

Research Article

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Exploring the Craft of Exilic Thinking/ Becoming

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Abstract: Being-at-home in a particular, determined, world is dangerous for thinking. For thinking to be thinking/becoming, one should not get too comfortable. For thinking is to not arrive back home, in the same place one begins. But how to escape the world that has created who you are, gave you purpose and a past? How to make sure the future is not a repetition of the Same? How to break away from something that you need? In this article, my aim is not to give one more solution to this fundamental problem that is in essence an ethical problem. For providing a refuge, a new theory, a new methodology, would be providing a new island for those who realise that a flood is endangering their own island. My aim is to exercise the craft of exilic thinking as a way to deal with the contradiction already pointed out by Heraclitus and Parmenides – “We both step and do not step in the same rivers. We are and are not.” Exilic thinking as a craft of fragilising the self establishes a matrixial borderspace through which the impossible becomes possible.

keywords: thinking, change, home, exile, praxis, becoming, other, critique, reading, methodology

1 Introduction

How can we deal with the illusion of change, the contradiction already pointed out by Heraclitus and Parmenides – “We both step and do not step in the same rivers. We are and are not.”¹ How do we not repeat history while not pretending we are outside of history. In this article, I want to outline a praxis of thinking/becoming, while being aware that both the river and the manner in which it has been stepped in are nothing new. Which is, paradoxically, the reason for saying it – again and a-new.

Constructionists tell us that we are who we think we are – and that *what* we think is based on *who* we are (made to be). The world and its inhabitants belong together. We are at home in our own worlds. After laying out this concept regarding “The Order of Things” – the English title is so much more fitting than the original French “*Les Mots et les choses*” (1966) – Michel Foucault spent the remainder of his life showing examples of this co-dependency of the world and its thought. Which isn’t as obvious nor as easy as it might sound. How to give an example of something that is so obvious that it was never doubted and could not be questioned? Something you already know and don’t even question – this cannot be shown. Which is why Foucault talked about an archaeology of thought, of digging into roots in order to show the present. Foucault showed us that changes that reach outside of the world we inhabit, radical changes, hardly ever happen. The great counter-point in change within the episteme was modernity,² and perhaps we

1 DK B49a, from Russell, *Heraclitus*, 24.

2 Foucault, *The Order of Things*.

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could add other axial moments to this.³ The change is a state of exception, that when looked back upon – which is almost always the case – becomes invisible because of the structures of the present that pre-tell us that reality is reality for a reason.

And yet, people who walked in his footsteps – Jacques Derrida, Alain Badiou – all actively aim for repeating and continuing the exception, the breaking point of the world. Not to destroy per se, they aim to understand change as a breaking down of the present, a future that is “new” in the sense of being unrelated to the past. This seems to be an overarching longing of whoever engages with philosophy.⁴ Science, having confined itself to the realm of describing and understanding the present, leaves it up to philosophers to create a future that is more than what is already available, a future that is more than a continuation of the same. And although this search is important, the frame that it introduces along with it, is problematic. Because it is talking about ontological exile, disrespecting the mechanisms that any sense of being-at-home-in-the-world brings along.

The concept of the change that is envisioned is naive – results of the past are not to be taken as guarantee for the future, as say legal disclaimers around investment banking⁵ and David Hume’s argument regarding the problems of inductive reasoning are. But strangely enough, this is exactly what happens. In the past, and even today: people with privilege continue to have privileges. The rich become richer, the poor poorer. Those in power do everything to stay in power, which history has shown us time and again. Why then adhere to this idea that results from the past do not guarantee the future? Because by presenting the exception, those in power give hope to people who are powerless, who are excluded from power.⁶ If nothing can be done, if all efforts are in vain, if the die have all been cast, why then give up part of your freedom to those in power? Why continue to make an effort and try to find solutions for problems that were created by the same system you’re forced to not rethink? So we keep perpetuating the idea that change can not only happen but can be a break from the past without (negative) consequences. Time is progress. The future is now. You are unique.

This concept of *the consumerism of change* has been ingrained into human life, at least since modernity. Perhaps before that people were fine with the order of things,⁷ with the *zazen* of being a part of the whole,⁸ with being one of the thousand things that make up the world. Ever since the future was artificially, idealistically, illusionarily disconnected from the past, change has become the driving force of human life. Change for the better, progressive change. Always more, more, more. Not just as in capitalism, but also in our relationship to the world.⁹ We are told that as humans to fulfill our potential we always need to know more, see more, experience more. Different is better. Diversity is always better, because it is different. While all the time “*the order of things*,” to refer back to Foucault, stays conspicuously the same.¹⁰

The disconnection of the future from the past is a problem. It puts the responsibility for one’s position once more on the level of the individual.¹¹ For if you don’t succeed, or if you do, it is your fault. This type of freedom is coexisting with individualism and appealing for those who are already at home in the world. Because, counterintuitive as it may sound, a future that is independent of its past cannot be anything else but a continuation of the same. Not (only, merely) because we must learn from the past in order to move away from it. But because the person reinventing the wheel will be the one put in that position because of

³ See Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*; Eisenstadt, “An Interview with S. N. Eisenstadt;” Lambert, “Religion in Modernity as a New Axial Age.”

⁴ Cf. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*; Žižek, *Less than Nothing*.

⁵ De Haan, “In het verleden behaalde resultaten.”

⁶ This is nothing new. It has extensively been described in different strands of philosophy. For discussion in colonial setting, see for instance Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Chambati, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa*.

⁷ Lefort, *Democracy as the Empty Place of Power*.

⁸ Lathouwers, *Zen Talks*.

⁹ Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time*, 113.

¹⁰ This critique on “progress” is also nothing new. See Read, *Wittgenstein and the ‘Illusion of Progress’*; Davidson, “Ugly Progress.”

¹¹ For example, the overworked employee is given online courses in mindfulness in order to learn to better cope with the stress from the workplace. See Jongepier, *Waarom is de burn-out zo’n groot probleem geworden?*

the present world she lives in, having already acquired the ability to reinvent it. As long as thinking itself is limited to the present, the world is prolonged and repeated, instead of un-made and made a-new. All because the present is thought of as laying outside the connection of past and future, the present can be thought of as a clean, abstract, free space where the messiness of reality can be an afterthought. This manner of thinking goes back to at least Plato. And even though philosophers from Plato to Martin Heidegger have time and again said that they wanted to think being again, they never meant that as an invitation for messiness to enter into the midst of understanding.¹² And thus thinking remained a method of cleaning up, removing the unknown, instead of being at home with the mess.

The concept of change should be divorced from the image of the romantic, poor, misunderstood artist who creates work that is light-years ahead of her time. But this divorce is never a final separation. A full cut between ourselves and the systems of thought that live in our present only once more illustrates the illusion of the disconnection between past and future that is the issue here. The placing of oneself or someone or something outside of the present, outside of time, allows for the distortion of our understanding of change.

The question then, if we dare to ask it, would be about how we can think change while acknowledging being-at-home-in-our-own-world. How can we think change, or change thinking, when we are also prisoners of a world we are actively keeping in place?

2 Understanding thinking/becoming

How can a knowing subject learn something that is not already present in her worldview? How can someone not respond in one of two ways to whatever it is that I will propose in this article: either that it is already known and normal or that it is impossible. Perhaps that is the weight of this matter, that the invitation of experiencing and living this kind of change cannot be made with words that are always already perpetuating and bringing about the status quo. The use of words that have been defined for centuries in dictionaries which are shared with everyone who is already alive to try to say something that does not exist – if there has ever been a definition of madness then it is this. Yet to be silent is not an option either, for then the noise of the present would always already have won. And so I will continue to try and say these things, preaching to the choir who thinks to know and therefore only listens to their own song.

I want to think about the answer to this question of change as a praxis, which I will refer to as a praxis of becoming/thinking, that is more than mere incremental expansion of the current status quo. Education is often viewed as incrementally expanding one's horizon, walking down a path and adding voices and ideas. To do more than this, the current understanding of the necessary integrity of a subject needs to be uprooted. If this praxis of becoming/thinking is successful, it will be possible to educate critically thinking people beyond the confines of the specific world and particular body in which and to which they were born. (Not to say that Heidegger's *gefallenheit* is no longer the case, but it need not be a *verfallenheit*, a constraint to the existence of the individual.) Without this praxis of becoming/thinking, the current polarised reality of the peoples of the world will not be resolved. Current practises of discussion and deliberation, of attention and listening, of acknowledging and appreciating are not enough to overcome the gap between different worlds that are at war with each other.¹³

What is at stake here is a subject's relationship to the world, not just to the radically *other*, but also her relationship to herself. At its foundation it deals with how one is at home in the world one inhabits. (And yes, Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein and all those other usual suspects hold your horses, we will need to

¹² Of course this is the author's reading of their work. Just like everything that can be said is a specific reading, a specific understanding and interpretation of things. To reference this would mean to provide a bibliography of my life, which I am not capable of doing (at this moment, or maybe ever).

¹³ Gaiman, *American Gods*.

deal with language, being the house of being and all. But let's set up the impossible first, before we venture into how we could even talk about something that lies outside of language.)

Understanding thinking in a non-violent, non-linear way requires movement. It requires education to stop being confined to the instilling of old doctrines and paradigms of excluding others and excluding alternative worlds simply because they cannot be approached except as outsiders. The loyalty to the already existing self requires that everything and everyone that comes second remains other, remains seconded. Approaches to the other keep the other as other, as they forget to include the remaking of the self in their methodology. Any move towards inclusivity that does not include the ability to rethink and reconstruct one's own self will continue to exclude. True inclusivity makes the self that excludes superfluous. True inclusivity is (theoretical) suicide – which is why it is only preached (if at all) and rarely if ever practised.

Each and every (feminist) beginning “points to yet another beginning – sometimes through an act of erasure or appropriation, other times through acknowledgment or mutual exchange.”¹⁴ Even though these are possible ways to relate to an-other, it is not enough. What I propose is a praxis that does not understand learning and/or approaching the other as an act of erasure, as that would entail the denial and silencing of the other as a subject.¹⁵ It is however not to become an appropriation: an overcoming the other, subsuming both the subject and the other,¹⁶ ultimately a Hegelian move resulting in nothing but madness¹⁷ or death.¹⁸ Neither is it to be mere acknowledgement, which is a constituting of the self based on the distance between the self and the other.¹⁹ Nor is our relationship to the world one of mutual exchange, where no risk is involved on the part of the integrity of the self, as is the case in for instance strategic essentialism.²⁰

What is needed is a praxis of becoming/thinking that allows thinking in non-linear terms, thinking from the position that one does not inhabit, allowing the subject (and not the other/object) to be destroyed and rebuilt. It is about finding a way to deal with the death of the subject without proselytising and without violence. It is about finding a way to hope while speaking of theoretical suicide of the self. It is a way to relate to the world without already framing the world and thereby being framed oneself.

Here, I would like to relate all of this to Luce Irigaray's rereading of Plato's Cave.²¹ She so clearly explains how Plato disconnected the messiness of nature and our way of relating to the world in the body of the uterus from ideas and the idea of thinking in particular. Although this is not the way to speak of that writing, and one sentence or paragraph or paper cannot make her work clear and beyond doubt, so this is not going to be an explanation, as readers will not be able to engage in a critical and constructive discussion of it. And that's Irigaray's point, or some of it at least. Why do things need to be clear in order for them to be (true)? That is the framing she is undoing, the finger she is pointing. But I'm unsure if this is something that can be simply said here. After reading those dozens of pages, how can I reduce that to one sentence? The relationship of my reading of Fanny Soderback's reading of Irigaray's reading of Plato which is itself a reading of reality is totally obvious to me, because I am the archaeology of that relationship. I can trace it like one can trace the veins in my hand. Each step of that reading has been done, has been lived through, has been fought and wept about. Each truth has been embraced, and none of the truths have disappeared even though these truths cannot exist at the same time (although that expression is not precise enough: it does not share a time, not even a world – or perhaps these things are connected after all, in their own way). So if I reference this thought, the illumination of what I would like to say, of what I am saying by way of Söderbäck-Irigaray-Plato (although I should not forget G.W.F. Hegel, Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Thomas Aquinas and all those other men that I became before), how am I to reference that? How to trace while living and speaking that which is part of the thinking/becoming? Or perhaps this is just an intermezzo that will

¹⁴ Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time*, 4.

¹⁵ Cf. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*; Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

¹⁶ Žižek, *Less than Nothing*, 471.

¹⁷ Blanchot and Josipovici, *The Sirens' Song*.

¹⁸ Thurman, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*.

²⁰ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

²¹ Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 243 and further.

disappear, an editor will cut it out, because this cannot be. If one cannot say one's own thought, how is one to be trusted to say anything at all? (And yet this is all people do, constantly.)

If I would be able to explain this praxis of becoming/thinking in simple terms that can be implemented like a vaccine, it would not be the praxis that can do what it sets out to do. For imposing one more ideology can never be the answer to the problem of the limits, inflexibility and power that is inherent in every ideology. What is at stake here is the privilege of presence, the privilege of being at home in a world. As long as presence and being at home is understood as an absolute, it remains outside of the possibility of thinking. As long as being-at-home in your world is an essentialist position, that is filled in and determinate, there is no space for movement. "The 'presence' of the Western tradition is in fact crafter of these two extremes – an absolute and stable past or an ultimate and predictable future – never on the undecidable and fleeting 'present' of time."²²

Thinking in terms of home and exile is positing two opposites against each other, both made into an absolute that is either romanticised or violently excluded. It implies a directionality that is based on a lie – to be at "home" in one's world is not as stable as it is made seem. Because being at home and prioritising home through the exclusion of others is dangerous for thinking. Instead of an absolute, the ontology of the being-with and the being-at-home of the self in the body is one that is in flux. Instead of based on definite limits, the self and being-at-home is a matrixial situation.²³ One that can be approached, time and again, but never reached as an absolute. Making this "being-at-home" the ground of being is therefore problematic when we understand it as a fixed state, one that is not in motion and not also a relatedness to itself. The ability to relate, to respond, is the response-ability that is fundamental to human life. The same goes for thinking. Ideology that is a given is no longer thought but an invisible prison of reality. To think is to always place oneself in relation, in response to what is perceived as a given. This is why it is better to think about thinking as also a becoming, to underscore the fact that once something is known, it moves outside of the realm of understanding. We need to remain open, in order to allow the possible to somehow emerge, and it is this state of always becoming-in-relation that is essential.

3 Why is thinking/becoming so important?

Science has become just one more opinion in the marketplace of reality. Nietzsche warned us of the death of God and called for people to search for meaning – but he realised he came too early. One hundred fifty years later, we still have not recovered from the death of truth by postmodernism, and the fact that "all sides matter" has led to profound nihilism and relativism – nothing matters and every perspective matters just as much. Diversity has become a word to show how systems are still based on the colour of one's skin, one's sexuality, one's personal choices, instead of the difference of experience. Judgements are instant, self-reflection about one's role and the system at large are frowned upon. The world is divided into good and bad people. Fear and life-threatening processes dominate the politics of the present, where accountability is not the same as justice. Fascism and other populist movements are on the rise.

The underlying problem is the inability of people to see the limits of one's own thinking. This is inherent in the functioning of a perspective – it is impossible to think what cannot be thought. This is a problem when reality is actively created based on our (limited) perspective, while we do not learn how to fundamentally question ourselves. Continuously, we are asked to produce new and innovative ideas and methods, while the craft of thinking has disappeared. So we produce new forms to the same core. We repeat the Same over and over again. Learning to see reality from a radically different perspective, not just observing the alternative from an outside, from a safe place that is already known, but allowing ourselves to enter into a process of becoming the other is not economical and is even dangerous: because taking up

²² Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time*, 120.

²³ Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*.

another perspective means to radically question our own. To give up safety, our roots, our reality. Remaining an individual while breaking with the limits of one's self is impossible, and instead of pointing to ourselves and trying to find a way to live with a broken self, we point our fingers at the other. Power corrupts, and present ideologies – simply because of being an ideology – corrupt the ability to see the ideology that remains powerless.²⁴ Endeavours to bring these alternative modes of thinking – whether they are “new” perspectives like queer thinking and decolonialism or “old” ones like Marxism and feminism – into conversation with established theory mostly fail because people have no method to approach the other – the new, the non-I, the thing that cannot be approached by the Same – without falling into the violent practises of appropriation or erasure. As a result, the other is now twice distanced: once to protect the status quo and the power of the prevailing paradigm, and once to protect the other from being changed and taken over by the powers that be. Still the same underlying idea prevails: that since we have no means to allow for multiple beginnings,²⁵ since the Same must always win in order to not destabilise what we have already gained, since “the ‘not-yet’ has been reduced to an ‘always-already.’”²⁶ The other remains *othered* and unapproachable. The home remains the absolute place of being, and exile is the place of the others that are forgotten – which is fine, if you want to repeat the present eternally. Yet this inability of becoming something that one isn't already, to become something else, something unpredictable, also inhibits innovation. At best we expand our horizon incrementally, but the directionality, the ordering of things, is not affected. This results in a kind of naivety in researchers: selecting theory and methods based on what one tries to accomplish, on the reality one already inhabits, the world that one is at home in. Outcomes are precluded by the approach chosen, as the present decides the future. Yet this means that there is no future, only a repetition of the same. No matter how much affirmative discrimination you enforce: without learning how to no longer be afraid of losing one's position of strength, without learning how to deal with the loss of self and power, without learning the craft of thinking/becoming (the other), system(at)ic structures of thought will not change.

4 The need for a craft of thinking/becoming

I call for a practical way to learn, to engage, to reflect, to embody the craft of thinking/becoming. Western philosophy seems clear about the theoretical impossibility of such a craft. Each world has its own truth procedure,²⁷ and thinking is at most an exercise in defining and comparing claims of propositional knowledge. Defining something means that there is already a framework through which something can be known and expressed – and excluded. Comparison assumes a mutual commensurability, a way that makes it reasonable that two things can even be compared. It assumes that there is a smallest common denominator.²⁸ Yet both defining and comparing an experience destroy the otherness inherent in the experience, or at the very least impose a framework on the otherness – resulting in pluralistic relativism or the impossibility to know more than one's own world. Moving beyond one's own world must be done if we want to find solutions to today's problems. At the same time, we cannot approach something out of the state of nothingness. Each phenomenal body, each embodied thinking being, “possesses a ‘certainty’ prior to any belief that we would have to ground or justify, and prior to any hypothesis.”²⁹ And even if we were to imagine an artificial intelligence, which might be thought of as a thinking being without body, it too has a past that it brings along, a set-up that frames it. So how to question this certainty without imposing a naive state of erasure of the self, of the past, of the reality that it brings along and brings about? How to break down what

²⁴ Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said*; Grosz, “Thinking the New.”

²⁵ Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time*, 273.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁷ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*.

²⁸ Des Bouvrie and Yoran, *Die kleinste gemeinsame Wirklichkeit*.

²⁹ Romano, “After the Lived-Body,” 454.

makes us what we are, while retaining (or maybe for the first time achieving) the ability to relate, to think? What is needed are solutions that are not based on the paradigms that created them.³⁰ Rearranging the deck-chairs on the Titanic is no longer enough. Yet, how do we surmount this theoretically insurmountable task? We know that education is mostly about reconfirming our own biases. Yet modelling the future based on our limited understanding of the present is dangerous. Philosophy has talked about the need for a process of becoming for a while. Yet what we need is not a clear-cut understanding, another model that is becoming, but a practice of thinking-as-becoming. This praxis is needed to develop an educational understanding of thinking something new, and enabling a new generation of innovators to tackle the problems of the present with the thinking of tomorrow.

The praxis of becoming as a way of thinking the other is a craft and not a methodology. A methodology implies a theoretical framework, a definition of goals and objectives that are based on a specific perspective (world/paradigm/episteme). A methodology is a plan to reach a certain outcome that is outlined from and through the beginning. When we want to approach something new, learn something that does not fit our present models, we cannot approach that with a methodology. Which doesn't mean there is nothing to be done but repeating the present (or history for that matter). Thinking/becoming is only possible outside of the logic of the present, and therefore cannot be approached as yet another ideology. Instead, it might be easier to understand thinking/becoming as a craft. A craft is something you do, something you can learn by doing. It allows for outcomes that are not yet understood by your present perspective. In the Middle Ages, the master teaching the pupil a craft did not control the outcome, the exact steps or the origin from which the pupil arrives, yet the master guided the pupil to become their own master at the craft.³¹ And it is the relationship between the master and the pupil that establishes the craft, in this case the craft of reading – the craft of thinking/becoming.

Modes of reading, like other habitual activities, are often deeply ingrained in the form of practical rather than theoretical knowledge – we learn to interpret by following examples of teachers and peers, not by consulting a rule book of drafting a general statement of principles. This approach holds true both for commonsense or everyday reading and for academic methods of literary interpretation. These methods are often transmitted unconsciously and by example: the student learns by modeling the teacher, by voicing similar observations and making analogous arguments, often without either participant's being fully aware of the processes of transmission that are under way.³²

This craft of thinking/becoming is not the same as critical thinking. Rita Felski shows how a hermeneutics of suspicion has come to dominate as the way to approach text. To the suspicious mind, “the text is never what it seems, never *only* what it seems.”³³ She explains that “to engage in critique is to expose ideology and the workings of power, encourage resistance, and generally contribute to social and political change.”³⁴ Although these goals are not wrong, the method of suspicion that critical thinking employs is harmful towards this very goal.

The hermeneutics of suspicion's obsession with the opposition between *the hidden* and *the shown* encourages paranoid readings. Bruno Latour notes that the techniques of critique are no longer the exclusive province of radicals. In particular, its trademark skepticism about ‘established facts’ has long since been hijacked by everyone from defenders of the Iraq War to climate change deniers. For him, critique removes us from the things we cherish, we focus on their conditions of possibility. When we have exposed them as socially constructed, and thus as contingent, we feel that our work is done. But, Latour asks, what good does it do to know that something we love is contingent, or socially constructed? Is that really all we can say about the objects of our affection and admiration?³⁵

³⁰ Einstein, “Atomic Education Urged by Einstein.”

³¹ Sennett, *The Craftsman*.

³² Felski, “From Literary Theory to Critical Method,” 111.

³³ Moi, “Nothing Is Hidden,” 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

Toril Moi challenges the idea of the text having a surface and a depth. “There simply is no special ‘suspicious’ as opposed to a ‘gullible’ method of reading.”³⁶ And although her endeavour is commendable, Moi continues to define reading, “whether I do a postcolonial or a feminist or psychoanalytic reading, methodologically I do the same sort of thing: I look and think in response to particular questions.”³⁷ So the position from which one is looking is accepted as a given and kept in place. She asserts that “the only ‘method’ that imposes itself is the willingness to look and see, to pay maximum attention to the words on the page. What we do next, what we choose to focus on, is up to us. We are responsible for our own reading.”³⁸ And precisely because we are responsible for our own reading, we need a praxis that allows for our own looking, our own focus to not be the priority when being with a text.

Some elements of the practice of Pardes, Jewish exegesis, might be interesting to consider. In Jewish exegesis people are trained to hold many interpretations next to each other and not limit themselves to just one paradigm. When understanding this type of exegesis as a purely rational endeavour, this type of training seems to focus on building the capacity of holding a multiplicity in mind at the same time, but it is still taking the human subject as moving between views, taking sides, approaching the interpretation as interpretation from a position of a whole self. Yet it wouldn’t do justice to the practise of Pardes to see this as a purely rational endeavour. Allowing a mystical part of revelation within the praxis of interpretation, a part that remains unknown and unknowable, this kind of exegesis is able to forego the limits of what is given. However, the core of this method still revolves around an unchangeable, original text, and the aim of this method is to never contradict it. Therefore as a craft of thinking/becoming, it still lacks something essential: the self is asserted throughout the process. The one root is prioritised over the plurality of roots.

Philosophy is often viewed as a theoretical tool. And although there is nothing wrong with theory in itself, what is aimed at here is not confined to being a theory. What we’re looking for is philosophy as an attitude, philosophy as a way towards life.³⁹ Because theoretical approaches to the other are exactly that: not just to be understood as *theory* as opposed to praxis, but also confined to be an *approach*. An approach requires a distance between the self and the other. They keep the *Other* as *Other* and thereby rely on the distance between the self (a self which in these theories is never an-other) and the non-I (the one who one is not). The Other remains a mystery.⁴⁰ The Other remains an after-thought, never constitutive of the present, but something to which the present must relate itself. In other words, the Other remains understood based on the terms and conditions of the present self, it cannot be approached on its own terms. Without fragmentation and vulnerability, the radical opening up of the situated self, without risking the present,⁴¹ there is no future except the repetition of the Same.⁴² Theory discusses thinking without necessarily doing it.

What is needed is a practical approach to doing thinking/becoming. What I propose, although relying and tracing my steps in historical and contemporary philosophy, is not to come up with one more model, one more theory. My aim is to articulate a practice that can be applied universally to paradigms from the past, present and the future. To provide a tool for people to use and expand their understanding of truth and thereby revolutionise their relationship with the world. There is a need for a rigorous and systematic craft of thinking/becoming that is transferable.

Moving beyond a theoretical exploration of this topic requires applied research in a multidisciplinary setting that shares this interest in developing a rigorous and systematic craft which enables students and researchers to look beyond their own world. I am not saying that this craft of thinking/becoming is not yet available, yet it is necessary to make this craft of thinking/becoming explicit, to understand it to such an extent that it becomes transferable. Once someone masters the craft of thinking/becoming, it can be applied to literally every field and context. This craft is not just valuable to researchers and educators. Those capable of employing this craft will be

36 Ibid., 34.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 35.

39 Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

40 Ettinger, *Que dirait Eurydice?*

41 Dufourmantelle, *In Praise of Risk*.

42 Cf. Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time*.

able to change the approach to political deliberation, economic and organisational structures, medical practice, etc. Being able to take on a new perspective, becoming in tune with one's "opponent," not just being able to listen to someone with another view, but being able to relate to the world from which an other approaches the situation will create possibilities that are not yet known. By making the craft of thinking/becoming available to people around the world as a tool, it is possible to educate a new generation of people who are no longer limited to their own truth and the truth of their existing paradigm. Further research will need to be done to be able to trace the effects of this method and prove its lasting effects on both the people who have mastered the craft as well as the contexts in which they work and live. By outlining the craft of thinking/becoming it is hoped this paper will set the agenda for further applied philosophical research.

5 Outlining the craft of thinking/becoming

If we were to provide a definite answer, a road map to lead to the kind of thinking/becoming that I'm aiming at, I would be simply substituting one type of being-at-home with another being-at-home. There are however two aspects that I feel are necessary ingredients for a thinking/becoming, irrespective of one's starting point.

5.1 Exilic present

The present is commonly understood as either a state of exception or as a place of control. It is an exception when the present is assumed to be free from the past and ideas of the future, when it is assumed that everything is possible. This is a dangerous and naive understanding of the present as a moment in which time is frozen and there is no longer any future. Although it might seem like a solution, as a way to get rid of the restraints and limitations of the past, it only means that the past is repeated and the Same is enacted – except that you're flying blind.⁴³ The other option, in which the present is nothing but a conclusion from the past and a place where the past and the future meet, is equally problematic. It would mean that everything is set in stone, and there is no way to break the process of repetition of the Same.⁴⁴

An exilic understanding of the present would avoid both of these options by acknowledging the plurality of origins from the beginning. The narrative of there being one origin, one root, is a dangerous invention in Western philosophy, forgetting the originary tension of the two – not only but also biologically so. By naming and thus not only prioritising one over the other, but also actively forgetting this originary plurality, the present is nothing but a place of repetition. Reclaiming this plurality of beginnings, and introducing the messiness and a-rational embodiment of *chora*⁴⁵ to the core of what it means to be, the present becomes a place in which movement and indecisiveness are possible. When the present is a place of repetition of the past, it is a repetition of the possibility of life that allows for change at its core. The past, the present and the future are no longer defined as only one thing. This is an exilic understanding of time, where being-at-home means to always be exiled because of the plurality, the multiple and the multiplicity of beginnings.

5.2 Commitment to thinking/becoming

Another aspect to a praxis of thinking/becoming has to do with one's loyalty. As long as one is committed to a specific understanding of the self, a being-at-home as a specific subject and its relation to the world, there

⁴³ Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, 125. Also cf. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*.

⁴⁴ Söderbäck, *Revolutionary Time*.

⁴⁵ See for instance Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 26–7.

is no possibility for thinking/becoming. What is needed is a loyalty only to that which is not yet there.⁴⁶ This means for a subject that is at home in the world to give up this homeliness, this certainty of connection to one specific world. By inviting the plurality of beginnings and the exilic notion of relation to the world, any loyalty to concepts of the self, one's past and one's future, is out of place – as this loyalty is prohibiting a future, a becoming something that one isn't.

This is not something one simply does or at least not easily does all the time. Because it constitutes what is known as madness, as a psychosis of reality. Yet this is only a problem, only dangerous, when giving priority to the rational subject.⁴⁷

6 Concluding

Here I find myself resisting the urge to provide an answer to the question of what this craft of thinking/becoming would look like. Any answer would be only one answer, and it would be mine. If it would be possible to find the words to explain it, it would be the result of the sequential shifting of worlds which has made me the person I am today. Truly saying it, simply, is not possible – at least not yet, and not to an audience I do not know, not like this; not being preceded by a dialogue so as to not only share the world from which I am speaking at this very moment but also to expand my and your horizon in such a way that an overlap of worlds might make it possible to share (a) meaning.

And whenever I find a word that fits, a sentence that makes sense, that sets up the stage, it is ridiculously obvious. What remains is the name itself. The name, as “the most intimate essence of language itself,” “through which nothing is communicated and in which language communicates itself absolutely.”⁴⁸ If you recognise it, it needs no longer be said. And if you don't, it will not be named, it cannot be named, and all the words uttered will only muddle the water. Everything that can be said about how to practice thinking/becoming could be equally said about the opposite. To read, to listen, to look – all of these depend on the intention, the reality, the attunement and the subsequent willingness to let go of all of these things for the practise to be successful. So instead of saying what one is to do, without falling into the trap of laying out a methodology that is already superfluous before this sentence has been fully written, perhaps it is better to talk about how one can recognise its success. Share anecdotes of experiences. That moment you looked up from a book and you do not recognise the world any longer. That moment you are walking along a river you have no idea where you came from or where you're going. That moment that you are making a sound you had no idea was in you. That moment you touch someone else and the world turns upside down. That moment you have become the other while also remembering who you are yourself. That moment you are exiled and at home at the same time, but not in the same time. That moment that everything has shifted because you turned 360 degrees.⁴⁹

The tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name. The unnamable is the eternally real. Naming is the origin of all particular things. Free from desire, you realize the mystery. Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations. Yet mystery and manifestations arise from the same source. This source is called darkness. Darkness within darkness. The gateway to all understanding.⁵⁰

Knowing it cannot be named is not the same as not saying anything at all. Not saying anything is not an option. The hopelessness of staying put, of resubmitting yourself to the status quo by not trying to do anything is not an appropriate response. There is a need for a response, as humans we are response-able. If

⁴⁶ Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*.

⁴⁷ Kusters, *A Philosophy of Madness*.

⁴⁸ Benjamin, “On Language as Such,” 65.

⁴⁹ Weil, *Gravity and Grace*.

⁵⁰ Tao Te Ching, Chapter 1.

not choosing death, then we need to do something rather than nothing. To be human is to be “a tragic being because it is exiled from its origin with no possible return. But at this point of no return, the human being instead turns expressively towards the other.”⁵¹ This expression, this poetic reason as Maria Zambrano calls it, is necessary to start anew the process of subjectification. Being exiled from one’s origin, this subjectivity is opened up as a space that must “go about making itself.”⁵² This exilic thinking is a way to continuously question one’s relationship to the world, never being at home. And thus allowing for a thinking/becoming of what is truly other.

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⁵¹ Enquist Källgren, *María Zambrano’s Ontology of Exile*, 147.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 167.

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