

## BEYOND ONE IMAGE OF FUTURE<sup>(1)</sup>

**Abstract:** What kind of imagination do we need ‘to see the future’? Stemming from Heidegger’s interpretation of the transcendental power of imagination as ‘original time’ in his Kant–Buch, this article focuses on a few significant points that follow this assumption: the tendency to conceive time in terms of wholeness and, consequentially, to condition the freedom of imagination. I claim that, since imagination is not able to establish arbitrary relations to time, it always fights with time for its freedom. This is why, in its primary function, transcendental imagination of future expresses its kinship with utopias which acquire a spatial topography of an island. As an alternative, I discuss several threads of thinking that emancipate the future from the paradigm of “one image.” In this respect I present two philosophical conceptions — *futurability* (by Berardi), *futurity* (Derrida) and *voir venir* (by Malabou) — which attempt to establish relations to the future time through its dimension of multiplicity and does not spark the utopian fantasy yet proffers the commitment to relations that would not be subordinated to human determination.

**Keywords:** Futurability, Future, Futurity, Imagination, Voir–venir.

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## 1. Pre-Imagination of Time

Is future an imaginary invention? What kind of imagination do we need ‘to see the future’? What is the relation between imagination and future? And, more fundamentally, what is the relation between time and imagination?

Let’s start by reminding Martin Heidegger’s re-interpretation of Kant’s philosophy in his *Kantsbuch*, where he comes up with a very radical conclusion: “The task of proving the inner time-character of the transcendental power of imagination, which was undecided, has been accomplished. If the transcendental power of imagination, as the pure, forming faculty, in itself forms time—i.e., allows time to spring forth—then we cannot avoid the thesis stated above: the transcendental power of imagination is original time” (Heidegger 1997: 131). It would be difficult in the history of philosophy to find a more subverting relation between time and imagination.

By reconsidering the famous triple synthesis described in the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Heidegger proposes to conceive the role of transcendental imagination as a pure function of time formation. Temporal synthesis is, fundamentally, nothing but the power of imagination in its purest state. That is to say — time is conditioned by the way imagination performs the role of unification of multiplicity into schemata of comprehensibility. I can see time — which, most certainly, is invisible — only by applying the fundamental schemes that describe the ways to approach its meaning.

Thus presence, past and future are not given as such; temporal phases are morphed by transcendental imagination through the procedures of apprehension, reproduction and recognition, marking our relation or so-called opening to time. Hence, I don’t need to get into a specific mode of imagination in order ‘to see time’. The aforementioned formula “the transcendental power of imagination is original time” means that time resists complete indeterminacy and is always pre-shaped by imagination. Time acquires form, otherwise it does not exist for us.

As Heidegger notes in this regard, “it is in no way permissible to think of time, especially in the Kantian sense, as an arbitrary field which the power of imagination just gets into for purposes of its own activity, so to speak” (*ibid.*: 123). Since our imagination is of temporal nature, we cannot establish loose relations to time. “Time as pure intuition means neither just what is intuited in pure intuiting nor just the intuiting which lacks the “object.” Time as pure intuition is the forming intuiting of what it intuits *in one*” (*ibid.*).

This is a very well-known, but frequently overlooked conclusion. Most certainly, human temporality is marked by the teleology of oneness, that includes 'the sequences of nows' into a model that subordinates temporal multiplicity (for instance, chronological axis, eternal return etc.). As it is emphasized by Heidegger, "the transcendental power of imagination is able to support and form the original unity and wholeness of the specific finitude of the human subject" (*ibid*: 131). The capacity to conceive our temporality, which for Heidegger is expressed in terms of finitude, is conditioned by the pressure of time, which articulates the ways we pre-imagine our relationality to time.

Hence, in Heidegger's reading of Kant, the temporal meaning of imagination should not be conceived only as a pure creativity, but rather a pre-imagination, that constantly deals with the necessity to respond to 'the temporal call' as well as to revise its own means to shape an answer to multiplicity. It prefigures, rather than crates out of nothing. This is why this implicit expectation of totality, the tendency to be determined by one image of time, produces a very special effect on the procedures of imagination. It is almost impossible to approach time without a pre-fabricated image of unity. We tend to hope that imagination of time works in the mode of 'one for all'. Original temporality provokes an effect of totalizing imagination.

However, what about the famous 'freedom of imagination'? If, as Heidegger notes, imagination cannot establish arbitrary relations to time, prefiguring power is always fighting with time for its freedom. The imagination, imbedded in temporality, is never completely free.

I would propose to conceive the fundamental role of imagination in relation to time in terms of its entrapment and determination. Since imagination is to be conceived as temporality, it is never as free as we like to think of it in the first place. Let us be clear about this: the relationship between imagination and freedom, that has been so heavily emphasized by thinkers like Sartre or Bachelard, appears as a fundamental problem: being entrapped in necessity of the fabrication of time that is guided by the goal of unity.

## 2. Utopias and Islands

In the regard, future is characterized by a very specific imaginary. The oneness of time, that has been recognized as implicit in the function of transcendental imagination, also predetermines the relationship with the phases of the temporality-to-be. Although it seems that future is the scene of freedom of imag-

ination, the preconceived expectation of wholeness conditions the field of its opening. This means — the oneness of time is best articulated as one image of future, or rather *the image of one future*, the totalizing scheme that tends to subordinate the trajectories of possible development in the coherence of its components. This is why, in its primary function, transcendental imagination of future expresses its kinship with utopias.

In the utopian regime, the moment of future is transformed into a representable topography of space. Future is a place, a defined location, which is better than ours. It is characterized both by separation and distanciation; it is namely because we cannot reach a utopian island that water comes into play. Ocean fills a void of empty space, but also defines the contours, so that utopian topography could be encapsulated into one image, conceived in one fragment, surrounded by emptiness. It reduces the complexities and architecturally reassures its systematic unity. The multiplicities are submitted to the normativity of representation.

One can find plenty historical evidences confirming that utopias and islands have been related, starting from King Utopos's decision to dig a channel to separate the famous island from the mainland, according to Thomas More's description (More 2005: 38). The geography of a utopian island is manipulatable, as well as conceivable at a glance; it is contained within its limits and it is almost transportable as an architectural model or pavilion. It works within a regime of formal imaginary, allowing to activate the topography of future through the production of concrete place, subducting it from rootedness within a complexity of the world. Thus, the irony by Gilles Deleuze: "That England is populated will always come as a surprise; humans can live on an island only by forgetting what an island represents. Islands are either from before or for after humankind" (Deleuze 2004: 9).

This being "from before or for after" — and never here and now — makes of an island always a utopian place, which requires imaginary fulfillment. You are obliged to forget its surreal ontology in order to survive on an island. And, conversely, to discover yourself on an island, imaginary projection is necessary, starting from the operating procedure of detachment and alienation.

"But everything that geography has told us about the two kinds of islands, the imagination knew already on its own and in another way. The *élan* that draws humans toward islands extends the double movement that produces islands in themselves. Dreaming of islands — whether with joy or in fear, it doesn't matter — is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far

from any continent, of being lost and alone — or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew” (Deleuze 2004: 10). At its core, an island represents an ideal result of illusionary topography, which is nothing else than a spatialization of future.

What is perhaps even more important is that this imaginary of the island described by Deleuze produces the framing of the dimension of possibility. In this sense, it produces the background to encapsulate and to delineate the fields of possibilities in the systematic unity, i.e. to function as a utopia that coordinates *the possibility of future*. Utopia is an exceptional future possibility, a chosen vision in which — through the process of determination — the potential of the future gains a cohesive structure. The power of utopia lies in the promise of a future coherence — a proposal clear enough to be pursued. Accordingly, presence has to be characterized in terms of lack and deficiency.

The future reveals its contours and restricts the dimension of the potentiality of the present. It is, in fact, an act of subordination for which the logic of teleology becomes absolutely instrumental in displaying the subordination of temporal relations. Utopia is never arbitrary in regard to the present moment. Without explicit articulation, it implicitly imposes the task to undertake. The image is a goal, an unattainable goal with which both what is possible and what not is measured. It also implies the solicitation to act. As a system of measurement, it has to be grounded upon a unitary vision.

Thus, as we can observe, the problem of *the future* is directly associated with the challenge of determination. When we ask what will happen, we must first circumscribe in whose regard do we project the periods of the future time, what do we distinguish in them and at whose expense do we achieve it. In this sense, utopian thinking (as well as the dystopian to which I cannot give more attention here), tends to transform the problem of temporality into a spatial topography as the field of representable possibilities.

Hence, in thinking about the utopian alternatives of future, I would like to suggest a consideration of several alternative threads of thinking that emancipate the future from the paradigm of “one image.” Firstly, I will present two philosophical conceptions — futurability and futurity — which attempt to establish relations to the future time through its dimension of multiplicity. On the hand, I will try to discuss Malabou’s concept of *voir venir* as the moment of imagination that dismantles one image of future by incorporating multiplicity and partial indeterminacy.

### 3. Futurability

Franco “Bifo” Berardi proposes the concept of *futurability* as a clear alternative to the imaginaries of one future. He traces down the semantics of this term in relation to possibility — by including the multiplicity of present possibilities into the register of the future time, their superiority to the unitary future image is asserted. “Extracting and implementing one of the many immanent futurabilities: this is the shift from possible to real. Futurability is a layer of possibility that may or may not develop into actuality” (Berardi 2017: 9).

Otherwise put, for Berardi futurability plays out the field of unrepresented possibilities that do not constitute the horizon of the present time. Since we tend to think of upcoming time in terms of improvement of presence, the presence itself acquires a determining role in delineating the images of future. The actual possibilities — that are indicated as a part of ‘nowness’, that can form the meaning of ‘today’ — play the major role in what kind of questions we ask about ‘tomorrow’. The lack of presence appears as a problem for future. As it was mentioned above, the deficiency that constitutes the meaning of presence, plays the major role in the dialectics with the utopian imaginary.

In this sense the link with Heideggerian understanding of the temporal role of *Einbildungskraft* becomes even more evident: time, functioning primarily as the multiplicity, it presupposes the necessity to be expressed in the systematic oneness of possibilities, thus conditioning the imagination to articulate the schematics of time. Without a scheme, we cannot imagine time. However, by fabricating time, we translate temporality in the fields of possibilities. This is why, I would propose to read Berardi’s intention as the project of liberating imagination: as an attempt to emancipate the future from presence.

In discussing the writing process of his book, Berardi quite clearly invokes the sources that frame his conception of futurability. First and foremost — the thinking of Bergson and Deleuze in which the topic of possibility is discussed from the point of virtuality: “This book is about futurability, the multiplicity of immanent possible futures: becoming other which is already inscribed in the present.” (Berardi 2017: 15) It could be recalled that in his *Bergsonism*, Deleuze stressed that the process of realization is essentially functioning in accordance with the logic of representation. This logic relies on resemblance and limitation. Possibilities here appear as prototypes that — in regard to their properties and characteristics — remain identical to their realizations. In becoming real, possibilities don’t change, some, however, can remain unrealized. Some are rejected and postponed, others — transposed into the dimension of the real.

However, in being transposed from one dimension into another, they do not undergo any change. This is where confusion starts, a confusion, which according to Deleuze, was precisely diagnosed by Bergson. When it is said that the real resembles a possibility, it is expected that — in virtue of its means — it will transcend the fictitiousness of the image. Yet, in fact, the opposite process occurs in which the real and possibility exchange places and thus it is possibility that comes to resemble reality. Possibility is posited as the arbitrary abstraction of the real, its sterile duplicate. In this sense, possibility comes to represent the past which always seeks to subordinate the future.

Following Bergson, Deleuze claims that the process of realization has to obey the rules of resemblance and limitation. As the rule of resemblance states, “the real is supposed to be the image of the possible that it realizes” (Deleuze 1991: 97). So what occurs here, is the effect of reversed imitation — it is not the real that still has to resemble the possible, but rather vice versa: “the possible that resembles the real, because it has been abstracted from the real once made, arbitrarily extracted from the real like a sterile double. Hence, we no longer understand anything either of the mechanism of difference or of mechanism of creation.” (Deleuze 1991: 98)

By operating with the conception of Bergson and Deleuze, Berardi purports to emancipate the future from the field of representable possibilities. “This book is about futurability, the multiplicity of immanent possible futures: becoming other which is already inscribed in the present. But if we assume that the future is necessarily inscribed in the present constitution of the world, we attribute a teleological meaning to the immanence, and inscription is turned into prescription.” (Berardi 2017: 15) In other words, the images of possibilities (representations) acquire a shape of a *necessary goal*. Such a position would claim that in representing the future — and utopian thinking is precisely such a procedure — we are simultaneously encoding the trajectory of its development, or differently put, we impose a futural normative schema, like some beforehand issued prescription.

And even though Berardi mentions the term of differentiation conceptualized by Deleuze (Berardi 2017: 10), the articulation of his philosophical position remains unclear to the end and thus problematic. “As the future is not prescribed, and the succession of now and tomorrow is not monolithic or determined, our task consists in distinguishing the layers of futurability that lie in the texture of the present reality and in the present consciousness. Futurability can be traced in terms of absolute necessity, relative necessity or probability, tendency, impossibility and possibility.” (Berardi 2017:

18) Hence, to think in terms of futurability, means activating the range of the modalities of possibilities — a certain exercise in imagination primarily — that rejects the monolithic status of possibilitization. If the multiplicity of possibilities is available to futurability, then perhaps a more radical question would be to what extent can these possibilities be representable, or in a wider sense — determined.

“Futures are inscribed in the present as immanent possibilities, not as necessary developments of a code. Futurability refers to the multidimensionality of the future: in the present a plurality of futures is inscribed. Consciousness is one of the deciding factors in the selection between these possibilities, and consciousness is continuously changing in the flow of changing social composition.” (Berardi 2017: 20) Berardi’s offered (political as well) proposal to extract and actualize the unactualized levels of futurability, purports to turn back to the multiple and subdue the faith in the past.

But can a teleology that operates with determined future possibilities be moved only by instrumentalizing competing representations? Otherwise put, what kind of challenge do other possibilities constitute to the consciousness that seeks to encounter (i.e. imagine) absolutely undetermined possibilities. Does this mean that the alternative futures remain given in the futurability? Are we speaking of a lower stage determination, which — in not raising itself to the level of actuality — nevertheless functions as representable yet hidden structure? And what, after all, does it mean to represent something that is not given? Can the invisible futurabilities gain the shape of an image?

Berardi pluralizes the future by emphasizing the importance of multiplicity. However, the problem of givenness is not sufficiently discussed in his thought. Perhaps, the fact that possibilities are not prescribed still mean that we maintain openness in our approach to them? Or, on the contrary, in ever drawing closer to the future, we should take another step, not only to suspend our faith in the past, but also change the tactics of our approach to the future itself.

#### 4. Futurity and *voir venir*

Catherine Malabou is famous for developing her signature philosophical concept — plasticity — which she draws from her reading of Hegel and which, affected by her search of fantastic in Heidegger, has been constantly expanded and re-contextualized. On many occasions, Malabou described plasticity as



a famous combination of triple meaning, which designates both an ability to receive, to give and to destroy form. It is precisely in the context of the problem of temporality and determination that Malabou's conception of plasticity as *voir venir* becomes so important.

Jean-Paul Martinon proposes to understand *voir venir* as the development of the concept of the concept *futurity* (*à-avenir*) which was elaborated in the writings of Jacques Derrida. "There is a crucial difference in French between *à-venir* [...] and *voir venir*. The first term refers not to the usual temporal moment of the future, but to the unhinging of space (and) time. The latter term, Malabou's other word for plasticity, *voir venir*, is the formation of this unhinging; it represents the shape of what is coming, as it becomes an event. In other words, it represents the formation of the future itself [*l'avenir*], what can be seen as coming or what can be seen turning into an event." (Martinon 2007: 41)

The term 'unhinging' clearly refers to a notorious formula found in Hamlet's speech at the end of the first act: "The time is out of joint" (Shakespeare 1998: 49). In Shakespeare's words, this expression refers to a specific temporality described in the play — which, as we are very well-aware, is full of horrific and lamentable events. However, in the *Specters of Marx*, Derrida interpreted the temporal meaning of the line as the reference to conditions of possibility for the phantom to appear, i.e. Hamlet defines the very condition of spectral occurrence: time is no longer a unifying synthesis, it gets disjointed from its usual trajectory as if it had several parallel flows.

Derrida emphasises that time is interrupted not by a delay and postponement but by coercion "here-now" which occurs without presence — time becomes disarticulated, removed, displaced from its natural ground. *Dans l'incoercible différence déferle l'ici-maintenant* (Derrida 1994: 60) — here and now it breaks through an uncontrollable *différance*. And this is the true meaning of *différance*. It signifies an absolute singularity, a moment of event where time is coerced — and it is not a lag, or an ever prevailing present, but a singularity that is exclusive through its difference (*singulière parce que différante*); it is inevitably related to that which befalls — i.e., the future that arrives in that unmistakable moment (*ibid*).

*The time is out of joint* means not a cyclic repetition but a convergence of all phases, which is otherwise impossible in a normal flow — it is a vertical time which, for a brief moment, expands itself into a horizontal involute of spectrum. And it seems that Derrida's intention is to incorporate the singularity into the capacity to apprehend time, without reducing it to a simple image,

without any hope of wholeness, but rather by accepting the very (im)possibility of designating power that might intrude at any moment. We can see the multiplicity of time only when singularity is taken seriously in consideration.

As it was noticed by Derrida himself, the temporal dimension that bears singularity plays a crucial role in Malabou's proposal as well as constantly provokes its evolution: "[P]lasticity is not a secondary concept, another concept which, conjoined with the expression 'to see (what is) coming,' would form a hermeneutical couple in *The Future of Hegel*. It is the same concept in its differentiating and determinating process. Because of its own dialectical self-contradiction and mobility, 'to see (what is) coming' is itself a plastic concept, it allows us to see coming plasticity itself." (Derrida 2005: iix)

However, Malabou brings the concept of futurity to its radical and, I would suggest, imaginary moment. By using *voir venir* interchangeably with her famous term of plasticity, Malabou intends to describe the process of entering into what shall soon become an event. Unhinged time is the time of the event, a supervening time that offers a future without even a trace of the present. This is precisely the meaning of *voir venir* — a futurity that is not determined by the possibilities of the present, conveying potentiality to that which was not given and cannot be reduced to presence. Hence, plasticity, in terms of temporality, has this particular dimension of futurity, as she describes it as "the formation of the future itself" (Malabou 2005: 12). Most importantly, future occurs namely at the intersection between substance and the accidental, both as what evolves out of given situation, as well as what shatters its coordinates. "Following this line of thought we understand the 'future' in the philosophy of Hegel as the relation which subjectivity maintains with the accidental." (*ibid*)

However, what does it mean to see not only so-called natural continuation — the possibilities that are coded and identified and, consequently, actualized, as they evolve from the presence — but, at the same time, what is not given and pre-conceived — the intrusion of undetermined transformation that is not logically attributed as being the part of presence? To my understanding, *to see something/somewhat coming*, among other things, means also the activation of the 'imagination of event', or even eventualization of imagination itself, the process that frees us from the schemes of predefined temporality. If, as we saw in Heidegger's interpretation of Kant, primordial temporality provokes the synthesis of unifying imagination, in her interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, Malabou sketches out the modality of imagination that emancipates itself from one image of time.

To re-imagine time in terms of plasticity is to expect the accidental to intrude, to see it coming in terms of not articulated and pre-determined possibilities. Hence, paradoxically, imagination, in this sense, assumes a fundamental plasticity — it determines not the fields of possibilities, but rather the process of entering into indeterminacy: it is the determination of indeterminacy that does not rely on satisfying answers. It is the imagination that sees its inability to see the event in advance; yet, it maintains the power ‘to see it coming’, the awareness of the accidental that is not given, but always possible.

As Malabou puts it, “‘Voir venir’ in French means to wait, while, as is prudent, observing how events are developing. But it also suggests that other people’s intentions and plans must be probed and guessed at. It is an expression that can thus refer at one and the same time to the state of ‘being sure of what is coming’ (*être sûr de ce qui vient*) and of ‘not knowing what is coming’ (*ne pas savoir ce qui va venir*). It is on this account that the ‘voir venir,’ ‘to see (what is) coming’, can represent that interplay, within Hegelian philosophy, of teleological necessity and surprise.” (Malabou 2005: 13)

Thus it could be argued that *voir venir* is the formation of this out-of-jointness; it expresses the form of what is yet to come before it becomes an event proper: “the foundation of the dialectical process is in fact a movement, the movement of self-determination. Its energy flows from the contradictory tension between particular determinacy as it is held and preserved, and the dissolution of everything determinate in the universal.” (Malabou 2005: 12) This means — to accept the event as a challenge of formation in the act, to meet head-on what is indeterminable without a sound determination. “In other words, it represents the formation of the future itself [*l’avenir*], what can be *seen* as coming or what can be seen as turning into an event. The formation of this movement is ‘plastic.’” (Martinon 2007: 41)

According to Malabou, “to understand the future otherwise than in the ordinary immediate sense of ‘a moment of time’ requires by the same token an opening-out of the meaning of time: an extension made possible by the very plasticity of temporality itself” (Malabou 2005: 12). *Voir venir* is the determination of the moment. That is, since it is engaged to become involved, imagination — which gives form to the event — prepares to receive it. In this sort of imagination what is being prepared to be received is essentially accidental. “There is never any possibility to actually perceive or represent the shape of *voir venir* as if it was an already constituted event; it can only manifest itself in its momentariness.” (Martinon 2007: 41)

## Conclusion

If a utopian fantasy produces the unity of island by transforming the contradictions into the image of representation, the imagination of the futurability and *voir venir* always operates at the limit of the possible or even within the realm of impossible. This is the imagination that does not confide in the capacity to grasp the future as wholeness, neither at transcendental, nor at the level of concrete representations. Therefore, futurability and *voir venir* are two strategies to meet the future that attempt to breakout from the determining and in this sense utopian image of the future.

Yet whereas the first seeks to obtain the future possibilities that are already existing but not representable in the present, the second functions as an imaginary meeting of the future which problematizes the image of the time itself. If futurability operates with the imagination in search of different possibilities, then *voir venir* is the imagination for which the temporality itself appears as a moment of ultimate possibility, beyond all given possibilities. This is why the procedure of fabrication of ‘unhinging’ becomes crucial: to imagine future means to resist the schematism of time that is pre-conceived at the transcendental manner. *Voir venir* is the imagination that fights with time for its own freedom — and unleashes itself of embedded schemes.

As it was mentioned above, in Malabou’s interpretation, plasticity describes the relation between substance and accidents and is to be understood no less than the very formation of futurity (*à-avenir*) in the making. In this sense, *voir venir* can be understood as a special type of the act of determination or a radical form of imagination — a motor schema which re-schematizes its own schemes — and expresses the relation between the subject and the unforeseeable (what is not predicated) as the unique moment or a specific mode of temporality.

The imagination as *voir venir* is precisely the process of seeing how the time is dislocated and disarticulated, the imaginary ‘seeing of futurity’ — that is to intervene beyond one image of future. As event is forming, the eventualizing imagination engages in the process of the time that is brought out of joint. This is the imagination that enacts the triple meaning of plasticity: it gives form by receiving and as well by expecting the accidental interruption.

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