moment, I will never join the objective present: nothing assures me that I am not already in the past believing that I am still “now”.

Thus, Nick Bostrom, founder of the “World Transhumanist Association”, has authored a famous and controversial article which postulates a strong probability that we already live in a computer simulation created by intelligences from the future, such that our present would be a kind of imperfect virtual reality of the future. Yet this type of eccentric and paranoid argument, after the manner of the science-fiction author Philip K. Dick, cannot be countered by an analytic theory of time which would, like GBUT, consider that all past presents really exist and at the same time that there is a present of the present, an objective and cosmological present, to the edge of space-time. Nothing assures me that my present, that I see and feel as current, is not an already dead present—nothing guarantees that I am not *deceived* by time. And in such cases, the venom of hyperbolic doubt always finds its efficacy.

Failure of the analytic divisions of time

Any analytically determined position does not allow us to conserve time in the entirety and certainty of its concept.

The problem of presentism is that it does not allow us to conceive of the reality of the past. For the presentist, a past moment only exists as it is understood in the present: it is a memory, a trace, an actual consequence; it is illusory that it is *past*.

For the eternalist, a present moment only exists in an order of succession similar to that of the past: it is only illusory that it is *present*.

But the problem with GBUT is that it accords an equal reality to the present of now and to the present of yesterday, such that it produces two possible presents: the present (of today, yesterday, and of the day before yesterday) and the present present (the now of now). It then becomes impossible to join the objective present to the indexical present or the present of consciousness. I say that I am “now”, but how can I assure myself that this “now” is even the “now” of now and not the one of two hours ago? By repeating that it’s a matter of the “now” of now. But two hours ago the “now” was the “now” of now. I must therefore assure myself that this “now” is now the “now” of now, etc. I have completely lost the present by dividing it into two, and I have once again given the field to the sceptic.

It seems therefore that every analytic of time is compelled to promote a certain aspect of time in order to better occult another, and it seems that neither presentism, nor eternalism, nor GBUT, do justice to the entirety of the concept of time. At the very most they revitalise doubt about the reality of such and such an aspect of time.

The time of phenomenology is too narrow: it finds itself reduced to the time of consciousness; the time of the dialectical tradition, notably the Hegelian, is too broad: it is understood by and dissolved in the future. If one wants to think time, neither more nor less, it is necessary to engage with the analytic tradition; but this tradition breaks time to pieces and systematically plays some of its parts against the others, so that one has a lot of time, but never time *entirely*. Why? Because it divides time into extensions, considering past, present and future as parts of a whole—some real, others illusory. If this conception can only arrive at dead ends it is because it is necessary to cease thinking these modalities as extensive parts, and perhaps envisage them as variations of *intensity*.

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Presence and present. Intensities of presence

The present is devastating in that, if it is identified with presence, it immediately becomes an absolute and eats away at past and future, which are given over to non-being: if the present is *all that is present*, in the past and future there no longer remains any possibility of being, other than negatively.

The confusion is surely born from the fact that one accords to the idea of presence a discrete, rather than continuous, character: either one is present, or one is not. One is not *more* or *less* present: according to the Aristotelian conception which is laid bare in the arguments of the *Physics*, in knowing that time is a number, the number of movement, we know that “a fast or slow time does not exist, because there is no number by which we count that is fast or slow”²⁰. Time is not susceptible to variable intensities, but only extensive divisions: a long or short time, a lot of time or a little. One cannot contradict this remark of Aristotle, which assures the objective homogeneity of time, but one can bypass it by raising the issue of what it precludes us from perceiving: that is, that presence, by contrast, is susceptible to variable intensities, such that time is an extension, but presence is an *intensity*.

Time is precisely the proof that presence does not relate to the category of what absolutely is or is not.

To modalise time from the outset by the categories of act, potency, or virtuality, changes nothing of the matter. To divide presence into distinct modes of presence allows us to think of the passage from one mode to another (from potency to actuality, for instance) as a leap from the future to the present, but it never resolves the problem of the variation of intensity from the present to the past. The past can be said to be neither virtual nor potential, since it has been; how then to understand its real presence, in act, without confusing it with the present—as the supporters of GBUT do? Any modalisation of the various parts of time is ineffectual here. The only solution is to understand it as a variation of intensity of presence, such that what is past is well and truly present, as the present is, but *less*.

Consequently one will say, by reversing this proposition, that the present is *that which is more present*: the maximum of possible presence, and not an *absolute* presence (in which case only the present would be present, which is the position of the presentist).

Present, past, future. Variation of intensities of presence

I click my fingers. Now, the clicking is finished. Let us imagine rather that the clicking becomes past, continues passing. Because the new present at all times becomes the past, it finds itself thrown further and further into the past, it moves away from presence. I click my fingers once again. What distinguishes that first clicking of fingers from the second? If both were henceforth inexistent, if both would appertain to non-being, then there would no more be one than the other: nothing would differentiate them in pure negativity. However, when I subjectively relate to them by memory, I can clearly consider them to be *two* events.

In other words, there is an *order* of the past on which I can rely: all that passes is not equally past, but passes according to an order, which has the effect that a certain place in the expanding universe is older than another. If all the past was equally non-present, then everything that no longer is would be the same age, there would be neither geological strata, nor fossils, nor more or less ancient states of light, nor a history of the universe: all our classifications, since antiquity, would be absolutely arbitrary.

If presence did not accumulate—that is to say: if there was always so much presence at each moment, neither more nor less, if what takes place in 2010 was not more present than what took place in 1644, at the very moment when this took place—then any moment of the past would as be as present as another moment of the past: only the very relative resources of indexicality would remain to us in order to distinguish the “now” of

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our present from the one of 1644. This is what the eternalist would like. But if any moment of the past was as equally present or as equally absent as another, we could hardly *date* the appearance of our galaxy, the formation of the Earth, or the appearance of the first metazoa, which would all find themselves to be strictly contemporaneous. Because in ordering events in time we do not content ourselves with reconstituting a causal chain, we evaluate their respective degrees of presence. This is the idea that we are now going to defend.

Time must be conceived as the objective condition of possibility due to the fact that events *can be* ordered by a subjectivity according to their relative presence. The existence of time is the sign that there is a *more and more important* presence in the universe and that this presence is ordered: there is more presence today than there was a thousand years ago, there was more presence a thousand years than there was five billion years ago, and there was more presence five billion years ago than at the moment of the Big Bang. From this point of view, it is necessary to remain faithful to Broad: presence in the universe does not squander itself. It does not disappear, it does not become non-being. We shall simply say that it diminishes *according to a certain order*.

Whoever tries to think time must meet the challenge of differentiating and ordering past, present, and future, in order to maintain the existence and reality of these three concepts. Our problem is therefore the following: since we will envisage thinking an *intensive* order of time, rather than an *extensive* division of it, how can we identify each of these temporal modalities (past, present, future) with a distinct intensity of presence, without any of them being reduced to the other? In considering presence to be a variable intensity, three possibilities for determination are freed: a maximal presence—without ever being absolute—, a maximal absence—which neither concerns absolute non-being—and all that can be situated between these two poles of maximal intensity (more or less presence, more or less absence). What tends to be relatively present and absent without being “what is more present” or “what is more absent”? Only the past seems to be in a position to play this role: the past is *relatively* present (and it is so less and less). On the other hand, since we have considered that the present is not an absolute and exclusive presence—but in fact is prime presence, maximal presence—nothing remains to us other than to define the future as “the greatest absence which is”.

This cascade of redefinitions rocks the traditional order of temporal modalities. According to our order of intensity of presences, the present must come first, since nothing can be more present than what is present; the past comes second, since it is a progressive order in the weakening of presence, and therefore an increase in absence; the future is paradoxically last, as maximal absence.

This order of time can seem eminently counter-intuitive. Will it be said that an event is present, then past, then to come?

The future: a maximal absence

I blink. In the future this blinking has *never* existed: the blinking could only find itself present in a future conceived as a maximal absence. As Broad reproaches of McTaggart, one cannot consider that “to come” constitutes an absolutely legitimate predicate for a state of things. There is only a minimum of presence in the future. If an event really was “to come”, that would mean that the future could be determined, and therefore that at least a part of its being would already exist. Although considered as “to come”, in a certain manner it would be already past, since it is fixed. A hybridization of the future (since it is considered still absent) and of the past (since it already possesses a relative presence), such an event could be qualified as “to pass”.

An event “to pass” is an event which is itself still not past, but that we insert into an order of succession copied from the past and localised in the field of maximal absence of future. But this *ersatz* of the subjectively projected past must not be confused with the future, which remains absence and therefore the greatest possible indetermination.

Contrary to what is believed, from this point of view the future would be closer to me at my birth, at the moment when, even defined by my family history and my social situation, I could become almost anything: I could die young, be famous, anonymous, good or bad. This future will be more distant from me at the time of

my death: I will be finished, determined and weighed down by a heavy past. As the past stretches, it therefore separates the future from the past, which is richer and richer in determinations.

The future, contrary to the past, is not an ordered process. The future is a fixed point of reference—without extension and in minimal intensity—which progressively detaches itself from the present, which is an irrevocable increase in the determinations of the universe.

We therefore do not get closer to future as time passes: in reality, we move away from it.

That presence, and not absence, accumulates

The major consequence of this order of time is that it disposes of neither the present nor the future on the front line of temporality.

If the present is conceived as maximal presence, this means that all that is effectively *begins* by being present. The fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644 was not to come in 1643, before arriving. If it was possible to foresee the fall of Ming in 1643, the foreordained fall of Ming, this fall “to pass” was not the fall which took place. However, one could maintain that the possibility of foreseeing this fall since 1643 was part of the very collapse of the dynasty: its weakening, which would allow us to foresee its end, would then pertain to the “fall of Ming”, which is no longer only dated to 1644, but to the 1640s. In this case the fall of Ming, in the precise sense of progressive weakening, is already present in the year 1643.

The present—according to our definition—is what is most present. That which passes, becomes past, is what loses this maximal presence: in 1645, the fall of Ming had been, it is already a memory. But the present state of the kingdom is permeated by the fall of the Ming dynasty, which is due to the accession to power of Qing. The fall of Ming did not *disappear* from the historical present in the sense that the China of 1645 certainly did not once again become the China from before the fall of Ming. Because it has been, this fall prevents what was before it from happening once again: every event separates events which have been anterior to it from those that subsequently happen. And if the universe, in an abstraction made from the existence of living beings, does not have memory, it well and truly demonstrates the existence of a principle of accumulation which orders the successive appearance of all that exists within it.

My birth is objectively more present than the fall of Ming because three and a half centuries have passed after the end of Ming and before I am born. All the events which have taken place in the meantime have therefore been more present than the collapse of the Chinese dynasty, even if they have had no direct causal relation with Asiatic history: everything takes place *afterwards*, as distanced in space that it could find itself, without an effective connection with this political event. The order of the past is this order of intensity by which all that takes place is less present than what follows. Indeed, the event of 1644 is less and less present. The year 1644 is less present in 2011 than it was in 1724.

It is here that it is necessary to distance ourselves from the theoreticians of GBUT, who think the entire and real presence of the past, without conceiving of the ordered weakening of presence of this past. All that passes is, however, less and less present, as there is more and more presence in the universe. Time is nothing other than this phenomenon: accumulation objectifies presence. This accumulation holds not only, as the supporters of GBUT believe, to the fact that the new present comes to be added to the past which continues to exist. Not only the past continues to be (even if its presence diminishes), but the present instant is more and more present. The now is not a fixed beam which brings events into the field of presence, it is a growing intensity, like a buzzing which would perpetually and without limit augment the volume of the universe.

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That which the present is; that which is present

Thus, there are two distinct localisations in time: *that which the present is* continuously moves away from the indeterminate future, since the present is more and more present and rich in determinations; but *that which is present*—that is to say, such or such a present moment, for instance the moment of my birth—at the moment it appears, forever remains at an equal distance from the future. Therefore, my present is less and less close to the future, since it is more and more determined. By contrast, the moment of my birth, which sinks into the past as my life advances, had a certain future when I was born and since then conserves this future, in spite of what followed. Otherwise my birth would no longer be realised in my life, my death, my posterity, etc., up to the present moment. In other words, all the past would be drawn into and immediately contained in the present. This is the risk of any dialectical thought of time as process and *Aufhebung*. But every moment of the past conserves its chance to remain individuated, that is to say, to not be absolutely consumed by the next moment. To recall my birth, before I became what I am, is to extract this event from the order of the past, in the progressive weakening of its presence relative to the present, and to consider it in relation to the future, in relation to what it could have become. Yet, in relation to this blank future, my birth remained what it was—an event in which the consequences that follow are indeterminate. As it is still not the birth of what I have since become, but simply a birth, this birth remains an individuated event and not the moment of a historical process.

In the order of time (not history), my birth remains what it is: an event still without consequence, which forever remains what it was at the time when it happened. From this point of view, the event is still present. But in the order of classification of the past, my birth becomes the link in a chain, it is a moment which, little by little, leads to the present, to what I am today—and this moment sees its relative presence continuously diminish, its relative absence increase. From this point of view, the event passes.

Every past event, as a compound of presence and absence, is situated between maximal presence (the present) and maximal absence (the future). Paradoxically, it moves away from the present but stays at the same distance from future. And what we call “its future” is nothing other than the measure of distance that would separate it, at the moment of its appearance, from the maximal absence of determination.

One could think of any present event as the top of an infinite pile of leaves. The future is the bottom, the soil on which the pile of leaves rests. The present is the leaf which finds itself at the top. Each time a new leaf covers the previous, any “past leaf” located in the middle of the heap is distanced from the top, which rises more and more high; but the distance which separates our “past leaf” from the foundation, the soil—as far as that is, perhaps even infinitely far—never changes.

The key to our model of the order of time is therefore the following: any event is doubly localizable in time—in relation to the present (the top of the pile) and in relation to the future (the bottom of the pile, that on which it rests). Such an event—the formation of planet Earth, for example—sees the present moving away from it, but remains at the same distance from the future which it had and which it has always had. This permanent relation to a fixed future, which is its ground, conserves its possibility of always being the moment that it has been, of not being entirely effaced in a constantly renewed present. If our pile did not have a bottom, then any event would only be localizable in relation to the changeable present: any past event would only exist in relation to this present, which alone would really exist. This is the present of the presentist. Absorbing the totality of what has been within this present, we could no longer recapture the more or less past; we would only ever discover the endlessly instantaneous: a pile of bottomless leaves in which only the latest leaf would ever remain, the others having already flown off towards non-being.

The order of the past; the order of time

The double localisation of an event in our model implies on the contrary differentiating the order of the past and the order of time.

The order of time is the order which drives maximal absence (the bottom) to maximal presence (the top): with time, presences accumulate and the pile gains height, as the universe gains presence. As for the order of the past, this is the order by which every event has less and less presence in comparison with the present.

In the order of time everything is present, and everything advances towards more and more presence by moving away from the future, which is the foundation of this accumulation. In the order of the past, every event gives way towards less and less relative presence.

In the order of time the subject is *that which the present is*: it is the present moment, which is more and more present (going towards the top). In the order of the past the subject is *that which is present*: it is each moment, which remains fixed and sees itself moving away from the present (this moment is lost to a given floor of our pile).

Any event which takes place is therefore in time and at the same time in the past. This is why one can seize any event by two temporal movements: *that which the present is* continuously advances and gains in presence; *that which is present* gives way, because the present which continuously changes moves away from it. The defect of presentism is to accord existence to only *that which the present is*: a form in which content is returned to nothingness as soon as it passes; the defect of eternalism is to accord existence to only *that which is, was, or will be present*: equivalent contents which have no privileged form. The eternalist only has an order of the past, but not an order of time; the presentist only has an order of time, but not an order of the past.

However, everything becomes in two senses. In the order of time, every entity—including this fossil, this cadaver, etc.—progresses and becomes more and more present. In the order of the past, a given state of this organism passes and moves away from the present; it finds itself progressively buried under more and more ulterior states of itself.

Any temporal object runs forward as it is in the present, and runs backwards as it is in the past. What I am ceases being more present; each of my states is less and less present. Time both intensifies my presence and orders the different states of my presence—that is to say, my past—by degrading them.

CONCLUSION

If we seek to think only time, then the models inherited from phenomenology or those inspired by Hegelian dialectic will be of no assistance to us: the first think too little, by limiting themselves to modes of consciousness of time and to the subjective constitution of temporal objects; the second think too much, by considering time to be an expression of the infinite mobility of becoming and of the work of the negative.

Many therefore turn to the analytic tradition in order to think objective time; yet, torn between presentism, eternalism, or GBUT, they never think of time completely: they conceive of it only partially by disputing the existence of this or that of its parts or modalities, and by dividing up its real or illusory extensions.

It seems therefore that to think of only time and completely time presupposes abandoning this extensive division of the past, present, and future, in order to understand time as the order of variation in the intensities of presence of all events.

The model which we propose for another order of time breaks with this intuitive but untenable representation, according to which time would flow from the past towards the future, by way of the present. Our intensive order is entirely different: the present is first, as maximal intensity of presence; the past, which is a second order in the very interior of the order of time, is the classification of events by the relative weakening of their presence; the future, finally, which is the ground rather than the horizon of time, corresponds to the greatest possible absence.

ANOTHER ORDER OF TIME

We can therefore envision an answer to the insolvable question of GBUT: is “now” now? The “now” of now is simply the one that is the most intense possible; the “now” of yesterday is a past now because there are objectively more intense “nows”, more present than it.

This intensive order of time must allow thought to measure up to time, neither too broadly, by dissolving it in the eternal, nor too closely, by reducing it to one or another of its parts; one could therefore hope to reflect on time exactly and time only.

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NOTES

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