

# Eugene Thacker's Conception of Negative Correlation Regarding Quentin Meillassoux's Speculative Materialism

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The current article deals with the analysis of the recently proposed ontological possibility to think the thing-in-itself. Quentin Meillassoux's speculative materialism is explained in relation with Eugene Thacker's critique of vitalistic correlation which is assumed as a broader attempt of thinking to transcend itself. The latter analysis manifests the limit of Meillassoux's project optimism, concerning the ordering of necessity of contingency, situated through the epistemological conditioning of possibilities. In this part, contingent logic requires the full apprehension of the possibility to be otherwise despite the determination of logical probabilism. The article ends with the explanation of Thacker's suggestion of the new mediation theory based on the excommunication (the negative communication act) as the primal condition of every speculative approach.

**Keywords:** speculation, correlation, vitalism, contingency, excommunication

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## INTRODUCTION

In the recent multiplication of discussions between contemporary realists and correlationists<sup>1</sup> one of the most important objects of disputes becomes the definition of correlation itself and the grounding of its limits which enables us not only to confirm the thought adequacy with respect to the thing in itself, but altogether allows us to legitimate the qualitative evaluation of realistic transcendence between thinking and being. Q. Meillassoux's speculative materialism attempts to think the thing in itself is the first step towards overcoming of correlationists' methodological closure. Frequently, realism is understood as relying on the naïve position, where reality in itself is apprehended without taking into account the conditions established by the critical philosophy, or it is accepted dogmatically, by positioning some entity as an authorization and at the same time assurance of reality constitution in advance. In such cases, realism is caught into the traps of absolutists' thinking, where any considerable position is acceptable as knowable in itself due to the being of a positive exterior guarantor which territory could be intervened by disregarding the boundaries of reality. Each similar notion enduring

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<sup>1</sup> Representatives of the accordance between being and thought negate the possibility of autonomic realism.

the lack of critical ontology, supposedly, is the case of ontology inability to find a place at the contemporary philosophy discourse. Ontology interpreted as metaphysics is precarious by its presupposed normative position, in addition, such self-determination is impossible to verify and at the same time to critically evaluate its status. Kant has already started correlationist's critique which formulated the first principles contributing to the exposition of every artificial metaphysics with pretention to the rational ontology. Though, is it still possible to talk about the possibility of any ontology? And what are the rules for contemporary realism?

### THE TASK OF SPECULATIVE MATERIALISM

Construing the possibilities of realistic constitution, at first, we have to turn to the Meillassoux's carried out correlationists' operational analytics, where correlationism is divided into the two types: weak and strong correlationism (Meillassoux 2008: 30). Weak correlationism could be identified with the primal Kantian movement towards the overcoming of absolutism. Hither correlation is proceeded between the being itself and the thinking in respect of the divide between the phenomenon and the thing in itself, and it means that even the thing in itself is in itself unknowable, the being cannot be dismissed as separated from us. Whereas a strong correlationism radicalizes the operational principle of correlation by absolutization of the correlation itself, so transporting the thing in itself into the region of phenomena. However, how is it possible to talk about the being itself while suspending the absolutists' notion and at the same time by being warranted that our claims are directed to the thing in itself and not conducted by the anthropocentric perspective?

Strong correlationism as the most potent anti-absolutist approach does not simply take into account the correlation as another absolute and the latter problem becomes the critical stance of speculative materialism. In this place, it is possible to present the necessity of contingency founded by the mechanism of de-absolutization, which acknowledges only the critical approach towards realism by thinking the chance itself and altogether the manifestation of facticity.

R. Brassier notices that with the establishment of the necessity of contingency it is quite unclear how to differentiate the manifestations of being and thinking, the necessity of contingency becomes indifferent to the latter divide (Brassier 2007: 87). Contingency is grounded on the interconnectedness of objects, which does not overstep the correlation, but remains true to it. Certainly, here the correlational mechanism is no longer the absolute, it is affected by the necessity of contingency and thus it could be thinkable as perishable or even as changing its form. Its existence becomes a fact, which, besides other facts, is based on chance. Meillassoux asserts that the only facticity of contingency is not factual, but absolute and in turn not contingent. That allows us to reach another conclusion which affirms the positivity of Meillassoux's system. The thing in itself indeed agrees with the position of Kantism, it really *is* and *is independent* from us. Meillassoux's project enables us to speak about such correlationism, which is not closed in the anthropocentric notion, but is open to the ontological possibility. Thus, the speculative materialism becomes capable to confirm the status of existence by categorizing the agents of facticity with the attributes of being and non-being.

### VITALISTIC CORRELATION

The ambivalence between being and thinking in Meillassoux's system evokes a question about the life of thought itself. Herein we suggest turning to the E. Thacker's comprehension of realism, who begins his reflections with the analysis of classical vitalistic correlation.

In the first instance, Thacker's research into vitalism is the analysis of life relationship with what is unthinkable. Besides the two classical ontological constitution schemes, Thacker proposes another anti-anthropocentric determination. The traditional model of correlationism could be characterized with *the world-to-us* definition. It is the most humane model of the world, while next to it standing the worldview, which could be defined as *the world-in-itself*, is idiosyncratically attributed to the constitution of the scientific model and must be the most distanced from any possibility of mediation. Nevertheless, Thacker is critical of the latter position. Anthropocentrism could be overcome only with the determination of *the world-without-us*. This world is such which could be without anyone able to think it (Thacker 2011: 4–7). Altogether with the manifestation of life the event of primal correlation is established and the tautological condition to think the unthinkable is inaugurated<sup>2</sup>.

Thacker's analysis contributes to the identification of inner correlationist dynamics as endeavoring to find a ground for the order capable to coordinate the ontological actions. The latter analysis is particularly suitable for the examination of correlationists' systems with absolutist pretensions to think the thing in itself. Thacker's interpretation is focused on the Aristotelian divide between the life as that-by-which-living-is-living and the living itself. This assertion is valuable for the thinking of life principle as the philosophical concept itself (Thacker 2010: 13). On the one hand, the thinking of particular manifestations is necessary which appears as existent (non-existent), on the other hand, the formal criteria for commonality apprehension of these manifestations is required. The definition of relationship between the life and the living determines and distributes the expressions of identity and difference. Thacker observes that the attempts during the history of philosophy to think the principle of life was unsuccessful, every positioning of life was substituted with another concept (Thacker 2010: 19). Therefore, what is the difference between the speculative materialism ambitions to think the thing in itself from the Hegelian project of absolute idealism? The difference resides within the Meillassoux's radicalization of speculation. Hegel, contrary to Kant, which is supported by Meillassoux, does not question the necessity of logical principles and asserts the possibility of their absolute true deduction (Meillassoux 2008: 39). Consequently, what does the Meillassoux's promised intellectual intuition, apparatus capable to think the thing itself, mean?

## BEING AFTER FACTICITY AND FACTUALITY

If Thacker's proposed scheme covers Meillassoux's resort, would that lead to the impossibility of realism? In Meillassoux's ontology two concepts are actualized along the lines of correlationism overcoming. Despite the fact that the latter concepts are grounded on their interconnectedness, *facticity* is introduced formerly (Meillassoux 2008: 62). This could be defined as the concept for the designation of entities contingency, it is a naming of their being and non-being with an aim to oppose existence to the necessity and so eliminate the absolutism with an assertion of contingency. The facticity itself indicates its own necessity, the affirmation of *the principle of factuality* implies the facticity of facticity, without a possibility to question it, and the facticity of facticity as the principle of factuality is no longer contingent. It is the necessity of contingency itself ensuring the facticity of entities (Meillassoux 2008: 79). These two concepts – facticity and factuality – could be adapted to Thacker's divide between

<sup>2</sup> In *Time Without Becoming* (Meillassoux 2014) Meillassoux gives the explanation of the divide between fossils and arche-fossils here serving as an explication of the life correlation, where arche-fossils, contrary to fossils, are the timely fixated pre-vitalistic matter.

the living and the life. Facticity is that-which-is-living and factuality is that-by-which-the-living-is-living<sup>3</sup>. Facticity is the invariant of possibility to be or not to be and concretely related with the entity identity to itself, whereas factuality is a guarantor of entity cognition enabling the latter insurance of the entity identity to itself. Both premises are coherent in-between.

An attempt to reflect the relationship between the living and the life, and between facticity and factuality brings to the thought of the limit, which is correlative with the negation of what is thinkable, perhaps with the negation of the life itself, the-world-without-us. Thacker pays attention to the analysis of the apophatic tradition attempting to demonstrate the common path of negation which rejects the positive epistemological evaluation and shows how every thought about the principle of life is interchanged with an approach to think the life-beyond-life. For such conception it is important to suggest a determination capable of sustaining even the contradiction and familiar with the ability to be otherwise. The being of the thing in itself is described analogically, its being is indifferent to any correlationism. Meillassoux entitles it as *hyperchaos* supported by the production of contingency, which takes the position of the thing in itself and is completely separated from the dependence on correlation (Meillassoux 2008: 64). To penetrate into the hyperchaos is the task of intellectual intuition.

### THE CONDITION OF VIRTUAL EPISTEMOLOGY FOR SPECULATIVE ONTOLOGY

Primarily, perhaps the Meillassoux's proposed conception of hyperchaos is true, though his epistemological notion is not adequately articulated. Could it be said that the Meillassoux overmuch positively evaluates the possibility of total knowledge and consequently does not evaluate the autonomy of the thing in itself through? Meillassoux himself directs his attention to the polemics of the totalization question. Moreover, he is critical enough to claim that totalization is even possible. The latter position is evoked by his thoughts about the conception of hyperchaos. Merely not radically enough admitted being of hyperchaos could be totalized, whereas the adequate approach is grounded on the possibility of non-totalization. Meillassoux suggests to note the probabilism validated in the theory of probabilities, where the negative totalization mechanism is the most visible. Every case, independently from its self-contained individuality, in the probabilistic thinking is accepted as a part of the absolutizable whole. The classical dice example carrying the symbolism of chance is totalized by the finitude of dice itself. Despite our knowing about the result of the throw, the anticipatory knowing is conditioned between 1 and 6. Henceforth, there always exists the conditional possibility of pre-conceived knowledge in the probabilistic theory, where the chance is absolute only illusionary. The previous example is not eligible for the substantiation of the Meillassoux proposed necessity of contingency, where the possibilities of hyperchaos should not be determined by totalization. Thus his suggestion is to acknowledge the non-totalizable resort by establishing the pure chance as a virtual possibility (Meillassoux 2011: 229). This is not the signification of the end of probabilistic logic, rather it is still capable to estimate the separated cases, though there originates the relationship between a possibility and virtuality, which prohibits the absolutization of manifestations set as necessary and disable to be otherwise. The illustration of this state for Meillassoux becomes the subject Master from the Stéphane Mallarmé's poem *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard*, whose meditation with the dice in his hand, at the last

<sup>3</sup> It is important to notice that here only the precise terminology relates the present investigation to the vitalistic problematics. However, the aim is to seek for the meta-position capable to disclose Thacker's methodology as applicable to the problem of correlationism itself.

moment of his life before vanishing into the sea, symbolizes the eternal instance of the indecisiveness to throw. His stillness could be interpreted as the right answer, but the last decisional maneuver is accomplished by the sea (Meillassoux 2011).

Accordingly, it would be wrong to assert that Meillassoux propagates the totalizing position, rather he adequately evaluates the hyperchaos altogether with the state of the necessity of contingency itself. His epistemological stance is not grounded on absolute idealism, rather it is directed towards what is not submitted to thought. Meillassoux's affirmation of virtuality relies on the unmeasurable necessity of hyperchaos activation and even the hyperchaos is conditioned by the rules. Unilateral epistemology is based on the radical unknowing and at last is liberated by the possibility of positive determinations. The first rule asserts the existence of the thing in itself (Meillassoux 2008: 67). That is demonstrated by the necessity of contingency as the facticity of facticity. If we take chance as an aspect of the thing in itself founded in the principle of correlation mechanism activity, then the negation of the only necessary principle of the assertion of facticity is impossible. The questioning of the facticity itself presupposes the tautology unauthorized by no other than the second level facticity, in such case the necessity of facticity itself. The present Meillassoux's observation enables the birth of realism, which would not be the naïve version of reality assertion, but rather would cooperate with the correlation as an evidence for its negation possibility. Nevertheless, the second rule attributed to the hyperchaos is much more complicated. Meillassoux, onward following Kant, asserts the non-contradiction of the thing in itself (Meillassoux 2008: 67). A contradictory entity is altogether a necessary entity and since the discovery of the necessity of contingency such possibility is ontologically impossible. After all, Meillassoux does not negate the possibility to incorporate the contradictions if they belong to the paraconsistent logics serving as a mediator between the extreme positions of consistent and non-consistent logics (Meillassoux 2011: 77–78). By his consideration, there are no real existing contradictions, but it is absolutely possible to apprehend them as logically possible and even to notice the contradictions in the oppositional statements<sup>4</sup>. Is this assertion about the status of contradictions consistent or is it another correlationists' attempt?

By taking into the consideration Thacker's analysis, herein the highlighted unknowing is recognizable from the realization of contradiction. The lack of the latter unknowability in Meillassoux's ontology complicates the estimation of hyperchaos status. At the same time, the necessity of non-totalization is stated and negated with the appreciation of the principle of non-contradiction as a rule for the hyperchaos determination. As J. Allan Mitchell notices, on the one hand, Meillassoux asserts that Kant's project detains from the possibility to accept the real hyperchaos, on the other hand, by the attempt to dismiss the pre-modern creations and systems Meillassoux himself confirms his absolute knowledge about the real being of chaos (Mitchell 2013: 156). Two necessities negating one another could create only a more effective principle of contradiction. Thacker's suggestion to take into account the contradiction existent inside the present system, as operating on the correlationists's relationship, not only manifests the correlation of facticity and factuality resided in the speculative materialism but also in conjunction lends the indirect link to the status of the thing in itself, its possibility of contradictions production. It could be denominated as another linguistic incongruity in the postulation of oppositional statements, however, this opinion is assisted with the contradiction inside the speculative materialism capable to negate the task of its project.

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Spectral Dilemma* (Meillassoux 2009) Meillassoux mentions the ethical contradiction solvable with the promise at the epistemological virtuality.

The acceptance of linguistic incongruity implies the introduction of transcendence familiar to naïve realism. With the return to Thacker's remark, it is possible to acknowledge the awareness of contradiction as active between facticity and factuality and directed to something else. That is the link for the anticipation of "beyond" from the perspective of apophatic logic. The identification of such factor would allow to realize the thing in itself, this would require the covering notion which could be able to transgress all requirements of totalization and that, as it is known, is the one of the main conditions of Thacker's postulated epistemological unknowability which is necessary for any system with a correlational status. The unknowability of the thing in itself must be adopted not as a deficiency but as an accession of the limit of thought for the formulation of the world-without-us concept.

### **MEDIATION BETWEEN COMMUNICATION AND EXCOMMUNICATION**

The problem of mediation confronts our analysis between ontology and epistemology. How to receive knowledge from radical closure? Thacker's thesis demonstrates determination of every communication act with the necessary communicational imperative and altogether communications possibility through the withdrawal (Thacker 2014: 78). That is called excommunication: "Excommunication is a double movement in which the communicational imperative is expressed, and expressed as the impossibility of communication" (Thacker 2014: 80). The latter conception is close to the Meillassoux's concept of virtuality. The withdrawal of the thing in itself remains due to the impossibility of totalization and jointly to the Meillassoux's estimation of the rule of non-contradiction, rather the contradiction itself, manifesting when the non-totalization is affirmed paradoxically and the conclusion is positioned as determination of the thing in itself. The radical possibility to be otherwise enables one to view the thing in itself as a transmitter at the end of the mediation act and completely different from the subject as a receiver of information about its identity. It seems that the negative description of the epistemological process should restrict wider epistemological possibilities, though Thacker, with his analysis of apophatic theology, explains how the negation procedure enables to reach the exteriority (Thacker 2010). Therefore, with an addition of the negative possibility to the positive Meillassoux's project the reasons which could otherwise remain unnoticed are liberated. As it has been already known, in Meillassoux's case, it is the imposition of the rule of non-contradiction as an effect of ontological determination. The mediation act of speculative materialism is based on the univocal purism. Meillassoux's aim is expressed with the Cartesian determination where the knowledge of the secondary qualities is sacrificed for the reality of the first qualities (Meillassoux 2008: 3). How is it possible to evaluate the relation between ontology and epistemology while remaining true to the radicalism of the thing in itself?

In confrontation with the manifestation of systemic contradiction, externalized as a relation between facticity and factuality, the subject expressing the necessity of communicational imperative is directed towards neutralizing entity. Herein subsists the radical epistemological withdrawal. the synthesis becomes impossible and the reconciliation with contradiction is inevitable, which reality is founded on the latter impossibility of synthesis. That anxiety *is* what *is*. Thacker proposes the acceptance of the ambivalence of reality, where waiting for the concepts of death or life is too humanistic for the epistemology of reality (Thacker 2013: 90–92). As it was mentioned earlier, the communicational imperative could be realized only through the withdrawal. It is a media mediating between the two poles and altogether negating the possibility of that mediation. Thus it is possible to mediate the unreachable facts of the thing in itself. In this case it was certain how Meillassoux's system was incapable to mediate the real

contradictions. Thacker entitles the latter possibility to mediate what is unreachable as *dark media*. According to him, every act of communication is based on the excommunication. In continuation, it could be noticed that dark media are the effect of excommunication and because every act of communication is determined by excommunication, hence, dark media determine the mediation itself (Thacker 2014: 81). Previously, with the guidance of Thacker's analysis, it was possible to observe how the contradiction between the life and the living, which specifies the principle of life in the vitalistic correlations, is acknowledged. The similar analytics could be simply adapted to other traditions of correlationism. Both Meillassoux and Thacker submit the conceptions of correlationism and its critique, still Thacker's determination of correlationism is more extensive.

One of the main elements which support Meillassoux's issue from the closed circle of correlationism is the assertion of the nonbeing of the principle of sufficient reason (Meillassoux 2008: 53). His opposition to Leibniz allows him to reach the understanding of facticity which lately conducts to the apprehension of the necessity of contingency itself. There is no reason for the being as it is and this assertion of unreason enables Meillassoux to eliminate the correlation as a result of the principle of sufficient reason. Inasmuch the principle of sufficient reason is the ground for the consistency of philosophy the risk to correlationism is essential. The latter Meillassoux's undertaking could appear as radical for its cardinal reconsideration of the first philosophical premises. However, Thacker's position pursues the questioning of the broader ontological myth.

## CONCLUSIONS

By the attempt to apply Thacker's critique of correlation to speculative materialism, it is visible that correlationism here is unavoidable as well. Meillassoux's assertion of the divide between facticity and factuality could be interpreted as a more extensive correlation. The latter inconsistency manifests with the reconsideration of epistemological requirements of the thing in itself formed in the conception of virtuality as a non-totalizing region.

Acceptance of the latter statements validity transfers to the speculation which possibility is grounded on a predicate of the thing in itself to be otherwise. In addition, to affirm the determination of contingency of the thing in itself implies rejection of the divide between thought and being. There the apprehension of contradiction in correlation is opposed to ontological conditions of speculative materialism, while the awareness of excommunication enables one to accept the radical terms of possibility raised by epistemology.

Received 24 July 2017

Accepted 23 November 2017

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## Eugene'o Thackerio negatyvi koreliacijos samprata Quentino Meillassoux spekulatyviojo materializmo atžvilgiu

### *Santrauka*

Straipsnyje analizuojama neseniai pasiūlyta ontologinė daikto savaime mąstymo galimybė. Čia Quentino Meillassoux spekulatyvusis materializmas aiškinamas remiantis Eugene'o Thackerio vitalistinės koreliacijos kritika, kuri priimama kaip platesnis mąstymo siekis transcenduoti save. Ši analizė pateikia Q. Meillassoux projekto optimizmo ribą įvedant tvarką kontingencijos būtinybei, pastebimą susiklosčius epistemologinėms aplinkybėms. Šioje dalyje kontingentiška logika reikalauja galutinio galimybės *būti kitaip* įsisąmoninimo, nepaisančio loginio probabilizmo determinacijos. Straipsnis baigiamas E. Thackerio naujos mediacijos teorijos, grįstos ekskomunikacija (negatyviu komunikacijos aktu) kaip pirmine kiekvienos spekulatyvios prieigos sąlyga, siūlymo paaiškinimu.

**Raktažodžiai:** spekuliacija, koreliacija, vitalizmas, kontingencija, ekskomunikacija