

Any attempt to square the afterlives of transatlantic slavery with the ontological provocations of the Anthropocene will sooner or later run into two related questions. How should these two seemingly disparate phenomena be thought together? The question of method. And how should we inhabit the world? The ontological question of how to be. In his timely and urgent book, History 4° Celsius, Ian Baucom spells out a much-needed interpretive method remarkable in its ability to address both questions at once. This is, arguably, what makes this important book important. Taking his cue from Dipesh Chakrabarty, Baucom supplies the humanities and interpretive social sciences (but also science, law and theology) with a dialectical method for thinking and being in the world in response to Chakrabarty's insistence that the gathering forces of the planetary pose a fundamental challenge to humanist thought. But more than a response to Chakrabarty, Baucom weaves his method from a panoply of thinkers that include Jean-Paul Sartre, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Frantz Fanon, Walter Benjamin, Paul Gilroy, Achille Mbembe, Timothy Morton, Quentin Meillassoux, Karl Marx, Immanuel Kant and to a lesser extent Judith Butler. The result is a highly original philosophy of freedom forged from a heterochronic reading of humanism subsumed within the 'totality' of the Anthropocene. For this reason alone, History 4° Celsius merits close attention from virtually anyone working within the humanities and interpretive social sciences on questions, even remotely, to do with the Anthropocene, climate change and the planetary. Not everyone will agree with Baucom, and nor should they. Still, this slender volume makes a masterful, outsized contribution to the debate on the Anthropocene we can scarcely afford to ignore.

History 4° Celsius begins and ends on the Ghanaian coastline where it addresses a series of questions that centre on the image of Collins Kusietey, a seven-year-old boy and a subject in Nyani Quarmyne's photographic collection We Were Once Three Miles from the Sea. Two

specific questions are at the heart of Baucom's method: "what, now, can we know of Collins Kusietey?" and "what, now, can we know of the sea rising up behind him?". (92) Do we see the Atlantic or the Black Atlantic? Is Collins simply a young boy living on the Ghanaian coast or is he the totality of times—biographical, nomological, biological, zoological, geological, and cosmological time—that precondition this young boy's life and future?

To answer these questions, Baucom crafts a dialectical method that puts the force of what he calls "Materialism I" (broadly, historical materialism) and the forcings of "Materialism II" (nowadays, the new materialisms) into dialogue around the possibility of a philosophy of freedom for the Anthropocene. The force of Materialism I is the relentless transformation modernism imposes on us and the Earth system. Materialism I designates a specific materialist epistemology which seeks to grasp our 'situation' as the culmination of historical forces (race, capital, imperialism, violence and so forth) whose animating conditions centre around the history of Europe. Baucom invites us to think Materialism I as the trajectory of thought that culminates in a version of humanism whose aim has always been to comprehend and make something from the situation we find ourselves in. Baucom retains this aim of humanism as a critical aspect throughout his philosophy of freedom. Thus, he returns again and again to Marx's formulation from Theses on Feuerbach: the point is not simply to interpret the world but to change it.

Materialism II, by contrast, is broadly synonymous with what some call post-humanism. The forcings of Materialism II are all those nonhuman entities that we now know shape what it means to be human in ways that have eluded conventional humanism. These are all the infra- and supraordinate natures that often go undetected in the structure of humanist thought. The neural and physiological natures that shape the body and mind, but also the geological, cosmological, biological and zoological natures that shape how we live. Thus, Materialism II is an

epistemology which seeks to read our situation “outside history” (41), or rather above and below history, expanding our grasp of the situation beyond the limits of humanism and historicism. Thus, the human is never internal to itself but coeval with nonhumans, including, in our troubled present, those “post-natural actors, agents, and actants of cyclones, heat waves, and melting” (47) whose forcings we now commonly associate with climate change.

The distinction Baucom draws between Materialism I and II will be familiar to many in the environmental humanities. What makes his method unique, however, is that rather than counterpose one against the other, he insists that we learn to read both together within the same ‘totality’ of our Anthropocene present. Thus, from Baucom’s reading of Collins Kusietey’s situation, we learn that the boy, like modernity itself, is a slow accretion of all those times revealed to us through both Materialism I and Materialism II. “Time does not pass, it accumulates,” Baucom writes, and yet “accumulation does not end, it doubles back and piles on.” (81) We cannot know Collins Kusietey outside this accumulated, doubling back of modernity, outside the “dialectic of forces and forcings” (15), the forces of history (slavery, race, capital, empire) and the forcings of matter (bios, geos, cosmos). And so, for Baucom, the methodological question, thus, becomes not only how can we know Materialism I and Materialism II together but what “order of time” (16) is required to do so and why.

Grappling with these materialisms, dialectically, lies at the heart of Baucom’s renewed philosophy of freedom for our troubled times, a freedom with the power to change the situation we now find ourselves in. From the vantage of Materialism I Collins Kusietey stands as a double reminder. Modernity was not only forged from labour stolen from the Ghanaian coast. It is, equally, coterminous with the enslaved’s relentless struggle for freedom. While from the vantage of Materialism II, Collins stands as a third reminder: the forcings of planetary climate change

contain the conditions for a renewed unfreedom bearing down on his singular life. History repeats itself. Only now it won't be the ships that abduct him but the sea. So, asks Baucom: "what can [Collins' image] teach us of the task of freedom in the age of the Anthropocene?" (72).

Two interpretive moments in the text clarify how Baucom responds. The first concerns his response to the question "what, now, can we know about Collins Kusietey?". Here, Baucom returns us to a dispute between Jean-Paul Sartre and Claude Lévi-Strauss from the early 1960s where we learn that the question had been posed originally by Sartre in his preface to The Family Idiot: "what, at this point in time, can we know about a man?" To which Sartre responds by arguing that to know man, the historical agent, is to know him as the dialectical instantiation of his 'situation', to locate him in and as his historical totality (Materialism I). Baucom, then, turns to Lévi-Strauss whose critique of Sartre's "historians' code" functions, in effect, to provincialize Sartre by calling on the infra- and supra-historical domains of anthropological difference. Lévi-Strauss' criticism was not that Sartre sought to reveal the totality of man dialectically, but that he wrongly assumed this could be done by reading 'man' within a purely historical matrix. The domains of the infra-historical (psychology, physiology) and supra-historical (biology, geology, cosmology), by contrast, would allow Lévi-Strauss to show how the dialectical composition of man extends well beyond the evental, plotted matrix of historical time (Materialism I).

Thus, for Baucom, questions of justice and freedom for the Anthropocene hinge on the realization, after Lévi-Strauss, that the human is only ever in relation with and composed of a multiplicity of infra-historical, historical, supra-historical times. For Sartre, and those who fall within the domain of Materialism I, freedom is expressed in the humanist idiom 'freedom from'. Freedom from one's historical condition, from tyranny, but also from nature, matter or, in the

case of Collins Kusietey, the encroaching sea. While for those of Materialism II, “if freedom is to remain an object of thought and of action, it will need to reorient itself towards [...] what Morton calls ‘the mesh’ and what Latour calls ‘the parliament of things’.” (97) For Baucom, such a reorientation amounts to a freedom towards a new future in the knowledge of a planetary history that knows no division between human and Earth. Such a freedom would be the pursuit of “one new disposition toward the future” in the knowledge of our interdependence with the Earth (71).

The second interpretive moment crucial to Baucom’s reconstructed freedom is his reading of Paul Gilroy and Achille Mbembe on the question of humanism. Here, Baucom provides a nuanced, and quite useful, comparison of their respective readings of Frantz Fanon. He observes, first, how both writers embrace Fanon’s commitment to a new humanism. But he, then, goes on to show how Gilroy reads Fanon’s humanism *against* the posthumanisms of those writers in Materialism II. By drawing an indelible line between humanism and racism, the latter, for Gilroy, wind up refusing humanism altogether in favour of interspecies becoming, a move which ends up privileging “cross-species relationality” “over a primary concern with the well-being, dignity, protection, and rights of man” (99). But in contrast, Baucom finds Mbembe offering quite a different reading of Fanon’s humanism, one in which humanism is understood to mobilize all of “life’s reserves”, one in which anti-colonial struggle is a struggle for life (p.99). Thus, Baucom eventually concludes that for Mbembe the ‘new human’ is not so much reparative, but a radical configuration of human being that gives primacy to interspecies being and relation. Whereas Gilroy seeks to repair a humanism tainted by racism, Mbembe, on Baucom’s reading, seems more concerned with making humanism anew alongside the “totality

of the living world” because it is here in the living world “that the truth of who we are is made visible.” (101)

When Baucom eventually brings Materialism I and II into dialogue he “braids” together the best of both for a conception of freedom. Materialism I allows us to imagine ourselves free from the tyranny and sovereignty of the planetary, where the struggle for freedom is the struggle for life and living. Materialism II allows us to imagine freedom towards the future, the freedom to remake the human in the knowledge of the “quake in being” represented by the Anthropocene. In its simplest, although this is not a simple thesis, Baucom is advancing a position in which the human can only be remade by struggling for a new kind of freedom in the epistemic disjuncture opened up by the Anthropocene, which also happens to be the very disjuncture in which ‘we’ come to realize that the human is marked not just by the accretions of historical time—empire, colonialism, slavery and capitalism—but those of infra- and supra-historical time, too. Thus, a freedom that can change the world is, for Baucom, one that responds to and unfolds within a totality in which the plurality of forces of Materialism I are immanent to the plural forcings of Materialism II and vice versa. This a nested concept of freedom in which freedom from the forces of the former are to be exercised in conjunction with and from within the forcings of the latter. Or as Marx put it in The Eighteenth Brumaire of the Louis Bonaparte, cited favourably by Baucom early in the text, “man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand”.

So, what is Baucom’s philosophy of freedom? How might it be summed up? This is a dialectical freedom that weaves the negative and positive freedoms of Materialism I into the freedom towards implied by Materialism II. Such a freedom is one that refuses to dispense with

the modernist freedoms of the former—“the work of freedom does not end, but like time, accumulates”—but instead sutures the former to the latter. Negative freedom thus becomes a freedom not from the arbitrary measures of the sovereign alone, but from the arbitrary sovereignty of a planet run amok. It is also conjoined with the positive, emancipatory freedoms inherited from anti-colonial struggle, from Black struggle, from feminist struggle. For Collins this is simultaneously the freedom not to be swallowed up by the encroaching sea and the “freedom to health, the freedom to shelter” (104). But Baucom also argues that both freedoms are necessary to realize the freedom towards interspecies being and relation implied by the Anthropocene. Too many modernist constraints remain in place and, thus, thwart the realization of the latter: national security impels a disregard for interdependence; the biopolitical imperative outlaws any sort of entanglement with precariousness (purification at all costs); and the unrelenting imperative of economy and technology. All stand in the way of the kind of interspecies being called for by the Anthropocene. Thus, the freedom towards interspecies life and living is also the struggle against these obstacles that stand in the way. Just as time accumulates, so the unending practice of freedom accumulates. The freedom of Materialism II bends back on those of Materialism I, remaking freedom from and freedom to into the very means of realizing the freedom “to be toward, act toward, live toward what we have experienced ourselves, a quake in our being, to be.” (109)

There is a lot at stake in this slim but pithy text. The fate of the planet and the fate of humanity are certainly front and centre throughout. Empiricists might be challenged by the thin empirical basis of Baucom’s philosophy. Is the image of a young boy on the Ghanian shore enough to sustain an argument about the entirety of the planet? But here we should remember that Baucom’s book is one of method. It’s not itself an account of the world but an invitation that

we grapple with our respective worlds on the terms he suggests. The method he provides is useful well beyond the philosophy of history and history of philosophy. Readers in the environmental humanities and the social sciences, even Earth systems science, would also find it immensely fruitful. It is, perhaps, no surprise, then, that while History 4° Celsius begins and ends on the Ghanaian shore, it finishes with a coda about the contemporary university. Or rather the book's coda is a plea for the university. Although not the familiar plea to reignite the humanities but a plea that the 'faculties' of the university, the forms of knowledge it garners—the arts and the sciences, philosophy and the law, critical theory and theology—work collectively towards this conception of freedom. The history of the university is unique in its Enlightenment articulation of freedom, against the tyranny of church and against the tyranny of the dictator, but also now the tyranny of climate change.

I would argue that we need Baucom's book as a matter of philosophical urgency, now. Climate change is our historical moment, and so like all historical moments, it contains the seeds of both our undoing but also our remaking. It circumscribes how we live and, thus, defines the necessary context for thinking, being in, and for changing the world. And herein lies the political significance of Baucom's method. It supplies us with the means to renovate the concept of freedom for the coming century. If there is an ethic to be taken from Baucom's text it might be this: "an ethic of being decomposed and recomposed through our entangled set of relationships to the biological, and the zoölogical, and the geological, and the cosmological orders and times of planetary life." (33) This is not a manifesto for revolutionary struggle but an ethic for thinking anew about our troubled world, and the point of Baucom's philosophy really is to change it.