

## ART HISTORY AND VISUAL CULTURE WITHOUT WORLD

By Aron Vinegar

### Introduction

In Pierre Bourdieu's essay *The Forms of Capital*, he notes that the material object of art history may be separated by space or time "from the *habitus* for which it was intended." Because the work of art continues to exist in its material factuality into the present well beyond its historical emergence in a particular *habitus*, art history tends to valorize the *opus operatum* over the *modus operandi*; an overemphasis on the physical and objective structures of the work, rather than an attentiveness to a more supple relationship between incorporated and objective structures, which would go much further in accounting for the "true basis" of the "conscious and unconscious choice of the techniques and forms itself."<sup>1</sup> Despite some important differences, Bourdieu's influential account of the status of art and art history echoes with Heidegger's ongoing critiques of art history's temptation to accumulate and classify facts rather than paying attention to the world-forming qualities of works of art that are grounded in and revelatory of facticity and "being-in the world."<sup>2</sup> As Heidegger notes in *Being and Time*<sup>3</sup>, "facticity is not the factuality of the *factum brutum* of something present-at-hand, but a characteristic of Dasein's being." If art is a form of Being in the deep sense that it has for Heidegger, it is also a mode of world-formation, with all that entails in terms of temporality, facticity, historicity, totality, unity, significance, and truth. Simply put, "the reciprocity between 'world' and 'art' is constitutive of both."<sup>4</sup> This reciprocity is exactly why Heidegger engaged in a fairly detailed account of art history in one of his early lectures courses, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. The work of art and potentially art history were exemplary manifestations of his nascent hermeneutics of facticity and analytic of Dasein that would come to fruition in *Being and Time*.<sup>5</sup> It would not be an understatement, then, to suggest that for Heidegger a sensitive engagement

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bourdieu: *The Forms of Capital* [1983], transl. by Richard Nice, in: *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by John G. Richardson, New York 1986, 241-258; see <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-capital.htm>, fn. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger's 'influence' on Bourdieu is a complex question, and at times the latter is quite critical of the former's hermeneutics of Dasein, not to mention his overall 'style' of writing and thinking. Nonetheless the resonances between the two are remarkable.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time* [1927], trans. by Joan Stambaugh, Albany 1996, 135, 127.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Creation of the World, or Globalization* [2002], trans. by François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, Albany 2007, 42.

<sup>5</sup> See my introductory essay to this special, and my introduction to *Heidegger and the Work of Art History*, Ashgate, 2014, 1-30, co-written with Amanda Boetzkes.

with the history of art has the potential to disclose the very movement, historicity, rhythms, moods, and moments of Being. Accompanying Heidegger's understanding of art as a primary exemplar of world formation is the equiprimordial potential for "world withdrawal and world decay."<sup>6</sup> Issues of nearness and distance, recovery and loss are always at play in art as a manifestation of being. But like Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*, and his attentiveness to its relationship to art and art history, Heidegger never really believed that works of art or worlds of art were merely past nor simply inertly present, no matter how far art history submits to its temptations.

Although we are still unclear as to the nuances of phenomenology's impact on the overall structure and practice of art history and visual culture, I would claim that it has been crucial and structuring precisely because it is woven into the mood, tenor, and orientation of its practices and premises. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the phenomenological concept of "world," and its allied notions of facticity, factuality, intentionality, ontico-ontological distinction, temporality, and history, not to mention most of the past and present terminology in art history and visual culture: style, period, culture, nation, etc. This essay explores the discipline's commitment to "world" in somewhat broad strokes in an attempt to elucidate what those commitments commit us to, as well as offering an outline of what a more speculative art history and visual culture would entail beyond those commitments. My underlying premise is that in order to move towards a more robust speculative and generous ontology we should seriously consider questioning our phenomenological notion of world as a driving force in art history and visual culture.

*The World Does not Exist: Against Facticity, Intentionality, and World-Views*

Art History and Visual Culture are structured by their commitment to the concept of "world." This might be couched in terms of biography, style, history, nation, period, culture, identity, or visibility. We are apt to talk about 'Michelangelo's late style,' the 'Baroque period,' the 'Dutch world-view,' the 'Englishness of English art,' 'visual culture,' and 'world art history.' Even as we seem to be moving into more sophisticated grounds the institutional and disciplinary mechanisms are still deeply wedded to the concept of world and a hermeneutics of facticity. Anyone who has participated in a recent job search in art history and visual culture can attest to the fact that issues of "world" still drive hiring practices. Although we might not hire a 'specialist' on a particular artist and her interpretive and cultural world, we search for candidates attentive to a determinate era of history and geographical location, or a particular era of art whether that goes by the name of a movement – let's say conceptual art – or its corresponding temporal or geographical manifestation. The concept of "world" seems to suggest an overarching totality,

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger: *The Origin of the Work of Art* [1950], in: id.: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter, New York 1971, 75.

an interconnected field of meaning, such that it assumes a certain familiarity and tacit sense for us as a resonant tonality.<sup>7</sup> Although we appear to have moved well beyond Heinrich Wölfflin's claim about our ability to recognize the Gothic style and spirit from a lowly pointed shoe to a lofty cathedral surging upwards into spires and pointed arches, we are still driven by worlds albeit with more attentiveness to disjunction and dissensus.<sup>8</sup> Of course the notion of world can operate at very different scales, as it does in Heidegger's claim about the 'world' of the artist, writer, or craftsperson, but the underlying logic of world in terms of totality, unity, and interconnectedness is still operative.

Thus, at a basic level the phenomenological notion of world suggests a totality of meaning and significance, which creates a unifying tonality and resonance despite the apparent diversity and plurality of things that take place within its overall focus. Heidegger's concept of "world" emphasizes the subsuming of things within a particular life world of tacit use, meaning, and significance. Thus, according to Heidegger, we do not think about a pen, paper, or desk as separate things when we are in the office writing, or about the nail, hammer, and wood as we are engaged in building a shelf in the workroom. These objects do not exist in any 'meaningful' sense in their singularity but rather only within a particular life world of meaning and significance. Consider the following sentence from *Being and Time*<sup>9</sup>: "Equipment – in accordance with its equipmentality – always is in terms of its belonging to other equipment: ink stand, paper, blotting-pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room." Despite the sentence looking like a list of objects it is not really a list – or a catalogue without the "logos" – but rather it must end with "room." The room is not merely another object in this list; the list comes to an end in a way that encompasses, surrounds, and subsumes all the other objects. The 'room qua world' provides, as Heidegger writes, a "thin wall" that separates the authentic self from the "they."<sup>10</sup> What he means is that this wall, however thin it may be, is meant to be a prophylactic against Being's "entanglement," "absorption," and "bedazzlement" in the world of factual objects, which would seem to carry "one" away from its more authentic modes of being, and into the everyday world of "ontological indifference." Heidegger's fundamental stake in human finitude as the fundamental ground and limits for knowing the world is expressed through what he calls "ontological difference," the difference between Being and beings and, consequently, the transcendence of the human Being beyond all other beings. Ontological difference articulates the primordial difference between beings as mere things, and beings that

<sup>7</sup> These searches also tend to be driven by a notion of expertise as a maximal claim, i.e. the candidate's necessary possession and mastery of the relevant languages and literature, time spent in the field, significant primary research, and recognition by colleagues, is the *ne plus ultra* of the desired criteria rather than being an absolutely minimal requirement. As Jacques Rancière has pointed out in the realm of pedagogy, expertise can be an oppressive tool indeed.

<sup>8</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin: *The Principles of Art History* [1915], New York 1932, 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> Heidegger: *Being and Time* [note 3], 69, 64.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 278, 256-257.

are aware of their Being-in-the-world in particular ways. Thus, Dasein is always ontico-ontologically distinct from other entities “within-the-world.”

There is a definite vertical hierarchy to Heidegger’s ontology, despite all his language about being thrown alongside of the world, and it is evident that he constantly uses the concept of the room as boundary to encompass all other objects, thus securing the vertical hierarchy of the (house of) Being over all other beings. The room operates as an overarching world, an ‘ur-container,’ even though Heidegger purposefully wants to avoid this spatial terminology considering his understanding of the house of being as an existential dwelling characterized by circumspective care. But any real turn to the things themselves must question this boundary or vertical hierarchy. There is no overarching world that would provide us with an overview of or container for this myriad world of things. To say that the world does not exist, means that there is no concept of a world that would encompass a totality subsumed within it; a domain that encompasses all other domains, a connection encompassing all connections. There is no “world-view,” simply the myriad of things in all their spatio-temporal complexities.<sup>11</sup> And there is no sense of the world that crosses over its edges to occupy a place overlooking itself.”<sup>12</sup> What this entails is an increasing attentiveness to an ontological plurality that is engaged in a flatter ontology – I prefer to call it a supple and inflected bathmology – that does not engage in ontological exceptionalism or vertical hierarchies based on the presupposition that there is “a coherence of the world, its congruence, or its conformity with an order, plan, principle, or an end.” There is no overarching world and certainly not one existing ‘for’ me or directed solely towards the ‘we’ of a given community, but rather an infinite field of sense and possible co-existences. It would be an ontology that does justice to all existence and not just to human existence. Heidegger never goes as far as Jean-Luc Nancy does in defining world, as “an indefinite totality of meaning,” which leads him to claim that “the time of modernity is followed by the time of things.”<sup>13</sup> Nancy then proceeds to provide

<sup>11</sup> In my thinking about world and worlds I am drawing on the following work: Markus Gabriel: *Fields of Sense – A New Realist Ontology*, Edinburgh 2015, ch. 7: *The No-World-View*, 187-209, and id.: *Why the World Does Not Exist* [2013], trans. by Gregory S. Moss, Cambridge 2015; Tristan Garcia: *Form and Object – A Treatise on Things* [2010], trans. by Mark Allan Ohm and Jon Cogburn, Edinburgh 2014, part II: *Thing and World*, 75-104; Levi R. Bryant: *The Democracy of Objects*, Ann Arbor 2011, 270-279 (*The World Does not Exist*), and id.: *Onto-Cartography – An Ontology of Machines and Media*, Edinburgh 2014, ch. 5: *The Structure of Worlds*, 111-139, 111-114; Jean-Luc Nancy: *A Finite Thinking* [1990], ed. by Simon Sparks, Stanford 2009, 300-307 (*Changing of the World*) and 311-318 (*Res ipsa et ultima*); id.: *Creation of the World* [note 4]; Jean-Luc Nancy and Aurélien Barrau: *What’s These Worlds Coming To?* [2011], trans. by Travis Holloway and Flor Méchain, New York 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy: *Creation of the World* [note 4], 40 and 43. Both Nancy and Gabriel make clear that the world has been secondary to the concept of a world-view. This makes sense, as phenomenology is not primarily interested in the existence of the world but that it appears.

<sup>13</sup> Nancy: *Finite Thinking* [note 11], 311-318 (*Res ipsa et ultima*), 318.

an unruly list of these things<sup>14</sup>: “ribs, skulls, pelvises, irritations, shells, diamonds, drops, foams, mosses, excavations, fingernail moons, minerals, acids, ...” This is truly a catalogue without the logos, and his attentiveness to an exuberance of existence resonates with Markus Gabriel’s claim that his thesis that the world does not exist finds its correlate in the notion that everything exists except the world.<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, the clarion call of phenomenology, “Back to the things themselves!” is not a call back to the things-in-themselves, but rather a call back to things as correlates of human consciousness, and thus as ‘essentially’ intentional objects. Despite Heidegger’s shifting Husserlian intentionality from an epistemological to an ontological realm that is more “worldly” it does not get around the fact of his inability to think “the thereness of the ‘thing-in-itself’ without a return to the self and as a correlate of intentionality.”<sup>16</sup> After all, the reduction in Heidegger is from the ontic to the ontological realm as a way of elucidating his basic presupposition of ontological difference.<sup>17</sup> It is for precisely this reason that Nancy has called for a “hyletic reduction” rather than an eidetic one in his attempt to do justice to existence.<sup>18</sup> In doing so, he is suggesting a sense of meaning and judgment that would be on the same plane as ontic existence rather than a thematization of the relationship between subject and world, which is to say the valorization of an ontology that is oriented primarily to Dasein’s facticity. This is a particularly worthy endeavor, as

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Gabriel: *Why the World Does Not Exist* [note 11], 9.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Heart of Things* [1990], in: id.: *The Birth To Presence*, trans. by Brian Holmes and others, Stanford 1993, 167–188, 183–185. The issue of Heidegger’s realism is complex. For some different accounts see Peter Gratton: *Speculative Realism – Problems and Prospects*, London 2014, 33–38; Tom Sparrow: *The Rhetoric of Realism*, in: *The End of Phenomenology – Speculation and the New Metaphysics*, Edinburgh 2014, 69–85; Gabriel: *Fields of Sense* [note 11], 36–37, 41 fn. 7 and 197–201; Lee Braver: *A Thing of this World – A History of Continental Anti-Realism*, Evanston 2007, 165. Braver and Gabriel see Heidegger moving away from antirealism after the so-called *Kehre*. I actually see intimations of that realism in his early lecture courses. Graham Harman’s engagement with Heidegger’s realism is another issue, as he see those implications throughout his writings from *Being and Time* to his later writings on the “fourfold.” See Graham Harman: *Tool Being – Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, Chicago 2002; id.: *Guerilla Metaphysics – Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*, Chicago 2005; and id.: *The Quadruple Object*, London 2011. Giorgio Agamben has claimed that facticity in Heidegger’s earlier lecture courses marks an abandonment of the notion of intentionality. I am not sure what that means exactly, but I take it that he is suggesting Heidegger’s shift away from Husserl’s understanding of intentionality towards a more “thrown,” worldly, and ontological sense of that “aboutness”. Ultimately, I do not see how this gets away from intentionality in any deep way. See Giorgio Agamben: *The Passion of Facticity*, in: id.: *Potentialities – Collected Essays in Philosophy* [1988], trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford 1999, 185–204, 188.

<sup>17</sup> The term “ontological difference” first appeared in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* published in 1927, and is further developed in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929–1930). However, its basic premise was articulated through different terminology in his early lecture courses and *Being and Time*.

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy: *The Experience of Freedom* [1988], trans. by Bridget McDonald, Stanford 1993, § 14: *Fragments*, 148–172, 159.

art history has always been wedded to a hylomorphic imperative, if not reduction, in its hierarchizations and thematizations of meaning, content, form, and matter.

But an even more promising way to proceed would be to question the presupposition of ontological difference that underpins phenomenological ontology, and its “ontologically privileged scenes.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, most of our attention in art history and visual culture is paid to such privileged scenes dominated by notions of facticity and finitude primarily attentive to “our mortal lives in this or that given historical setting.”<sup>20</sup> The primary example that Marcus Gabriel uses to help us understand his claim that there is no world is a fairly ordinary scene: a “Friday-evening dinner” with friends in a local restaurant.<sup>21</sup> With little effort we could slightly alter his example to orient it towards art history and visual culture by drawing on Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), one of Cy Twombly’s Italian Paintings, Rirkrit Tirivanija’s *Untitled (Free)* (1992), or perhaps more traditionally, Caravaggio’s *Supper at Emmaus* (1606), or Courbet’s *After Dinner at Ornans* (1848). Gabriel’s point is that there is no overarching focus to this scene of a ‘Friday-evening dinner’ such that all objects would fall under the concept of ‘Friday-evening dinner’. For instance, there are most likely customers at other tables in the restaurant with different dynamics and preferences, as well as the different ‘worlds’ of employees, and the diversity of labour undertaken by cooks, wait staff, dishwasher, or owner. And no doubt there are many other entities in the room, for example insects and spiders hidden in corners of the restaurant, bacteria on the tablecloths, or “the huge number of hairs in the room, fingernails, lungs and livers, and so on,” not to mention events at the subatomic level such as “cell divisions, indigestion, and hormonal fluctuations.” Some of these objects and events hang together and others do not. The spider is indifferent to the world of a Friday evening dinner yet it is still a part of my visit to any restaurant.

There are many existing worlds that do not find any common ground within the scene ‘Friday-evening dinner’. The dinner does not encompass all the objects appearing within it, nor does it provide the ultimate focus for this scene. As Gabriel points out, the scene is not a more general concept than the tablecloth such that we can say the tablecloth is a Friday-evening dinner. The dinner is clearly not the meaning of everything unfolding within its world despite the drive to subsume it into an ontologically privileged view of this realm of significance. A phenomenologically driven approach to this Friday-evening dinner would necessarily emphasize a Dasein oriented ontology that would concentrate on its human dimensions at the expense of all the other ontic beings present-at-hand within the scene. Art history is often only dealing with a very small portion of existence in its hermeneutic practices.

<sup>19</sup> Gabriel: *Fields of Sense* [note 11], 195.

<sup>20</sup> Gratton: *Speculative Realism* [note 16], 54.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriel: *Fields of Sense* [note 11], 194–196, and id: *Why the World Does not Exist* [note 11], 8–11.

Clearly there are worlds which extend well beyond our realms of significance and meaning, our cares and concerns, our laughter and joy, our losses and mournings, or any world, horizon, or dwelling. These worlds are often indifferent to us and we need to move beyond our solely negative understanding of indifference as a general lack of interest, concern, care, or empathy due to emotional distancing and /or lack of affective connectivity, towards seeing it as an onto-ethical way of registering the plurality of worlds, which includes humans, but does not privilege them or reduce all worlds to human ones of facticity, meaning, and significance. If we really want to take seriously that art is fundamentally inhuman – a claim made from Adorno to Badiou – then we need to be more attentive to a conception of art history as an ontologically indifferent realm; a formal means of exploring modes of co-existence rather than an ontologically privileged mode of world formation.

### *Logical Time versus Historicism*

Art history's cult of historicism – its presupposition of history and desire to put things and events into context – does not really help us to think about issues of emergence and different worlds that perpetually cross-cut each other, and that are not necessarily given to us. The crux of this dilemma is elucidated in Heidegger's claim in the first version of *On the Origin of the Work of Art*, that there is no such thing as prehistoric art, for as soon as there is art, there is an opening up of history and world and thus, "art can only be or not be as historical."<sup>22</sup> This statement seems to be radical in the sense that it suggests that art is not always already in a world, but rather opens up a world of meaning, sense, and historical destiny. This world, however, is always a human world of art, and an art (techne) of the human world. It is not clear, however, from Heidegger's writings how art could disrupt world, despite the play between earth and world, concealment and unconcealment, and despite all the opacities and resistances indicated by phenomenological terms such "thrownness," "facticity," "profiles," and "concrete lived experience."

Although all notions of art as an 'event' that disrupts the given coordinates of existence are indebted to Heidegger's notion of art and its play between earth and world, this disruption occurs 'within' already given networks of significance, i.e. these worlds emerge from and within worlds already given to us. This inability to think about a time before the arrival of the human is brought forth powerfully by Quentin Meillassoux's notion of the "ancestral", which refers to "any reality anterior to the emergence of the human species" later refined by the term "dia-chronicity," so as to include events taking place after the extinction of intelligent species, and the allied term "arche-fossil," which is the material evidence of a reality or event before or after humans, and thus before any possible correlation of the

<sup>22</sup> Martin Heidegger: *On the Origin of the Work of Art – First Version* [1935–36], in: *The Heidegger Reader*, ed. by Günter Figal, trans. by Jerome Veit, Bloomington 2009, 130–150, 149.

thought and world. These terms are crucial to Meillassoux's critique of what he terms "correlationism," a view that holds that we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other.<sup>23</sup> Meillassoux makes clear that – contra Heidegger's understanding of facticity, art, and world – there are times that cannot be correlated to a historical community. Meillassoux's notions of "ancestrality" and "diachronicity" emphasize a *temporal* discrepancy between thinking and being, which is exemplified by the deep past and an imagined future, a pre- and post-human era. Needless to say, this is a time that cannot be accounted for within the phenomenological parameters of temporal ecstasis and radical historicity.

However, the issues Meillassoux raises through these terms are not simply applicable to or have implications for the 'origins' of image and mark making in the deep past or in an apocalyptic future where the emergence or extinction of consciousness is most dramatically at stake. Rather, the dilemmas, commitments, and possibilities raised by "ancestrality" are a pressing issue at all times and at all moments and for all art up to the present. Meillassoux tends to downplay issues of spatial discrepancy, the composition of entities in the present moment, and the fact that we are always surrounded by mind-independent processes, which are contemporaneous with the existence of consciousness.<sup>24</sup> To take an example from the prehistoric period, bacteria and fungi co-exist and actively contribute to the prehistoric Bradshaw rock paintings in the Kimberley region of Western Australia preserving and enhancing the vividness of their colours over many years. In fact, many of the applied pigments that render the silhouetted human figures have been replaced and enhanced by the "living colour" of these pigmented microorganisms.<sup>25</sup> One would have to conclude that the bacteria and fungi contribute equally to the making and existence of these rock paintings. In Francis Alÿs' *The Nightwatch* (2004), the artist released a fox after hours within the Tudor and Georgian rooms of the National Portrait Gallery in London that was then tracked by CCTV.<sup>26</sup> The work involves a complex intersection between human, animal, and camera vision, as well as the indifferent yet cross-cutting animal, artistic, ontological, and perceptual *umwelts* of the fox and museum. Alÿs' work explores the superior night vision of some an-

<sup>23</sup> Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude – On the Necessity of Contingency* [2006], trans. by Ray Brassier, London 2007, 1–10 and 112. Not surprisingly Meillassoux considers phenomenology to be a form of "strong correlationism."

<sup>24</sup> See Graham Harman: *Quentin Meillassoux – Philosophy in the Making*, Edinburgh 2011, 37–44; Ray Brassier: *The Enigma of Realism – On Quentin Meillassoux's 'After Finitude'*, in: *Collapse*, vol. II: *Speculative Realism*, ed. by Robin Mackay, Oxford 2007, 15–54; Gabriel: *Fields of Sense* [note 11], 290–317.

<sup>25</sup> See Jack Pettigrew et al.: *Living Pigments in Australian Bradshaw Art*, <http://antiquity.ac.uk/projgall/pettigrew326/>. Pettigrew has proposed dating these rock paintings by using DNA sequencing taken from these microorganisms.

<sup>26</sup> I have initiated an account of Alÿs' *Nightwatch* in the spirit of this essay in an unpublished talk, "*Tapetum lucidum: Art After Hours and the Inhuman*" at a small colloquium on *Time in Art and Philosophy* convened by Jonathan Tallant at the University of Nottingham.

imals, as compared to humans and their different thresholds of visibility, which are open to wavelengths beyond the capacities of the human eye. We are alerted to the intersecting thresholds of perception and visibility as the light of the CCTV camera or infrared video is reflected off of the fox's *Tapetum lucidum* illuminating a non-cognitive form of reflection emanating from the animal world itself, which humans increasingly try to appropriate and harness in terms of new surveillance technologies that have now expanded beyond the visible wavelengths of light to other parts of the spectrum. The *Nightwatch* alerts us to the complex spatio-temporal logic of multiple worlds existing in the same surroundings but often not in the same worlds. We are used to thinking we are living in one world – our *umwelt* – which we take to be our objective *umgebung*, but there are a plurality of worlds. Museums are human worlds, but they are also worlds of wood, paint, decay, mould, bacteria, chemicals, machines, and animality. In the *Nightwatch* we are exposed to an interruption of our human *umwelt* by the *umwelt* of the animal, with its different spatio-temporal parameters.

But these issues are equally at play in traditional art historical examples, as Gabriel's example of the world of Friday-evening dinner has shown us. Rather than seeing works of art as exemplary modes of world-formation that are historically and ethically determinate for a given people, the logic of ancestry would enable us to explore forms of art and visibility that are attune to co-existence with a myriad of worlds from the deep past to the present and into the future. The implications of these examples are that we need to be more attentive to how worlds encounter each other, or are only partially visible or entirely indifferent to each other. This might call for an art history that is open to practices of ethology where the co-existence of worlds is a relevant issue.<sup>27</sup> It would also need to consider allied endeavours, such as Ian Bogost's "alien phenomenology," which are attentive to how non-human objects and entities experience and perceive the world.<sup>28</sup> Art history's embrace of Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics is predominantly driven by his phenomenology of perception. But even in his most radical moments when he is pursuing the possibility of a perception and visibility beyond the human realm through concepts such as 'anonymous visibility,' 'wild being,' 'hyper-reflection,' or 'flesh ontology,' his phenomenology remains grounded in an experiential realism internal to intentionality.<sup>29</sup> But a more speculative realism and ontology might alert us to how things

<sup>27</sup> Levi Bryant has raised the need for a "post vitalist ethology" drawing on Jakob von Uexküll's *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans* that would account for objects and not just animal worlds. It would of course also need to be attentive to its tendency to displace a phenomenology of world onto other entities. See Bryant: *Onto-Cartography* [note 11], 62–64.

<sup>28</sup> Ian Bogost: *Alien Phenomenology, or What it's Like to be a Thing*, Minneapolis 2012.

<sup>29</sup> There are rigorous accounts of art that are not based on the premise of intentionality but they are few and far between. One important example is François Laruelle's concept of non-photography. For him, photography is a radical critique of phenomenological perception in its letting things be without standing in for them or representing them; it is a mode of thought that presents things without being about them – without representing them or intending them as objects. See François Laruelle: *The Concept of Non-Photography*, trans. by Robin Mackay, London

perceive and experience and not just humans. It would urge us to be more attentive to the multiple temporalities in works of art, which would require us to heed and radicalize Georges Didi-Huberman's prescient warning against "euchronism": the art historical assumption – based I would argue on a phenomenological notion of world – that because two events exist at the same time they share the same time.<sup>30</sup> Most of our lives are determined by operations that we do not perceive and that partake of different temporalities, which do not adhere to our lived experience, horizons of expectation, finitude, and facticity. And there are many forms of algorithmic and digital art practices that will go on making themselves long after the finitude of any human agent involved in their genesis.

*Accruals of Substance: Habit and Ontological Indifference*

The notion of facticity is in many ways an integral aspect of the phenomenological "rhetoric of concreteness" via what we might call forms of excess, opacity, or material resistances to interpretation. But this concreteness is always internal to intentionality, and thus an excess *within* the correlation of thinking and being, and never a way of opening up onto meaning and sense beyond human finitude. Habit is often seen as a piece with this recuperation or taming of the chaotic world, in its ability to convert substance into pliable meaning.<sup>31</sup> In the dominant pragmatic-phenomenological interpretation of Heidegger's tool analysis, ready-to-hand objects tend to withdraw and disappear into networks of habitual use and tacit implementation. Thus, habit can function to engender a world completely mediated by human history, and invested with the full apparel of socio-cultural significance. It then becomes a privileged way to internalize the external world. For instance, in habit the body can become a supple tool and any external object coming into contact with that body becomes an extension of it. There is an incorporating dimension to habit and tacit life-worlds that has a tendency to swallow up everything in its path, including external objects, and potentially even difference itself. In habit, objects tend to withdraw and disappear, like the blind man's stick referred to by Merleau-Ponty, which becomes an extension of his body, and in the process "ceases to be an object for him."<sup>32</sup> It is hardly surprising that those with a realist inclina-

2011. For a succinct analysis of Laruelle's work, see Steven Shaviro's: *The Universe of Things – On Speculative Realism*, Minneapolis 2014, 130.

<sup>30</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman: *Before the Image, Before Time – The Sovereignty of Anachronism*, in: *Compelling Visuality – The Work of Art in and out of History*, ed. by Claire Farago, Minneapolis 2003, 31-44. Levi Bryant raises exactly the same point in his book *Onto-Cartography* [note 11], 166.

<sup>31</sup> I have written an essay on habit for *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, which provides some of the background to this section. See Aron Vinegar: *Habit*, in: *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. by Michael Kelly, 6 vols, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford 2014, vol. 2, 259-262.

<sup>32</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Phenomenology of Perception* [1945], trans. by Colin Smith, London 1989, 165-166 and 176.

tion, or simply a deep mistrust of human-centred accounts of knowing the world, are often suspicious of habit because it seems to be one of the fundamental ways of securing the primacy of the human-world relationship over all others.

But a more robust notion of habit can push our sense of aesthetics much farther toward the ‘thingly’ nature of our selves, not simply so that we find ourselves among things, but such that there is something stony, animal, and digital at the heart of us.<sup>33</sup> Habit brings us into contact with an exteriority, objecthood, and automaticity that is not only out there, but also in us in itself. If habit is both a being and a having, simultaneously intransitive and transitive, its resistance to us is a realism that is at the heart of a being that is not simply ours. As Rudi Visker has so nicely put it, we are more than the direct object of the word to be, as “it sticks to the one who is supposed to conjugate it in the first person singular”.<sup>34</sup> This stickiness alerts us to the fact that there is an excess of substance at the heart of things, and at the heart of habit, which can never be completely subsumed by any grace, spirit, fluidity, transparency, network, or world of significance. Thus habit is not primarily evidenced by the frictionless, smooth running of things, or the stumbling over of things in order to become conscious and recognize them “as” broken tools, but rather the irruption of substance, when it is most threatened by a total permeation by spirit, pragmatism, or use. When habit brings out the externality and objectness of our own being and bodies we become aware of other aesthetic worlds – biological, technological, digital, genetic, cosmic – that cut across ours in compelling ways. This sense of habit is conducive to an ethics of existence full stop and not simply enabling of Being-in-the-world, facticity, and intentionality.

Habit would no longer be the “lightening conductor” of existence, as Samuel Beckett once put it, but rather a generosity of existence. In the right light habit opens us up to a state of ontological indifference, that would begin to unravel our commitment to ontological difference, which separates us from and elevates us above all the other sundry objects and entities in the world, inanimate or animate. Habit is a stance that does not presuppose itself; it is a manner of being that is a pirating of foundations. Nancy has defined habit as an open mode of dwelling – “a conduct-of-being-the-there,” or “an *ethos* which is the ek-sisting of existence itself” – that does not attempt to find the essence of existence as a “House of be-

<sup>33</sup> Of course there is the French tradition of thinking about habit from Félix Ravaisson to Henri Bergson, which is conducive to a more speculative realism and ontology but I do not want to pursue that here. Both see habit as a supple mechanism and supplement to negotiate between matter and consciousness, cause and effect, necessity and freedom, activity and passivity, nature and culture, automatism and will. Deleuze’s conception of life as a bundle of habits in modes of aggregation and consistency, sinking and surfacing, dilating and contracting across multiple scales and ontologies from single cell animals to inanimate objects to animal and human bodies to cultures is continuous with this tradition.

<sup>34</sup> Rudi Visker: *Intransitive Facticity? A Question to Heidegger*, in: *Rethinking Facticity*, ed. by François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson, Albany 2008, 149-191, 165-166. The classic essay on being and having is still Emile Benveniste: *Être et avoir dans leurs fonctions linguistiques générales*, in: id.: *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, Paris 1966, 187-207.

ing.” It is a definition of habit that is of a piece with a world without foundation and world-views – what Nancy has characterized as the thrownness of the world and not just Dasein’s being-thrown-in-the world – as well as a notion of experience that is not internal to intentionality but rather fully coterminous with existence and a full blown metaphysical realism.<sup>35</sup> Habit does not treat existence as a property; it is a manner of being that does not presuppose itself in generating its own being. This sense of habit can help us rethink issues such as style that have been intimately allied in art history with phenomenological notions of world and facticity. Style would no longer be a correlate of biography, an intentional stance, culture, world, world-view or historical period but rather an “encrustation of being” to use Merleau-Ponty’s felicitous term; an integral ally of habit in the practice of an art history, visual culture, and aesthetics without commitment to phenomenological notions of world, intentionality, and facticity.

### *Conclusion*

Ultimately what I am searching for is a practice of art history and visual culture open to an ontological, ethological, and political generosity rather than one predicated on distance, loss and melancholy. This would allow issues of timing, thresholds, habit, style, substance, and ontological indifference to emerge, and begin to unseat our disciplinary commitments to a hermeneutics of facticity, ontological difference, and world.

<sup>35</sup> I have found Nancy’s thoughts on habit /ethos to be thought-provoking. For example see Nancy: *Experience of Freedom* [note 18], § 13: *Decision, Desert, Offering*, 142-147; Jean-Luc Nancy: *Originary Ethics*, in: id.: *A Finite Thinking* [note 11], 188-189; and Jean-Luc Nancy: *Creation of the World* [note 4], 42-43, 47, 52. Giorgio Agamben also has some interesting things to say about habit that resonate with Nancy’s in his *The Coming Community* [1990], trans. by Michael Hardt, Minneapolis 1993, 28-29 and 93.