

FRAGMENTS OF A CONVERSATION

1

–So I’m becoming strangely interested in the most basic of basic concepts. The concept of time. The concept of a thing in general. And the concept of an idea, or the concept of concept itself, if you like.

–Let me do you the courtesy of pretending I’ve never heard of “ontopubism.”

–Or “monotonocubism.”

–Yes.

–To understand a thing *as* a thing is (it seems to me) caught up with time and idea.

–I ask facetiously: how so ?

–To recognize the thing as a thing is to “employ” the “idea” of the thing. The thing as thing is a *unity*. It is *the* thing that it is.

–A unity of what ?

–A unity of its appearances.

–In consciousness ?

–Now you are just fucking with me. But, for our eavesdroppers, who may indeed never arrive, not for consciousness. Or rather it must be stressed that *the thing is never inside me*. And that includes any kind of supposed “image” of the thing in a stuff called “consciousness.”

- You know this will offend and confused people.
- I know. Time was when I’d have been offended or too disbelieving to hearken further.
- “Hearken ?” Never mind. You like your poetry. OK, so we agree. This is weird shit.
- To people, like I was, who hadn’t read the “right” philosophers. I’m not saying that various indirect realists weren’t great philosophers. But to stay in that framework the whole time is to mistake the ear for the elephant.
- We’ve talked about how sci-fi just builds it into even the most philosophically illiterate as obvious.
- Yes. We just live in a time that thinks in terms of a consciousness stuff and images thrown up by a brain, without noticing that this brain would be one more image. Should I gripe about Hoffman ? I mean really I should laugh. It all sounds very sophisticated and skeptical, while being indulgently incoherent. Old wive’s tales now involve AI and pseudo-physics what-not. Tech-superstition. Androids for angels. White lab coats for wizard’s beards. Now you’ve got to get some STEM credentials to purvey such merchandise.
- Ah yes. A scientific irrationalism. I’ll be your Horatio, friend. But let us move on to ontocubism.
- Indeed. So a thing is a manifold that endures through time. Its identity is ideal or idea. How’s that ?
- You’ve left out the interpersonal part.
- I have. So *ideas themselves* are fundamentally “tran-

scendent” or “interpersonal.”

–OK. But what are people in this framework ?

–As “existents” they are the perspectival presence of things. As “extant,” they are bodies with toe-tags in the wings. With proper names. Entities themselves.

–If I didn’t already know what you mean, I’d probably think you were insane.

–Yeah.

–Let me paraphrase. A person “with consciousness” is a thing in the world. But that “consciousness” is “really” the *presence* of the things are present.

–Yes. But we must stress that this presence is *perspectival*. In other words, the things are present as “aspects” or “moments.”

–As appearances.

–Yes. “Appearance” is the “easier” synonym here, but I worry about the default fuzzy understanding of appearance as something contrasted with reality.

–Your point is that appearances are “real.”

–Yes. The thing is a manifold of its appearances. We might say that it is “behind” its appearances, but not in the sense of a “thing in itself” in some outside-of-consciousness realm.

–Because there is no consciousness.

–Right. But there is related notion. A kind of direct realist notion. To put it crudely, what people

call “consciousness” or “experience” is a “chain of moments.” And not moments of time in the usual sense, but moments as what things unify in order to be things.

–So the thing is an idea that unifies moments.

–Yes. To put it less obscurely, the thing is the logical synthesis of its appearances. But these appearances are not “images.” The thing has its genuine presence exactly *through* such presentations.

–The thing is really there but not all of it is there.

–Exactly. Because of their “constituting ideality,” things are always already infinity. Since even an “immaterial” idea is a thing, ideas are always already infinite. You might say that empirical objects are “made infinite” by this “constituting ideality.”

–How so ?

–Ideas are between us, not within us. To put it crudely, “phenomenal streams” have no “inside.” In other words, absolute consciousness is a “nothingness.” The subject is “empty.”

–In other words, the field of vision is not anything in that field.

–Exactly. “Consciousness” is the “field” and not its contents. But even here we unfortunately have a container metaphor. We *might* say that “consciousness” is like a container of *aspects* of things. But to recognize the aspect as thing is to recognize a “darkness” or “blind spot.”

–Because it is only an aspect. Not the entire manifold.

–Exactly. It’s this interplay between immanent aspect and transcendent thing that seems to give us time or take time for granted.

–And other people.

–Right. So ideas are between us. The thing holds faces in reserve for others. The thing has been, currently is, and will be “seen” in ways that I will never see it. Generally speaking. New things can be created. But even a freshly created thing, as intentionally object, is always already potentially communicable. Co-intendable.

–How can you justify that claim ?

–You just have to foreground the forum. The request for justification already presupposes the shared framework of intelligibility that is supposed to be justified. Ideas are between us. We live this fact without noticing it theoretically. Especially in a age that is immersed in things in a practical way.

–Heidegger stuff.

–Yeah. Existence understands itself in terms of the extant. It “lives” being-with-others but it theoretically blind to it. Which goes with indirect realism and the little bubbly boy with a private conceptuality.

–The gremlin in the pineal gland.

–That’s the one. Then there’s the transition identification with the screen of the Cartesian theatre.

–Finally, I suppose, one understands the screen as the

genuine if partial-perspectival presence of things.

–That’s how it was for me. I think you have to suffer the hard problem of the physical. The hard problem of consciousness just cries out for mystification. What it misses is the character of the presence of the so-called physical.

–We seem to have got back to idea that existence is time. Or that “phenomenal consciousness” is in some sense time. Or a local or situated streaming of time.

–A local streaming of time as disclosure, yes.

–Disclosure that is also covering, since things give themselves only partially. They give only aspects or moments.

–Right. And you “moments” is more correct, in some sense, or at least “aspects” is an ocular metaphor for something as general as moments.

–Rational aliens might not have eyes.

–That too. So ontocubism is not anthropocentric. It is perhaps “idea-centric,” but think idea transcends human biology, even if some kind of biology is its necessary soil.

–Some kind of Platonism.

–Maybe some soft kind. Honestly I want to go back and study Plato on this issue. I’ve read a respectable amount of Plato, but not since I’ve been fascinated by this issue. I will say that I’m more of mathematical Platonist than I used to be. I’m not sure what we can say about “how” ideas exist. We swim in them.

- Objects, even empirical objects, are ideal. Yes ?
- Yes. Ideas are ideal. Which means what ? Open, ajar. The future is open. Things, including concepts, “fall” into the future.
- Is this the horizon ?
- Yes. Our sense that the thing here now is here as aspect is a sense of horizon. Levinas (whose work I don’t know well) speaks of the infinity of the face of the Other. The other is fundamentally one who sees and not one who is merely seen. He is seen to see. The horizontal aspects of things hide in the darkness of others.
- Does this make others — or phenomenal streams in general — more fundamental than other kinds of intentional objects ?
- That’s my latest issue, a motive for writing up this imaginary interview. The “Other” *is* a “chain” of these “aspects.” But aspects in such a chain have a certain coherence. Which is another reason ideas are ideal. They are a discretization of a continuum, in some sense. Like the rationals against the reals.
- So we have a particular enduring “consciousness” as a sequence or continuum of moments, in two sense of the word “moment.”
- Yes. In the usual tense, like a lifestream consider as a stream of “time moments.” But then these time-moments are also the moments or aspects of entities as manifolds constituted by such moments.
- But isn’t life more like a stream of *situations* ?

–Yes. But situations are themselves manifolds. Still, I basically agree that life is more like a polyphony of moments than a chain. I mean many things appear in a situation, perspectively or in terms of aspects. Entire situations too are given in aspects. Even in the obvious way of two people “experience” the “same” situation very differently.

–Fair enough. I agree. This constitution of the other by aspects leaves out ethics.

–Well we have to remember that “subjects” have no interior. So the beauty of entities, the way they make people feel, is “in” the object, “part” of the moment. And then “subjects” are also entities that can appear beautiful to one another. And of course I include the deep beauty of rectitude, honest, etc. Not only physical beauty.

–If the Other is especially one who sees and not the one who is seen, then that other as disclosing stream of time is, I suppose, *what* it sees. Is the moments of entities. Though especially or even only complex entities like situations.

–Yes. That’s the idea. One motive for this approach is that we don’t make some witness primary. The witness is a theoretical construction. Practically necessary of course. A primary component of the forum, of rationality itself. I’m very influenced by Robert Brandom. A self is fundamentally a locus of responsibility. So much of a “torrent” is self-referential. This intense coherence of its “parts” is probably one reason why the reification of consciousness is so natural, so

hard to see around.

–And the invisibility or “non-sensory” “private” presence of ideas.

–Yes. Civilized beings keep secrets. And they just omit needless words. So we are used to living among intentional objects that are relatively “inside” as well as those that are just about always “outside.” Private and public. At the same time, our ability and desire to speak “should” have been a clue. We live in the forum, but people think you are wacky if you point it out.

–A physicalistic age.

–Yes. Which serves the practical person that most of us mostly are. Heidegger’s “What is a thing?” is great on this. Or we might think of Schopenhauer. Ontology is a weird passion, not far from math in my view.

–And not far from religion.

–I’d say that as ontology melts into religion, traditional or this new age stuff, we see the theoretical angel get its wings dirty. A metaphor that suggests that “pure” theory involves its own weird quasi-religious energy.

–Is it aesthetic ?

–What is the beauty of math exactly ? Why would the injection of politics or religion annoy us ? Is it the topicality ? Is it an impatience to *use* the object ? In contrast, theory wants an unmolested object. The object itself should shine. So we have something

like a serene wonder that experiences sermons as a reduction of this wonder, an interruption, a descent of some kind.

2

–If I say that I’ve sniffed the black flower, then I presuppose the possibility of others who have or might sniff it. This “blank flower” symbolizes a possibility of personality.

–Please be more concrete.

–Nietzsche at his best glows with a cosmic irony. His Dionysian Nazarene is contagious with a mysticism without content. A “vision” not ocular but musical.

–An “anti-vision.”

–If vision gives the sacred external object, then yes. Does this connect to phonocentrism and the intimacy of voice and *feeling* rather than between voice than idea ?

–A musical mysticism, ultimately without pictures.

–Right. Perhaps with pictures that point beyond picturing. Negative concepts that point beyond conceptuality. An absolute ineffable innermost “mystery” or “X.” Something maybe like the “pure negativity” in Hegel. A detachment from or going-beyond the “ocular” as a projection.

–How is this different than typical obscure guru shit ?

–Now that’s the question, and I think the answer

is “musical” — a matter of tonality. A matter of whether or not the tonality is symmetrical. As in adult-adult in Berne’s transactional analysis.

–As opposed, I supposed, to sentimentality and/or solemnity.

–Yes. Yes. Nietzsche would rather be a buffoon than guru. That’s what he was getting at. Of course we see that he was right to be concerned. He is grasped mostly as a daddy, an old-timey Jordan Peterson.

–Nothing to be done.

–Indeed, and to pretend or insist there is would be to become another Jordan Peterson. Another pied piper, another daddy guru. And maybe get rich and famous. Which “should” not, said the ironic shaman, be cause for resentment or envy.

–Which returns us to the Dionysian Nazarene. Who can’t be bother to notice Caesar or his pundits who crowd the circus.

–Indeed. No stranger or more offensive than the clouds in the sky. As radiantly liberal as the sun. But, ideally, as untouchable.

–And you find this in Stirner.

–Yes. I mean I find this as the *best* in Stirner, the “best” in Nietzsche. What we really have is the “vision” of a possibility of personality. The fucking *idea*, which floats free, for those who know, of absolutely any ceramic idol who maybe have served as its mere vehicle or host.

–Which is why we speak of “transcendent pessimism” or the “black flower.”

–Right. Or the “ironic shaman” or whatever. Those with eyes to see and ears to hear will search behind the symbol into their own mortal and yet also immortal depths.

–In theory, you could take this show on the road.

–I suppose so. I think any and every fucking thing can be watered down. We come up in a world where all the “true” things are always already trivialized and deactivated. Badges of education as badges of class, but the same dull conformity of feeling and pose.

–We should address how this “black flower” comes off as sociopathic.

–I don’t know. Think of the raging factionalism. The “ironic shaman” is well positioned to tolerate and befriend just about anyone with an ounce of genuine sociality. On the other hand, I agree that the secret of this genial tolerance is one that tends to keep itself. I’d say there’s a gap between what people are and what they want to think they are. And maybe it takes a “personal catastrophe” to undo this situation.

–A slight digression, but some Heidegger passages come to mind where he talks of meaningful silence, or not blowing one’s own horn.

–Yeah. And maybe the political disaster was the other part of him taking control. I don’t want to delude myself with presentism. I grew up in the belly of an empire, never feeling much threatened by enemy

armies. And I guess I grew up in the end of history, with no real feeling or even much of a longing for some alternative to capitalism.

–But certainly an alienation from money making.

–That’s true. Never gave much of a fuck about money for its own sake. I was engrossed in ideas and a few intense relationships. In retrospect, I was and still am some kind of artist type trying to find a place in the world. Except now I pretty much accept that there is no final or perfect place. I lay my eggs in hope but without desperation. The “black flower” has a certain beauty, and it doesn’t depend on me. And it too can die forever. That will be no great tragedy. I mean of course the death of the species.

–I suppose you think of death as the absence of both pleasure and pain.

–Yes. That simple. We the living are usually attached to life and driven on by the “master madness.” But as time takes away the youth of our flesh and the greed of our vanity, it’s not so important to endure.

–But young men will be as horny and vain and self-preserving as you were.

–That’s the bloodflower fuckwheel, my brother. I sure didn’t want the wheel to break back then, and I still don’t *want* it to break now. But I am apparently not so troubled by the thought. Half-world-weary at times, and at other times I think I am peaking. Which is maybe two sides of the same coin. Noon, harvest, the beginning of decline. The eggs are laid, for what-

ever they seemed to be worth. Let us think now of our beds.