

# I Believe That The World

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The Missing All – prevented Me  
From missing minor Things.  
If nothing larger than a World's  
Departure from a Hinge –  
Or Sun's extinction, be observed –  
'Twas not so large that I  
Could lift my Forehead from my work  
For Curiosity. (Dickinson 1970, 459)

At a climactic moment of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, Goldberg attempts to explain his philosophy of life to his associate McCann. 'Never write down a thing. And don't go too near the water. And you'll find that what I say is true. Because I believe that the world ... (*Vacant.*) .... Because I believe that the world ... (*Desperate.*) .... BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE WORLD ... (*Lost.*) ' (Pinter 1991, 71-2). Any number of sentiments might have risen automatically to Goldberg's lips here, for he is a mine of plausible phrase and fable, but, unaccountably, something breaks down when it comes to predicating something believable of 'the world'.

The phrase 'ways of worldmaking' asks us to consider questions such as the following: what is a world? how is it made and kept in being? how do worlds connect and collide? My concern in this talk, by contrast, is not with the conditions that might attach to 'a world', one world among others, but rather to the ways in which 'the world' can come into being, and so, beyond this, with the history and prospects, not merely of the world but also of 'the world'. What now may constitute the worldhood of the world?

I want first of all to give a ludicrously brief history of the concept of 'the world', even given the fact that the history of 'the world' is indeed ludicrously brief when compared with the 4.5 billion year long history of the world. I will divide it into two phases: first of all of worldbuilding, or the *Bildungsroman* of the world; and then unworlding, or the remission of the world. Finally, I will urge that the era of worldmaking is in fact an evasion of the demand of worldhood, an evasion which, because it is no longer our demand but the demand of the world itself, even if it is a world that we have participated in making, we should not, perhaps even dare not, allow ourselves.

A Borgesian fable might be concocted about the rise and fall of 'the world'. Once upon a time, there was the world, full of animals, islands, mountains and plants of all kinds. But at this time, 'the world' could not be said to

exist. Slowly, as human beings began to spread across larger and larger regions of the world they began to try to imagine what ‘the whole world’ would be like, and what it would be like to occupy it. In fact, the phrase ‘the whole world’ does not seem to appear frequently in English until the sixteenth century. I can find no instance of it before its appearance in William Tyndale’s *Parable of The Wicked Mammon* of 1528 – ‘Yff the whole world were thine yet hath every brother his right in thy goodes and is heyre with the as we are all heyres with Christe’ (Tyndale 1528: xlii). And, although references to ‘the world’ and ‘all the world’ are common, they do not before about 1500 usually have a geographic reference. In around half of its 44 appearances in Chaucer, for example, ‘the world’ is a temporal word, to indicate a term of existence, rather than a place. Medieval maps, at least in the Christian world, tended to be cosmographic as much as geographic, and also to represent the world as a temporal domain, and so were likely to feature the Garden of Eden as well as the road to Aylesbury. We should remember that the word ‘world’ actually derives from *wer-ald*, the age of man. Thus we find the word meaning an age in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* (1390) ‘The world of Selver was begonne/And that of gold was passed oute’.

Slowly, though, ‘the world’, or the known world, grew, until those portions of the world inhabited and legislated by humans came more and more to be coextensive with the world. Gradually, the scattered archipelago of human habitation began to become continental, and then intercontinental. By the middle of the seventeenth century, only the Western parts of America, certain Pacific Islands and the Poles remained untraversed and unrepresented on maps. Once the world had come to coincide with ‘the world’, jokes like the following became possible. Q. What was the largest land-mass before the discovery of Australia? A. Australia. The world had been clothed with a thin, skintight coat, of many hues, but, like the tunics in which you were supposed to dress witches to prevent them escaping from prison, woven of one continuous, all-too-human thread. ‘The world’ is more than just everything-that-is, precisely because it is less than everything that is. The world is everything that is, but contained or englobed within the concept of ‘the world’. The world is sealed in its totality, hemmed and girdled by ‘the world’. In being worlded, the world seemed to have been voided.

For the doubling of the world by ‘the world’ was not benign. To bring the world so continuously to mind was also to narrow it, to subjugate it to human purposes. The enlargement and consolidation of ‘the world’ seemed to entail the erosion or exhaustion of the world. After the high point of world-consciousness, extending from around 1800 to 1950, it began to seem imperative for human beings to retreat from ‘the world’, in the interests of a

return to the possibility of living once again in the world. The making of ‘the world’ gave way to ways of worldmaking. The rescuing of the world, it now appears, depended upon the remission of ‘the world’. The problem now was how to remove the coat that, like a skin-graft, seemed to have grown together with the fabric of what lay underneath it.

### **History on Horseback**

The first, active phase of worldmaking can itself be divided into two. First of all, there was the work of exploration, mostly, though not exclusively, by Europeans – first of all to the East, then to the West, then to the South, then to the extreme North. This work of exploring, traversing and settling was followed by a second phase, in which the world that had passed under heel, wheel and keel had then to be brought to mind. The difference between world-exploration and the bringing of ‘the world’ to thought is that the latter implies a formative antagonism between thought and the world. Whatever it may be said to be, modernity brings with it the exercise of global thought, the effort to imagine or project what may be called a world-consciousness, the consciousness of the world as world.

Worldthinking, or the thought of the world, can be understood in two ways. There is first of all the effort to blot the world up into thought, to think in terms of a world, to make it possible for the world to be thought. But this very quickly becomes the thought of the world in another sense, namely the idea that in making it possible to think the world, the world itself is brought to thought in the sense of being made conscious of itself. Making the world an object is also the process of making it a subject for itself. Hegel’s philosophy of history suggests that the world must, in Don DeLillo’s phrase ‘grow a mind’. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, first published in 1837, six years after his death, Hegel offers us two convictions. One is ‘that Reason is the Sovereign of the World; that the history of the world, therefore, presents us with a rational process’ (Hegel 1956, 9). The other is that the world is nothing but this Reason, and its realisation:

The destiny of the spiritual World, and, — since this is the *substantial World*, while the physical remains subordinate to it, or, in the language of speculation, has no truth *as against* the spiritual, — *the final cause of the World at large*, we allege to be the *consciousness* of its own freedom on the part of Spirit, and *ipso facto*, the *reality* of that freedom. (Hegel 1956, 19)

For Hegel, the realisation of the worldhood of the world is not something added to, or adduced from it – it is what the world immanently and everywhere is. So, on the one hand, the world is, as traditionally conceived in Christian and other religious systems, something other than, the shadow

or residue of, divine truth. But, on the other hand, it is in some sense necessarily and inevitably already World, since the world is nothing other than the unfolding of the World-Spirit. So the starting point of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* is that "The inquiry into the *essential destiny* of Reason – as far as it is considered in reference to the World – is identical with the question, *what is the ultimate design of the World?* And the expression implies that that design is destined to be realized" (3.18) It always already in some wise is what it cannot yet be.

Hegel sees the realisation of the world through history as concretisation. The problem is not that there is no idea or image of 'the world', but rather that there is no experience of it: 'in the process of the World's History itself – as still incomplete – the abstract final aim of history is not yet made the distinct object of desire and interest' (Hegel 1956, 25). Of course, considered in its actuality, there is a kind of lumpiness or historical irregularity in the rate at which the world is becoming spiritualised: Hegel spends a couple of pages on Africa and then leaves it, explaining 'it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit'. Hegel was keenly on the look-out for concretisations of world-spirit. We read at the beginning of part IV of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* that 'The German Spirit is the Spirit of the new World'.

He saw embodiments of the world in other persons and places too. On October 13th, 1806, he saw Napoleon riding through Jena, as French troops prepared for the crushing defeat of Prussia they would inflict the following day. He wrote to his friend Niethammer: 'Den Kaiser – diese Weltseele – sah ich durch die Stadt zum Rekognoszieren hinausreiten; es ist in der Tat eine wunderbare Empfindung, ein solches Individuum zu sehen, das hier auf einen Punkt konzentriert, auf einem Pferde sitzend, über die Welt übergreift, und sie beherrscht' (Hegel 1952-60: I.120). 'I saw the Emperor, this World Soul (*Weltseele*), riding through the town reconnoitring. It is indeed a wonderful feeling to see an individual of this kind, who, concentrated here to a single point, sitting on horseback, reaches out over the entire world and masters it.'

Given how famous this letter is, it is extraordinary that so few people seem able to bring themselves actually to quote it. Muhammed Khair (2002) has Hegel refer to Napoleon as 'the personification of "History on Horseback"'. Matthew Price (2000) prefers 'the world-spirit on horseback', and an unnamed editor of a selection from Hegel's *Philosophy of History* on the Center for New History and Media website finds that Hegel saw in Napoleon 'world history on horseback'

<<http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/566/>>. Marek Kwiek thinks that Hegel describes Napoleon as 'reason on horseback', and thinks it is in the

*Phenomenology of Spirit*, but must have given up looking for it, as he provides no source (Kwiek 2006, 30). Alan Woods (2003) has Hegel blurt out excitedly “I have just seen the World Spirit riding on a horse!”, and, possibly even more grotesquely, Andy Blunden (2003) improves Hegel’s remark into ‘The Absolute Idea rode around Europe on horseback’. Finally, and as if Hegel’s own formulation were not already bathetic enough, we can read in a contemporary review that ‘Hegel ... wrote that he had seen the *Weltgeist* (world spirit) on horseback (Kojève observes that Hegel is careful not to say *Weltgeist*, but rather *Weltseele* - - <http://www.panix.com/~mrzero/KojeveonHgltrnNap.html>). A similar thing can be said of DJ Spooky, when one is watching him cut up records with classical musicians or a rock band, one is watching the *Weltgeist* behind two turntables’ (Mudede 2005). It’s plainly too late to bolt the stable door. Freely roaming the world wide web, which for some has taken the place of the Napoleonic world-soul, ‘the world’ seems increasingly to be riderless.

Hegel’s influence was transmitted to the twentieth century via the movement of ideas known as Naturphilosophie, which sought to integrate natural sciences and Hegelian metaphysics. In fact, it was not Hegel, but rather Friedrich Schelling who gave the most emphatic impetus to this current of ideas, particularly in his notion of the ‘World Soul’, as set out in his *On the World Soul* of 1798 (2000). Schelling saw Nature as divided into three phases or stages: the inorganic, the organic, and the universal underlying both, and slowly struggling to expression through the differentiations of physical forms. Schelling’s work looks back to the mystical traditions embodied in the work of Jacob Boehme, and, beyond that, through the work of Paracelsus and the Stoic notion of the *pneuma*, to the conception of the world-soul set out in Plato’s *Timaeus*. It is Schelling who provides the connection between this mystical tradition and later efforts through the nineteenth century to absorb the discoveries of science, especially evolutionary biology. Naturphilosophie attempts to find in the very movements and transformations of the physical world evidence of the slow, but continuous emergence of spirit through history, a history that includes, not just human events, but the entire history of the planet, from bacteria up to baboons and beyond (‘up’ being the favoured preposition of this style of thought). This worldmaking idea passed through a network of scientists, philosophers, poets and mystics, eminent and obscure, estimable and downright crazed, including Goethe, Lorenz Oken (the inventor of the word ‘biology’), Emerson (who wrote a poem called ‘The World Soul’ in 1847), Gustav Fechner and Madame Blavatsky.

We have witnessed a remarkable return of Naturphilosophie in the twentieth century. One of the most important Hegelian survivals is to be found in the idea of the noosphere, which seems to have originated in the

thinking of Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky, a visionary Russian mineralogist and chemist. Vernadsky conjugated from the 'biosphere', a term proposed by Eduard Suess in his *Die Entstehung der Alpen* (1875), the idea of what he called the 'noosphere'. He connected it with the work of A.P Pavlov (1854-1929), who had emphasised the increasing importance of man in the biosphere:

Mankind taken as a whole is becoming a mighty geological force. There arises the problem of the reconstruction of the biosphere in the interests of freely thinking humanity as a single totality. This new state of the biosphere, which we approach without our noticing, is the noosphere. (Vernadsky 2005, 19)

Vernadsky believed that human beings were making fundamental changes to the geochemical composition of the planet. Although he did not think that the arrival of the noosphere meant that human beings had escaped or transcended geospatial existence, he did suggest that 'the whole history of mankind is proceeding in this direction' and that 'man is striving to emerge beyond the boundaries of his planet into cosmic space' (Vernadsky 2005, 21).

Vernadsky's conception was carried forward dramatically in the work of the Jesuit palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whom he met in Paris during the 1920s. In fact, Chardin had already completed by 1938 the manuscript of his major work, *Le Phénomène humaine*, though the Catholic Church would prevent its appearance until after Chardin's death in 1955. Chardin was the most worldly of mystics, who sought in the incarnate forms of human existence and earthly habitation the promise of a spiritual reunification with the divine principle. He began his *Mass of the World* (1961), written in 1923 when he was working in the Ordos desert of China, with the words 'I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world.'

Chardin develops the concept of the noosphere, to add to the various other zones or layers of the earth: the barysphere (the earth's core); the lithosphere (geology), the hydrosphere, the atmosphere, and the biosphere. 'With hominisation, we have the beginning of a new age. The earth "gets a new skin." Better still, it finds its soul.' (Chardin 1959, 182). Sphericity is in fact central to Chardin's concept of the coming of thought into the world. He distinguishes between two modes of energy, which he calls tangential and radial. Tangential energy is exhibited by forms and organisms that give out energy. Tangential energy tends to associate similar things and is to be

identified with the diminution of difference and increase of entropy characteristic of descriptions of energy given in the physical sciences (Chardin 1959, 65). Radial energy, by contrast, is ‘centric’ or ‘centrating’. Radial energy brings about an involution, or turning inwards, in which the physical form in question, whether molecule, cell or planet, ‘coils up round itself in a *closed volume*’ (Chardin 1959, 72). At every moment, this involution produces inwardness in the world, a dimension of the ‘within’ to which physical science has been insufficiently attentive.

The most important of these involutions is the development of reflective consciousness in primates. But this is not an isolated or chance event. Rather it is an explosion (though Chardin says that it ‘explodes into itself’ (Chardin 1959, 165) of a principle of radial energy or incipient inwardness that itself lies implicit in the evolving history of physical form. This is perhaps the most important of the many evasions effected by Chardin with regard to the idea of evolution. Where Darwinian evolutionary theory depends upon processes of selection that, so to speak, work from the unknown future backwards, pulling organisms forward into new forms as the result of unpredictable and emergent selective pressures, Chardin’s theory depends upon the belief in a principle that is buried implicitly in organisms and drives them forward. In short, where Darwinian natural selection has its engine in the front, so that environment shapes organism, Chardin’s engine is in the back, so that organisms propel themselves into their futures:

The being who is the object of his own reflection, in consequence of that very doubling back upon himself, becomes in a flash able to raise himself into a new sphere. In reality, another world is born. Abstraction, logic, reasoned choice and inventions, mathematics, arts, calculation of space and time, anxieties and dreams of love – all these activities of inner life are nothing else than the effervescence of the newly-formed centre as it explodes into itself. (Chardin 1959, 165)

Ultimately, man is not agent or originator of the noosphere. Rather, he is its occasion or catalyst. Man is the self-knowledge or reflexivity of the world, the ‘planetary Flux of co-reflection’ by which the world turns on itself to become ‘the world’.

Experientially, if the Universe is examined in its most advanced areas, in the direction of the Improbable, it is seen that it converges upon itself. To my mind, it is impossible to be fully an evolutionist in the true sense of the word without seeing and admitting this ‘psychogenic’ concentration of the World upon itself. (Chardin 1959)

And yet, man is the unique and unprecedented vehicle of ‘psychogenesis’, which he can be sure is the formation of the world soul itself. Chardin thought that we could look forward to the end of this psychogenetic process in what he called the ‘Omega point’, which would be characterised by ‘the wholesale internal introversion upon itself of the noosphere, which has simultaneously reached the uttermost limit of its complexity and its centrality’ (Chardin 1959, 288). At this point, which Chardin thought of as the Christification of the world, the material framework of thought would drop away, like the discarded stage of a rocket (though Chardin makes it clear that there will be no necessity for man actually to leave the planet in order ‘to abandon its organo-planetary foothold’, since ‘it is in a psychical rather than a spatial direction that it will find an outlet, without need to leave or overflow the earth’ (Chardin 1959, 287).

Chardin has been both fortunate and unfortunate in his readers. Peter Medawar gave *The Phenomenon of Man* a superbly savage review in *Mind* in 1961:

Teilhard is for ever shouting at us: things or affairs are, in alphabetical order, astounding, colossal, endless, enormous, fantastic, giddy, hyper-, immense, implacable, indefinite, inexhaustible, extricable, infinite, infinitesimal, innumerable, irresistible, measureless, mega-, monstrous, mysterious, prodigious, relentless, super-, ultra-, unbelievable, unbridled or unparalleled. When something is described as merely *huge* we feel let down. After this softening-up process we are ready to take delivery of the neologisms: biota, noosphere, hominisation, complexification. There is much else in the literary idiom of nature-philosophy: *nothing-buttery*, for example, always part of the minor symptomatology of the bogus... “Man discovers that he is *nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself*”... It would have been a great disappointment to me if Vibration did not somewhere make itself felt, for all scientific mystics either vibrate in person or find themselves resonant with cosmic vibrations; but I am happy to say that on page 266 Teilhard will be found to do so. (Medawar 1961, 100)

Nevertheless, as Medawar mock-acknowledges, ‘In spite of all the obstacles that Teilhard perhaps wisely puts in our way, it is possible to discern a train of thought in *The Phenomenon of Man*’. (Medawar 1961, 101). Chardin’s conception of the noosphere has seemed to many to be a prediction of the second world of thought provided by the age of information, and its principal embodiment, the internet.



Perhaps the strangest legatee of Chardin's work is James Lovelock, the originator of what he has been happy to continue calling the Gaia hypothesis, despite the howls and whimpers of protest from fellow scientists, and the embarrassingly enthusiastic acclaim of bishops and white witches. Lovelock's proposal is that the atmosphere and the biosphere are closely related, in that active feedback processes enable organisms living on the Earth to help to regulate the stable conditions of the planet, conditions which are suitable for life. In other words, organisms help to form the environments and, in particular the atmospheric environment, to which they adapt. The Gaia hypothesis is summed up in a statement produced by a meeting in Amsterdam in 2001: 'The Earth System behaves as a single, selfregulating system comprised of physical, chemical, biological and human components' (Lovelock 2007, 32). The most dramatic example of this is the transformation of an atmosphere rich in methane and carbon dioxide into one of which more than twenty percent consists of that dangerous, ravenously reactive, carcinogenic poison, oxygen. Plants farm the air of carbon dioxide, breaking it down into the carbon they need, and expelling oxygen as a byproduct. Human beings live off this vegetable pollutant, which they recombine with carbon, largely through the act of combustion known as respiration, and put back, in currently prodigious quantities, into the air.

Though Lovelock has acknowledged the influence of those scientists like Vernadsky who saw the possibility of a systematic and integrated earth, in which living and nonliving organisms would be treated as an inclusive whole, he has kept a sober and dignified distance from some of the loopier claims for the implications of the Gaia hypothesis. In particular, he has never embraced assertions of the progressive coevolution of mind and mundus. Indeed, his most recent book, *The Revenge of Gaia* (2007), chillingly proposes that, far from being the integrating peak of coevolution, man is well on the way to being dispensed with by an earth that is undergoing one of its rapid transitions to an inhospitably hot condition. Although he writes with passion of his love for the countryside of the West Country and with bitterness at its destruction, Lovelock sees no prospect of a peaceful truce, in which human beings would learn the lesson of living in tune with nature, and be able to live in a condition of sustainable development. Rather, technological means must urgently be sought to mitigate the effects on the atmosphere of man's tenancy of the earth, nuclear power being the most egregiously and culpably neglected of these means. For what matters most is that there should be fewer humans: Lovelock calls for what in effect would be a cull, to reduce the population from over six billion to around half to a billion. For Lovelock, it is not a matter of human beings learning to tread more lightly upon the earth. Rather than returning to the land, the least injurious way to sustain the human population would be for nearly all

human beings to live in dense urban masses, consuming the junk food they adore, which could be synthesised from the air or the effluents from nuclear power stations, rather than the products (whether ‘organic’ or not makes little difference), of catastrophically overfarmed land (Lovelock 2007, 170).

It is hard to know whether Lovelock’s work belongs on the side of the growth of world-consciousness or its retraction. While Gaia-theory has contributed hugely to a new synthesis of world and ‘world’, his actual arguments suggest that the human world has no choice but undignified, sustainable retreat (Lovelock 2007, 8). The world can only be appeased by a standing aside of ‘the world’. As Bruno Latour observed, in a lecture given to the British Sociological Association, the war being waged by human beings on Gaia is truly a ‘world war’, in a sense to which no previous conflicts really approximate: ‘Speak of a *World War*... Those of the 20th century were little provincial conflicts compared to the one that awaits us. Retreat, retreat! before it’s too late and we lose everything’ (Latour 2007, 1). There is another feature of this war of ‘the world’ on the world to which Latour draws our attention. ‘We lose especially because this war against Gaia has one trait in common with that rather local fight ridiculously called the “War on Terror”: it cannot be won. Either we win over Gaia, and we disappear with her; or we lose against Gaia, and she manages to shudder us into nonexistence’ (Latour 2007, 1). In reality, we cannot win, because it is no longer clear what winning this kind of world war could mean.

Ironically, the orderly retreat of ‘the world’ from the world can only be engineered by an increase in world-consciousness. The strongest and most emphatic exponent of world-consciousness in the last ten years has been Michel Serres. His previous work, governed by the figure of Hermes, had been concerned with the logic of unpredictable crossings and communications, often in the mode of a kind of minority, drawing attention to the exceptional, the unexpected, the anomalous and the unassimilated, in a way which has occasionally endeared him to the supporters of micrological perspectives. But, for the last ten years, Serres’s work has been taking a different turn. In this period, he has been trying to make good his promise made to Bruno Latour in an interview of 1990 to try to ‘to form, to compose, to promote – I can’t quite find the right word – ...a *syrrhèse*, a confluence not a system, a mobile confluence of fluxes. Turbulences, overlapping cyclones and anticyclones, like on the weather map’ (Serres and Latour 1995 122). The beginning of this process is perhaps to be found in his *The Natural Contract*, but the decisive move to the universalist thinking that has characterised his recent work is taken in *Atlas* (1994). As its title suggests, this book is an attempt to provide a kind of mappamundi for the modern world of communications. Serres had devoted much of his earlier work to the describing of patterns of interference, intersection, relation and

communication – describing his work as ‘a philosophy of mixed bodies’, or a ‘philosophy of prepositions’. A map of the modern world would need to render and make navigable a world that is no longer the inert background or arena of these movements, but is formed through them. If we are to construct a new understanding of the world, it will have to be through a mapping of movement, itinerary, trajectory. And this is because relations are no longer exceptions, especially in the world that we have constructed, but rather constitute the world. In a space formed out of mediations and relations, of *pas-se-partouts* and between-times, it is no longer possible to maintain the separation of different spaces – or the distinction between the local and the global.

One might imagine a fly in flight: it moves in zizags, hurried, choppy, discontinuous, changing course unpredictably, suddenly flies the length of the room, from one extreme to the most distant belief, in brief, medium and long trajectories, as though generated by the throw of a dice, halts, turns tightly for a long period in a tight space, striking near or contiguous objects, mirror, window, lamp, table, buzzes in a little prison, rotates in a little island, sets off again .. and now flies out of the open window. Let it enter by chance a car or a plane and it will be on the other side of the earth, where it will begin again the dance that we think crazy but which reveals, miraculously, the reason and wisdom of the world. Yes, it defines, really, here and now, the local, marking out its frontiers in its flight, weaving out an island of singularity, seeming to rest to rest in this chosen niche, but then, suddenly, carries news of this particularity to distant and unexpected horizons, where it starts weaving nesting, spinning a new place ... but then is off again. Yes, it localises, and to be sure, it delocalises. What invisible tissue is it weaving, what network, what map is it tracing out?

The atlas itself. (Serres 1994, 102-3)

Two later books extend Serres’s attempts to intimate a map of global connections in *Atlas*. In these two books, Serres connects the making of a new kind of world candidly with the emergence of a new kind of humanity, in ‘*hominescence*’.

At the centre of *Hominescence* (2001) is what Serres calls ‘the greatest event of the twentieth century’ (Serres 2001, 90), by which he means the end of agriculture as it had been practised up to this point. ‘The Earth, in the sense of the planet photographed in its globality by astronauts, takes the place of the earth, in the sense of the plot of ground worked every day’ (Serres 2001, 90). This condition is created by and reciprocally accelerates a ‘general humanisation of species’ (Serres 2001, 92). The central section of

*Hominescence*, entitled ‘The World’, takes the measure of this new configuration of man in relation to the natural world. Serres sees this as a new domestication of nature, though it completes, rather than fundamentally contradicting, a process begun in the Neolithic period. In this process, the natural world is not literally enclosed in farms and zoos, but it is absorbed into knowledge: ‘the Universe has become the farm of knowledge’ (Serres 2001, 115). Such a prospect of a universal subordination of animals to the dominion of man may strike animalists with horror, but Serres insists that such a relation need not of itself be dominative. Rather, now that nature has entered culture, a word which Serres insists on taking in its primary meaning, animals and human beings can enter into new relations of mutual cultivation, a reciprocally-defining dance of care, charm and enchantment. More even than this, as we ‘leave the farm and enter into the world’ (Serres 2001, 144), we are in the process of constructing a new, collective body, borrowing and integrating the particularities of every species. Insofar as a species represents a certain inhabitation of a particular time and space, the construction of what Serres calls the ‘Biosom’ (Serres 2001, 146) effects a synthesis of such times and places:

If each species carves out a space-time, that is, a niche in the world to subsist in, or if, inversely, the spatio-temporal dimensions of each particular niche bring about the appearance of one or more species, as if they represented each grade or rung of this ladder, then the Biosom composes the global space-time, complex and intersecting, of the ensemble of living creatures in the world. (Serres 2001, 147)

When he begins to ask, what kind of soul or subject might evolve to match this globalised body, Serres comes close to the world-mysticism of Teilhard de Chardin: ‘It is as if the world were evolving slowly towards selfknowledge. Does the apparition of life mark the first emergence of this knowledge? Are we entering into a vague idea of a capacity for selfcomprehension of the world by itself, of which we would be the mediators?’ (Serres 2001, 153).

*L’Incandescent* (2003) enlarges many of the arguments of *Hominescence*, adding to the spatial emphasis of the former book an insistence on the globalised world as a fulfilment of a ‘grand récit’ extending through the entire lifetime of the planet – ‘we are all almost as old as the earth’ (Serres 2003, 27). Serres’s central claim in this book is that, compared with other species, each of which is restricted to a particular locality, or environment, human beings are undetermined. Human beings inhabit a ‘habitat that is indefinite, open and white – the undefined world of our being-in-the-world’ (Serres 2003, 112). *L’Incandescent* expands the celebration of the universal man to be found in *L’Hominescence*, saluting the arrival of *Pantope*, the human who can inhabit

all space, *Panchrome*, the participant in all times, *Pangloss*, speaker of many languages, and *Panurge*, unprogrammed in his actions (Serres 2003, 216-43).

Serres recognises that the prospect of this ‘totipotence’ (Serres 2001, 155) may be terrifying, but suggests that a retreat to finitude would be both evasive and reactionary. Our anxiety at the prospect of entering into the world may prevent us not only from taking an opportunity, but also from acknowledging a responsibility. Just as, previously, we were locked into our localised and finite being-in-the-world, so now our finitude consists in our being-in-The-World, the finitude of the absolute. Man has been forced, suggests Serres, to face his own freedom as a new kind of necessity, a new second nature, which must in its turn be ordered and managed: ‘If economics pushes him still towards the mastery and possession of the world, a certain ecology requires a mastery of this mastery’ (Serres 2003, 361). Serres acknowledges that his celebration of the universal is likely to create uneasiness among those who suspect that universalism must always imply imperialism. His defence is that all such imperialisms are in reality monopolising extensions of the local or parochial.

### **Unworlding**

Heidegger inherits from Hegel the conception of a relation between what he calls Dasein, which he is at pains to tell us is not necessarily to be identified with human existence and the worlding of the world. He inherits too the sense that it is in some way the destiny of Dasein to concern itself with the worlding of the world. This is in contrast to animals, for example, who have a merely passive or reactive relation to their environments, or *Umwelte*.

But Heidegger marks the beginning of a difficulty or reluctance or difficulty in the project of thinking the world. Heidegger sets out in chapter 1.3 of *Being and Time* to try to grasp the ‘worldhood of the world’ (Heidegger 1962, 63-148) In asking this question, Heidegger has already made something like a break, almost a breakthrough. For he newly assumes that being cannot be understood apart from its worldly condition, and that this condition of having to be in a world is essential to it. Where much philosophical endeavour prior to Heidegger had assumed that the condition of belonging to the world was just that, a condition, attaching to, but not an essential part of the nature of things and beings, Heidegger shows that the accident of being in the world is an essential accident, and as such is something to be grasped rather than abstracted away.

Worldhood must be understood because it is always presupposed in everything to do with Dasein. The world has thus already begun to advance upon understanding, calling to be understood, refusing any more to be

simply set aside as a condition of things. Indeed, Heidegger's determination to try to find a way to think worldhood may itself be thought of as a crucial kind of explication, or of worlding, whereby the world comes into the world. But the specific way in which Heidegger insists that the world come into the world means that it must also retreat from understanding. This is because, for Heidegger, the essential condition of the world is to be that in which everything that is in the world must have its being, it is to be the outside of everything that is inside it. It is for this reason that Heidegger's account of the world can predicate so little of it. Dasein is that form of existence that cannot but pose the worldhood of the world, even if that worldhood must in its essence remain withdrawn. The best that we can hope for is the achievement of *Gelassenheit*, which allows the in-the-worldness of the world to be disclosed without being grasped.

Given Heidegger's comic agonies of scruple as regards reducing the world to predication, it is strange to find him being denounced for doing just that. And yet there have been many who have done just this. One of them is Luce Irigaray, who has suggested that in the course of the worlding of the world in Heidegger, something gets left out. Irigaray accuses Heidegger, who stands as the representative of masculinist philosophy, of the reduction, or, in her terms, 'forgetting' of air. The air has the dual qualities of being 'whole' – it is 'the whole of our habitation as mortals' (Irigaray 1999, 8) – and of being endless, not just space, but spaciousness: 'Is there a dwelling more vast, more spacious, or even more generally peaceful than that of air? Can man live elsewhere than in air?' (Irigaray 1999, 8) The forgetting of air takes the form of a solidification, an encrusting, or 'vitrification'. This imaginary encrusting both closes the outside off, and bounds the air within. Irigaray offers a resourceful reading of the cosmology of Empedocles to express this:

The first element to be separated by hatred was air, and it surrounded the world in a circle, or an egg. The exterior circle of air solidified, or froze, and was transformed into a crystalline vault that bounds the world. Thus was the world constituted as a whole closed in upon itself, the most fluid cosmic element serving as its solid crust. (Irigaray 1999, 16)

Luce Irigaray's account of the bounding of the air anticipates the arguments of Peter Sloterdijk, who has attempted in the three volumes of his *Sphären* (1999-2004) to update and particularise the unhelpfully dim view of technology taken by Heidegger. His way of doing this is to investigate the condition of insideness, or enfoldedness. Human existence is a matter of enspherings, of various kinds and on different scales: that of the cell, the body, the womb, the city, the nation, the world. These enspherings are

always in part withdrawn from awareness and experience, precisely because they depend upon what is held to be given or latent.

For Sloterdijk, as for Irigaray, it is for this reason that the last and most recent environment is not in fact the solid world, but rather the atmosphere, the image of ensphering as such. The air which surrounds is ubiquitous, abundant. But modernity is characterised by progressive stages of what Sloterdijk calls 'explizieren', which we should probably translate as 'explicitation', a making explicit, rather than 'explication', or simple explanation. By this, Sloterdijk means the making manifest of the complex support systems and dependencies that constitute man in his environment. Environmentalism itself, provoked by Jacob von Uexküll's development of the idea of the *Umwelt*, is an example of the explicitation, which may be thought of as the bringing of the outside into perception.

Sloterdijk has read this era of explicitation as having two effects. One is that we come closer to the possibility of understanding the limits to our autonomy and the full extent of our ensphered condition. There is always, for human beings, a sphere, an *Umwelt*, in which we participate and which participates in us. The other is that we lose the vital sense of openness, or givenness, in the manner mourned by Luce Irigaray. For explicitation makes it clear that, not only might we depend on the air, the air might depend on us. When we draw air into our sphere, when we enter an era of 'airconditioning', we must recognise the danger of asphyxiation. Sloterdijk sees the principle of explicitation at work not just in science and technology, but also in the avant-garde art of the twentieth century, whose principal purpose is the 'breaking of latency', in order 'to burst mystified latent positions and achieve a breakthrough with more explicit techniques' (Sloterdijk 2006, 15). Here too, then, there is a drawing of previously implicit atmospheres – psychological, political - into the circle of understanding and engineering. Sloterdijk finds an emblem both for the 'atmospheric consciousness' which was 'central to the self-explication of culture in the twentieth century' and for the risks that attend the moving out of the security of one's own bubble of presumption by recalling the near-fatal accident suffered by Salvador Dali when he undertook to deliver a lecture on the Paranoiac Critical Method at the International Surrealist Exhibition in London in 1936, dressed in a diving suit. The air-supply failed, and Dali was only rescued from asphyxiation at the last moment. 'The fact that the artist chose a diving suit equipped with an artificial air supply for his appearance as ambassador from the deep leaves no doubt about his connection with the development of atmospheric consciousness', comments Sloterdijk (Sloterdijk 2006, 16). But this is a peculiarly literal metaphor:

His performance makes it obvious that, in the present age, conscious existence must be lived as an explicit dive into context. Those who venture out of their own camps in multimilieu society must be sure of their ‘diving equipment’ – that is, of their physical and mental immune systems. The accident cannot be accounted to diletantism alone; it also discloses the systematic risks of technical atmospheric explication and technically forced access to an other element – precisely in the way that the risk of poisoning the home troops was inseparable from the actions of military atmo-terrorism in gas warfare. (Sloterdijk 2006, 16)

This last phrase is an allusion to an event that Sloterdijk has made central to his account of modern culture, the first use of gas in warfare in 1915. From this point onwards, the outside will have been drawn into the inside, and so will not be able to be relied upon, as arena, as support, as environment. In this entangled condition, war will take place not in, but on the environment:

The ‘total war’ heralded by old particles and new signs would inevitably take on the characteristics of an environmental war: during this war, the atmosphere itself would become a theatre of war; furthermore, air would become a kind of weapon and a special kind of battlefield. And, in addition, from the commonly breathed air, from the ether of the collective, the community, in its mania, will in future wage a chemical war against itself. (Sloterdijk 2006, 19)

It is true that Heidegger is much more attentive to the element of earth, or of ground, than he is to the air. And yet it must be acknowledged that Heidegger writes at a turning point. Previously, the world had been that which was to be grasped, to be made conscious, made knowable and selfknowing. It is more than a matter of a latency that is to be explicitated, in Peter Sloterdijk’s formulation. It is the worlding of the world. But there is a danger in this, that accounts for the perceptible anxiety in Heidegger’s account, that strives to allow the world to remain withdrawn in latency, as well as disclosing it as that latency.

### **Implication**

Bruno Latour has characterised a paradoxical wrinkle in the history of globalisation:

when the cartographer Mercator transformed Atlas from a distorted giant supporting the Earth on his shoulder into a quiet and seated scientist holding the planet in his *band*, this was probably the time when globalization was at its zenith. And yet the world in 1608 was barely known and people remained far apart. Still, every new land,



every new civilization, every new difference could be located, situated, housed, without much surprise into the transparent house of Nature. But now that the world is known, people are brought together by violent deeds, even if they wish to differ and not be connected. There is no global anymore to assemble them. The best proof is that there are people setting up demonstrations against globalization. The global is up for grabs. Globalization is simultaneously at its maximum and the globe at its nadir. There are lots of *blogs* but no globe. (Latour 2005, 27)

Once, there was a strong idea of the world without a corresponding experience of it. Once it was possible to imagine the world without being able to live it. Now we are forced to live in the world, and maybe also to live out the world, without being able any more to imagine it. And so we have a demanding experience of the world without being able, or, what may come to the same thing, without daring to imagine it. We have become mundophobic, world-shy.

Unfortunately, this story of the climactic spate of world-consciousness followed by an orderly ebbing of world-consciousness will not do. For one thing, it is clear that the era of worldmaking by no means an effect of the abatement of global consciousness. It is rather the effect of its intensification. As Bruno Latour, among many others, observes, fragmentation is an effect of globalisation, not its opposite or remedy. The more integrated the world is, the more worlds there seem to be in it. This is not the first time that this has happened. At the very beginning of geographical world-consciousness, in the early seventeenth century, we find an extraordinary capacity for the idea of world to be expressed as multiplicity. In a movement that anticipates our own, the extension of the one world intensified the sense of the multiplication of worlds of different kinds. In no writer is this disintegrating duress on the word 'world' more intensely applied than in the work of John Donne. In "The Good Morrow", the lover represents his mistress as his completing hemisphere:

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone ;  
 Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown ;  
 Let us possess one world; each hath one, and is one.

In another poem, he characteristically brings together the little world of the body with the larger spheres of discovery and exploration:

I am a little world made cunningly  
 Of Elements, and an Angelike spright,  
 But black sinne hath betraid to endlesse night

My worlds both parts, and (oh) both parts must die.  
 You which beyond that heave which was most high  
 Have found new spears, and of new land can write,  
 Powre new seas in mine eyes, that so I might  
 Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly

Donne's *Anniversaries*, subtitled 'An Anatomy of the World', plays with the notion of worlds that die and come into being, of actual giving way to what we might call virtual worlds:

Let no man say, the world it selfe being dead,  
 Tis labour lost to have discovered.  
 The worlds infirmities, since there is none  
 Alive to study this dissection;  
 What life the world hath stil.

For there's a kind of world remaining still,  
 Though shee which did inanimate and fill  
 The world, begone,

... The twi-light of her memory doth stay;  
 Which, from the carkasse of the old world, free  
 Creates a new world; and new creatures bee  
 Produc'd:

She to whom this world must it selfe refer,  
 As Suburbs, or the Microcosme of her,  
 Shee, shee is dead; shee's dead: when thou knowest this,  
 Thou knowst how lame a cripple this world is.

But it is not just the inextricability of the integral and the multiple with which we have to deal in reckoning with the world or 'the world'. For the world and 'the world' have become irreversibly entangled with each other. Sloterdijk has a tendency to write of the process of explication as though it always represented a violent eviction. His book *Luftbeben* (2002) its substance later taken up into the third volume of his *Spheres* (1998-2004) tells the story of the explication of the atmosphere entirely in terms of developments in military technology, beginning with the first use of gas at Ypres, and extending through the use of gas chambers for execution in the USA and in the concentration camps, and the large-scale 'atmo-terrorisms' effected by the firestorm of Dresden, the nuclear explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He aims to go beyond the position of melancholic regret represented by Heidegger, who can offer nothing but the impulse to

*Gelassenheit*, the effort to restore the relation to a given world, in the face of explication. But he seems to share with Heidegger, and with Irigaray, the sentimental memory of the implicitness of being-there, where the ‘there’ is always richly and abundantly given.

Explicitation resembles objectification, that process whereby, according to Heidegger, nature is made over simply into *Gestell*, standing-reserve, in order to be available for us. Objectification is traditionally thought of in terms of a separation, between a subject in here and the object out there in front of it. We are able to wrest out secrets from the body of nature, because we persuade ourselves that it is not our body, or that we are essentially not body at all, but mind, will, knowledge. But the process of explication not only makes known the grounds of our dependence on what lies outside us (most dramatically in the explication of the process of respiration at the end of the eighteenth century), it also makes clear the extent of our entanglement with the things that surround us. Explicitation makes it possible to understand and to regulate, even to transform what had previously been thought to be simply given; but by no means does it extricate us from that givenness.

Heideggerean ecology suggests not only that it is necessary, but that it might also be sufficient to find a way to let things be, to allow a nature that has been bottled up on the inside of things, to escape into the atmosphere, and thereby reconstitute the atmosphere itself. But this fails to recognise that this sense of the inexhaustible abundance of nature is not the opposite of environmental degradation, it is its condition and cause. The explication of nature is twinned with the fantasy of the inexhaustible, the cake that can endlessly be eaten and had again. The fantasy of explication is that all the latent mysteries of nature can be forced out of hiding, and everything that had previously been held to condition us invisibly and unconsciously from the outside can be drawn into the inside of human thought and technique. Through explication, nature will be brought indoors. Our exposure to things will be reformed as enclosure.

The theme of claustrophobia nags insistently through much contemporary writing about the question of worlds, as though in baffled recognition that the once ineffably and unimaginably wide world has become both bloated and closed. For Teilhard de Chardin, the closing of the world on itself, and the resulting concentration of thought, is the necessary condition, like the pressure that liquefies a gas, for the formation, through ‘forced coalescence’ (Chardin 1959, 239) of the noosphere. For Michel Serres, the coming of hominescence represents a vast domestication, a taking into custody of the natural world.

But we may have moved into an explicitation of the process of explicitation itself, the result of which is a disclosure of a principle which must be regarded not as the opposite of explication, the fantasy of latency, but as its consequential contrary, namely the fact of *implication*. Bruno Latour has recently connected Sloterdijk's explicitation with attachment, suggesting that 'while we might have had social sciences for modernizing and emancipating humans, we have not the faintest idea of what sort of social science is needed for Earthlings buried in the task of explicating their newly discovered attachments' (Latour 2007, 3). The opposite of the explicit may be the implicit; but the contrary of the explicit is the *implicated*.

The work may be done by means of another word, around which two contrasting meanings can hinge: *assuming*. Previously, we could assume the world would continue to be there for us, as nourishment, provocation, latrine. Now that we are, perhaps not precisely at the end of the process of explicitation, but certainly in the middle of its long arriving, we must assume the world, in the sense that we must literally take it to, take it upon ourselves. To assume the world is to take to it, as one assumes a role, or a responsibility.

Serres and Latour have come together around the notion of what Serres calls the 'quasi-object'. Recently, Serres has expanded this notion to encompass what he calls 'world-objects', or 'objets-mondes'. If quasi-objects are objects that circulate through social structures, forming and sustaining social bonds, then 'world-objects' perform the same function in circulating between human beings and the world. World-objects both open to the world and open the world to us. Such objects are characterised by their capacity for rapid expansion and dispersal, which is perhaps why Serres sees them beginning with the very first atmospheric emissions from human civilisations: 'Who would have believed that globalisation began in prehistory?' (Serres 2001, 179). More recent examples of world-objects are satellites, nuclear weapons, the internet and nuclear wastes. Such objects seem to require a change in the understanding of the very nature of objects. These objects, especially informational objects, are not so much things of which we make use, but habitations, or environments:

What is an object? In the literal sense: 'That which is thrown, or which one throws, in front'. Do world-objects lie in front of us? The global dimension which characterises them suppresses the difference between them and us, a gap which once rightly defined our objects. We live in them as in the world. Shall we call objects our houses? (Serres 2001, 180-1; my translation)

Bruno Latour has made such objects, or, in his preferred phrase, ‘things’ the centre of a new conception of world-construction. In his *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), Latour argued against modernity’s defining self-conception of the split between nature and culture, or, as we might put it, between the world and ‘the world’. In fact, he argues, there have only ever been ‘cultures-natures’ (Latour 1993, 104), the bumpy, rutted, heterogeneous ‘Middle Kingdom’ of things that can be assigned securely either to nature nor to culture, but are active mediators between them. In the work he undertook during the 1990s in the history of science and technology, Latour set himself the task, alongside others who identified themselves with actor-network theory, of following through the ‘associology’, of various hybrid objects of this kind. Of late, Latour has taken more and more interest in the kinds of political negotiations that might be constituted through the Parliament of Things.

For Latour, the world is to be built through the necessary mediation of objects, through *Dingpolitik*. Latour prefers the word *Ding* to *object*, because he looks forward to the time in which ‘Objects become things, that is, when matters of fact give way to their complicated entanglements and become matters of concern’ (Latour 2005, 31). He reminds us of Heidegger’s reminiscence of the etymology of the word ‘thing’:

long before designating an object thrown out of the political sphere and standing there objectively and independently, the *Ding* or Thing has for many centuries meant the issue that brings people together because it divides them. The same etymology lies dormant in the Latin *res*, the Greek *aitia* and the French or Italian *cause*...Are not all parliaments now divided by the nature of things as well as by the din of the crowded *Ding*? Has the time not come to bring the *res* back to the *res publica*? (Latour 2005, 13)

Some of these things are much less solid than we imagined. Latour has drawn repeatedly on Sloterdijk’s examination of the successive explications or unveilings of the different spheres in which we live. Since these atmospheres are no longer simply available to us, we must take responsibility for their maintenance. Latour joins Sloterdijk in taking seriously the metaphor of the ‘public sphere’, which, he says, will have henceforth to be maintained in a careful ‘air-conditioning’:

the Public sphere is precisely that: a sphere, or another private place that has to be generated, maintained, heated, lighted, furnished and preserved through a delicate technology of many intricate life supports. It is not true that we move from the narrow domestic space to the large breathing space of the public forum. We travel from

bubble to bubble, all the way to the Global dimension, which is itself nothing more than a tiny bubble. This is why we should invest at least the same amount of attention in the artificial fabrication of public domes as we do in making the private a liveable place. (Latour 2004)

This complex, attentive, fragile sphere is to supposed to stand in place of the all-purpose ‘pneumatic democracy’ that Sloterdijk himself has satirised in his idea of the ‘Pneumatic Parliament’, an inflatable structure which could be dropped in the form of a self-opening parachute on to the terrain of countries, immediately behind the waves of bombers, where it is desired to impose democracy quickly and effectively.

The almost transparent, thin, silvery outer shell of the building is a symbolic reference to the vulnerability of the democratic order and the transformation process of the mindset of future democrats. On entering the building, parliamentarians first encounter a pneumatic air lock: an intermediate chamber as mediator between the public subject outside and objective affairs of state inside. Once inside the rotunda, the essence of the spoken word can develop in a concentrated and dignified atmosphere.’ (Sloterdijk and von der Haegen 2005, 954)

Latour gives us important resources for understanding the nature of our implicatedness in and with the world. And yet, he also insists that we must give up the validating idea of the ‘one world’ of nature, and recognise the multiplicity of the worlds that we inhabit. He even calls for a genuine ‘war of the worlds’ to replace the ‘clash of civilisations’, which he sees as a phoney war, a war by the West or the Whites on behalf of the ‘one world’ of Nature and Reason against the rest. In fact, he argues, this ‘one world’ does not exist and has never existed. It is there to be made (and by war, or by war as a necessary prelude to a enduring peace). He therefore aligns himself with the point of view expressed by Isabelle Stengers in her *Cosmopolitiques*, first issued in seven volumes in 1997, and reissued in 2 volumes in 2003, that we need to give up the idea that the world constituted by scientific knowledge, and especially the ‘master-discipline’ of physics, has final authority over the other worlds, or frameworks of reality. She represents the cosmopolitical, in almost direct opposition to Kantian cosmopolitanism, as a deliberate defection from worldhood. As opposed to the Kantian view ‘that politics should aim at allowing a “cosmos,” a “good common world” to exist’, she has explained, the whole idea of cosmopolitics is to slow down the construction of this common world’ (Stengers 2005, 995). Though she appears to be happy to tolerate the abstract horizon or orientation constituted by the prospect of a ‘common world’, she wishes to discourage, even perhaps to discredit, all efforts to speak in its name and borrow its authority:

In the term cosmopolitical, cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulations of which they would eventually be capable... There is no representative of the cosmos as such; it allows nothing, demands no “and so ...”... As for the cosmos, as it features in the cosmopolitical proposal, it has no representative, no one talks in its name, and it can therefore be at stake in no particular consultative procedure.  
(Stengers 2005, 995, 1003)

Like Stengers, and the other ‘cosmopolitiques’ she has encouraged (Soubeyran and Lolive, 2005), Latour scorns the ‘tolerance’ paradigm, but in fact his discourse belongs to an ecology or protectionism of plurality. He wishes for a war of the worlds to protect the possibility of a plurality of worlds, of the internal extraterrestrial, of an infinite intraterrestrial. His common world will, he believes, need to be constructed, and through war.

### **The Missing All**

In truth, the worlds that Goodman describes are pretty obviously the same kind of thing that we refer to when we use words like cultures, civilisations, mythologies, frames of reference, discursive regimes, idioms, games, rituals, clubs, cliques, clans and gangs. The more verification we seem to lend Goodman’s claims by multiplying examples of such worlds, the more those claims are in fact eroded.

The most important difference between what Goodman seems to mean by ‘a world’ and ‘the world’ is the following. A world is strongly determined, but weakly determining. By contrast, the world is strongly determining, but weakly determined. This must in fact be so. We have the impression that frameworks or states of affairs that we can strongly and exhaustively specify must be similarly strong or exhaustive in their effects. But this is a mistake. The very fact that these frameworks can be so strongly and persuasively specified, that their grammar is so readily legible, is what makes it impossible for them to contain us. We can step outside them precisely because we can see round them. In fact, once we have seen round them, we have in some wise already stepped outside them. So a strongly determined world must be weakly determining.

The same is not true of the world, because the world is not totally specifiable. But this does not mean that we are less determined. Anyone who actually tries to complete Goldberg’s achingly incomplete sentence ‘I believe that the world’ is using sleight of hand. It is not just the largeness and variousness of the world that makes it unspecifiable. It is because the world is an open necessity. There is no necessity for the world to be

constituted in any way in particular, but it is absolutely necessary that it will come to be constituted in some particular way or ways, that are always more finite than the current possibilities. This is the kind of indeterminate finitude that I think we can read out from Heidegger's conception of worldhood, though it is perhaps to anticipate what he might have said had he ever written the second part of *Sein und Zeit*.

For the world is not merely a place – and this is another of the distinguishing features of 'the world' as opposed to 'a world'. World is *wer-ald*, the time of man, even the age of man. World-weary, we say, and the world is always weary, or wearing. No matter how many worlds there may seem to be, the point is that it will make no difference to us, because being in the world means only being able to have lived in one world. Of course one is able to choose, maybe constrained to choose, among many worlds. But one will have chosen only one, or only one conglomerate. The world is an issue of the future perfect. 'The world lay all before them', Milton writes of Adam and Eve. But the world is not a prospect, it is a retrospective construal, or the prospect of such a construal. This is the meaning of the definite article in 'the world'. The worldliness of the world is not the issue; the world is the 'the-ness' of the world. When he said that the world is everything that is the case, Wittgenstein was a little previous (like the world itself, perhaps): rather, the world is everything that will have been the case. To think the world is to give it the chance of having been.

We find the idea of the unity of the world a terrifying, even a terroristic concept. This is because unity, which used to sound like an augmentation – the joining together into one of the 'whole world' – now seems to us like the most brutal of reductions. The plurality of worlds, the possibility of the plurality of worlds, must, we feel, be defended from the desire of the imperialist and the desire of the terrorist alike, for they are the same desire, for there to be only one world. But perhaps Michel Serres is right when he points out the conservatism and defensiveness of the philosophy of the fragmentary:

Let's take a vase or some object that is more solid, more constructed, larger. The larger it is, the more fragile it is. If you break it, the smaller the fragment is, the more resistant it is. Consequently, when you create a fragment, you seek refuge in places, in localities, which is more resistant than a global construction...Constructing on a large scale means moving towards vulnerability; thus, synthesis requires courage – the audacity of the frail. (Serres and Latour 1995, 120)

So the frothing paroxysms of worldmaking are perhaps not generative, as we would like them to be, but fiercely defensive, conservative, reductive.



Perhaps they amount to something like the process that Wilfred Bion called ‘attacks on linking’. This process is typical of what Klein called the ‘paranoid-schizoid’ phase of the young child, who splits the world up into good and bad objects, in order to defend itself against the anxious, melancholy acknowledgement that the good breast and the bad breast, the good mother and the bad mother, are the same thing (Klein 1997, 61-7)

‘The world’ has two dimensions or axes. One of them is number – the question of how many our world is to be, or how many sub-worlds it is going to allow. We fear that, if the world is reduced to one, it will necessarily be one-and-the-same. But it is a question of the integration of the world, rather than its unification, in the sense of its reduction to one. The world is not one, even if, increasingly, it is without exception or fissure. The world is not all the same, any more than the ocean or the atmosphere are all the same, even there are no places where one can make out divisions in them, or cut them at the joints. Continuity does not entail consistency. Rather than making the world uniform, human habitation has made the world more massively, subtly continuous with itself. The point is not the number of worlds we can participate in, the number of cultural and philosophical *pièdes-à-terre* we can maintain, but our capacity for implicated worldliness, the degree to which we are going to be able to live in-the-world, to acknowledge our implication in the world, and the implication of all our worldly acts. This remains true even despite the fact that we currently seem to be required to acknowledge, as a form of Dasein, or in-der-Welt-sein, conditions and practices that seem so obviously to take us out of this world, temporally and spatially. What is the Dasein of Second Life? What would it mean to be worldly, when the world itself has become extraterrestrial, when we have become so exorbitant?

The pinching irony is that, at a time when our implicatedness not only in the things of the world, but in the world itself, has never been more pressing and unignorable, we seem so capable of living out of this world, or of regarding ‘the world’ as well lost. Like St. Augustine, who prayed ‘Lord, make me chaste, but not yet’, we seem, just at the point that the world and ‘the world’ have become so inextricably involved or convolved in each other, and probably for that reason, to want to hold off the gathering of the world. A little like the modern souls spoken of in Eliot’s *Dry Salvages*, we have the reality, but would do anything to miss the meaning.

In the past, the world was finitude, the condition of always having to have one’s being in a particular here and now, rather than in the world as such. The defining condition of being in the world was, in fact, that you could never inhabit the whole of the world, that, as Michel Serres is fond of saying, you could never sleep on both ears at once (Serres 1997, 16). But

now the extraordinary augmentation of human desire and power has reached the point where it seems about to be able to overcome all these forms of finitude, and thus to be able to apprehend, inhabit and even begin to legislate the world as such. And this has become part of our own finitude. It is as if, having progressively domesticated the world, drawing the outside of nature into the inside of human culture, that condition has suddenly flipped, so that our control over the world has become an external necessity, separated from us, and thus a new paradoxical condition of finitude. We are stuck with our ubiquity, our totipotency, as previously we were stuck with mortality, impotence, location, distance, facticity. Our power has become our audacious frailty.

When constructivism attempts to substitute multiple made worlds for the given world, it ignores the fact that the given world has also been for some considerable time under construction, at least since human beings started to change their environment in the Neolithic era. Bruno Latour is right: the world is to be made, rather than simply being given. But if he is right about the sense, he is wrong about the tense. For, whether or not we allow it, a world, that cannot but be the world, is in the making. The question may be, not how many worlds we can multiply, but whether we can find a way to live in the world at all, a world that, most hair-raisingly of all, is in large part up, or down, to us. The one choice it seems we do not have is the choice not to make a choice. For so it goes in the world.

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