

Creativity and The Ontology of Not-yet Being

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This chapter aims to explore the transitional moment at which something new comes into existence, something that was not yet there before. What do we see if we place ourselves on this open frontier of the world? We might call this moment the actualization of creativity. It is not so easy to formulate a clear account of what goes on at the brink of not-yet-being. In prevalent modal ontologies, that is ontological theories that seek to give an account of various modes of being, among which not-yet-being as a form of possible being, the creative moment is often overlooked. But in the philosophy of Ernst Bloch, who self-consciously developed an ontology of not-yet-being we find useful starting points for the development of categories that can help us to articulate this dynamic dimension of what is not yet but might be. In the second half of the chapter Bloch's account will be augmented by a consideration of David Bohm's analysis of creativity and the overcoming of fragmentation. Both thinkers stretch language beyond its normal, everyday contexts to express what is involved in creative advance as a connection of individual existence to a wider horizon. The implications for the humanities of these somewhat exotic ontologies of the future as not-yet-being, ontologies that seek to articulate a ubiquitous feature of the real that

nevertheless is often ignored, are explored in a discussion of Mikhail Epstein's conception of the humanities as transformative disciplines.

The Ontology of Not-yet Being in the Philosophy of Ernst Bloch

The ontology of not-yet being is a central element in the philosophy of Ernst Bloch (1885–1977). Bloch develops an interpretation of those aspects of being that exhibit a tendency, and hence a propensity to change or process, that is not random but has a certain direction. Bloch's philosophy is unique for locating the question of futurity, in the sense of reality having a future (in whichever way this is to be understood), at the level of ontology as the theory of being qua being, and much can be learned today from considering it. While his thoughts on this topic are scattered throughout his publications (from the 1918 edition of *Geist der Utopie* to the 1978 essay collection *Tendenz-Latenz-Utopie*, his final publication, which appeared shortly after his death) a particularly central statement of it can be found in the *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie*, the text of the lectures on philosophy that Bloch delivered in the University of Tübingen between 1961 and 1970.¹

¹ Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie, Faksimile der Erstausgabe 1918* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977); Ernst Bloch, *Tendenz-Latenz-Utopie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978); Ernst Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970). In this last book, part VI, 'Logikum/zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-Seins' (210–300) is devoted to the

Bloch's ontology of not-yet being is a strong theory of futurity. By this I mean that tendency at the ontological level is not conceived as following a predetermined course, as for example in Aristotle's notion of *entelecheia*, but that there is crucially space for a creative dimension to tendency. While the ontology of not-yet being conceptualizes goal-directedness, it is not a teleology in the classical sense of the word. The goal of process is created in its unfolding, while at the same time there is a goal-directedness which is more than merely formal. We can easily see that this creates a tension in the theory and places it uncomfortably between deterministic ontology (including the determinism of final causality) and radical indeterminism. Yet Bloch insists that both of these alternatives state too much and hence say too little. The aim of the ontology of not-yet being is to occupy this uncomfortable space in which futurity can be conceived of as *unfertige Welt*—world that is not yet finished. The claim of the strong theory has to be taken seriously: not-yet being points to a dimension of being that is indeterminate, which is a mid-point between fully circumscribed and entirely open or absent. Mostly we tend to think of our understanding, or our awareness, as perhaps incomplete or vague, oriented

ontology of not-yet being. This part of the book has its origins in a manuscript from the 1930s which was published in an annotated edition by Gerardo Cunico: Ernst Bloch, *Logos der Materie*, ed. Gerardo Cunico (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000). A partial translation of the *Tübinger Einleitung* was published in 1970: Ernst Bloch, *A Philosophy of the Future*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

towards a fullness of understanding that we may never achieve. In Bloch's ontology, this incompleteness pervades reality itself and the ontology of not-yet being has its aim to develop an adequate understanding of it. This aim puts certain requirements on the form of the theory and the language in which is it expressed, which remove it from many of the standard assumptions about how philosophical thinking proceeds and expresses itself. If we want to be adequate in what we say, we cannot expect more clarity than the topic allows. Also we cannot hope for finality of statement when we talk about not-yet being. This circumstance partly explains the difficult reception of Bloch's philosophy. We cannot speak in 'finished' language of an unfinished world. On the contrary, the denial of the proper requirements placed on thinking futurity in Bloch's sense has, according to Bloch, been part of philosophy since its beginnings. It is the basis of reifying consciousness, a denial of the future masquerading as a commitment to the—no more than basic and no less than indispensable—requirements of clarity and logical precision. If philosophy is the struggle against, and with, bad philosophy, it is at this point that we encounter the heart of the philosophical relevance of the ontology of not-yet being. Not only is it an attempt to conceptualize creative development, it also embodies a view of philosophy as the critique of abstractions, reifications, and ideology. The question where the propensity to reification comes from connects Bloch's thinking both to German Idealism and to Schopenhauer, who had a great

influence on Bloch. It is a matter of the will more than of the intellect. One dimension of philosophy is therefore a critique of the will for certainty and final truths, the continuous practice of overcoming reification and reconnecting the mind back to process, rather than the attempt to eradicate it once and for all. Philosophy is a second-order, or reflective, if not corrective, activity. This is philosophy as *docta spes*, learned hope.

In our awareness of ourselves we can most easily encounter not-yet being. In the opening section of Part VI of the *Tübinger Einleitung*, Bloch leads his reader to this encounter. In the process he also tries to change our relation to the language we move in, so as to prepare us for an understanding of the ontological account that will follow and that makes up the main part of the ontology of not-yet being. It will be instructive to look more closely at this methodological entry into the ontology of not-yet being:

Where does it start? Thinking has to start where. This ‘where’ changed, sometimes the start was in the midst of things, already really full, sometimes also from the top downwards. But thinking that has far to go and in which something develops itself, commences small, apparently at least, and understated.²

These three sentences are set apart at the beginning of the text, before the first section. Bloch writes ‘Denken muß wo beginnen’, thinking has to start

² Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung*, 210 (my translation).

where.³ The ungrammatical, or at least uncommon, use of the interrogative ‘where’ in this sentence expresses the fact that thinking starts with a question. The question where to start in philosophy is answered by ‘where’. Where functions as an adverb in this sentence, but it has a pronominal ring, although it cannot be replaced by a noun. Not yet, anyway. Either ‘in the midst of things’ or on ‘top’ will not do. The form of the declarative statement is interrupted and subverted and we are put back into an experience of a question. The question where to start is the beginning of philosophy; this small, understated entry into a perplexity that echoes within itself rather than offer us the view on an answer, which would then set thought in motion, securely on its path. One is reminded of the telling opening line of Plato’s *Phaedrus*: ‘Where do you come from, Phaedrus my friend, and where are you going’ (227a1.⁴ In his own opening lines, Bloch puts us into contact with a question and makes us stay with the question. From the point of view of the question ‘where?’ we can appreciate we have far to go, the distance acquires a felt reality in our awareness and we are freed from the need for an immediate answer that would close off the ontology of not-yet being. These opening lines convey to us a negative capability, in Keats’ sense of the term, and this gives us, now, our answer to

³ Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung*, 210.

⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Reginal Hackforth, in Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, (eds.), *Plato: The Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 476.

the question where to start. By the end of the three sentences we have arrived at that place. Not by going a distance from there to here, but by turning around our attitude, in the face of the questioning with which philosophy starts. Note that we, in our reading of these few lines as a way of opening up the ontology of not-yet being, also have started small, in an inconspicuous and understated way.

Now we can start, and at this point, indeed, the text begins, with the title of the first section: ‘nochmals der Zugang fürs Offene’, once again the access for the open.⁵ As before, we are thrown out of kilter. We are going to repeat what we have just done, ‘once again’. We were put back into remaining with our experience of questioning as the beginning of philosophical thinking because it opens up a view on how far we have to go. But we do not read, as we might have expected, ‘access to the open’. In a way, the previous three sentences gave us an access to the open. We reflected on our experience of our own perplexity, as it is given in the question ‘where to start?’ and we were, to speak metaphorically, invited to have our sojourn in this question as the proper way of experiencing openness, before any declarative statement can be made. But now the direction is inverted. Bloch speaks of an access *for* the open. If we wanted to speak the language of school philosophy, we might say our perspective is

⁵ Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung*, 210.

shifting from an epistemological one (our experience of questioning as openness, our access to the open) to an ontological one (this experience means that openness is itself something real, even if only in the form of our self-awareness). The access of the open, here to us, will turn out to be the starting point of the ontology of not-yet being as it will point us to the radical in-self-sufficiency of beings, the unfinished world.

We will complete the initial turn toward ontology, but more cannot be done within the limitations of this chapter. After we have done that, we will indicate the connection to the sphere of culture via an interpretation of the idea of creativity. It will be necessary to present, in translation, a few more sentences from the opening page of Part VI:

The closer to us, the better? Certainly, so when are we living then? In the now, it is said, here one halts already, because what is immediate is not always fresh or bare. Things are not that clear nor 'there' in the now that was just lived through. It is too fleeting for that, above all something throws shadows in it, is too close, not brought out enough. What goes around there surely is always entirely 'first', but it isn't 'there', not more than 'not'. As such it is situated, as far as exhibiting it is concerned, still before the first sentence which, philosophically, can be written at all, until further notice. This means that although everything begins with it, it has not yet begun itself. Exists in philosophical bringing to light (*Heben*) at

first as ‘not’, which drives things out of themselves, which means as not-having (*Haben*).⁶

In a way that is remarkably similar to how Heidegger and Whitehead think about the access to ontology, here Bloch shows up what the experience of the lived moment contains as a way of articulating the meaning of being.⁷ That which is nearest to us is best as an access for the open. It constitutes that access because what is nearest to us is as ungraspable as it is immediate. In other places, Bloch often speaks of the ‘darkness of the lived moment’.⁸ The instant we relate to it, it is gone, but not without a trace, namely as something that eluded us and which yet exercises a hold over us. Where is it? We halt, until we realize that the ‘not’ in the lived moment is that which drives us out of ourselves, that which goads on the process of philosophical bringing to light and the negative presence of something that remains unbegun. A kenotic generative nothingness remains as the source of creative advance, here in the heart of what is closest to us. In a way it is less than nothing, more inconspicuous because it does not enter into mediation, the process of realization, itself but remains as the generative trace or

⁶ Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung*, 210 (my translation).

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (rev. Albany: SUNY Press, 2010); Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, (ed.), David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

⁸ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight (Cambridge (USA): MIT Press 1986), 287–316.

remembrance of what itself is both unmediated and immediate.⁹ Without such a curiously paradoxical play of the relation between the immediate and the mediated, the very notion of immediacy itself could be mediated without remainder. This is merely another way of saying that thought and reality do not collapse into one another while they can also not be abstracted from one another. For Bloch's way of thinking, this is the salient point of materialism.¹⁰

The tormented, out-of-joint language reflects the difficulty to articulate an awareness of what lies before all articulation, but it also reflects the difficulty of positioning ourselves in the right way to hear what the text has to say and this, we have said, is a large part of the work of philosophy. We want to ask: could Bloch not have said this in a more straightforward or more recognizably theoretical way – note for example how he uses 'not' when, we might say, he could have used an abstract concept, 'negativity', or developed a logic of fuzzy concepts? The answer must be no. Conceptual language comes too late because it has already reduced the relation to the real to one of static subsumption under abstract categories, whether of thought or of being, or both, no matter how speculatively, of fuzzy for that

⁹ I cannot explore the many connections, parallels, and disparities with Slavoj Žižek's materialist reading of Hegel here, but see Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso, 2012).

¹⁰ Ernst Bloch, *Das Materialismusproblem, seine Geschichte und Substanz* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), 450–56.

matter, it might try to conceive of conceptual thinking. Concepts are reifying unless they are developed on the basis of the initial beginning as Bloch tries to indicate it here. We must note, however, that this indication is not a pointing to an already existing reality which simply escaped our notice, for example because it is so inconspicuous, or so ubiquitous. We have to think to gain access to it, and that means we have to use language, even if this is a use of language before the first philosophical proposition can be uttered. It is a discovery proper to philosophy that language is somehow able to do this. One aspect of this discovery is the realization that the future, or as we can say more precisely now, not-having or not-yet being, is crucial to this aspect of language: ‘And only with this does philosophical signification begin, as clearly as is appropriate at this point, namely initially clearly-vague (more would be false here), like that with which the signified itself begins.’¹¹

The strong theory of not-yet being is even stronger than we at first thought. There is a real ontological sense in which the world is unfinished, and not only an epistemological sense that merely affirms the limitation and feebleness of our understanding. Moreover, this ‘unfinishedness’ means that being is fundamentally in process and it means that, within process and as its source, there is an unmediated dimension that manifests itself as ‘not’ and that has not itself not even entered into process, remains unbegun. This

¹¹ Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung*, 210 (my translation).

guarantees the reality of process and, as Bloch in the remainder of the chapter establishes, accounts for the open finality of the process of the real. Now we can, and must, move into conceptual thinking. Bloch develops a conceptual scheme involving three interdependent concepts: *front*, *novum* and *ultimum*; the front, the new and the ultimate. These replace traditional modal ontological notions. The front of process is the point of transgression in any given development where a space of real possibility opens up that is distinct from the mere continuation of chains of causality. The new is the materially new, the creation of something that was not there before. The ultimate is the reference to the unbegun that has not entered into process but functions as source and goal at the same time. Another term that Bloch uses for it is *identity*. Far from there being an incompatibility between the new and the ultimate, the one is the precondition for the other. The new exists only as the repeated attempt at identity, at the ultimate, and the ultimate exists as the groundless emergence of the new. Without the ultimate, the new would reduce to mere variation, nextness, which is a form of sameness but not identity. Identity, or the ultimate, on the other hand, as living identity with itself cannot exist without the novum as the promise of fulfilment, the 'genesis that comes at the end'.¹² It is only at the concrete,

¹² Bloch, *Tübinger Einleitung*, 278.

material front of realization that this dynamic can play out: ‘Denken heißt überschreiten’; ‘to think means to transgress’.¹³

It seems that the thought the ontology of not-yet being tries to maintain, and which I have sketched here in its bare outline, is an extraordinarily subtle one. It does not reduce to the classical European (Christian) metaphysical *exitus-reditus* structure in which the manifold of the world has emanated from the divine One and is destined to return to it.¹⁴ Nor does it reduce to a nihilist ontology of radical contingency in which necessity of goal and outcome emerge either retrospectively or as future anterior. Rather it aims to overcome both positions by, and I find no other words to say this, keeping the open itself open.¹⁵ This point can be made clearer perhaps by asking what the existential or cognitive-affective attitude is that we might take up in the face of the *front-novum-ultimum* constellation. The form of possibility that we can think with this constellation is not that of a guaranteed course of events, as for example a physical process that unfolds according to the laws of nature. Nor is it that of mere logical possibility,

¹³ Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1959), 3. The English translation has ‘thinking means venturing beyond’ (Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 4) but ‘transgression’ captures the spirit of utopia better and is also a more literal rendition.

¹⁴ W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomist Metaphysics* (Notre Dame University Press, 2001), 303–12.

¹⁵ For an interpretation of Bloch’s ontology of not-yet being that affirms radical contingency, see Peter Thompson, ‘Religion, Utopia and the Metaphysics of Contingency’, in Slavoj Žižek and Peter Thompson, (eds.), *The Privatization of Hope: Ernst Bloch and the Future of Utopia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 82–105.

anything that might be brought about or be under the right circumstances. As we said in the beginning, the ontology of not-yet being accounts for a directionality or tendency. We now know that this tendency exists as the curiously paradoxical constellation that we have outlined. The tendency has the character of a striving. On one hand it is a driving desire; on the other hand it is an anticipatory hope. Hope is neither a guarantee, nor a mere logical possibility. In hope there is transgression, there is genuine newness, and there is an orientation on the ultimate. The ontology of not-yet being sees by the light of hope, which connects concrete possibility to the unbegun identity in creative process: 'Hope is anchored somewhere beyond the horizon'.¹⁶ The future, from the perspective of this philosophical approach to it, is not a neutral space for what will come to pass, but an experimental site of possible fulfilment, precisely insofar as it is a site of open creativity and responsive hope, which knows that it cannot control or simply make happen. For the ontology of not-yet being, the future is through-and-through utopian.

Culture, the Humanities, and Creativity

¹⁶ Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* (London: Faber, 1990), 181.

Bloch followed the traces of hope as widely as possible, in nature and in culture. *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, written between 1938 and 1948 and published in 1959, was intended as an encyclopaedia of human desires, dreams and hopes.¹⁷ It demonstrates how pervasive the not-yet conscious is to all cultural production, including art, philosophy, literature, science, religion and politics. Following on from prior discussion, it is not just a book about hope, it is also a hopeful book because it applies the ontology of not-yet being as a way of knowing to the sphere of human culture and this way of knowing is coloured by a cognitive-affective attitude of hope.

I will not discuss the reception history of this book here, except to observe that, as a theory of human culture that seeks to valorise our experience of futurity it has yet failed to make a significant impact.¹⁸ Of the cultural theorists that have had a determining influence on their discipline, only Fredric Jameson has explicitly used Bloch's work in his exploration of cultural mediations and representations of the future.¹⁹

One way of exploring the potential of the ontology of not-yet being for our understanding of ways of knowing the future, especially in relation

¹⁷ Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.

¹⁸ A scathing critique of the book, especially concerning its political stance, provides the basis for much of Hans Jonas' thinking. See Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1979); English version: *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago University Press, 1984).

¹⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science-Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005).

to human cultural production, is to use it to understand creativity. In Bloch's work this remains an almost entirely implicit notion, but it is here that, I claim, we can add crucial aspects to our understanding by utilizing his thought. We can see cultural theory as providing a framework for the humanities as engaged with analysing, interpreting, understanding, and imaginatively transforming human creativity. Beyond the culture wars and theory wars of the past decades a new perspective is emerging in which the unique position of the humanities is theorized, as a way of understanding creativity and the experience of meaning transformatively and imaginatively, from within, not as an outward object of study. Mikhail Epstein's recent conception of the transformative humanities provides a useful guide. He points out that the humanities have a critical component as well as a constructive component. The constructive component involves creative thinking and can have a transformative effect on its topic of study: 'The crucial distinction between the humanities and the sciences is that in the humanities the subject and the object of the study coincide; in the humanities, humans are studied by humans and for humans. Therefore, to study the human being also means to create humanness itself.'²⁰ Human creativity is a manifestation of our relation to an open future and thus to the project of creating humanness itself:

²⁰ Mikhail Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto*, trans. Igor Klyukanov (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 7.

Thus, we need futuristic humanities. Why has the orientation to the future become the exclusive privilege of natural sciences and science-based technologies? Is nature more dynamic than civilization? Why does the study of civilization usually turn out to be so much more conservative than the study of nature? Why do philosophy and literary and art theory fail to project new futuristic forms of living, writing, or painting in the way that the sciences project and instigate the emergence of new technologies?²¹

Mining Bloch's ontology of not-yet being for a philosophy of human creativity can provide an impetus in this context.

We can see a fascinating example of the ways in which Bloch's ideas can be applied to understanding creativity in a short article by David Bohm.²² Bohm starts by pointing out that creativity cannot be defined in words, it can only be hinted at by a speaker, so that the hearer might be able to use the words to notice what is being talked about for themselves. If we take language to be the use of terms with fixed references, Bohm is right. Creativity would be the principle of novelty, and as such it cannot be defined as this would go directly against its nature. Creativity is the antithesis of mechanical reproduction, method, and technique. Bohm observes that this implies that there can be no planned effort to become

²¹ Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities*, 286.

²² David Bohm, 'On Creativity', *Leonardo* 2, no. 1 (April 1968), 137–49.

creative but that creativity arises as a by-product of normal mental operation.²³ But this implies that we cannot be taught how to be creative, we cannot look to someone else to tell us how to be creative, or even what creativity is. Everyone has to discover this for themselves. We as readers can draw the conclusion that these words are mere hints, ultimately understandable only for someone who has already experienced creativity. True to these considerations, Bohm writes about creativity from his own perspective, that of a natural scientist. He sees creativity as a possibility in almost all human pursuits. While in artistic activity creativity is aimed at making something, the scientist aims at understanding, or learning something new, but not new for the sake of it:

Rather, what he is really seeking is to learn something new that has a certain fundamental kind of significance: i.e. a hitherto unknown lawfulness in the order of nature, which exhibits *unity* in a *broad range* of phenomena. Thus, he wishes to find in the reality in which he lives a certain oneness and totality, or wholeness, constituting a kind of *harmony* that is felt to be beautiful.²⁴

As we are listening to someone who is using words to speak about something that can only be hinted at, and of which he claims that everyone has to discover it for themselves, we ought not take this statement as an

²³ Bohm, 'On Creativity', 148.

²⁴ Bohm, 'On Creativity', 138 (Bohm's italics).

outline sketch of the fundamentals of a theory of creativity, but as fleeting indications of something in experience that out of its very nature escapes attempts to pin it down. We have to, as it were, squint and then look at the text, to hear what it is trying to say. If we do so, we notice ‘the world in which he lives’ (*front*), in which ‘something new’ (*novum*) comes about that has a ‘fundamental significance’ as it is related to ‘wholeness’ and ‘oneness’ (*ultimum*). As in the opening passage of Bloch’s ontology of not-yet being, we see here also the difficulty with language, which nevertheless exists only in language. If we are bothered about the overly classical overtones of the idealist sounding appeal to *unum, verum, bonum* in Bohm’s statement, we can easily supplant them by Bloch’s more materialist reading of the creative process and his ear for rupture, unfinishedness, and hope. However, Bohm’s view is open, as we have seen, because, radically, it refers everyone to their own experience in giving meaning to these terms.

I have picked out Bohm, because, like Bloch, he had a transformative view of culture and creativity. For Bohm, technological and scientific thinking have created a mentality of fragmentation, in which we have come to treat as separate that which is not really separate, most catastrophically human beings in their social relations and the human versus the natural world. Under the influence of the scientific world view of the seventeenth century we have come to see ourselves and world as a collection of particles, which exist independently of each other. Among the

bifurcations he speaks about, the separation of mind and matter is the most fundamental one. Bohm's theory of the 'implicate order', developed as a fundamental physical theory, views reality very differently.²⁵ Independent existence is relative and can be seen as a temporary stable formation in a unified whole that connects everything, like waves or whirls that form on the surface of flowing river, maintain themselves for a while and then merge again with the great body of water that moves along. Within all existences of this type, the explicate order, the whole lies implied in such a way that there is no final ontological distinction that can be drawn between one thing and another. This holds also for thought and consciousness, so that Bohm concludes that these dimensions are ubiquitous in nature and not only localized in the brain. The cultural ramifications run deep. The mentality of separateness precludes a genuine process of individuation. If human beings are to become individuals, rather than isolated fragments, they have to establish a conscious relation to the whole. But this relation is only genuine if it is also a particular creation, rather than an imitation of a mechanic pattern. Thus newness and wholeness, creativity and the connection to the implicate order, the new and the now of a wordless contact with the implicate order cannot be separated. Only when we are fully alive, and that means creative, can we be individuals rather than fragments. We see how

²⁵ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge, 2002).

there is both a critical and constructive-transformative aspect to the cultural practice that is implied or inspired by such a view, which corresponds well to Epstein's critical and constructive dimensions of the transformative humanities. At the same time, the critique of separation and fragmentation shares many of the drivers of Bloch's critique of reification. Bohm's practice of dialogue is a way in which human beings in communication can overcome separateness and only thus become genuine individuals, both in the sense of achieving a wholeness within themselves, becoming 'undivided', as well as in the sense of integrating individual existence into the larger whole against the background of which it unfolds and without which it cannot exist. These are two sides of the same coin. The implicate order consists in a mutual interdependence of individual existence and wholeness, which rise and fall together.²⁶

Where does the urge to separate and reify come from? If, as Bohm seems to suggest, it is given with the nature of language, the entire sphere of human culture would be ill-equipped to deal with the future. Making space for the future would be a constant battle against the tendency inherent in human thought and language to fix, to stifle, to mechanize, and thereby to separate and lose contact with the wholeness underneath. The sphere of human culture would be the sphere of lifelessness, of the absence of creativity and originality. But in this way a second-order incoherence would

²⁶ David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (London: Routledge, 1996).

be introduced, because the presence of this anomaly within reality would be beyond explanation. For Bohm, the mentality of separation is a mistake, a result of linguistic and representational thinking in the service of the survival of the individual organism. Impersonal thought, embodied in the organism, creates an image of self that is isolated from the environment. This self seeks preservation. In order to do this, it has to conceal that it is a mere image, or illusion, the product of thought, rather than the other way around. It also has to conceal the concealment so that the self appears as natural and foundational. Therefore thought creates its own unconscious. The process of coming to see this is necessarily a difficult and painful one, as the imaginary self defends itself in the only way possible: by preventing that the reality of the matter comes to light, because that would mean, if not its disappearance, then at least its unmasking. This model gives us a handle on exploitative reification and it echoes strongly Bloch's critique of ideology. The separated self, as Bohm sees it, is an ideological formation.

If, however, this mistake is intimately bound up with the nature of language, it becomes almost indistinguishable from original sin, a deficit given with the very fact of what it means to be human. There are elements of this in Bohm's thinking. Whereas there is for him an intuitive, direct experience of wholeness, it is so different from language that the two can never meet. Again, separation re-affirms itself at a second-order level.

Bohm was acutely aware of the fact that language holds the key to finding a

way out of separation. In *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, he devoted an entire chapter to developing a new form of language that would not be burdened by the fatal flaws of static conceptual thinking. He called it language in the ‘rheomode’, the flowing mode, but even he never used it anywhere else than there.²⁷

Perhaps Bohm was wiser in his short article on creativity, in which he stated that what he speaks of cannot be defined in words, which does not stop him from talking. If the ontology of not-yet being is universal, would it not also have to apply to language itself, and even more so to creative language? Would language itself then not appear as the constellation of *front*, *novum* and *ultimum* that is closest to us, and that carries within it the furthest way to go. Language would then be the place where we come into contact most intimately with the future, with not-yet being and anticipation, in the words that form themselves as we speak, or write, that emerge on the open of the surface of the world as we communicate with each other. Language would then also contain the kenotic withdrawal of that which has not yet entered into process so that a world can appear, can be constructed. Perhaps we can think of that as the stillness or silence that precedes every instance of speech, and to which all speech is also directed. In the creative play of language, as everywhere else, being is playing hide-and-seek with

²⁷ Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, 34–60.

itself.²⁸ It is not a mistake, nor original sin, although misunderstanding the nature of play can become both of these. Philosophy, which we defined as the struggle against bad philosophy, would then be that function of the human mind that keeps the future open. We could come to see it as part of a transformed understanding of the humanities as ways of knowing the future. The ontology of not-yet being thus leads to a renewal of philosophical reflection on language and to a transformation of our attitudes toward the language we speak and create.

Since Feuerbach and Nietzsche, the idea of a 'philosophy of the future' has been part of European thought. But it is with Bloch's ontology of not-yet being that this idea has been given a concrete shape, in both readings as a philosophy that gives us access to the future and a philosophy that itself is not yet realized. These two readings are dependent on each other. When we move with Bloch beyond Bloch and make explicit the conception of creativity that is implicit within his ontology, we obtain a perspective on a radically transformed language philosophy, in which the split between what can be said and the unsayable, direct intuition, and discursive thought, nothingness and reality can be overcome. Thought, language, and reality assume the features of a way. The anticipation that responds to futurity

²⁸ In Alan Watts's felicitous formulation, here taken out of its original theological context.

assumes the features of what it means to go on a way. There it may even find the peace that belongs to all deep play.²⁹

FURTHER READING

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²⁹ Here lies the starting point for an exploration of the connections between Western and Eastern (especially Daoist) thought that has the potential to move beyond the compare-and-contrast approach of comparative philosophy to become a new form of philosophical thinking, on the basis of these traditions. It seems to me that, as culture will continue to globalize, such a world philosophy may well be the most relevant development in philosophy in the twenty-first century.

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