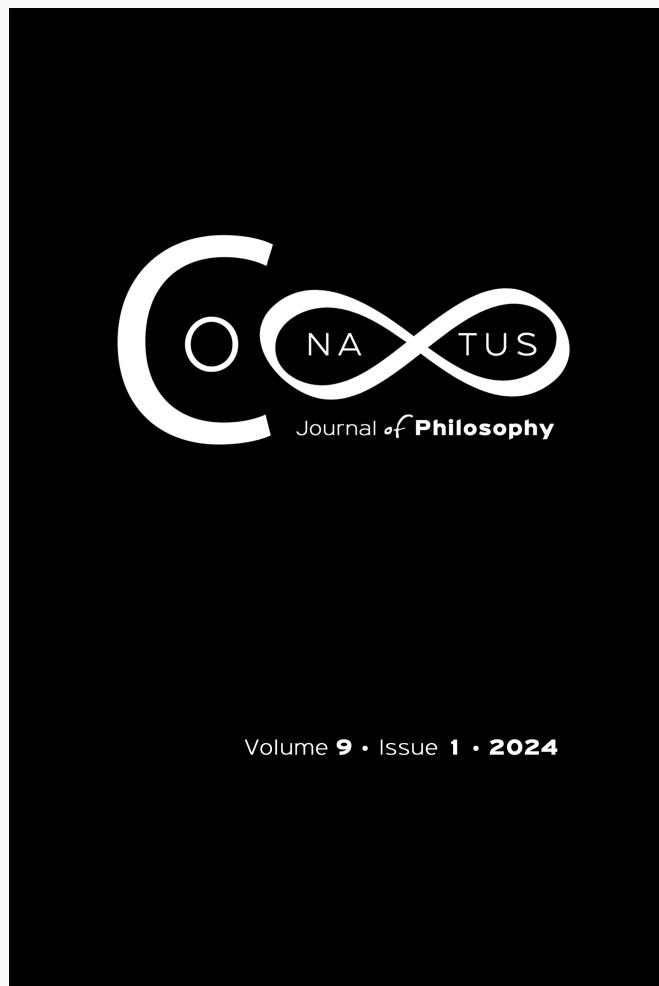


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Complexity, Reality and Ontological Insecurity: On Mistakes and Navigational Skills

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of reality and the transformation concerning the complex approach to the modes of existence based on the interrelation between diverse actants that make up our world. Considering recent ontological debates and critiques of modernity, the article argues for a shift away from ready-made suppositions about reality and the desire for simplified answers. We propose a radical idea of an actant interaction perspective grounded in Bruno Latour's and Hartmut Rosa's ideas of exploring an ontology embracing curiosity, imagination, and the importance of making mistakes as necessary attitudes in navigating the uncontrollable nature of reality. The article emphasizes the importance of embracing a sense of liberty when comprehending and interacting with the world. It encourages us to concentrate on the strengths and connections of living organisms.

Keywords: ontology; mistakes; reality; adaptive transformation; uncertainty

I. Introduction

This essay works by networking conceptual considerations and empirically informed descriptions, aligning them in a particular direction: a detailed elaboration of the adaptive transformation concept. Mainly, it is a place to transit through the question of how to engage complex realities and diverse living beings by elaborating contemporary questions around the ideas of the uncontrollability of reality and navigational capabilities.¹

¹ Sebastián Alejandro González Montero, *Living in Transit: Youth, Nomads and Reality: A Narrative Essay on Becoming and Education* (Bogotá: Universidad de La Salle, Ediciones Unisalle, 2023).

We are real beings able to deal with reality through performances that express our capabilities and explorations.² Indeed, anyone interested in living knows that motivations, desires, goals, challenges, and achievements come from real life, which consists of unsolvable contradictions, like pain-love, sorrow and happiness, friends and not friends, inequality and privilege, and so on.³ In the middle of reality and its challenges, we exist. It is not a dream. Real living does not concern illusions. We live surrounded by images, models of reality, simulacra of facts, electronic devices representing quotidian issues, and information ideologically displaying biased symbolized living scenarios. In any case, reality is there flowing by its immanent becoming.⁴

We live among real living beings and actual challenging events. That represents a human dilemma: to take over things or let them happen? Living is complicated. We constantly face similar issues. How to incubate a sense of good humor or appreciation of complexity and variation in the middle of living? How can we navigate reality by learning and making mistakes without renouncing to handle things and inventing scenarios to live? How can we manage change and simultaneously ask for stability?

To speak of adaptive transformation and reality as being radically complex is to take up a position in the recent ontological debates concerning the problem of human capabilities and the uncontrollability of the real.⁵ It is well known that humans are keen to make decisions based on logical reasoning and planning. Who wants to drift into uncertainties without having a plan? “Out of the blue,” goes the saying. Does reality conform to previously prescribed human programs? At times, that may be true, while at other times, it may not. How to be sure? Would I make it? There is a constant struggle to make it through. We are aware of the uncertain nature of reality. However, that awareness represents existential pressures provoking anxiety, weariness, and depression.⁶

Reality rebelliously exceeds us. Despite all our efforts to engineer

² Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 191-255.

³ Purissima Emelda Egbekpalu, “Aristotelian Concept of Happiness (Eudaimonia) and its Conative Role in Human Existence: A Critical Evaluation,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2021): 75-86.

⁴ Dave Elder-Vass, *The Reality of Social Construction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 64-86.

⁵ Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 153-212; Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 181-291; Hartmut Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, trans. James Wanger (Cambridge: Polity, 2020), 60-85.

⁶ Alain Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of the Self: Diagnosing the History of Depression in the Contemporary Age* (Montreal: McGill’s Queen’s University Press, 2010), 21-70.

the world, we are lost in seeking purpose and meaning. There are options, nevertheless. Curiosity, imagination, and exploration represent some of the best attitudes in front of open events, odd beings, and in-subordinate realities. It is essential to note that while curiosity, imagination, and exploration can lead to growth, they also come with the risk of making mistakes and being wrong. On the other hand, being curious, imaginative, and explorative can also lead to making mistakes and being wrong sometimes. Can we deal with that and find reasons to live better?

A disregard for convention is needed here. It is better to say that it is necessary to disturb comfort regarding commonly shared habits of going into assumptions about reality that give us already-made answers and securities. *Ontology* has been the name for the tradition of discussing ready-made suppositions about reality and the field of seeking principles.⁷ Essence, substance, nature, and identity are words about previously defined realities supposedly ensuring safety. Everything is better if it is possible to believe that, despite changes, struggles, and elusiveness, something is there to keep us safe in the framework of solid beings. At least, that is what we, humans, would prefer to think.⁸

How to think beyond our narrow perception of things and preformed beliefs? It can be a great relief to stop trying to reduce everything to a single source and seek a universal answer for everything. Authoritarian attitudes are behind those who seek simplifications. Elitism is the socio-political outcome of that. It comes from old wisdom the reckoning with this fact: Reality is real. It is out there independently of us.⁹ On the other hand, conceptual procedures and methodological tools can provide the means to map and model reality.¹⁰ At least, as a premise, it is possible to say that reality is objective, and reality's models are very useful human inventions attached to facts and enabling survival. We have inherited a similar thesis from modern times: we can manage uncertainty by modeling facts and creating tools for transformation and adaptation.¹¹

That thesis comes with a concrete question, nevertheless. Is there a single model standing somewhere that will solve all problems? Let us say

⁷ Dale Jacquette, *Ontology* (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing Ltd, 2002), 12-134.

⁸ Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 3-113.

⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130-156; Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, 102-117.

¹⁰ Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 179.

¹¹ Stuart Brock and Edwin Mares, *Realism and Anti-realism* (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing Ltd, 2007), 11-48; Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3-109.

“no”: There is no such thing.¹² What would happen if we were to say that we can only get to know realities when we encounter them and model them from diverse and complex perspectives? The reality principle is that there are neither places nor things much more significant than reality, where explanations are the strength of truth. The argument concerns a radical object-oriented *ontology*. We know nothing until we meet and follow realities, living beings’ capabilities, and factual connections.¹³ Ultimately, a particular topic is at the bottom of our effort here.

We are calling for freedom based on a realistic approach to reality. There is no more totality. There is no more substance. There are no more transcendental fields. “Things in themselves lack nothing.”¹⁴ We have traditionally framed our relationship with the world under the assumption that it is controllable and that we can project our lives onto the future through planning designs and collective goals. But what can happen if we consider avoiding metaphysical suppositions about reality? What could be the outcome of acknowledging that the way living things connect and intertwine with each other at various ontological levels creates active networks to explore?

Considering different frameworks and exploring more convenient routes can have enormous benefits. By embracing the unknown with fearless curiosity, we can avoid oversimplification and embrace the complexities of diverse realities. Instead of submission or judgment, our actions toward reality should focus on interpretation and comprehension. We can recognize, clarify, categorize, measure, and conceptualize the differentiated aspects of life without assuming that these operations lead to definite truths.

A final introductory word. Our research premise comes from recent ontological debates and discussions in cognitive sciences about reality’s principle and our possibilities to know and think. We decided to isolate those debates and discussions going into Bruno Latour’s and Hartmut Rosa’s oeuvre as a methodological choice.¹⁵ However, a caveat is needed. “Commentary is never faithful. Either there is repetition, which is not commentary, or there is commentary, which is said differently. In other words, there is translation and betrayal.”¹⁶ Following this idea, we do not work

¹² Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 179.

¹³ Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican, 2018), 19-58.

¹⁴ Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 193.

¹⁵ Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, 96-90; Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 3-59; Bruno Latour, *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis*, trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity, 2021), 19-29; Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 1-22.

¹⁶ Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 193.

over a reproduction of their theoretical considerations. Instead, we work on a question in which their thoughts are at play and handle them creatively using complementary materials – from Kathryn Schulz's *Lost and Found* to Clarice Lispector's *The Complete Stories*.¹⁷

II. Uncontrolled reality

How do we build the structures required to control the problematic natural forces around us? How do we construct the social bonds necessary to support us? Those questions illustrate a well-known human driving imperative of getting safe environments to live our lives. True, Post-Industrial Western civilizations had been trying to engineer realities for a very long time. We have been attempting to control realities by making them visible and knowable by unfolding descriptions of what is there.¹⁸ Engineering the world concerns how to make things accessible. The more knowledge we have about how things are, the better we manage them in terms of physical modification, manipulation, and alienation.¹⁹ In addition, controlling realities concerns managemental administration.

The history of our modern relationship to the world is a history of conquering and dominating the night with electric light, the sky with airplanes, the seas with ships, the body with medicine, the temperature of our surroundings with air conditioning, and so on.²⁰

Finally, controlling the world refers to attempts to make it worthwhile. Transforming, designing, and producing: "What is there, what is present is instrumentalized, transformed into the material and the object of our projections and desires."²¹ Throughout modern times and into late modernity, we have developed science, technology, economic systems, and political structures to exert control over the world through gradual and ongoing processes.

¹⁷ Clarice Lispector, *The Complete Stories*, trans. Katrina Dodson (New York: New Directions, 2015), 17-20; Kathryn Schulz, *Lost and Found: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2022), 1-77.

¹⁸ Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, 41-57.

¹⁹ One of the most successful attempts to do that is, for instance, Pasteur's revolutionary comprehension and manipulation of the small entities behind diseases. Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 158-176.

²⁰ Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, 16.

²¹ Ibid., 17.

III. Upheavals

History has made clear that reality resists us. A privileged example of that fact usually comes from the history of revolution – notably, the Latin American history associated with the ideas of emancipation and social justice.²² History helps to illustrate that reality is wild and defiant because it is constitutively uncontrollable. The world constantly resists our attempts to control it, as evidenced by recent events such as the QAnon movement, Russia's involvement in international conflict, and the emergence of new COVID-19. Additionally, there have been political upheavals in the USA and Canada, protests in Latin America – e.g., Chile and Colombia – and ongoing debates between left-wing and right-wing groups.²³ Contemporary challenges are chaotic and difficult to manage, and they remind us that humans often feel lost and uncertain in our place in the world.

IV. Being lost

Being lost means that we are at the mercy of open possibilities. In that way, we are susceptible to constantly losing things (from loved people to capabilities) in the hands of non-human forces and events. Death is the limit of a regularly experienced situation of being lost²⁴. We can indeed perish in this endeavor that is living. We can cease to exist. But being lost also concerns an existential condition of the living. We are here. And we can die. In the middle, we are radically lost because we do not know precisely how to face the endeavor of living while death comes. The ontological insecurity stands with the psychological insecurity – i.e., anxiety – coming from reality's absolutism: its stubbornness of not being at the human will and desires.²⁵

In general, being lost is about the anxiety of not knowing what to do, what answers are better given the events already happening, and how to face open and uncontrolled possibilities in the upcoming present. We are lost until we die. Living is complicated because losing involves questions we do not know how to answer.

²² Enzo Traverso, *Revolution: An Intellectual History* (London: Verso, 2021), 32-72; Charles Tilly, Ernesto Castañeda, and Lesley J. Wood, *Social Movements, 1768-2018* (London: Routledge, 2019), 1-15.

²³ Fernando Calderón and Manuel Castells, *The New Latin America*, trans. Ramsey McGlazer (Cambridge: Polity, 2020).

²⁴ Schulz, *Lost and Found*, 16-25; Michel Foucault, *The Japan Lectures: A Transnational Critical Encounter*, trans. John Rajehman (London: Routledge, 2023), 125-150.

²⁵ Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 149-263; Carl G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, trans. Richard Francis Garrington Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958), 31-63.

V. Powerlessness

“It is breathtaking, the extinguishing of a consciousness.”²⁶ Death is not just about disappearing. It is about a diminishing process of becoming powerless. Being lost means we can be separated from the things we can do, the ideas we can engage in, and the habits we follow. We are lost when we are separated from action possibilities. That is poverty: the critical situation of being negated in the sense that the things we can do and the conditions of doing them are canceled, evaporated, and unjustly distributed. Lives, freedoms, and capabilities are the material conditions of doing things. Without that, we are lost in poverty: too poor to freely experience and enjoy the power of doing what we can do.²⁷

VI. Quotidian difficulties

Being lost, misplaced, and imperfectly anchored to the time and place we are in is a fact that can come as a becoming by which we risk losing our minds and hearts. The nomad and the insane: the ordinary and the existential, are usually stuck together.²⁸ Existential questions are typically related to everyday situations. We are lost in the universe. But we can be lost in thought or a conversation. We can be adrift in a book. Alternatively, we can wander on unknown streets. We can fall in love and lose our minds. Quotidian losses are part of being unable to find one’s way.

We can lose our credit card, our driver’s license, the receipt for the item we need to return; we can lose our good name, our life savings, and our job. We can lose faith and lose hope and lose the custody of our children.²⁹

At a collective level, losses can be historically fixed: famine, terrorism, natural disasters, pandemics, political turmoil, and economic contingencies. In the end, we are lost. That is. We are lost in this universe surpassing us. Every time we see a picture of the Earth navigating the universe’s space, we can be sure we are lost and powerless. How the universe is and how we can manage to live it is marked by losses and possibilities open to whatever can be the case, to whatever can be a

²⁶ Schulz, 15.

²⁷ Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 31-124.

²⁸ Schulz, *Lost and Found*, 4; Julian Young, *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 273-293 and 528-531.

²⁹ Schulz, *Lost and Found*, 5.

change. “This is the essential, avaricious nature of loss: it encompasses, without distinction, the trivial and the consequential, the abstract and the concrete, the mere display and the permanently gone.”³⁰

VII. Being open

On the other hand, being lost is also about the diversity and open constitution of active thinking and the enterprise of discovering new things. Adaptive transformation: Starting with the idea that life is an adventure with no guarantees can be helpful in exploring its meaning. It involves risk but also offers promise.

Being lost and making sense of reality. We are lost because we are at the mercy of making mistakes while walking the world. We do not have truth as the signal we need to navigate uncertainties. Everything would be more accessible and comfortable otherwise. We have lost God. Moreover, we have lost the truth. Perhaps we never have had them but invented them because we are lost.³¹ The fact is that we live precisely another way around. By making mistakes and engaging in dubitative inquiries, we can find ourselves lost but living within genuine opportunities to deal with the our-being-lost situation. The main consequence of that notion is that living and being lost are the same.

VIII. Being right, being wrong

Being right? Being wrong? We may enjoy all the moments of being right and reject the situation of being inaccurate, erroneous, and false. The enjoyment of being right is commonly related to the assumption that our convictions, beliefs, assessments, memories, concepts, and perceptions are valid and correct and good, proper, and complete. It is the biased condition of the mind, indeed.

In contrast, making mistakes has traditionally been an example of our limits and imperfections. Making mistakes has been understood as connecting with the worst human part. They have been equalized to stupidity, ignorance, laziness, lack of attention, timidity, and inferiority. Being wrong is a shame on us. Moreover, given the case that we can incorporate mistakes in our comprehension of things (not precisely a quotidian fact), our common attitudes to them are about delivering excuses (“I was wrong, but...”), acknowledging them as not being our own (“Mistakes were made by...”) or considering them as being other people’s

³⁰ Ibid., 6.

³¹ Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 174-175.

responsibilities. We can excel at recognizing other people's mistakes. Even when we are wrong, we fight to be correct.³²

IX. Making mistakes

Mistakes can be understood as presenting the opposite image of the thinker's goodwill to pursue the truth that desires, at the same time, to share it – i.e., philosophy and science understood in the context of the idea of seeking truth and knowledge.³³ The awareness of being lost, living in the middle of unknown and undecided possibilities, represents a strange situation. Curiously, we usually believe we are correct – that is, we can be straightforwardly right even knowing we are lost.

Paying attention to mistakes crystallized a more and less novel research path. Far from representing an environment to sustain imperfections and pathologies, making mistakes constitutes scenarios for human apprehension and cognition. Indeed, making mistakes allows us to think and learn amid uncertainties and changes. So, the questions to be made are other. It is not about getting the truth. It is about something other than being right. It is about the question of managing the situation of being wrong. What is the meaning of making mistakes for us who strongly desire and need to be right – i.e., being right is gratifying but also imperative for our survival?

X. Cloudy judgment

We can be wrong about facts, convictions, and beliefs. We can “believe something is true when it is false – or, conversely, believe it is false when it is true.”³⁴ Mistakes are complex, nevertheless. We can be wrong in many ways. That is, we can make copious, abundant mistakes. It is a human, too-human capability. It is possible to find a detailed error taxonomy. Unfortunately, the list of human errors is too large to consider – i.e., error types and error forms.³⁵ So, let us take some limited examples.

There are slips, lapses, and mistakes. Slips are accidental declines in perception. We can wrongly notice how things are or escape to keep them on track. That means we may not see things correctly because they are beyond our perceptual limits.

³² Kathryn Schulz, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 50-77.

³³ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2001), 129-140.

³⁴ Schulz, *Being Wrong*, 11.

³⁵ James Reason, *Human Error* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 15-34.

We may get rid of information in the way things are happening. Lapses can be minor errors in assessing things: a vague impression mixed with biased judgments gives us blurred images of the events, producing inadequate and obscure final opinions and resolutions.

There are “errors of planning and errors of execution, errors of commission and errors of omission, design errors and operator errors, endogenous errors, and exogenous errors.”³⁶ *Human Factors Research and Decision Studies* are fields where errors occur because of human bodily and cognitive features that have been recently interrogated.³⁷

Comprehensively, mistakes can be understood as failures in perceptual and judgment processes. From inferences to selecting information procedures to build reference frames, we can proceed by deficiently making connections between states of affairs’ descriptions, modeling, mapping, conceptualizing, and judging. Generally, we can make mistakes because of poor reasoning or carelessness – e.g., wrongly jumping between premises and conclusions.

XI. Wrongness

How can the experience of being wrong be described? That question represents an obsession for those who deal with the problem of knowing if truth and errors are real beings or, instead, results of how we perceive, apprehend, and reason about facts and entities.

On the one hand, there is an ontological way to face mistakes going into critical realism – that is, going into the idea that we can measure errors concerning a knowable reality.³⁸ Recent debates around the concept of the social construction of knowledge and reality can nurture complex notions about realistically incorporating human possibilities to create accurate models of reality and the awareness of the biased nature of those possibilities.³⁹

On the other hand, we can examine and question the reasons to affirm our rightness concerning the possibility of being wrong. By doing that, we test convictions, beliefs, values, perceptions, and concepts. How do we think about being wrong? How do we feel about it? It is not enough to

³⁶ Schulz, *Being Wrong*, 11.

³⁷ Dan Nathan-Roberts and David Schuster, “Looking Ahead: Human Factors in Sociotechnical Systems”, in *Human Factors in Practice: Concepts and Applications*, eds. Haydee M. Cuevas, Jonathan Velázquez, and Andrew R. Dattel, 139-145 (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2016); Martin Peterson, *An Introduction to Decision Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 17-39.

³⁸ Roy Bhaskar and Tony Lawson, “Introduction: Basic Texts and Developments,” in *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, eds. Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson, and Alan Norrie, 3-17 (Oxford: Routledge, 1998).

³⁹ Elder-Vass, 13-38.

say that being wrong is about a false belief because it is necessary to have access to objectively determinable facts to make comparisons. If we could have that access (or not) is an openly debated question.⁴⁰

Complementary, it is possible to propose an alternative path. Instead of calling for objective scenarios supporting comparisons of facts and beliefs, “we could define [being wrong] as the experience of rejecting as false a belief we ourselves once thought as true.”⁴¹ To put it another way: as a premise, it is possible to accept that being wrong is about the experience of rejecting something that we previously considered valid, accurate, and rational – not a deviation from external reality or an internal upheaval in our reasoning about truth.

In that sense, being wrong is not just about the experience of noticing we are not correct: It is about the experience of being lost and realizing it.

Firstly, the experience of being wrong is challenging because we are usually blind to errors. It happens that we cannot notice mistakes while we are making them. It is possible to realize that we are making mistakes but precisely afterward recognize that we were sustaining a false belief, doing something improperly, following inadequate instructions, and wrongly making decisions. Arrogance, insecurity, and lack of self-examination are human factors in our error-blindness. Moreover, there is a structural necessity for that blindness: We cannot currently notice we are wrong because we need to witness that our beliefs are not correct in the first place. We usually realize we are wrong after comparing what we believe with what is actually true.

Secondly, we have difficulty remembering when we are wrong. Mistakes can be elusive sometimes because we do not keep track of errors. Moreover, holding up mistakes could be extremely laborious and painful. Forgetting mistakes involves a practical requirement: false beliefs, wrongdoings, lapses, etc., are rapidly replaced by another idea, action, consideration, etc. – all under the assumption that what is essential is to go ahead and get rid of errors in favor of apparently new “true” beliefs.

In any event, the experience of being wrong concerns an existential problem because it is related to an unaccustomed disagreement with ourselves that can endanger our loved identity and confidence in our righteousness. What was I thinking? How could I have done that? Those questions are challenging for every one of us.⁴²

⁴⁰ John R. Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 159-192.

⁴¹ Schulz, *Being Wrong*, 16.

⁴² Ibid., 21.

XII. Curiosity

Kids are not afraid but curious about what is happening out there. Kids are travelers – not tourists. They are driven by curiosity and the desire to experience things that can change them. For them, the world represents the possibility of failing and learning simultaneously. “The world is enormous in childhood.”⁴³ It is the opposite in adulthood. For us, the world gets scarier as it gets smaller. For that reason, kids can enjoy making mistakes while we suffer from them.

What an astonishing thing it is to find something. Children who excel at it – chiefly because the world is still so new to them that they can’t help but notice it – understand this and automatically delight in it.⁴⁴

Discovering the world is joyful because it is different from believing. While learning is about changing your ideas, notions, perceptions, assumptions, hypotheses, etc., believing is about securing what was already there: an idea we take as valid; a concept that we consider adequate; perceptions that we think are previously granted, etc.

In that sense, discovering and learning contrast with believing because they are human faculties about being open to making mistakes by encountering things that we do not know how they are.⁴⁵ Making mistakes is helpful. It lets us face the event that our more convincing beliefs, cherished assumptions, and commonly engaged habits can be false and wrong. Moreover, making mistakes shows that the world’s models, maps, reference frames, and concepts can differ.

Our errors sometimes bear far sweeter fruits than the failure and shame we associate with them. True, they represent a moment of alienation, both from ourselves and a previously convincing vision of the world. But what is wrong with that? “To alienate” means to make unfamiliar, and to see things – including us – as unfamiliar is an opportunity to see them anew.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., 79.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁵ Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*, trans. Alastair McEwen (London: Secker & Warburg, 1999), 12-55.

⁴⁶ Schulz, *Being Wrong*, 22.

XIII. Learning

Progressive learning processes are attached to errors. Making mistakes represents an open need to engage realities in the sense that getting rid of false beliefs, wrongdoings, etc., has to do with challenging struggles, with actual events and real beings resisting our assumptions. “It can be accepted that an outside world independently exists concerning us.”⁴⁷ Such ontological assertion has concrete consequences at the human psychological level. Reality works as a regulatory principle. Moreover, reality works as an authority imposing restrictions, coordinates, and possibilities. It is well-known that we do not have access to reality. Accurately stated, we do not directly access reality. That means we must form a perceptual, cognitive, and emotional conception of reality. We create a world model in our heads by mapping and modeling real things and events hand in hand with adaptations.⁴⁸ The reality model is born on dynamic procedures held up to face becoming. In such a way, reality gradually educates us. We learn very quickly that reality has rules that we should not avoid. We realize that by making mistakes. Sometimes, humans need complications to learn. Death is around the corner if we forget gravitational forces or the connections between acceleration, an object’s mass, and its experienced forces.

We also learn – again by making mistakes – that we can partially avoid reality through imagination. What happens in the middle of realizing that reality physically commands us by humanly unmanageable facts and psychologically by limiting our escaping creativity is a matter of numerous debatable issues in contemporary psychology since Freud’s times.⁴⁹

Reality is undeniable, even considering we do not have direct access to it. Things happen independently of a conscious ability to apprehend and interrogate facts and beings. Psychologically, acceptance of this has enormous consequences. We are dazzling beings in thinking about reality. We are lost precisely for that reason, indeed. Facing the independent reality’s existence is all about producing errors. That is the same as saying that reality exists despite all cultural simulacra, human fantasies, and perceptual and cognitive misconceptions. The idea that we emotionally and cognitively represent reality has to be taken as

⁴⁷ Searle, 107-132.

⁴⁸ Jeff Hawkins, *A Thousand Brains: A New Theory of Intelligence* (New York: Basic Books, 2021), 13-109.

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, “‘Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning’ (1911b),” in *On Freud’s “Formulations of the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,”* eds. Gabriela Legorreta and Lawrence J. Brown (London: Routledge, 2016), 6-14.

seriously as the notion that reality is independent of us.⁵⁰ Erratically wandering, making mistakes, and learning are tightly linked processes. Reality gives us diverse opportunities to inquire about what is happening through combinations of experience and errors.⁵¹ What do I know? Following the old path of distinguishing errors from the truth is unnecessary. Unsolvable metaphysical assumptions compromise that path. Instead, facing reality leads to facing troubles. Reality surrounds us constantly, producing questions, emerging problems, and creatively limiting our ideas and beliefs. In that sense, reality is a source of mistakes: Imperfect glimpses of real things triggering extraordinary interrogative endeavors. In the end, saying that leads us to this notion: Reality constitutes a hard reference to consider. Besides enabling learning, making mistakes involves the human realization that reality is a field of messy events that must be faced – i.e., reality is fluid and nonbinary in nature.⁵²

XIV. Questions

At this point, we must be cautious. What is reality? Of course, we will not declare what that is. Defining reality is tremendously tricky. Instead, we think we need to face that question insistently. That means we are living beings ontologically committed. It is acceptable that reality is out there. However, even with that acceptance, reality challenges us, supporting debates about the nature, meaning, and extent of the question: What is real? Do you believe in reality? We must – at least, pragmatically speaking.⁵³

XV. Complexity

Traditionally, we have been committed to reality in the sense that we usually have engaged in reducing it to a particular image.⁵⁴ The vision of reality has sometimes been about a religious representation. Sometimes, that image has traditionally been about an abstract metaphysical representation. On other occasions, it has been about a pragmatic scientific world picture. Christians, astronomers, mathematicians, philosophers, engineers, semioticians, males, militants, women, professors, pundits,

⁵⁰ Searle, 41-83.

⁵¹ Schulz, *Being Wrong*, 41.

⁵² Shohini Ghose and Barry C. Sanders, “Entanglement Dynamics in Chaotic Systems,” *Physical Review* 70, no. 6 (2004): 1-6.

⁵³ Jacquette, 12-155.

⁵⁴ Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, 49-59.

politicians, etc.: All they have dreamt, from time to time, with answering the question of “What is real?”⁵⁵

There is another way to do things regarding any attempt to present – and sometimes to impose – an image for everything. What about if reality is considered too fluid and messy to be reduced to concrete ideas? What about if reality precedes structures and entities – being simultaneously able to gain consistency at levels of mutually defined aspects and elements of the world? It is not strictly necessary to have an image of thought presently designed to offer a frame where every living being and fact suits it. Instead, being ontologically committed can be understood as an openly conscious activity to question what produces non-Previously known modes of existence and unexpected existential possibilities involving unrestricted inquiries.

Just imagine William Herschel, “the astronomer who, in identifying Uranus, increased the known boundaries of the solar system by nine hundred million miles almost overnight.”⁵⁶ Thinking about that discovery is not about the challenge of understanding the nature of existence in the speculative meaning of the expression – i.e., going into seeking a final substance supporting the real. It is about dealing with realities we cannot avoid but interrogate. Making mistakes teaches us that reality flows everywhere and fills everything and that we must constantly negotiate with it.

Being ontologically committed is being committed to the open question of what is happening. There are no trivial things or events here. It is possible to consider reality as a scenario in which objects, people, institutions, forces, decisions, desires, electrical stations, public transportation systems, libraries, social networks, communication devices, stories of love and stories of loss, trips, etc., all are relevant in searching for real life. How to look? When to look? How can we investigate reality? How to stop doing that? Instead of giving an image of ultimate causalities and definitive, comprehensive frames, it might be more beneficial to be oriented towards reality and deal with concrete questions expressing continuous seeking processes.

To summarize, *ontology* is about experiencing events, interrogating entities, and facing open questions.⁵⁷ We can avoid seeking substances and self-identical unities to propose and clarify open questions.⁵⁸ That idea refers to the calling for absolute concreteness.

⁵⁵ Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 13.

⁵⁶ Schulz, *Lost and Found*, 122.

⁵⁷ Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 157.

⁵⁸ David Menčík, “Identity Theft: A Thought Experiment on the Fragility of Identity,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 71-83.

We can accept that there are no substances nor essences but real things and processes that display capacities in this world and can undergo specific becoming at peculiar moments and spaces.⁵⁹ In such a way, reality can be understood as a scenario of the ceaseless interplay among capable individuals affecting themselves by actions and forces open to possibilities. There is no need to presume something beneath remains identical beneath fluctuations and appearances. Reality is not trivial. We must take it seriously because it is a complicated field filled with actors experiencing transformations in what can be called “events.”⁶⁰

Trees and fungi.⁶¹ Students and universities.⁶² Mathematical theorems and pandemics.⁶³ Ultra-chips and advertisement.⁶⁴ Public transportation and citizen behavior.⁶⁵ Screens and love.⁶⁶ We only know about those things once we inquire into what they can do and how they are connected, altered, and mutated, given complex multiplicities. There are also strange creatures. Marriage, motherhood, clothes, family ties, financial issues, exile: Weird combinations of things, circumstances, and connections that make singular beings flourish and change.⁶⁷

Reality is weird and messy. We cannot comprehend certain things because reality is not limited to what our senses perceive and our minds can understand. Reality goes beyond our perceptual models and conceptual maps. We make mistakes discovering the world because we are implicated in establishing connections between multiplicities expressing diverse activities and fluid interactions beyond our mapping and modeling abilities. How can it be done otherwise? The world is more significant and more extensive than our images of it. How can we avoid mistakes if

⁵⁹ Marko Markič, “Conatus and Dasein: The Problem of an Existential Theory of Motivation,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (2021): 193-211.

⁶⁰ Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: Re.press, 2009), 11-71.

⁶¹ Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate: Discoveries from a Secret World*, trans. Jane Billinghurst (Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2016), 6-14.

⁶² Keri Facer, *Learning Futures: Education, Technology and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2011), 1-14.

⁶³ Latour, *After Lockdown*, 24-36.

⁶⁴ Joachim Burghartz, ed., *Ultra-thin Chips Technology and Applications* (New York: Springer, 2010), VII-XII.

⁶⁵ Iain Docherty, Greg Marsden, and Jillian Anable, “The Governance of Smart Mobility,” *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 115 (2018): 114-125.

⁶⁶ Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*, trans. Peter Bush (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2012), 53-76.

⁶⁷ Lispector; K.H.L. Key, “Phasmatodea (Stick-insects),” in *The Insects of Australia: A Textbook for Students and Research Workers*, eds. I. D. Naumann et al., 394-404 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991).

reality is so complex concerning the multiplicities of beings in action and dynamics? For that reason, making mistakes requires a constant willingness to change, improve, or dismiss our approaches to reality and a solid commitment to following what happens and how it happens.

XVI. Conclusion

Adaptive transformation is at odds with any entrepreneurial conception of human lives and purposes.⁶⁸ Instead of simply appropriating realities and making us more suitable for producing goods for consumption (including us), facing facts and engaging learning processes refer to the labor of metabolic interconnections with the outside and the things happening there.

The Western approach to reality involves transforming the world into commodities, leading to unfavorable consequences like alienation and reification (Theodor Adorno and Georg Lukács), a “loss of world” (Hannah Arendt), and a narrower comprehension of the world (Hans Blumenberg).⁶⁹

Is it possible to have an alternative to alienation, reification, loss of the world, and disenchantment? Responsivity, or our capacity to actively respond to the outside, can be described as resonance, adaptive transformation, or becoming different by connecting with multiplicities.⁷⁰ The conclusion here is that we are corporally and cognitively open to realities and able to manage errors and learn from them – all within an awareness of networks highly connected and powerfully affecting themselves and others.⁷¹

a. Who are we? What can we know? What can we hope? Who knows? Those questions come from an old Kantian tradition and indicate a human challenge: all we can do is explore the living and make mistakes.⁷²

⁶⁸ Michel Scott Christofferson, “Foucault and New Philosophy: Why Foucault Endorsed André Glucksmann’s *The Master Thinkers*,” in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, eds. Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 6-21.

⁶⁹ Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*; Hans Blumenberg, *The Readability of the World*, trans. Robert Savage and David Roberts (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library, 2022); Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 2001); Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972); Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

⁷⁰ Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, 30-34; Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 176-191.

⁷¹ Michael Hardt, *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 26-57.

⁷² Henry E. Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 3-20.

Living beings make worlds for themselves. Embryos do that. Viruses do that. Fungi do that. We do that. By trying to create a world, we test our capabilities. That is, we challenge our strengths and weaknesses. That is all that we can do.

The spectacle of the living is there. It has been there. From time to time, we forget that the world is more significant than our impressions of it. But the world is there despite our lack of attention. It is still being determined if it will be there for us. The greatness of nature is that she does not need our attention – or presence. What about that insect? What about that mollusk? Is that ape asking herself if we can understand what she is doing? Is that Australian walking stick becoming different things to teach us how to change? Is the sun burning every day to give us warm moments? All we need is fresh air to wander from place to place, seeking to make our apprehension more comprehensive and improve our understanding of things. Can we have moments to respite from the constant human attempt to encapsulate, categorize, and control the living? From time to time, we all need an escapade from the confinement of the living: The boxes we invent to feel secure. That necessity is the expression of a particular question. How to accept that reality is free – that it does not obey us and is more voluminous than our representations and wilder than our “civilized” taste usually takes?

b. Sometimes, living beings can attempt to accommodate new situations. The bee’s colony buzzing in the middle of a building. The tree’s roots breaking the asphalt. The virus interrupting the citizens’ lives. Bugs running everywhere despite cleaners’ shifts. By moving one thing here and another thing there, we mobilize resources, trying, at the same time, to keep everything more and less, as has been the case. To surf. To flow.

Lab studies have shown that perfectly normal frog skin cells, when liberated from the instructive influence of the rest of the embryo, can reboot their cooperative activity to produce a novel proto-organism, called a “xenobot.”⁷³

By making rebellious efforts, living beings can significantly modify themselves.

If a new mutation results in an eye being in the wrong place, a hardwired organism would find it very hard to survive. However, modular systems can compensate for the change while

⁷³ Michael Levin and Rafael Yuste, “Modular Cognition,” *Aeon*, March 8, 2022, <https://aeon.co/essays/how-evolution-hacked-its-way-to-intelligence-from-the-bottom-up>.

moving the eye back to where it is supposed to be (or enabling it to work in its new location), thus having the opportunity to explore other, possibly useful, effects of the mutation.⁷⁴

Radical changes or more subtle adaptations are extremes. However, all living beings are intelligent because they can manage open realities flexibly. This is true not only for embryos, birds, cephalopods, viruses, tissues, individual neurons, motor proteins, molecular networks, and axolotl: the Mexican salamander, etc. They are flexible problem-solving agents because they express intelligence when facing changing circumstances and responding to them by undertaking new steps, inventing new procedures, and connecting in novel ways – i.e., self-course-correcting within environmental perturbations.⁷⁵

c. We can decide that this world is all about perceiving and thinking within the limits of our human condition. In such a way, we nurture mere human dreams and desires about ordering and commanding realities and reducing the world to accountable books and numbers. That has been an old dream and a traditional human passion.⁷⁶

We can embrace our place among other beings and forces, respecting their autonomy and freedom. We can venture out and actively question our surroundings. The decision is ours to make to the extent that we cannot avoid the reality of our existence. Other entities live in varied circumstances, and challenges must be faced. All beings understand they must navigate uncertainties and adaptively negotiate to flourish. A crucial lesson to learn is to thoroughly evaluate our understanding of reality by recognizing possible obstacles, focusing on significant aspects of change, and enhancing our comprehension of facts based on imperfect processes of learning and making mistakes. A commonly shared ignorance makes us err so constantly. Curiously, it is also by making mistakes that we can understand the meaning of the word “reality.”⁷⁷

It is a creative doubtfulness that making mistakes displays in front of us. Can we better look at the liquidness and movements of what is currently happening? That is an achievable task. But it comes at a high price: It requires disciplined efforts to understand, investigate, and explore. Real things must be tested, counted, considered, mapped, measured, and

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Alan Jasanof, *The Biological Mind: How Brain, Body and Environment Collaborate to Make Us Who We Are* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 65-89.

⁷⁶ Crosby, 129-139.

⁷⁷ Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 192-211.

interpreted by practical but imperfect means – i.e., from conceptual to methodological tools.⁷⁸

Perhaps, we need to change some quotidian terms: “the universality of...,” “the abstract meaning of...” Instead of that traditional gesture, we can try another one. We can try a more vigorous and fresh gesture. We can say that reality is a scenario of processes at play in which all living beings try to respond as better as possible. Is this the right moment? Is this a good place? Is this going to be provisional? Being here, will it be forever? Do things have to change? But how? Within a fluid reality full of events, we all need to answer the challenges at stake by acting more and less adequately regarding environmental conditions and situations. That means there are no useless and essential things. There are just questions to be made. We have to encounter things and produce questions in concrete circumstances. There are things in life. And inquiries related to them. Everything else is a matter of curiosity, research, discipline, and imagination. Can we listen to things’ stories? Can we appreciate what living beings can do in their immanent richness and differentiation? Can we abandon our narrow perception of reality and favor a more uncomfortable and diverse viewpoint?

d. Living beings have a life of their own. That is, they can do things. Living beings are their actions: the things they can do in the middle of occurring realities. Living beings are, then, actants.⁷⁹

That conclusion comes from understanding reality as open and constituted by forces becoming more and less stable, events displaying multiplicities and diverse relationships. More accurately, saying living beings are what they can do represents a conclusion based on the idea that reality is connected, performs immanent relations, and produces mutual connections.⁸⁰ Actants engage with gatherings full of others. They propose saturations and plenitudes. There are not isolated things, but things with more and less numerous connections performing agencies and forces directing growth and life. On that ground, apprehending and understanding are more about asking questions than theoretical abstractions and methodological categorizations. “What is the same and what is different? What is with whom? What is opposed, allied, or intimate? What constitutes, stops, abandons, hastens, or attached itself?”⁸¹ Can we accept that there is no commanding principle over reality? Can we acknowledge there are no Gods, axioms, essences, substances, etc., giving meaning to reality? Can

⁷⁸ John Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (London: Routledge, 2004), 45-68.

⁷⁹ Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, 159.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 160

⁸¹ Ibid., 167.

we renounce the idea of hierarchies and superiority as securing an abstract reality's organization? If we do that, the principle of reality can refer to the concrete circumstances where we constantly negotiate encounters, events, connections, disconnections, failures, routines, and changes.

That idea represents an unexpected gift: We must let go of reality's becoming and learn how to respond flexibly to changing circumstances.

Everything is involved in events, forces, and beings. We are the product of encounters: accidental clashes with the stuff of others.⁸² There are tensions between reality's becoming and us: The struggle between training the necessary skills to navigate uncertainties and apprehend and interpret events and living beings at their speed, capabilities, and rhythm. Why not accept that control is an illusion? That does not mean we must get paralyzed or simply relaxed to the point of assuming it does not make sense to act. There is an interplay between what is not controllable and what can be done in the middle of that. To put it abstractly: Navigating uncertainties is about dealing with mistakes by seeking partial stabilization in the middle of open dynamics running at an independent acceleration and at different levels of becoming. That can be appropriately called "innovation."

e. Being burned is the recent price paid for the increasing demand for responding to changing environments.⁸³ Through escalation, we compete to do better and keep what we have. These days, people want more resources, open markets, technological capabilities, political rights, social interactions, access to information, security, leisure, etc. We want more and more. Nevertheless, we struggle to have the same and no less than that. It is the game of escalation – a game strongly "perpetuated not by lust for more, but by the fear of having less and less."⁸⁴

Expand the models we use to navigate the world and become flexible by learning how uncontrollable reality represents an attempt to defeat the modern promises of expansion and escalation threats. Dynamic learning is not for getting motivational resources supporting the compulsion towards competition, personal enhancement, and pleasure. It is not for bringing more and more within our reach that we have said we can deal with changes. It is crucial to release any excessive need for control and the idea of solely pursuing personal endeavors to advance groundbreaking ethical standards. It is important to let go of extreme

⁸² Elena Ferrante, *In the Margins: On the Pleasures of Reading and Writing*, trans. Ann Goldstein (Rome: Europa Editions, 2022), 3-10.

⁸³ Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 16-35.

⁸⁴ Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, 9.

desires for control and the notion of pursuing individualistic efforts to promote novel ethical principles.

Learning navigational skills can be done in the name of more than the categorical imperative of conquering the present and buying shares of the world. Learning new abilities by making mistakes is about becoming different. That is a rebel assertion, an irreverent one because it expresses the possible modes of existence at stake when we face something new and learn. We know that thinking about the ethics of becoming (as it has been scholarly called) has the risk of repeating the slogan of the people defending the interactions of self-techniques and self-care practices turning into entrepreneurial ideologies – i.e., the liberal ideology of self-understanding and freedom.⁸⁵ Get empowered. Get inspired. Pundits create lists to do. Sellers usually gave speeches about strategies for being the better yourself. Any personal coacher would endlessly talk about being positive, customized spiritual care, and leadership that engages and motivates. Ultimately, facing complex realities is living by exploring and making mistakes. And it is about learning from them, trying, at the same time, to make connections as strong as possible with the things happening. How? There is no method. There are possibilities, nevertheless. It can be said that “resonate” is similar to “connect.”⁸⁶ Resonating is about making connections: that is about creation and good fortune. No matter what is out there, we must be in contact with it if something can happen. Making connections requires resonating encounters. Again, there are no rules about that. Openly wandering guarantees nothing. It is possible to find no one. It is always probable that we can run into nothing. But it is also true that a simple phone call can be enough to make connections without previous intentions or desires. Reading all the collected books on the bookshelf is unnecessary to access an entirely new idea. A single page of a randomly found book can change everything. The same can be said about a song, a picture, a landscape, a conversation, a silence, a movie, a dream, etc. Researchers of the living are lucky persons, for sure.

How to know, on the other hand, that a connection has been made? That is a complex question to answer because nuances are at stake. There can be immediate connections. It is the chemistry of a situation in which things flow easily. Nevertheless, there can be connections in need of time because it is necessary to discover them and unfold their possibili-

⁸⁵ Jan Rehmann, “The Unfulfilled Promises of the Late Foucault and Foucauldian ‘Governmentality Studies,’” in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, eds. Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent, 134-158 (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).

⁸⁶ Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of our Relationship to the World*, trans. James Wagner (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), 1-20.

ties after a while. Everything is there, and nothing happens. That can be true. But one day, an obscure trigger displays connections that are not already established but are possible. The secret is not to force connections and be attentive to the affections at play.⁸⁷ Truly, encounters need uncontrollable ingredients: unpredictability, non-trivial answers, and adaptation.

When people experience resonance with a mountain, a book, a record, or the first snowfall, this means that they have encountered or confronted something that concerns them in some way, that has a meaning for them.⁸⁸

That encounters can have meaning is not about transcendental contents or enigmatic substances contained as hidden entities behind the things. It has to do, instead, with actions and responses interlinked within a compositional scenario. That met person.

I don't recall very clearly how it started. I transformed myself independently of my consciousness, and when I opened my eyes, the poison was circulating through my blood irreducibly, its power already ancient.⁸⁹

Living beings are very remarkably responsive. Something happened. Something is triggered. And dynamic openness and attempts to eliminate uncertainties must happen: We are more and less captured by one of those extremes.

Being excited or frustrated is not as important as the occasion of mutual affection between the events and us. Encounters are subtle because of the sense of the attachments at stake. What is at play? Encounters can materialize *cul-de-sacs*. Other times, they can take the form of open paths. There are boundless possibilities in the middle of those extremes. In any case, experiences are meaningful because they set dynamic changes expressing actions immersed in other activities. Responsiveness: Encounters are meaningful depending on how they trigger answers to them.

He noticed my transformation and, if at first, he retreated in surprise at my courage, he took up the old yoke with still great-

⁸⁷ Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, 42.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁸⁹ Lispector, 21.

er violence, prepared not to let me escape. Yet I would find my own violence. We armed ourselves and were two forces.⁹⁰

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⁹⁰ Ibid., 42.

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