

From Ontology to Ontologies to Trans-Ontology

The Postmodern Narrative of History and Trans-Theological Ludic Transhumanism

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ABSTRACT This paper describes the implications of the transition from Ontology conceived as fundamental metaphysical logos to ontologies construed as postmodern historical applications of this, and then, finally, to Trans-Ontology as the ultimate, futuristic innovation of Transhumanism. If modernity counts as the key shift that has occurred in our living and understanding of the world since the dawn of history, postmodernism seems to be the record of a transition from the absolute Grand Narratives of modernity to a scenario consisting of polycentric, equally justified narratives. Thus, the historical failure of the old Ontology, in the form of monarchy, absolutism, monotheistic religions, Eurocentrism, and nationalism, entails the plurality of approaches and diversity of flexible transformations of ontologies. Yet such a purportedly liberating evolution is encountered en route to the likewise postmodern trans-humanist impulse that aims at a complete transformation of the traditional human essence by means of a theurgist, miraculous, Trans-Theological technology. The latter's goal is to normalize the arrival of a paradoxically innovative universe, where transhuman beings will rebuild the world, and re-essentialize it. Ultimately, this universal integralism will be based on an ever-growing ludic character, coupled with a mathematically scheduled playfulness, aiming at a transformed, fully integrated and manageable entity.

KEYWORDS history; postmodernism; technology; Transhumanism; Trans-Ontology; Trans-Theology

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I shall attempt to delineate a rather intuitive and personal philosophical and psychodynamic circle in respect of the historical process: one which may mark the ontological course of our postmodern historical times. It is part of an ongoing project, and the goal is not to find proper and persuasive ways to surpass the opposition between Ontology and History, but to offer preliminary insight into the historical and ontological evolution from Ontology to ontologies and, eventually, to Trans-Ontology, as the ultimate, postmodern, and rather eschatological, reality. This historical process, in which modernity and postmodernity mingle their boundaries, desires, means, and scopes, seems to result in a curious kind of Trans-Theology, where really miraculous, theurgist endeavors and products are displayed in front of us with an extraordinary dynamism. This Trans-Theology has no God and no Father any more, but incessantly makes magnificent God-like actions, aiming at eventually transforming not only the world, but also human nature itself, into something still unknown in its entirety yet extremely desirable inasmuch as it imagines itself filling the gap between the old and the new theodicies. Such an attempt links Trans-Theology to Transhumanism—the one falling, so to speak, into the other's arms. They are engaged in a joint project and have mutual targets: the rectification of the Creation through technological innovations—the amendment of the incomplete and imperfect work of God by extremely highly educated and magnificently ingenious humans who have already found a way to succeed in such a risky mission.

I shall attempt here to pave the way for this unfolding historical process, and to trace the various stages of the construction of a new hyper-reality—one compatible with the individualistically, ludically, and narcissistically oriented character of postmodern society. The main norm within that process of evolution seems to be the loss of the Father—given that the era of modernity is that universal *principium* which, according to Lacan, is to be identified in the form of the Name-of-the-Father with the great Other of the symbolic order, and with the latter's function of prohibition.¹ Modernism should be considered the decisive shift in our living and our understanding of the world²—one actually unparalleled in any earlier period of human history—brought about by its instituting

1. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), 67.

2. Berman described “modernism as any attempt by modern men and women to become subjects as well as objects of modernization, to get a grip on the modern world and make themselves at home in it.” Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 5.

of a rigorous and coherent Grand Narrative concerning its existence, in which the rejection of religious and socio-political traditions, faith in progress, industrialization, individualism, and rationalization are included among its most distinctive features. In contrast, postmodernism seems to construct a palimpsest-like record of a continuous transition from the scenario consisting of the absolute/absolutist metanarratives of modernity, as Lyotard acutely described them,³ to that of a plurality of polycentric, multifaceted, and equally justified or self-legitimizing narratives. It could also be described as an evolution from the Essence, which is considered totalitarian and, significantly, no longer workable, to multiple, liberating essences accompanied by structures of expression having the form of a fragmented “bricolage.”

THE TWO PHASES OF POSTMODERNISM

Looking closely at this advancement, we may discern two, not separate, but rather blended, phases in the course of postmodernism: that of *deconstruction* and that of a new, homogenizing *re-construction*.

The first phase has set itself the explicit goal of deconstructing Ontology. Ontology is a branch of Metaphysics concerned with the nature of being, the general state of reality. As such, although Ontology derives from an ancient, polytheistic era, we suggest conceiving of it—at least within the specific domain of monotheistic religions—as the logos of the Father: that universal, authoritative, and singular *principium* which has entirely formed our Western way of thinking and living—certainly along with, and as a result of, its rejection. God the Father is the entity/person who holds the universe firm, and consequently maintains human societies in a stable, eternal, stern/affectionate and, moreover, workable condition.

However, postmodernity has no Father, has refused his authority and, moreover, seeks to kill him and even destroy his remnants. It experiences, therefore, the absence of the Father, and pretends to have lost the real or supposed Father’s hunger, too. The refusal of the Father is related to the deconstruction of Truth and the demolition of Ontology: that is, the eradication of singularity. In the first phase of postmodernism, therefore, we may observe a gradual transition from traditional, as well as modern, authoritative Ontology to postmodern, liberating and purportedly emancipatory, ontologies. It can be seen in the releasing of the contents and

3. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1984.

the yielding up of the secrets of the old Father, the old King, and the old God in the given form of monotheistic religions. Deconstructive readings and plausible narratives currently abound, and this is the very process of demythologization and demystification that, at first, fits perfectly with the postmodern condition.

What is most obvious about postmodernity is that we are actually witnessing an empire of multiplicity. The singular is liberatingly dissolved into the plural. Thus, intelligence is multiple, identity, reality, sexuality, science, theology, technology, pedagogy, language, and so on are, just like *cancer*, multiple. We live in multiple contexts, we have multiple perspectives and give multiple interpretations; we seek for multiple access, we are taught multiple literacies, and we investigate nature or anything else within a synergy of multiple disciplines. We also enjoy multiple commodities through alternative innovations, living as we do in the context of consumerism, which epitomizes the realm of multiplicity. Furthermore, we have acquired a temperamental inclination towards multiplicity: we have been indoctrinated in it, and we are cheerfully waiting for a new, innovative, and flexible multiplicity to emerge in every corner of our world. For multiplicity is the other name for alternativity, which seems to be the refuge of *postmodern wisdom*, as we might ironically name it. There is, also, an *autocracy of alternativity*, where any singular element or meaning is under relentless attack, and everything should be derived only from this powerful anchorage. Moreover, this is our duty, our unique, inescapable human condition: indeed, multiple investigations have worked hard to highlight the self-evident character of such an unquestionable certainty.

Last but not least, truth is, above all, multiple. For the very origin of postmodern multiplicity is the deconstruction of Truth, as the content and essence of Ontology, which in turn is included into the concept and the shell of the Father. Postmodern perceptions seek to dethrone the old Ontology in favor of the historicizing process, which seems to release its contents only gradually over the course of time. Thus, everything can have its own ontology, permitting the personification and privatization of ontology to prevail.

DECONSTRUCTION IN HISTORY / HISTORIOGRAPHY

We suggest that the transition from Ontology to ontologies is more concretely and effectively illustrated in the field of historical studies than anywhere else. The historical failure of the old Ontology, in the form of monarchy and political absolutism, monotheistic religions, colonialism, Euro-

centrism, nationalism, and the various messianic incarnations and utopias of modernity, is generally focused on the hierarchical, fixed, and mercilessly inflexible nature of its entity. The colonized, oppressed, and marginalized national groupings in Asia, Africa or Latin America have gradually been indoctrinated by their own Western-educated intellectuals into acknowledging the unnatural character of their subjugation in the wake of the postwar period. In the last decades of the twentieth century, not only de-colonization *in* history, but also the de-colonization *of* history itself,⁴ came to the fore, creating the so-called *culture or history wars*,⁵ which have formed the topics of most heated historical and pedagogical debate since the 1990s.

In order to undermine the old totalitarian singularity, postmodern historiography has legitimated a plurality of approaches, a multiplicity of historical fields and, therefore, also a diversity of flexible transformations of ontologies. Certainly, history's voracious appetite for incorporating new objects, modes and branches in historiography—this “omnivorous history”, the “panhistoricization” problematized by Le Goff⁶—has been derived from the pluralistic and transdisciplinary project of the Annales School. However, this trend is now absolutely typical for postmodern historiographical production and its new textualization of the past. From histories of zero, the glance, or hell, to histories of dirtiness, magic, or boredom, historians always attempt to conceive and to construct alternative and permanently eclectic approaches to an inherently unattainable historical Truth. There are many historical questions, and no longer a single final account as an adequate response to them, for all history is authorial, and “it is the historian, not the past, which does the dictating in history.”⁷ Disputing “reconstructionist or modernist” historical epistemology as well as the “positivist-inspired . . . constructionist or late-modernist”

4. Tuhiwai Smith assembles a set of interconnected ideas, which could delineate the meaning of the above-mentioned idea of the de-colonization *of* history. Thus, she enumerates at least nine ideas: that history is a totalizing discourse, that there is a universal history, that history is one large chronology, that history is about development, that history is about a self-actualizing human subject, that the story of history can be told in one coherent narrative, that history as a discipline is innocent, that history is constructed around binary categories, and, lastly, that history is patriarchal. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books / Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999), 30–1.

5. Roger Chapman, and James Ciment, ed., *Culture Wars in America: An Encyclopedia of Issues, Viewpoints, and Voices*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015).

6. Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elisabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 211.

one, “de-constructionist historians”⁸ are continually turning towards “the possible story” of a given historical version, always searching the dominant history and reading it against the grain. They recognize the absence of a core, representable reality, and “require the rejection of the centered, all-knowing utterly self-reflexive omniscient narrator and the epistemological pretense that the existence of the past must entail correspondence and/or correlation theories of truth,”⁹ intermingling their scientific and aesthetic paths, highlighting the random nature of history and life, illustrating the irrational motives of the protagonists, blending the boundaries between history and literature. And, simultaneously, “as we remake it [the past], the past remakes us,” Lowenthal notes,¹⁰ establishing in this way a mutual relationship that underscores the historical enterprise. The main impulse behind such historiography is the given plausibility of historical constructions, the privileging of alternative voices, a hard or soft play (or game) of persuasion and rhetoric between the author and the reader. “The only thing we can ever offer as a history is a present-centered *proposal*, a tentative *presentation* about how ‘the before now’ might be seen.”¹¹ If historical Truth, as with any other truth, is no longer accessible, then no authoritative account can exist of everything in the past, and we must be trained to embrace alternative narratives, and for adopting positive or negative approaches to an ever unknown and unattainable “Ithaca.” It is about a curious journey, a journey without a *telos*, which is best illustrated by Constantine P. Kavafis’ famous, early postmodern, poem:

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey
 Without her you would not have set out
 She has nothing left to give you now

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won’t have fooled you
 Wise as you will have become, so full of experience
 you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean¹²

7. Chris Lorenz, “Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality: A Plea for ‘Internal Realism,’” *History and Theory* 33, no. 3 (1994): 314, doi:10.2307/2505476.

8. Alun Muslow, *The New History* (London: Pearson, 2003), 5–6. 9. *Ibid.*, 194.

10. David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xxv.

11. Keith Jenkins, *Refiguring History: New Thoughts on an Old Discipline* (London: Routledge, 2003), 40.

12. Constantine P. Cavafy, “Ithaca,” v. 32–7, in *Collected Poems*, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 69.

After all, if postmodernism is “the era of aporia,” where all our decisions are “ultimately undecidable (aporetic),” as its devotees strongly insist,¹³ then what remains is pure experience, an experience *par excellence*. It is unpolluted by old-fashioned ends; it is only a gymnastics of the body, of the mental, and of sentiment, which triumphantly paves the way towards a popular postmodern, hedonistic fitness.

Yet if man is nowadays legitimately considered as having multiple selves, sub-selves, and numerous identities, the same has also occurred in the realm of history. Thus, “through the continual enlargement of its territory, history is still becoming *coextensive* with man.”¹⁴ Man is engaged in steering history towards his ever-growing empire of purportedly emancipatory multiplicity. Since the early 1990s, such a process has been best illustrated by the writing of so-called “allo-histories”: that is, alternate, alternative or counterfactual histories,¹⁵ the genre of the historical novel, and extreme extensions of the human imagination into the historical realm that serve to put into question the three fundamental axioms of the traditional historical discipline: necessity, causality, and determinism.¹⁶ These are plastic and experimental histories, offering countless new initiatives as regards historical procedure and ending up with myriad outcomes, all committed to a continuously shifting meaning that should be shared too.¹⁷ Since “allo-histories constitute allo-selves,” as Frank Dietz notes,¹⁸ such historiographic pluralism is now not only legitimated but also praised as the royal road to authenticity. Certainly, this is no longer an authenticity that is simply given in the sense of being God-given, but rather is a constructed—and also a humanly and collectively personalized one, too. Behind such an irrational impulse we may obviously detect the explorative mania of uncharted territory, the narcissistic, symbolic violence of an expansion over any space that seems to demonstrate a def-

13. Jenkins, *Refiguring History*, 71. 14. Le Goff, *History*, xxiii.

15. Niall Ferguson, ed., *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London: Basic Books, 1997).

16. Simon T. Kaye, “Challenging Certainty: The Utility and History of Counterfactualism,” *History and Theory* 49, no. 1 (2010): 40–1, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2303.2010.00527.x.

17. Historically speaking, the literary genre of alternate history has existed ever since ancient times, but over the course of the 20th century, and especially in the 1990s, it in fact witnessed a boom. Among the most popular works of this genre are Isaac Asimov’s *What if* (e.g., in *Nightfall and Other Stories*, New York: Doubleday, 1969, 191–205), Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Years of Rice and Salt* (New York: Bantam Books, 2002), and Philip Roth’s *The Plot against America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

18. Brett Cooke, “Introduction: Deception, Self-Deception and the Other,” in *The Fantastic Other: An Interface of Perspectives*, ed. Brett Cooke et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), xi.

inite or supposed resistance to the Ego. Yet, in these alternate historical attempts, we can also trace a hidden, paradoxical aspect—that of an odd “liquid stability,” which is best demonstrated in Brent Stypczynski words:

The genre does nothing that historians are not doing everyday, but it does provide a solid unchanging history, in its own way. The author of the alternate history sets in stone the change(s) he wishes to make in our accepted history. From that point on until every copy of the novel or short story vanishes, that particular view of history is permanent, after a fashion. From this perspective, alternate history appears to offer a solid stable ground for our history, rather than causing our foundations to slip away.¹⁹

This search for a newborn stability, a stability in its own terms and, even more, the establishment of a permanent stability mechanism through the constant elaboration of fluid realities, though contradictory, precisely characterizes the Trans-Ontology trend, which we shall trace further in due course.

Furthermore, we can witness the fact that current historiographic investigations have moved on to more and more unique, personalized and quite irrational issues, such as *Emotional* or *Affective History*, and the *History of Trauma*, which strengthens even more the role of individuals in the history-making process. This may be indicative of a fundamental turn towards individuality and singularity, or, instead, towards multiple, shattered, unconnected or interconnected singularities. But it is also a decisive shift towards the personification and psychologicalization of theory, science, history, life, and society, developing in the setting furnished by post-modern self-actualization. In fact, a gigantic, two-way process heading in the direction of an exhaustive, in-depth historico-sociological investigation of internalized, mostly savage, realities, and also of externalized felt trauma, is underway. The dynamic interactivity and flexibility obtaining between the inner and the outer leads the way in this regard. The contemporary discrediting, or rather the catastrophe, of our turning in upon ourselves, and the continuous, unrestricted show of extroversion in every aspect of our postmodern life, would seem to be a secular, and rather fraudulent, reversal of the old, religious sort of confession: a public cleansing of the most intimate of human secrets—which, through the surprising

19. Brent Stypczynski, “No Roads Lead to Rome: Alternate History and Secondary Worlds,” *Extrapolation* 46, no. 4 (2005): 463–4, doi: 10.3828/extr.2005.46.4.5 [cited in Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, “What Almost Was: The Politics of the Contemporary Alternate History Novel,” *American Studies* 50, no. 3–4 (2009): 67].

expansion of an old, “objective” moral field, binds persons in their public image. This affective personification within the historiographic field is particularly visible in the context of the challenge that readers face: that of considering themselves active agents in each and every historical construction. In fact, it expresses the historiography of procedure itself, subjected to the long course of demystification—which certainly has its origins in modernity.

Moreover, it is well known that postmodern historiography has been based upon a new paradigm of linguistics. The “linguistic turn,” the shift from the transparency of language to a completely ideology-laden language, has had a huge impact on the postmodern historical conception of the world—when “history dissolved into relativistic discourse; the truth could not only never be known, but was indeed itself merely an article of faith.”²⁰ Man has now become the content of language, not the other way round. We do not speak any more of a steady historical identity, but of a continuous, and even endless process of inventing ourselves. Historical works are mere fictions, “constructions in the present not—as traditional historians would claim—reconstructions of the past.”²¹ We now acknowledge ourselves not as general, global, rational/emotional beings, but as subjects trapped in a specific place and time, local, historicized beings, which have their own pre-interpreted ontologies as well as anthropologies. Local and global mingle their boundaries. This liberating multiplicity of various discourses entails a somewhat imperceptible slide from history to theory, from text to context, from truth to trust, from empathy to sympathy, from facts to fictions, from the world to the word, from the known to the knower, from sources to stories, from time to place, from value-free to value-laden perceptions, and so on. Given that language is not neutral, but situated, and yet merely a system of signs, then the power of invention as well as fabrication seems to be the only historical/historiographic drive. History rejects its authoritative, rationalistic status and becomes an issue of curiosity, aspirations, and interests, a matter of elaborated, disobedient irrationality.

FROM ONTOLOGIES TO TRANS-ONTOLOGY

Let us now we proceed to the *second phase* of postmodernism, as we might call it, which in fact is blended with the previous one. Since mythos is the fundamental ingredient of humanity, the old demythologization of pre-

20. Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3. 21. *Ibid.*, 5.

modern and modern narratives is easily replaced by a new, innovative, and unifying / homogenizing re-mythologization, which, after the massive dissolution of essences, attempts once again to re-essentialize the world. This is no longer the phase of de-construction, but rather a new phase of re-construction: one which, at the same time, falls under the aegis of the—also postmodern—transhumanist urge.

Transhumanism is considered an innovative, technological, and philosophical, movement, which

promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology. Attention is given to both present technologies, like genetic engineering and information technology, and anticipated future ones, such as molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligence.²²

Its ultimate goal is to normalize the passage to an entirely new, trans-ontological universe by means of a currently theurgist technology, wherein transhuman beings will correct diachronically historical errors, re-build the world, and, moreover, re-essentialize it, looking for purer, truer, and certainly richer foundations. Within this process we might also discern the fact that Transhumanism has, in addition, the goal of unifying the above-mentioned polycentric, equally justified, and disobedient narratives of the first phase of postmodernism with an innovatively indoctrinated and homogenized humanity, which should be properly prepared for the future to come. We suggest that the reason for taking on such an extraordinary double mission is embedded in the extreme longing for a regained *innocence*—a bedrock assumption of Western culture, corresponding to the desire to redress past wrongs by amending and enhancing the traditional, incomplete and fearful, human condition, and to be forever immune to guilt, where such guilt always threatens Western man's alleged integrity.

We might also argue that the hunt for a regained innocence is the crucial motive behind Transhumanism's neurotic and dizzy quest for *innovation*—not a need or a lack, but a deep, rather unconscious obsession, which also hides its curious demon, *boredom*. Innocence, innovation, and boredom are paradoxically intermingled in the contemporary realm. Innocence is

22. Nick Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values," *Review of Contemporary Philosophy* 4, no. 1–2 (2005): 87.

the endearing foundation, which postmodern man seeks to bring to light in order to feel and prove himself stable, incorruptible, and upright. This condition of being always innocent is used by him to bring forward the future in a rush—to construct his future only through his own powers and talents, unspoiled by narratives of resentment. Yet the demon of boredom lurks behind such a success-story. Our postmodern way of living oscillates between speed and boredom, but in addition leads us to experience the paradox of incessantly producing great amounts of the latter, even as we are all the while engaged precisely in trying to avoid its impact. It may be that many of us are workaholics on account of excessive boredom. Our bulimic quest for innovations, for perpetually interesting things and ideas, for new and hedonistic experiences, shows especially the catalytic effect of boredom on our lives, as Svendsen comments:

Boredom is not connected with actual needs but with desire. And this desire is a desire for sensory *stimuli*. Stimuli are the only “interesting” thing. That life to a large extent is boring is revealed by our placing such great emphasis on originality and innovation. We place greater emphasis nowadays on whether something is “interesting” than on whether it has any “value.” To consider something exclusively from the point of view of whether it is “interesting” or not is to consider it from a purely aesthetic perspective. The aesthetic gaze registers only surface, and this surface is judged by whether it is interesting or boring. . . . The aesthetic gaze has to be titillated by increased intensity or preferably by something new, and the ideology of the aesthetic gaze is superlativism. It is, however, worth noting that the aesthetic gaze has a tendency to fall back into boredom—a boredom that defines the entire content of life in a negative way, because it is that which has to be avoided at any price. This was perhaps particularly evident in postmodern theory, where we saw a series of *jouissance* aesthetes, with such mantras as “intensity,” “delirium,” and “euphoria.”²³

However, given the real mania for scientifically investigating absolutely everything over the last three or four centuries, it could be added that boredom also lurks behind our precious and self-confident scientific tools of innovation: namely, *questions* and *curiosity*. We are really haunted by our questions, and we are also humbly obedient servants of our curiosity. In fact, we have been fully prepared for this by our modern and postmod-

23. Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*, trans. John Irons (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 27.

ern education, and it also seems to be the dream of any future teaching and schooling.²⁴

In the same vein, boredom might be concealed in our insatiable and wholly orchestrated contemporary appetite for *meaning* and *understanding*, which is constantly presented as completely self-evident and unequivocal in our societies. No one can even live without searching for and uncovering some meaning in the specific conditions and activities of his life—and, moreover, in the whole of it. To be sure, we are not talking here of a “natural” and “normal”—though these words are now considered highly suspicious—human search for an integrated and fundamental worldview, a *Weltanschauung*, such as would link events together and impart significance to them, but rather are implying the presence of an odd, irregular, and rather tragic-comic *fetishism of understanding*—to coin a phrase. It is about an extraordinary, mainly unconscious, and deeply neurotic longing for more and more, and ever deeper, broader, and higher, understanding, which is continuously propagated in our society as the sublime vision of a really authentic and creative humankind. In the postmodern historiographic context, this *fetishism of understanding* seems to have replaced the old “fetishism of sources” and “archive positivism.”²⁵ The deity of such an understanding is, plainly, endless revision. This curious incompleteness in turn generates a true *itch* for understanding in a really corporeal sense, which indicates the primarily instinctive nature of the process. One can argue that this is a historically unparalleled phenomenon, based chiefly on the deeply consumerist and ludic character of our contemporary society. No historical epoch has ever before manifested such a voracious, manic, and excessive hunger and thirst—particularly for meaning and understanding. It is perhaps an outcome of the modern, and especially postmodern, demolition of Truth and Essence, of the establishing of a polytheism of truths and values, and, even more, of the constructivist theory of knowledge, which affirms the idea that knowledge of the world is always a human and social construction. In this construction, the dynamic will and

24. For issues such as these, see Anthony L. Smyrnaioi, *Cult and Neurosis in the Pedagogy of Innovation: Notes on a Postmodern Philosophy of Education* [in Greek] (Athens: Hestia, 2009), Anthony L. Smyrnaioi, “De l’ école innovante,” *L’ Atelier du Roman* 69 (2012): 185–94, and Anthony L. Smyrnaioi, “Some Thoughts on the Impossibility to Imagine Contemporary School beyond its Consumerist Mentality,” in *Reimagining the Purpose of Schools and Educational Organizations: Developing Critical Thinking, Agency, Beliefs in Schools and Educational Organizations*, eds. Anthony Montgomery and Ian Kehoe, 25–34. New York: Springer, 2016.

25. Fulbrook, *Historical Theory*, 3.

interaction of human beings are central and unique, while a continually invented reality forms the cornerstone of such a perception.

We may encounter such a paradoxical condition in the abysmal contemporary hunger for multiple, extreme, and instantaneous experiences, which are always unique, marvelous, yet never satisfying. In the whole of our life, and in the course of our education as well, we are really trained to seek, and to share, not goods or sentiments, but simply *experiences*, and this latter term furnishes another keyword for our culture. Experiences are constructed by communities of meaning, and meaning is precisely all we search for. This insatiable desire fights precisely against aging and death, being marked by an increasing repression of death as the very annihilation of living experience, and serves the well-known “pornography of death,” as Gorer once famously noted.²⁶ This is, therefore, the focal point in our postmodern, multifarious world: *the excessive quest for experiences*.

THE LAST PHASE: THE HOMOGENIZING PROJECT OF TRANS-ONTOLOGY

Boredom, and its obedient healers, *innovations, questions, curiosity, meaning, understanding, experience*, and their magnificent interactions, are all really present in the world of Transhumanism and Trans-Ontology. All of them have seductive ontologies to narrate and lay the foundation of the historically *cathartic* advancement from the ontological birthplace to the trans-ontological homeland, from utopia to heterotopias and, ultimately, to trans-utopia. This new and Great Idea is particularly obvious in the rhetoric of politics, economy, society, and sciences.

We may enumerate powerful universal projects whose agenda would in each case be that humanity be brought into conformity with this Trans-Ontology. We might well include the following in such a list (though the items are not presented here in any hierarchically significant order): the Theory of Everything, political correctness, civil society, voluntarism, global consumerism and global governance, pornography, and the new gay culture. It may also contain a universal appetite for innovation, emotional capitalism,²⁷ together with the ludification of culture,²⁸ the enormous shift towards pan-aesthetics,²⁹ the manipulation of information as well as common sense, the intense search for Excellence (which seems to

26. Geoffrey Gorer, “The Pornography of Death,” *Encounter* 5 (1955): 49–52.

27. Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007).

28. Joost Raessens, “Playful Identities, or the Ludification of Culture,” *Games and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2006): 52–7, doi:10.1177/1555412005281779.

be a quite new paternal authority-principle!) and, in parallel, the current dynamic focus on leadership, the self-regulating market, and religious ecumenism—not to forget the extraordinary boom in conspiracy theories. Certainly, all the above are derived from science in the form of technology—especially in the context of Information Systems and knowledge engineering, which are so famous now for the plurality of their ontologies and also for the powerfulness and functionality of them.³⁰ Technology has completely transformed not only modern society, but, even more, our inner desire, our intimate way of thinking and sensing.

These are some of the indications of the emergence of a new, homogenized Trans-Ontology, where everywhere a marvelous argument for the mutual translatability of everything is articulated. It is possible that all these projects are interconnected and pushing towards an integral theory, a holistic image, using the excessive current quest for understanding as an alibi for excessive control over the world. Meanwhile, the relationship between *understanding* and *control* should be considered mutual. Through our education, and using the means available thanks to our philosophy of education, we are compelled to investigate (and consequently understand) nature and human beings ever more deeply and broadly—not for their own sake, not to feel the joy of our creativity, but in order to be able to control, regulate, and manipulate them for good or for evil. In the context of science and technology, which seems to be our fateful condition, our inescapable *destiny*, this particular yet currently ecumenical use of understanding seems all too obvious. Hence, contemporary understanding should not be conceived as a basic human trait (Heidegger), or as a way in which humans are directed towards the traditions of a given culture (Gadamer), but as an instrument, a weapon, enabling the adepts of technology to know better, and control more fully, their environment. It is not a question of understanding for the sake of living-in-the-world, aimed at solving the problems associated with such living, but rather understanding for the sake of dominating and transforming the world in the direction of an antihuman orientation.

Thus, if everything were to in fact be considered under the aegis of understanding, then understanding would become a basic and polemical keyword: the word of the *Lord*, a dominant yet seductive device of a still unknown global power. Hence, such a *fetishism of understanding*

29. This is best illustrated by the book by Daniel Albright, *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

30. Roberto Poli and Johanna Seibt, eds., *Theory and Applications of Ontology: Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Springer, 2010).

is a fetishism possessing really innovative power, in that through understanding it promises to unite all of the known models into one all-encompassing, explosive supermodel. It attempts to give the whole story, to construct the overall map, for the huge dispersal of fragmented ontologies is no longer manageable or bearable, and is extremely dangerous for the individual, as well as for the world. Now is the time for all centrifugal, wild forces to become inward, united, and certainly obedient ones. The time of freedom, the wind of openness, is no longer fashionable. Consequently, we are obliged to take shelter beneath a groundbreaking conformity—one which, however, is coming to be dominated by a similar ethos of age-old, universal, “objective” principles. And there is an urgent moral obligation to see this whole course reversed. A new, common trans-humanity should emerge, with a definitive standard as regards the realization of *goodness*, *truth*, and *beauty*. A messianic Geist is on the way! After all, it was Ihab Hassan, a leading theorist of postmodernism, who, according to McHale, claimed that postmodernism is simply a step on the “road to the spiritual unification of humankind.”³¹

As was already mentioned, the key device for such global integration is technology. Ever since the time of the first practical applications of electricity, such unification has been the perpetual day-dream of scientists. Peter Schwartz and Peter Leyden have pointed out that personal computers, telecommunications, biotechnology, nanotechnology, and alternative energy constitute an inevitable drive towards global integration.³² Ken Wilber, in turn, industriously propagandizes “an integral vision”:

a vision that attempts to be comprehensive, balanced, and inclusive. A vision that therefore embraces science, art, and morals; that equally includes disciplines from physics to spirituality, biology to aesthetics, sociology to contemplative prayer; that shows up in integral politics, integral medicine, integral business, integral spirituality.³³

That is precisely the field of Trans-Ontology. It supports the idea of an incessant transition in order to defeat the old, pre-trans entities, and thus

31. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 4.

32. Peter Schwartz and Peter Leyden, “The Long Boom: A History of the Future, 1980–2020,” *Wired*, July 1, 1997, <https://www.wired.com/1997/07/longboom/>. See also Peter Schwartz, Peter Leyden, and Joel Hyatt, *The Long Boom: A Vision For The Coming Age Of Prosperity* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2000).

33. Ken Wilber, *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science, and Spirituality* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), xii.

leads the world to trans-humanity, surpassing the level of merely prosthetic functions. The assumption that “there are no true human universals that can be traced to a common nature”³⁴ is considered a given by transhumanists. In such a realm, the instantaneous combination of telescopic and microscopic visions of the world, where every entity appears to communicate instantly with the whole universe, the dizzying understanding and the immediate activity derived from it, would together wholly transform our common perceptions of being-in-the-world.

Allow me to consider this the crucial point of a precisely theological discourse, for such technological transformation is really an achievement for the theurgist. And *theurgy* is, in fact, the daydream of the currently prevailing futuristic technologism. This technologism has its origin in the Scientific Revolution, which made a strong attempt to dethrone God by investigating and interrogating his own universe, and constructing innovative God-acts without any reference to his will, for his will was strongly related to his orders in respect of morality. Therefore, in such a transforming universe there is an urgent need for precisely a *Trans-Theology*: that is, a new Essence, and a new Grand Narrative, too. Trans-Theology initially exhibits features of a conciliatory kind as regards relations between the world’s religions: syncretism, inclusivism, pluralism, and an underlying combination and global unity, all seem to exist in it and, moreover, should be urgently promoted. It concerns a rational, as well as pleasure-seeking, meta-theology, founded on the assumption that the time has at last come for a diachronically desirable human unity. It is willing to consent to the increasing acceleration of technological progress and the abundantly innovative, rather idolatrous, impulse to radically transform everything. It also promotes the re-essentialization of the world, which, allegedly, would be fairer, fascinating, liberating, pluralistic, and unpolluted by traditional inflexibilities and slownesses, just as the new rhetoric demands. It also has a strong desire to transcend the blind ally of multiple subjectivities and arrive at the formation of a new objectivity: that of universal integralism. Consequently, a unification of our understanding of the spiritual, the physical, and the technological world through a synthesis of the old tradition with contemporary (and, even more, futuristic) philosophical, theological, and scientific research, should be counted a great gain for humanity. We need a tool, and even more a formalism, for describing the internally complicated and contradictory structure of our world, which,

34. Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (New York: Picador, 2003), 133.

without frontiers, is a combination of mystic experience, technological advancement, and philosophical interpretation—such as might also be our eschatological desire. Finally, we must obey the newborn and seductive “tyranny of experts,” the secular priesthood who know better, understand more healthily, and are more imaginative, ingenious, and productive than the traditional sacred one.

THE PLAY AND THE GAME

At this point, it is important to emphasize the fact that the above-mentioned universal integralism must be founded on an ever-increasing ludic character: one which not only colors, but also constructs, its own coherence. Thus, we may discern a new, trendy dipole between the *play* and the *game*, which seem to be two of the most vital elements thanks to which postmodernity takes on its ephemeral existence—its ultimate metaphors. On the one hand, *play* is committed to the absolutely ludic-aesthetic human being, programmed to play hedonistically with itself, the society, and the world. It normally occupies the pole of aesthetics and playfulness, and is generally associated with irrational passions, romanticism, and the unconscious, joyfully embracing the very insatiability of desire. On the other hand, *game* suggests a mathematically scheduled playfulness for the contemporary magician’s apprentices, who are currently the powerful decision- and myth-makers. It is based on the strategic, rational organization of life and thought. It is precisely this which incorporates play into a controllable and deliberate plan of being-in-the-world. Romanticism and Rationalism happily mingle their boundaries together in postmodernity, each contributing to a hybrid mixture that puts its irrevocable seal on our society. Hence there is play in the game, and a game amidst the play. The play and the game constitute a new key postmodern dyad.

If that is so, then it is an enormous, global, and rapidly prevailing “ludification process” that is seductively leading the way. In this realm, it is significant that

play is not only characteristic of leisure, but also turns up in those domains that once were considered the opposite of play, such as education (e.g., educational games), politics (playful forms of campaigning, using gaming principles to involve party members in decision-making processes, comedians-turned-politicians) and even warfare (interfaces resembling computer games, the use of drones—unmanned remote-controlled planes—introducing war à la PlayStation).³⁵

Zygmunt Bauman also draws attention to the sovereignty of playfulness, when he argues that “The mark of postmodern adulthood is the willingness to embrace the game wholeheartedly, as children do.”³⁶ In addition, the integralism of such a ludic Trans-Ontology, along with the powerful exchange between play and game, is clearly underlined by Lourens Minnema, who claims that whereas in modern society culture has consisted of many relatively autonomous sub-domains (politics, economics, law, education, science, technology, art), in postmodern society we may observe the unifying element of play, and see the culture “as a game without an overall aim, as play without a transcendent destination but not without the practical necessity of rules agreed upon and of (inter)subjective imagination; as a complex of games each one having its own framework, its own rules, risks, chances, and charms.”³⁷

Thus, Trans-Ontology may not be constructed anymore by *philosophers* but, conversely, by the calculative rationality of *designers*. Eric Zimmerman, in his recent and fascinating “Manifesto for a Ludic Century,” distinguishes between the 20th century, as “the century of information,” and the 21st, as “an era of games and systems” where “information has been put at play.” He argues that we already live in a fully “systemic society,” in which “there is also a need to be playful,” because “being playful is the engine of innovation and creativity.” Finally, Zimmerman demands that we think as designers do, for system, play and design are “elements of gaming literacy” which “can address our problems.”³⁸ Multiple forms of trans-literacy will thus entail a felicitously organized and highly productive body of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In this short and certainly incomplete attempt to connect up history and ontology in the context of postmodernity, I have tried to discern the two phases, blended together, of postmodern and transhumanist gaming, fo-

35. Joost Raessens, “The Ludification of Culture,” in *Rethinking Gamification*, ed. Mathias Fuchs et al. (Lüneburg: meson press, 2014), 94, also available online at <http://meson.press/books/rethinking-gamification>.

36. Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995), 99.

37. Lourens Minnema, “Play and (Post)Modern Culture: An Essay on Changes in the Scientific Interest in the Phenomenon of Play,” *Cultural Dynamics* 10, no. 1 (1998): 21, doi: 10.1177/092137409801000102.

38. Eric Zimmerman, “Manifesto for a Ludic Century,” in *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications*, ed. Steffen P. Walz and Sebastian Deterding (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 19–22.

cusing on the implications concerning the transition from Ontology to ontologies, and, finally, to Trans-Ontology, this being the eschatological, futuristic realm of Transhumanism. In the context of such a process we now come face to face with a new kind of really belligerent Trans-Theology—one which really has no God and no Father, but performs magnificent theurgist, God-like actions that are, moreover, impressively tangible and recognizable by all. If traditional miracles may be considered acts of reassurance of God's presence in the world, then the new transhumanist ones would reassure us of his absence, ultimately serving to guarantee a unique human sovereignty. For all human beings ever need are miracles—in order, if anything, to consolidate their own imaginative power.

Thus, we may consider Transhumanism a reality that dizzyingly brings eschatology right into the present itself. A new, anxiously deterministic, history/historiography of humanity is already engaged in analyzing its countless documents and synthesizing its own triumphant records. Yet it is all the more important that we seek to promote a heightened awareness of the fact that in human history it has been common to speed up technological preparations when a real or supposed danger is impending, as happened during the Cold War period. Thus, given the current revival of an almost global terrorism, it is possible that many devotees of Transhumanism would consider this to furnish the optimum opportunity for accelerating still further its process, precisely as an unbeatable means of defense against that.

Finally, if a recurring challenge within Christianity concerns how we make past events present, then the current challenge may be construed, by contrast, as being about how we are forced to make and accept futuristic events as present—as always conveying “a sort of frisson of the real, a frisson of vertiginous and phony exactitude.”³⁹ It is a new and rather obligatory certainty, in which playfulness might also be conceived as its last *metaphor*. It seems that we are already living in a world of *transition*, yet everything should ultimately be integrated into a *hyper-trans*-reality. This, to be sure, will not be a process of gradual maturing, but rather an impatient rupture in history: a forced outcome which, however, would be propagated as the messianic moment of a “redemption” from modern linear temporality—as with the utopianism of Walter Benjamin's *Jetztzeit*,⁴⁰ following the “tiger's leap” not into an amiable future, but rather into chaos.

39. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 28.

40. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 261.

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