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Original Article

# Myth-science as residual culture and magical thinking

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In two recent essays I have sketched out an idea of myth-science as a 'fictioning' of reality (with its concomitant calling forth of new subjectivities adequate and appropriate to this) and as a kind of libidinal engineering (involving the construction, following Félix Guattari and Jacques Lacan, of new and different 'patheme-matheme' assemblages).<sup>1</sup> In the first of these essays (O'Sullivan, 2017a) I offered up my definition in contra-distinction to 'hyperstition' (as defined by the Centre for Cybernetic Research Unit, 2015); in the second (O'Sullivan, 2015) against an overly rational Prometheanism (especially in its renewed 'accelerationist' form).<sup>2</sup> Here, I want to develop my idea of myth-science in relation to how the past, and especially previous modes of existence, might be utilised as a resource against the impasses of the present (and the production of an increasingly homogenised subject that is attendant on this). This is not from any nostalgic desire to return to an idealized moment (or to dream of 'escape' from the complexities and pressing concerns of today). Neither is it, strictly speaking, to do history. Rather, it is to view the past and present as entwined, with the former a living archive and possible repository of materials

1 The term myth-science is taken from Sun Ra (and Afrofuturism more generally). See Eshun (1988), especially Chapter 9, 'Synthesizing the Omniverse' (154–63). Kelley (1995) links the term more particularly to the fictioning aspect of contemporary art practice, especially in its expanded form.



- 2 In terms of the first of these see the definition of hyperstition (and other writings on it) in Ccru (2015); in terms of the second see the essays collected in the final section of Mackay and Avanesian (2015).
- 3 In terms of theoretical work in this area there is Dinshaw (2012), which specifically foregrounds the work of the amateur medievalist, in particular how this involves a more affective and performative involvement with the past. For a compelling example of a 'theory-fiction' that also explores and experiments with this area (and lays out a convincing argument for a neomedievalism in contemporary art practice especially) see The Confraternity of Neoflagellants (2013).
- 4 Mark Fisher, following Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, develops a similar idea of the survival (broadly construed) that might well provide alternative points of subjectification today, especially when the latter are mobilised in contemporary aesthetic productions.<sup>3</sup>
- The article begins with a brief re-vision of Raymond Williams' writing on hegemony, before going on to offer a commentary on a recently translated extract from Gilbert Simondon's *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* (2011). Throughout, I make some references to other theoretical resources (especially Félix Guattari and Henri Bergson) and, in the sidenotes, draw on a larger archive of writings (especially around magic). My commentary ends with four case studies – one longer look at a work of literature, then three more brief: two from filmic art practice and one from cinema – that exemplify this syncretic attitude and orientation towards the past.
- ### Residual cultures
- In his essay 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory' (1980), Raymond Williams presents a compelling matrix of the contemporary, or, more simply, an account of the way in which any present moment is always already made up of different times. In particular, he writes about how the dominant – and thus effective – culture (or, in Williams' terms, hegemony) is never complete, that there are always 'left overs' from previous hegemonies that might offer alternative and even oppositional cultures ('opposition' here naming the possibility of a challenge to the dominant).<sup>4</sup> Williams calls these kinds of cultures 'residual,' differentiating them from what he calls 'archaic' cultures, which, rather, include those aspects of the past that have been effectively incorporated within the dominant and thus effective culture. Williams mentions religion, rural culture, and monarchy, each of which might have both residual and archaic aspects (although, other than for right-wing Neoreactionaries [more on these below], this last would seem to offer little in terms of alternative or oppositional culture).<sup>5</sup>
- Williams goes on to write about more future-orientated cultures, what he calls 'emergent' – often the expression of a new class, but not necessarily so. The emergent is simply a new area of human activity as yet unrecognized by the dominant (hence its importance, politically speaking). Williams is attuned to what might be called a logic of deconstruction here – that an emergent culture must express itself in terms of the dominant – but he also suggests the importance of a pre-emergent scene. Elsewhere, in a development of the themes of this particular essay, Williams goes one step further (or one step back) suggesting that it might even be a question of what he calls 'structures of feeling' that are, as it were, pre pre-emergent (Williams, 1977). It is within art – literature, in fact – that Williams identifies these new forms, or proto-forms, of



life, and, indeed, it seems clear that aesthetic practice in general is often involved in what we might call this affective register.

I briefly mentioned Neoreaction above, and certainly there is a resonance here with the ‘NRx’ self-definition (or, at least, Nick Land’s definition): as a ‘time-twisted vector that spirals forwards into the past, and backwards into the future’ (Xenosystems, n.d.).<sup>6</sup> Equally clear, however, is that Williams’ thesis is on the Left, which is to say it is progressive rather than reactive. Again, the source of emergent culture is often a new class, and the dominant and effective culture is identified as the Bourgeois ideology of capitalism itself. That said, both Williams and Neoreaction gesture to other times that might be utilised against the present (and, indeed, there is a sense that both identify a hegemonic effective culture, albeit for Williams this is not a Left-oriented ‘Cathedral’ [understood by Neoreactionaries as the broadly left-wing parliamentary-media-academic institution]).<sup>7</sup> For Neoreaction these ‘other times’ also often involve a Science Fiction futurism (a tendency also apparent in Left accelerationism).<sup>8</sup> Williams also writes on Science Fiction elsewhere, and in particular its tendency to privilege technological determinism (it is, we might say, overdetermined by the capitalist mode of production). I have attended more particularly to this in a further essay on myth-science and Science Fiction (O’Sullivan, 2017b), but we might note here Williams’ own idea of a form of utopian writing adequate and appropriate to our time: a fiction of the ‘wasteland’, as Williams calls it, that involves a ‘voluntary deprivation,’ at least for ‘those who have known affluence and known with it social injustice and moral corruption’ (Williams, 1978, 212). I will return to this idea – and to a concrete example of a fiction of the wasteland – towards the end of my article, but we might note here that this utopian impulse to a post-capitalism necessarily echoes aspects of a pre-capitalist past.

## Magical thinking

I want now to deepen this account of the complexity of the present by looking at the Simondon extract I mentioned above. Although from a different intellectual tradition to Williams (broadly, continental philosophy as opposed to British Cultural Studies), Simondon is likewise highly attuned to the residues of the past within the present.<sup>9</sup> At the very beginning of the extract Simondon offers his own temporal matrix in terms of phase shifts between, precisely, different modes of existence. The idea of phase shifts is used so as to move away from any dialectic or idea of simple temporal progression; it also suggests the possible co-existence of different phases as well as their interpenetration and specific points of genesis. In relation to Science Fiction, this particular perspective – of the whole, as it were – also means the

of future-orientated past cultures within the present in terms of a general hauntology (see as indicative, Fisher, 2014).

- 5 I have written more about the possibility of ‘residual subjectivities’ in my book *On the Production of Subjectivity* (2012). There I staged an encounter between Williams’ writings on the residual and emergent with Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988), and more particularly the plateau ‘587 B.C.–A.D. 70: On Several Regimes of Signs’ (111–48), with its laying out of the possibility of a mixed semiotic (and, in relation to the themes of the present article, the possible transportation into the present of a proposition from a previous regime that might then operate as an alternative point for subjectification).

6 In many ways this article is an attempt to reclaim this particular 'time-twisted vector' away from the Right and, in particular, from Neoreactionaries.

7 The thesis on and against Cathedral is laid out in detail in Land's series of essays on 'The Dark Enlightenment' (n.d.).

8 See, for example, Srnicek and Williams (2015) and Laboria Cuboniks (n.d.).

9 In fact, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* is written against a certain ideological hangover from the past that views the technical as distinct (and inferior) to culture. Simondon's aim, in this sense, is to explain technical consciousness and, indeed, gesture towards its future possibilities. My own article reads Simondon (or at least the extract in question) somewhat against the grain in so far

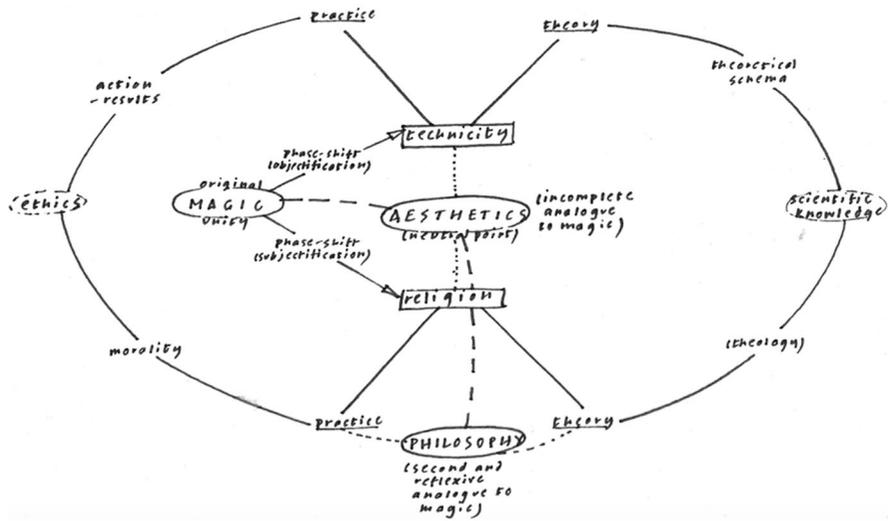


Figure 1: Diagram of Gilbert Simondon's modes of existence to highlight connections between magic, aesthetics and philosophy.

Simondon extract reads like a kind of report on human consciousness from a transhuman (or even alien) point of view.<sup>10</sup>

To very briefly reconstruct Simondon's argument: the original mode of existence of primitive humans was one of magical unity. This was a state before any subject-object split and before any concomitant division into religion and what Simondon calls technicity. For Simondon, aesthetics is a kind of future-orientated reminder of this originary unity:

We suppose that technicity results from a phase-shift of a central, original and unique mode of being in the world, the magical mode; the phase that balances technicity is the religious mode of being. Aesthetic thinking emerges at the neutral point between technics and religion, at the moment of the division of primitive magical unity: this is not a phase but, rather, a permanent reminder of the rupture of the unity of the magical mode of being and a search for a future unity. (Simondon, 2011, 408)

In fact, things are more complex than this, with the two modes – technicity and religion – split further into theoretical and practical aspects. The distance between the two theoretical aspects characterises scientific knowledge, the distance between the two practical aspects characterises ethics, or 'ethical thinking' (these divisions are themselves divided, with morality and theology representing the practical and theoretical aspects of religion, and action-results and theoretical schema representing the practice and theory aspects of technicity). We might diagram this constellation of different modes and phases as in Figure 1.



As well as the various circuits and relays, the diagram foregrounds the connection – or resonance – between magical thinking (arising from the originary unity) and aesthetics (the neutral point). Again, as Simondon remarks: ‘aesthetic thinking is truly situated at the neutral point, extending the existence of magic’ (Simondon, 2011, 408). In fact, Simondon also mentions philosophy here that, as it were, apprehends the totality (in order to ‘redress and refine the successive waves of genesis’) and, as such, philosophy is ‘inserted between theoretical thinking and practical thinking in the extension of aesthetic thinking and of the original magical unity’ (Simondon, 2011, 409). As I mentioned above, Simondon’s own writing has this philosophical character (a kind of view from the outside).

For Simondon magical thinking, as mode of existence, involves a unity of human and world, but also involves its own particular organization: figure/ground relations which structure the very milieu of living beings. It is this originary figure/ground relation that is then isolated and fragmented in the shift away from magic. Figure is abstracted and cut off from its ground, just as the ground itself is ‘freed’ from its relation to any specific figure. This is then an objectification resulting, ultimately, in technical objects (that can be manipulated) and a subjectification that results in religious mediators (and, ultimately, the subject).

There is more to be said about how religious mediators (and religion more generally) actually produce this subject,<sup>11</sup> and, indeed, about the whole co-dependent relation of technicity and religion (insofar as they are two halves of a whole), but here I want to go further into the definition of the prior ‘primitive magical unity’ which, as Simondon suggests, is ‘the vital relational link between man and the world’ (Simondon, 2011, 411), in order to see if something remains of it which might, in Williams’ terms, offer up an alternative to a more dominant and effective technical-religious mode of existence.<sup>12</sup> Put bluntly, is magical thinking residual?

Simondon suggests that the magical mode (again the ‘fundamental structuring of the milieu of a living being’) involves ‘the birth of a network of privileged points of exchange between the being and the milieu’ (Simondon, 2011, 412). This is the figure-ground relation I mentioned above in which certain points are foregrounded from a background. To quote Simondon:

A privileged place, a place that has a power, is one which draws into itself all the force and efficacy of the domain it delimits; it summarises and contains the force of a compact mass of reality; it summarises and governs it, as a highland governs and dominates a lowland; the elevated peak is the lord of the mountain, just as the most impenetrable part of the wood is where all its reality resides. The magical world is in this way made of a network of places and things that have a power and are bound to other things and other places that also have a power. Such a path, such an

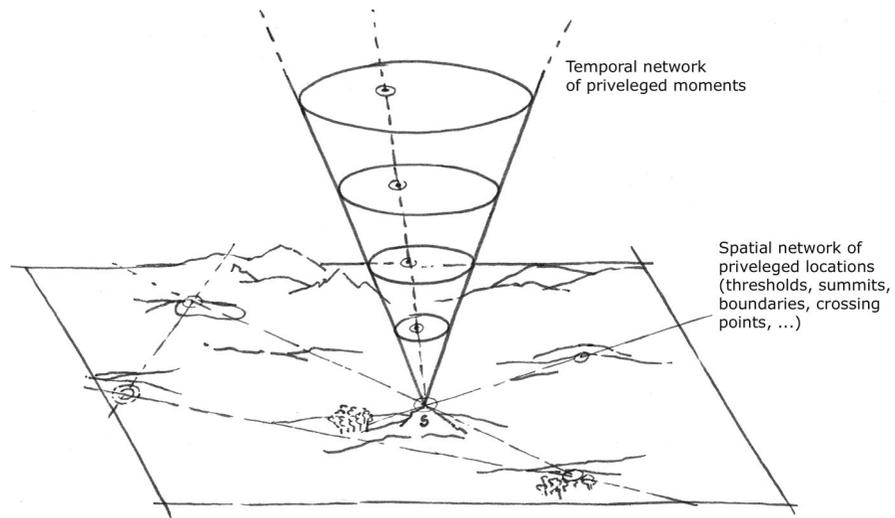
as I am interested in the resistant and oppositional quality of a pre-technical mode of existence that might exist alongside the technical (and, indeed, resonate with a mode yet to come).

10 Comparable, for example, to that found in Doris Lessing’s pentalogy of novels *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (1979–1982).

11 See Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of the white face of Christ in ‘Year Zero: Faciality’ (1988, 167–91) and my own discussion of alternative modes of subjectivation (O’Sullivan, 2006).

12 It is worth highlighting here that other definition of magic as a ‘regression in thought,’ as Adorno and Horkheimer understood it, and, as such, a form of thinking that is pre-capitalist, but

also subsumed by late capitalist forms (Williams' term 'archaic' would also be relevant here) (see Adorno and Horkheimer, 1969).



**Figure 2:** Diagram of magical structure (following Henri Bergson) to highlight connections between privilege points in space and time.

enclosure, such a temenos contains all the force of the land, and is the key-point of the reality and of the spontaneity of things, as well as of their accessibility. (Simondon, 2011, 412)

For Simondon, these key points of exchange and communication between human and world can be characterised as knots in which there is an unmediated relation – or point of passage – between two realities. Again, as Simondon remarks: ‘The magical universe is made up of the network of places providing access to every domain of reality: it consists of thresholds, summits, boundaries and crossing points that are connected to one another by their singularity and their exceptional nature’ (Simondon, 2011, 414).<sup>13</sup>

This magical landscape is doubled by a similar reticulation in time. Privileged locations are accompanied by privileged moments – specific dates – on which it is auspicious to act, or to begin an action (and, in both these cases, we can clearly see the influence on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* – not least on its novel structure with specifically dated plateaus). Indeed, these notable dates are linked back through time in a temporal topography that doubles the spatial one. In a nod to Henri Bergson and his own diagramming of the relationship of the past to the present in *Matter and Memory* (Bergson, 2004, 133–78), we could perhaps diagram this magical structure as in Figure 2.

Festivals (and rituals more broadly) performed at a specific time and place mark – and enact – a privileged link between these key points (see point S in Figure 2).<sup>14</sup> They are the special kinds of space–time foregrounded out of the

13 In terms of Europe, the seminal text on these privileged points and their lines of connection is Watkins (1974).

14 See also Deleuze’s discussion of the repetition of festivals at the very beginning of Deleuze (1994).



more ordinary and mundane. Following Bergson we might also suggest that a suspension of habit is important here (again, at point S): a hesitation, or pause – a ‘stopping of the world’ – that allows other times to be ‘accessed’ (the past has not gone anywhere in Bergson’s thesis – it subsists – albeit it tends to be occluded by habit and utilitarian interests).<sup>15</sup> Simondon suggests that with vacations we might have a version (if a watered down one) of this desire for privileged points (a specific time to journey to the city for the countryside dweller – or to the countryside for the city dweller).

Once again, the shift from this magical unity and structure involves these key points becoming detached from their ground – hence technical objects which retain ‘only their functionary mediatory characteristics, becoming instrumental, mobile, capable of efficiency in any place and at any time’ (Simondon, 2011, 415).<sup>16</sup> At the same time the characteristics of the ground itself become detached, able now to ‘hover over the whole universe, throughout space and throughout time, in the form of detached powers and forces above the world’ (Simondon, 2011, 415). Once more, this is the splitting of magical unity into two subsequent modes of existence: technicity and religion (returning to our Bergsonian cone, we might say that point S becomes unfixed, mobile – detaching itself from the ground, just as the circular base of the cone itself expands to cover the universe). Simondon suggests that this very split gestures towards a further ideal unity, a new meeting of science and religion, though in his argument this remains merely a tendency.

For myself, to be clear, myth-science does not name this tendency as such (the oft mooted marriage of science and religion), nor does it call for any simple return to an originary unity. Rather, it can be equated with an aesthetics which, again, ‘emerges at the neutral point between technics and religion’ (Simondon, 2011, 408). This is a point which reminds us of a previous magical unity but also suggests an extension of it, a new phase yet-to-come. (In terms of my cone diagram, aesthetics might also be a name for the pause – or hesitation – in and of the reactive sensory-motor apparatus, a break in habit which allows ‘access’ to other planes of existence.) This neutral point from which aesthetics develops also resonates with what Simondon suggests is a second ‘reflexive analogue’ to magic, namely philosophy, when the latter is understood as an attempt to grasp the whole phase-space and to intuitively follow the different modes beyond what is immediately apparent. Myth-science might then be characterised as both an intuitive perspective of the whole and a kind of future-orientated pre-modernism (itself ‘actualised’ through a stopping of the world). Or, more simply, a form of magical aesthetics.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of this latter point, we might note in passing Guattari’s own thesis on the new aesthetic paradigm and on a third ‘processual’ assemblage of the production of subjectivity. The latter involves a mediated return (at least of sorts) to a first pre-capitalist and transpersonal assemblage, one that is marked by its passage through our own capitalist assemblage with its reduction and

15 See also my ‘A Diagram of the Finite–Infinite Relation’ (O’Sullivan, 2013).

16 It is worth noting a key issue here – that of the differences between Simondon’s idea of magical unity as prior mode of existence (that itself involves magical thinking) and the more typical understanding of magical causality operative in the practices of magic. In *The Golden Bough*, Frazer suggests two ways in which such a ‘manipulation’ of nature might be achieved: by a law of similarity and one of contact (1957, 16). The term ‘sympathetic magic’ brings these two laws together.

17 Dixon (2015) develops a convincing and compelling thesis on what he calls ‘magical aesthetics’ (through recourse to Simondon, Guattari, and the concept



of animism) and relates it especially successfully to the expanded art practice of Mark Leckey.

18 This formulation of a 'folding-in' of transcendence is my own take on Guattari. For a more detailed discussion of the latter, and of the three assemblages more generally, see O'Sullivan (2012, 89–123).

19 Erik Davies in his chapter on 'The Spiritual Cyborg' (1988, 129–63) makes a compelling case for understanding Scientology as a very particular modern and technological religion (or spiritual Prometheism, as he calls it). Dianetics – 'the modern science of modern health' that is the Church's 'Tech' – involves an application of Norbert Wiener's 'new' cybernetic theory to the mind, as well as the use of technical machines in its

standardisation of subjectivity (not least through transcendent enunciators). The third assemblage involves a kind of folding-in of transcendence so as to produce autopoietic nuclei around which a different subjectivity might crystallise.<sup>18</sup> In fact, in many ways Guattari's three assemblages are analogous to Simondon's phase shifts in so far as they are not, strictly speaking, to do with a linear progression, but might well coexist (as in the hyper-modern, but also animist, culture of Japan). The role of aesthetics – as a neutral point/future-reminder of unity and as a point around which a different subjectivity might coalesce – is also remarkably similar.

To return to Simondon, the phase shift from magic then produces the first objects and subjects and with that the beginnings of the modern world:

This phase-shift of the mediation into figural characteristics and ground characteristics translates into the emergence of a distance between man and world. The mediation itself instead of being a simple structuring of the universe, takes on a certain density; it becomes objectified in technics and becomes subjectified in religion, making the first object appear in the technical object and the first subject appear in divinity. (Simondon, 2011, 415)

In both technical and religious modes, then, the individual is distanced from the world, always less than the original unity, or totality, that, in some senses, preceded them (and, indeed, their very formation as individual). In religion 'particular being is understood in relation to a totality in which it participates, but which it can never completely express' (Simondon, 2011, 419). Here, the individual is, as it were, cut off from the infinite of which it is a part (a curtain has been drawn between man and his world). In technicity there is always a lack of 'absolute adequacy' to the world insofar as the technical object 'is localized, particularized,' and, as such, for Simondon, 'adding technical objects one to another can neither remake the world nor regain contact with the world in its unity' (Simondon, 2011, 421). Ultimately, religion affixes the powers of the ground to various personifications of the divine and sacred, and, eventually, the figure of the priest (with his or her subjects) arises as privileged mediator. In technicity mediation is provided by the technical object.

It is in this sense, for Simondon, that both technicity and religion are the heirs of magic – not degraded forms but two tendencies abstracted from an original unity. Although Simondon does not address this, it seems to me that this might also account (at least in part) for the reason that advanced technology, alongside the very primitive, can seem magical, just as the older a religion the more it takes on a magical character (one thinks specifically of non-monotheistic religions such as paganism). In a more speculative vein we might also ask whether there is such a thing as an 'advanced' form of religion (in a form different to dominant monotheistic ones)? Might this also appear magical in some sense (or, at least, not necessarily about mirroring and securing a centered and cohesive [or facialised] subject)?<sup>19</sup> Myth-science, to return to my brief definition above,



might be a name for those practices that attend to the connections between primitive and advanced technology alongside pre- and postmodern religion: a Science Fiction paganism perhaps?<sup>20</sup>

Is it also the case that advanced technicity might in and of itself produce a different mode of existence beyond a more typical alienated one (for example, the advanced operations of neuroscience producing the transparent in-the-world-ness of the nemo-centric subject or ‘subjectivism without self’)?<sup>21</sup> In relation to this, and in another recently translated extract – ‘Technical Mentality’ – Simondon suggests that technicity ‘has not yet properly emerged’ and thus to judge it in its partly complete form is to miscomprehend it (Simondon, 2012, 1–15). For Simondon, in this essay: ‘If one seeks the sign of the perfection of the technical mentality, one can unite in a single criterion the manifestation of cognitive schemas, affective modalities and norms of action: that of the *opening*’ (Simondon, 2012, 14). He continues: ‘Technical reality lends itself remarkably well to being continued, completed, perfected, extended. In this sense, an extension of the technical mentality is possible, and begins to manifest itself in the domain of the fine arts in particular’ (Simondon mentions the modular architecture of le Corbusier as case in point here) (Simondon, 2012, 14). Technicity’s lack of unity – its fundamental character as alienated mode of existence – is, in this sense, productive, creative, and always future-orientated.

In terms of this future, Simondon suggests that the open character of technical reality is also manifest in a ‘virtual network’ to come (a ‘multifunctional network that marks the key points of the geographical and human world’) (Simondon, 2012, 9). There is a profound resonance with the magical structuring of the universe here (the privileged points) – as there is also in the way in which technicity, ultimately, involves an ‘appeal to forces that *do not depend on the human being*’ (Simondon, 2012, 15, n. 5). This is the discovery and harnessing of the ‘infinite reserve’ of nature. In the same footnote from where the above quote is taken, Simondon also gestures to certain activities – ‘agriculture, nursing and navigation with sails’ – that might also be seen as industrial insofar as they involve a relation to these non-human forces, albeit not, strictly speaking, their manipulation. In fact, ‘*they commodulate the human operation of preparation and the cosmological action*’ (Simondon, 2012, 15, n. 5). We might note Deleuze and Guattari’s own writings on industry here, and especially the emergence of metallurgy with its nomadic smiths (Simondon himself suggests metallurgy as the first industry).<sup>22</sup> Technicity (if this is the right name for this particular mode of existence) is, in this sense, not a domination of nature by man, but involves a tracking of the singularities present in nature. Indeed, as Simondon remarks, these kinds of operation can ‘give rise to a *magico-religious thinking*’ (Simondon, 2012, 15, n. 5).

That said, this thinking is still, clearly, the result of an alienation from the world. Technical mentality in general cannot overcome this alienation insofar as it is the progenitor of it. This also implies – as I mentioned above – that technical

therapeutic practices (and in this sense of mobilising technicity alongside an understanding of the fiction of a self, Scientology might itself be described as a form of myth-science).

20 In relation to this, see Sames (2014).

21 See Brassier (2011).

22 See Deleuze and Guattari, ‘1227: Treatise on Nomadology: – The War Machine’ (1988, 351–423).



objects themselves (and science more generally) are not enough to remake the world insofar as technicity itself is just one half of a prior phase (and a prior unity). Simondon's thesis implies a limit to the Promethean impulse – to 'remake the world' – in this sense (for example as laid out by both Ray Brassier and Reza Negarestani), or, put differently, there is, in Simondon's writings a sanctity of the given over the made.<sup>23</sup>

23 See also my essay 'Accelerationism, Prometheanism and Mythotechnesis' (O'Sullivan, 2015).

In fact, to return to the extract from *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, Simondon suggests that technicity can only ever attend to the how of things and not the why. It certainly provides knowledge, but one that is inevitably piecemeal, lacking any overview. Or, in Simondon's words: 'The application of schemas drawn from technics does not account for the existence of the totality, taken as a unity, but does account for the point by point and instant by instant functioning of that totality' (Simondon, 2011, 422). Technicity, in this sense, is characterised by induction, defined as any process whose 'content is inferior to the status of unity, if it strives to attain unity or, at least, it if tends towards unity from a plurality of elements, each of which is inferior to unity' (Simondon, 2011, 423). Induction, ultimately the method of any reason-based Prometheanism, is forward moving and productive, but always blind in this sense.

24 In terms of a practice – or mode of existence – that involves these impersonal affects, or becomings, Deleuze and Guattari invoke (and themselves identify with) sorcerers. For more detail on this particular idea of magic – as involving inhuman transformation – see the three 'Memories of a Sorcerer' sections of the Becoming plateau of Deleuze and Guattari (1988, 239–252) and also my own commentary on these (O'Sullivan, 2017c).

Any ethics that develops from this technicity (for example, 'to want the whole duration of life to be a series of moments, to extract from each situation what is pleasant in it, and to want to construct the happiness of life by accumulating its agreeable element') also falls short of unity (Simondon, 2011, 423). Further, for Simondon, it invariably involves the denigration – even elimination – of the passions 'since they cannot be treated as elements; they are larger than the unity of the subject; they dominate it; they come from farther away than it and tend to go farther on than it, obliging it to exceed its limits' (Simondon, 2011, 423). Conversely any morality developed from religion derives its significance from a totality with which the subject does not coincide (the subject is always forsaken in this sense).

We might note, again, a resonance with Bergson here and with the idea of duration as an intensive multiplicity that cannot be divided (and, indeed, can only be intuited). We might also note a further resonance with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of an impersonal affect that takes the subject out of themselves.<sup>24</sup> When the latter is organized – structured, as Williams might say – we have aesthetic productions (compositions of affect). In terms of my comments above, we might say that art is that privileged point that produces a shift or gap, a passage to other Universes of reference (or, indeed, to the infinite whole). In terms of ethics, we might note a further resonance with Spinoza and with the idea (contra typical religious thinking) of a finite–infinite continuum that the subject can traverse (the programme of *The Ethics*). We might also note once more Guattari's new aesthetic paradigm which names, precisely, an ethico-



aesthetics different from more typical techno-scientific thinking, and, indeed, different from any ethics derived from transcendent enunciators (which is to say, any ethics that treats life as an object). For Guattari, as for Deleuze and Guattari, art points the way to this other non-technical mode of existence.

## Case studies

i. *Riddley Walker*. In Russell Hoban's post-apocalyptic novel *Riddley Walker* (1980) – a fiction of the wasteland if ever there was one – there is a mixing, or syncretism, of the magical and technical modes of existence insofar as the story is about a future in which technicity has receded (following a crisis) and thus all sorts of other practices and ways of thinking come into play. These do include the technical, especially when this is pre-industrial (there is, for example, the excavation – with shovels and pulley systems – of 'past' machinery), but also various proto-religious practices (such as the Eusa show, a strange kind of divinatory Punch and Judy) and, towards the end of the novel, practices and scenarios that could only be described as magical (these are the various visions and supernatural happenings at 'Cambry,' or the city of Canterbury).

In terms of a magical structuring of the world, *Riddley Walker* is also organized around the central point – and pilgrimage to – Cambry (following *The Canterbury Tales*) and, indeed, the book as a whole might be said to be organised around passages and thresholds, privileged times and locations (such as the 'hart of the wood'). There is also, again, the question of the Eusa show (and, more generally, of storytelling as fabulation) with its involvement of 'real' human intercessors (that ask the puppets questions) in a kind of sympathetic and incantory magic. The Eusa show is certainly a residual culture (in fact, in Riddley's world it operates as a kind of doubled residual culture insofar as it is a throwback to an earlier time [for Riddley], but also, even then [in our time as it were], it is a remnant of a previous culture), but, for the reader, the Eusa show is also a story within a story (Riddley's own telling of his tale) that is itself 'within' Hoban's novel. This nesting of fictions produces what might be called a fictioning of reality (or, simply, a self-reflexive questioning of our own 'reality' as perhaps just one more fiction). We might diagram this nesting of fictions as in Figure 3.

A complicating factor here is that the Eusa show, the innermost circuit, also provides a kind of divinatory knowledge in and of Riddley's world. The Eusa show, this 'story within a story,' allows an exiting and passage to a larger circuit. Indeed, this is the role of fiction in *Riddley Walker* and of *Riddley Walker* as fiction: *Riddley Walker* is for us what the Eusa show is for Riddley.

But *Riddley Walker* is also an aesthetic work itself, constructing its narrative, characters, and startling images through language. The very particular use (and abuse) of syntax involves a crude, comical (and contemporary) idea of

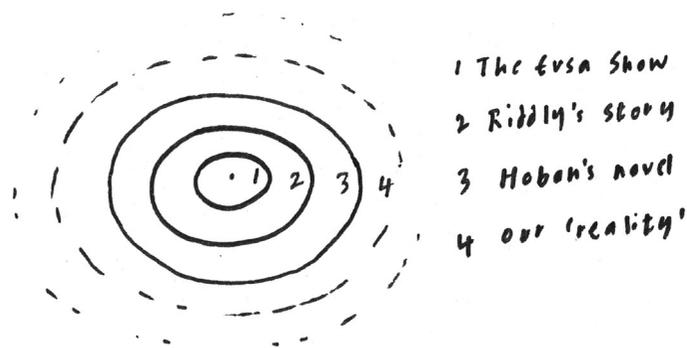


Figure 3: Diagram to show nesting of fictions in *Riddley Walker*.

premodern speech, but there are also remnants of the modern and, indeed, constructions that gesture forwards to a language yet to come. In fact, ultimately, it is this strange future-past syntax that produces a very particular scene – or structure of feeling, to use Williams’ term. Like a Burroughs or a Ballard, the book is an embodiment of a different kind of consciousness: a fragment of another world thrown backwards/forwards into our own time (it is not simply about another place, but from it). It is also a text that needs to be performed in this sense (or, at least, the reading of it requires a certain effort). To quote an indicative passage:

Eusa come up then slow and scanful like all ways terning his woodin head this way and that and his paintit eyes taking us all in in. Many and manys the time Id lookit back at the staring blue eyes. Since back befor I cud member it even. Only this time it seamt like the 1st time I wer seeing him and I wer afear of him. The way he kept terning his head it made me think of that thing with no name looking out thru our eye hoals. (Hoban 1980, 46)

25 Hence, ultimately, the difference between fiction (and art more generally) and philosophy: the first is on the ground as it were, from the point of view of an embodied subject (albeit imagined); the second is more abstract – a disembodied view from above.

In this sense, the book is about a form of aesthetic thinking (insofar as this is a reminder of, and incomplete analogue to, magic) but is also a form of aesthetic thinking itself. In terms of some of my comments above, we might also say that it stops the world (as this is habitually understood), not least in the way its syntax calls for an alteration of our speeds (of typical ‘communication’). Fiction operates here to point to something ‘outside’ technicity and religion (again, it operates at and as the neutral point). In Simondon’s terms, *Riddley Walker* is also about the different phase shifts of different modes of existence – their co-dependence and inter-penetration, as well as their specific points of genesis (and also their de- and then re-genesis). It is also about the living of this complex temporality.<sup>25</sup> The novel portrays a broken world, bleak and dystopian, but also



harbours a strange joy and affirmation (not least that of Riddley himself) of a future which, for us, is yet to come.

In Williams' terms, the book is then clearly about the survival of residual culture (and the relation of this to more archaic aspects that also survive). But these survivals are also themselves nested in a strange manner. The residual culture is mainly from a further back past (a pre-modern and pre-industrial time), with the more recent past (the modern age that brought about the unnamed catastrophe) operating as a trauma event which has been passed over (and which survives only in a kind of occult knowledge – and in terms of archaeological relics). In fact, this event is clearly connected to the atomic, that apotheosis of a certain kind of scientific mentality (if not the apex of technicity itself). This strange temporality is itself doubled insofar as the actual present of *Riddley Walker* is our own imagined future with the threat of human produced catastrophe (the novel is of its time in this sense – in terms of the omnipresent fear of nuclear holocaust that haunted the 1970s – but, read today, it is also highly prescient in terms of the fears and anxieties of the Anthropocene). The power of *Riddley Walker*, it seems to me, is in part about the nesting of these different times that accompanies the nesting of fictions I mentioned above (and which itself includes a mixing of residual, dominant and emergent cultures). This syncretism of times and phases – the co-presence of different futures and pasts within the present – is an example of what I have been attempting to define as myth-science.

ii. *Journey to Avebury*. In terms of Simondon's magical structuring of the universe, Derek Jarman's film *Journey to Avebury* (1971) focuses on a certain privileged point (or threshold) but also, like *Riddley Walker*, on a journey – or pilgrimage – across a sacred landscape. Indeed, although Simondon does not address this, it seems to me that standing stones and henges, such as the one at Avebury in Wiltshire, are markers of the key points of the magical mode of existence; or, at least, they are on the cusp between this magical unity and the new technical mode of being to come (the stones are static place markers, but they have also been moved – and often otherwise manipulated – by humans). They are also, of course, visible reminders – or themselves residues – of the pre-historical within the contemporary, markers that subsist in space and through time.<sup>26</sup>

Jarman's film is then a modern work about a pre-modern site. It evidences the co-presence of our own technical mode of existence with a prior magical one in both its subject, Avebury, and in the subjectivity of its auteur, Jarman himself. But it is also, again, specifically an aesthetic work. As such, we might say it is 'about' a magical mode of existence, but also, as art work, a future calling to a different mode of existence (one that resonates with the pre-technical). In Williams' terms the power of the film – that doubles the power of the stones themselves – arises from mobilising a certain residuality (the survival of a kind of paganism in the present), achieved through a specific composition of affect – or

26 For a compelling art historical account of the resonances between standing stones – and prehistoric objects and images more generally – with contemporary art, see Lippard (1983). For a more recent account of modern and contemporary art's connection and resonances with the past, see Bracewell et al. (2009).



27 The soundtrack by Coil also contributes to the affect of the film (Coil were also themselves interested and involved in magical practice). For a different fiction – that produces a different structure of feeling – in relation to pilgrimages to standing stones, see Home (2002).

28 See Mellor (2012).

structure of feeling<sup>27</sup>. Paradoxically, the film is also only possible because of a technical object: the camera. Magical thinking precedes technicity but, here, technicity itself begets aesthetic thinking, which in turn operates as a reminder and an extension of magic.

iii. *Castlerigg*. In Bruce Lacey's film *Castlerigg* (1981), we find similar themes to those above in relation to stone circles, their residual power and aesthetic thinking. The film – which records a visit to Castlerigg in Cumbria in the UK – conjures a very specific affective scene, produced, in part, by its analogue nature (especially for a contemporary viewer immersed in the digital), by the weather and other atmospherics of the site that the film captures, and, crucially by the point of view it provides (the handheld camera, the selection of certain shots). Especially interesting in this respect is the time-lapse photography: the technology itself allows us to 'see' a different world beyond the habitual and typical, allowing a mode of perception (and thus gesturing to a mode existence) beyond the human.

There is also the figure of Lacey himself performing a ritual of sorts at the stones (Lacey's other films more explicitly involve him re-animating, but also re-inventing these pre-modern rituals). Lacey demonstrates the importance of participation when it comes to residual culture (it is partly this that gives the latter its oppositional character, as opposed to our dominant culture of passive spectatorship); but he also operates as a kind of residual subjectivity in and of himself, one that was part of the larger counter cultural 'movement' of the 1960s and '70s that turned away from industrialisation and a more typical techno-scientific paradigm. Indeed, Lacey was attuned to the specific problems of modernity and, especially, to the increasingly pressing ecological issues of the late twentieth century. He was also interested, especially earlier on in his career, in a kind of future-orientation, in Science Fictions and other cosmic dramas which, again, were performed and enacted.<sup>28</sup> Lacey, we might say, was a myth-science practitioner in this sense, a pre-industrial post-modern figure – one attuned to residual culture and magical thinking but also to future cultures and fictions of a world to come.

iv. *The Wicker Man*. My final case study is *The Wicker Man*, a feature film about the encounter of a modern individual (a Christian policeman) with a pre-modern, pagan world (Hardy, 1973). On Summerisle (where the film is set) a past culture survives and is operational in the present, but also offers various alternatives to it (with aspects that are both residual and archaic). Indeed, this is the fascination of the film: besides the compelling and macabre storyline, it shows a modern working and integrated pagan society, complete with alternative school lessons and village rituals. The film, in part, is about a clash between transcendent enunciators (the law, Christianity) and a culture of immanence with its focus on magical thinking. The horror, but also joy, arises from the inadequacies (and ultimate irrelevance) of the transcendent enunciators in a culture which is, in this sense, irreligious and lawless. Indeed, the pagan



Figure 4: Still from *The Wicker Man* (courtesy of STUDIOCANAL Films Ltd.).

culture – with its liberated notion of sexuality and its respectful participation in and with the natural world – comes over less as an aberration than as the successful imagining of an alternative mode of existence.

In one particular scene of the film the idea of the festival – in this case the Maypole dance – exemplifies this magical mode of existence and especially the idea of key points existing in space and time (see Figure 4).<sup>29</sup> The dance is a repetition of all previous dances as well as an echo forwards to those dances yet to come. It is also specifically communal and participatory. In the film it stands out as an especially important moment, not least in the protagonist's realisation that there is something not quite right about life on the island (the dance is accompanied by a song about fertility and a heretical parthenogenesis).

The film also evidences the link I made above between a pre-modernism and a 1960s and 70s counter-culture, a time in which new and alternative subjectivities were being produced and experimented with. Immanence was, we might say, being activated. The power of the film comes from this nesting of different times, a co-existence of different modes of existence – and, especially, the affirmation of something, simply, different (including a different form of consciousness).<sup>30</sup> This temporal syncretism – that is never less than convincing – means the film itself offers up a different world (it is not simply about a return to the past). In fact, as with the above case studies this is achieved as much through the form of the film – its aesthetic composition – as through its manifest content. It is especially the colours and sounds – the songs in particular – that produce a kind of Spinozist joy, and, indeed, transport the viewer to a different space–time.

29 I attend further to the Maypole – and its dance – as an alternative point of subjectification in my article, written with Ola Ståhl, 'Contours and Case Studies for a Dissenting Subjectivity' (O'Sullivan and Ståhl, 2006).

30 For another example of this nesting of the future within the past, this time from the 1920s, see the Kibbo Kift whose look, practices, and ideas involved a particular combination of the pre-industrial and aspects of the modern in their experimental exploration of another mode of being (for an analysis of the Kibbo Kift along these lines see Plastique Fantastique's review article on this 'movement', 2016).



Might myth-science also be a name for these kinds of future-past fictions that offer up – almost as side effect – different affective scenes and potential modellings for a subjectivity increasingly hemmed in by neoliberalism?

## About the Author

Simon O'Sullivan is Professor of Art Theory and Practice in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has published two monographs with Palgrave, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (2005) and *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite–Infinite Relation* (2012), and is Co-editor (with Henriette Gunkel and Ayesha Hameed) of *Futures and Fictions* (Repeater 1017). He also makes art, with David Burrows and others, under the name *Plastique Fantastique*, and is currently working on a collaborative volume of writings, with Burrows, on *Fictioning: Mythopoesis/Myth-Science/Mythotechnesis* (E-mail: s.o'sullivan@gold.ac.uk).

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