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| Dwelling in the Light of the Thou, Or the Art of the Opening Spacel

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## DWELLING IN THE LIGHT OF THE THOU, OR THE ART OF THE OPENING SPACE

This essay draws a parallel between Martin Heidegger's reflection on our growing inability to 'dwell' in the world of techniques in his text "Building Dwelling Thinking" (*Bauen Wohnen Denken*) and Gabriel Marcel's concern about the fading of 'availability' (*disponibilit*) in contemporary society. The essay reflects on those concerns with particular reference to cross-cultural aesthetic experiences, and argues that both our ability to dwell and willingness to be available are ethical prerequisites for meaningful creative cultural experiences.

**Key words:** *Cross-cultural experience; phenomenology; ethics; Martin Heidegger; technology; Gabriel Marcel; availability*

### Пребывая в свете твоём или искусство открытия пространства

Это эссе проводит параллель между рефлексиями Мартина Хайдеггера о нашей растущей неспособности 'жить' в мире методов в его тексте «Строительство жилого Думая» (*Bauen Wohnen Denken*) и Габриэля Марселя о недовольстве ослаблением 'доступности' в современном обществе. В эссе делается акцент на кросс-культурных эстетических переживаниях, и утверждается, что и "способность пребывать", и "готовность быть доступным" являются этическими предпосылками для конструктивного творческого культурного опыта.

**Ключевые слова:** *Кросс-культурный опыт; феноменология; этика; Мартин Хайдеггер; технологии; Габриель Марсель; доступность*

To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free, the preserve, the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature.<sup>1</sup>

*Martin Heidegger*

Building, or thinking is the means by which human beings can dwell, that is to say, can be and remain at peace, safe and free. This also means that dwelling can never be secured. The ensuing plight of dwelling, as Heidegger calls it, is that human nature constantly looks to giving forms to dwelling instead of learning how to dwell.

In his text "Building Dwelling Thinking" (*Bauen Wohnen Denken*) Heidegger's insights into the essence of dwelling — and therefore authentic existence — were suggestively prophetic.<sup>2</sup> In market-oriented societies, the homelessness of being translates into the ephemeral architecture of the consumerist and the groundlessness of thinking. In other words, contemporary culture has made duration disappear at the cost of the authentic experience

<sup>1</sup> Heidegger, M. (1971) 'Building Dwelling Thinking' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter, New York: Harper & Row, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> See the original German text: 'Bauen Wohnen Denken' in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Klett-Cotta, 1967.

of dwelling. The kinds of building and thinking that the German philosopher had in mind are those that enable us to be in a place and thus to remain authentic.

One cannot but feel a sense of despair that emerges from Heidegger's writings. This, after all, comes as no surprise for a witness who contemplates the ways human beings give forms to their ever increasing, multiple aspirations. But there is one fundamental element that is partly overlooked in his reflections on dwelling: meaningful dwelling as authentic experience always longs for consideration toward the Other. Such an experience can take the shape of hoping in the direction of a place; it can also be a response to the appeal of the Thou, "You too." The latter, however, should by no means be confused with an object of anticipatory drive or concern (*Sorge*) since the experience rests on mutual trust and reciprocal attentiveness. Dwelling in the light of Thou may well be what remains for the contemporary subject to hope for in an era dominated by self-centeredness and superficiality. De facto, the contemporary ethos of displacement is as ethically blind with regard to the Other as used to be the modern tendency to "have" a place or be "enclosed" in a place.



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The present essay aims precisely at describing meaningful dwelling as an opening of space that can only take shape with regard to the Thou, to which corresponds a particular temporality; a duration whose very essence is the combining between forms of retention and protension. It comes as no surprise, then, that meaningful dwelling finds its most revealing incarnation in artistic experience.

Heidegger's metaphor of the bridge is an enlightening starting point, regardless of its historical specificity and location. First, the metaphor evokes a particular spatiality. Heidegger makes a fundamental distinction between the concepts of "location" and "space." In his own words,

... only something *that is itself a location* can make space for a site. The location is not already there before the bridge is ... the bridge does not first come to a location to stand in it; rather, a location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge ... Only things that are locations in this manner allow for spaces.<sup>3</sup>

The central idea is that "things" are not entities that are located in a space. They are like bridges that create locations, opening up spaces in the process of being built. This echoes in many ways Maurice Merleau-Ponty's conception of the perceived space in his *Phenomenology of Perception*,<sup>4</sup> which rejects the idea of homogeneous space waiting to be measured by the empirical mind on the ground that it simply cannot account for the embodied condition of the perceiver. For Merleau-Ponty, space is above all a set of bodily directions and orientations. Notwithstanding, he equally challenges the intellectualist's conception of space on the basis that it operates by means of abstract configurations such as geometry, ignoring thus the conditioning nature of embodiment. Merleau-Ponty suggests instead the idea of a not-yet-constituted self whose orienting actions or pre-objective being-in-the-world is generating — or opening — space. With Heidegger, the picture is somehow incomplete, for it tends to overlook the element of "availability" needed on the behalf of the self for any space to open in a meaningful manner. The metaphor of the bridge, however, remains a powerful tool to understand how space opens in the light of a location; the metaphor is one of the numerous devices that Heidegger uses to challenge traditional metaphysics.

The second fundamental fold in Heidegger's metaphor is temporality. Things are bridges; they gather the two sides of rivers and by doing so, they "bring forth" a location. The "presencing" of a thing becomes the bringing forth of a location. Importantly, a location is somewhere specific; in other words, it is meaningful. The taking place or, rather, the opening space of meaning, corresponds to the elaboration of a passage from one state, or site, to another, with its particular temporality. Thus, it takes time for architects, structural engineers, and builders to build a bridge; and it takes time for someone to cross a bridge. Similarly, the situating or locating dimension in any meaningful experience has a certain

duration that is not yet measured, or, to borrow from Henri Bergson, the temporality at stake is not yet spatialised.<sup>5</sup> Spatialised time corresponds to what Bergson calls "real time" as opposed to "abstract time." For Merleau-Ponty, spatialised time is "objective time."<sup>6</sup> Temporality that is not yet spatialised is indivisible flux and continuous movement.

Time is unfolding when one looks at a piece of sugar melting, as much as when one stretches a piece of elastic, when one builds a bridge, or when one walks across it. And what are left on one side of the river in the process of building the bridge are memories, abstractions and knowledge, all of which constituting an invisible "objective world" that can become preconceptions if anticipated on the other side of the river.

This is where the metaphor of the bridge falls short and remains incomplete, or even irrelevant, when it comes to understanding the taking place of "things," or the opening space of meaning. There are, at least, two reasons for this. The first is metaphysical, and the second is ethical. We shall see shortly how the two are inexorably interrelated. Let us first use concrete examples from both everyday life and artistic experience. The metaphor of the bridge evokes the duration of the dwelling that characterises the experience of meaning. Listening to a bird singing gathers one's prior knowledge of what birds are supposed to sound like and the invisible horizon towards which the song is leading. The presencing of the bird's song is a bridge under construction, without precise knowledge of what lays on the other side of the river. If, during the listening, the listener sought to identify a particular melody for the sake of pleasure, there would probably be disappointment; the perceived set of sounds would sound unbearably chaotic and meaningless. Composer Karl Heinz Stockhausen expressed something similar, with different words, when he pointed that noise becomes an audible sound as soon as the ear *lends* itself to it.<sup>7</sup>

The sounds to which we listen, our memories, conceptions, and knowledge are gathered in a movement, a passage invoked by the metaphor of the bridge. But the question remains: how can the phenomenon of gathering, or the presencing of things, or simply the experience of meaning, be at the same time a form of dwelling? The incompleteness or irrelevance of the metaphor of the bridge lies in

<sup>5</sup> Bergson's concept of 'duration' (*durée*) is developed in his early doctoral work 'Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience', in Henri Bergson, *Oeuvres*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, Coll. 'Grands ouvrages', 5<sup>e</sup> éd. 1991, pp. 51-156; but also in relationship to his vitalist conception of life in 'L'évolution créatrice', *ibid.* pp. 495-500 & pp. 725-807; in 'Matérialisme et idéalisme', *ibid.* pp. 337-352; and in 'La pensée et le mouvant', *ibid.* pp. 1251-1432. He defines duration in terms of 'creative evolution' in which '... there is continuous creation of possibility and not only of reality' (own translation): '... il y a création perpétuelle de possibilité et non pas seulement de réalité.' (*ibid.*, p. 1262). In addition, '... the unfolding of duration in some ways seems like the unity of a progressing movement, and in other ways like a multiplicity of states spreading out' (own translation): '... le déroulement de notre durée ressemble par certains côtés à l'unité d'un mouvement qui progresse, et par d'autres à une multiplicité d'états qui s'étalent, ...' (*ibid.* p. 1399). And Bergson's criticism of temporality defined by physicists is in fact a criticism against any conception of time relying on fixed spatialisation.

<sup>6</sup> See Merleau-Ponty (1962), 'Temporality' in *op. cit.*, pp. 410-433.

<sup>7</sup> See Werner K. H. & Hopkins, B. eds. (1977) *Stockhausen: Life and Work*, Berkeley: University of California Press. And also Cott, J. (1973) *Stockhausen: Conversations With the Composer*, London: Simon & Schuster.

<sup>3</sup> Heidegger (1971), *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>4</sup> See Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) 'Introduction: Traditional Prejudices and the Return to the Phenomena'; 'Part One: The Body'; and 'Part Two: The World as Perceived' in *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, London: Routledge, pp. 3-63; pp. 67-199; pp. 203-365. The original text was published in 1945 as *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris: Gallimard.



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the fact that the latter is never constructed without the knowledge of what we want to bring together. To build a bridge, we must know what is on both sides of the river. This is why the metaphor is metaphysically irrelevant. The metaphor of the bridge implies knowledge of the Other (side of the bridge), or *having* the Other, instead of showing considerate attentiveness toward the Other. Of course, a metaphor is in essence always incomplete, evocative, un-explicit, and therefore “live” — to use Paul Ricoeur’s expression<sup>8</sup> — for a metaphor is no definition. Heidegger’s metaphor of the bridge, however, is used in a way that overlooks, even implicitly, the fundamental ethical dimension at the core of the presencing of things, the experience of meaning, and the opening of space.

The taking place of meaning creates a location and therefore opens a space. The presencing of a set of sounds, a drop of water, or a stone, as captured so beautifully by traditional Japanese aesthetics, is patently incompatible with the ethos of having, dominating, or anticipating. To judge or to think objects in representational terms is not to let things appear. To seek to recover or recapture one’s image prevents the appearing of things. For Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro, Western art has traditionally striven to work out “the space of things,” whereas the quest of Eastern art has rather been, in his own words,

... the space of the heart, [not] the space against the self, [but] the space within the self, [that is to say] the ordinary heart [which] includes heaven and earth in a tea bowl ... The line of eastern painting [is like] the natural process of things as they are.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, only a particular kind of gathering between the perceiver and the Other, for instance a sound, water, or a stone, can make the bringing forth of things as such and as location possible. It is only by considering, or making oneself available to the Other, in other words by dwelling in the light of the Thou, that the experience of the presencing of things, or to put it differently, of meaning, will not be *in-nihilo*. But, again, if the experience of meaning is always oriented, it is never determined. To build a bridge from one side of the river to the other is to create a space that remains functional. It requires knowing the Other with the intention to ultimately reach it. In other words, it is a form of spatialisation, which calls for immobility. Dwelling, in the sense of making oneself available to the Thou, is on the contrary never about staying at the same place, or even less being subsumed to the Other. To dwell, that is, to be and remain at peace, safe and free, is not an immobile

experience. Heidegger of course never suggested anything similar; his conception of dwelling corresponds to that very attitude that lets things appear or be brought forth, invoking thereby a specific movement.

What needs to be acknowledged, though, is a conception of dwelling as considerate orientation toward the Thou. Only then can space be conceived to open up, during a certain time, by throwing light on the one who is willing to listen, look, touch, or think. This ethical conception is of course essential to understand the gesture of the artist who intends to communicate a message whose orienting nature in motion always takes place with regard to somebody or something. To this ethical dimension corresponds a particular attitude, which Gabriel Marcel called “availability” (*disponibilit*).<sup>10</sup> For Marcel, availability together with responsiveness, admiration, consideration and hope, was the paradigmatic keystone of any meaningful existence. Perhaps more than Emmanuel Levinas — this other great philosopher of alterity<sup>11</sup> — Marcel saw the essential creative role played by availability in dialogical relationships. The available self, for Marcel, is not subsumed to or hostage of the Other whose “otherwise” nature brings being to completion by pulling it out from its centeredness. The transcendence of the Other must not be overwhelming nor negating. Availability is a free choice to consider the Thou with admiration; a choice that is also based on mutual trust. If availability implies a degree of faith or fidelity, to use Marcel’s wording, it must be sharply contrasted to fideism and its subsequent ramifications such as fanaticism, idolatry and sectarianism. To have faith is a willingness to be available in a reciprocal act of consideration. The available self remains free for it is not overwhelmed or blinded by the Other. The freedom at stake is therefore no selfish autonomy since the self trusts that it will shine and be renewed in the light of the Other. Put differently, the I trusts that it can give itself up for the Thou to let its presencing be. It may seem paradoxical to advocate the idea of availability while stressing that the I-Thou relationship must remain an act of freedom. The paradox is also contained in one of Marcel’s fundamental philosophical expressions, that is, “creative fidelity.” In point of fact, there is no paradox because of the necessary reciprocal character

<sup>10</sup> The concept of ‘availability’ is recurrent throughout Marcel’s entire work. See in particular *Du refus l’invocation* (1940), Paris: Gallimard, translated as *Creative Fidelity* (1964) by R. Rosthal, New York: Noonday Press; *Etre et avoir* (1935), Paris: Aubier, translated as *Being and Having* (1951a) by K. Farrer, Boston: Beacon Press; *Homo viator: Prolgomnes une m taphysique de l’esp rance* (1944), Paris: Aubier, translated as *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysics of Hope* (1951b) by A. Craufurd, Chicago: Henry Regnery Co.; *Les hommes contre l’humain* (1951), Paris: La Colombe; translated as *Man Against Mass Society* (1962) by G. S. Fraser, Chicago: Henry Regnery Co.; *L’Homme probl matique* (1955), Paris: Aubier, translated as *Problematic Man* (1967) by B. Thompson, New York: Herder and Herder; *Le myst re de l’ tre* (1951c), Paris: Aubier, translated as *The Mystery of Being* (1960) by G. S. Fraser and R. Hague. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co..

<sup>11</sup> See in particular Levinas, E. in *Le Temps et l’Autre* (1983), Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, translated as *Time and the Other* (1987) by R. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press. See also *Autrement qu’Etre ou Au-del de l’Essence* (1974) The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, translated as *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1981) by A. Lingis, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff; *Totalit et Infini. Essai sur l’Ext riorit* (1961), The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, translated as *Totality and Infinity* (1980) by A. Lingis, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff; and *Ethique et Infini* (1982), Paris: Fayard, translated as *Ethics and Infinity* (1985) by R. A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Ricoeur develops his conception of the ‘live metaphor’ (*m taphore vive*) in *La m taphore vive* (1975), Paris: Editions du Seuil; translated by R. Czerny as *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (1977), Toronto: University of Toronto Press. In Mary Gerhart’s words, in her essay on Ricoeur’s ‘live metaphor’: ‘... metaphor destroys to create: By creating a tension within ordinary language, the effect of metaphor is to call a new meaning — that which has not been previously said — at the boundaries of language.’ Quote taken from Gerhart’s ‘The Live Metaphor’ in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. L. E. Hahn (1995), Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, pp. 216-217.

<sup>9</sup> These quotes are taken from Ken’ichi Iwaki’s essay ‘Nishida Kitaro and Art’ in *A History of Modern Japanese Aesthetics* (2001), ed. & trans. M. F. Marra, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, p. 279; originally from *Nishida Kitaro Zenshu* (Selected Works of Nishida Kitaro) (1998), Ky to: Toeisha, Vol. 10, pp. 162-163.



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of the relationship between the I and the Thou, which is based on considerate freedom. For all the emphasis on transcendence as a correlative of the freedom of the self — also found in Karl Jaspers' conception of "Existenz"<sup>12</sup> — the Thou (the transcendent Other) must show the same trust in the self's disposition to respond to its appeal with consideration. A betrayed trust on either side will take the form of drive for *having*, and the relationship between the self and the Other will be used as a controlling means to reach an end. The trusted Thou must deserve to be considered, that is, must guaranty that its appeal is neither interested in using the I as a means for an end, nor disinterested or self-addressed. To this effect, considerate dialogue proves to be essential for the creative presencing of the I and, correlatively, of the Thou.

Marcel, Jaspers, Martin Buber and Ferdinand Ebner stress how fundamental the interpersonal nature of relationships is for the formation of the I to take place at all.<sup>13</sup> The same view can be extended to the formation of all entities, including nature, the earth and the sky. The subject who dwells regardless of the natural world, for its own interest, does so at its own peril. Biological and ecological disasters are clear reminders of such unavailable subjectivities. Even the romantic figure who used to delight himself by the sight of the overwhelming nature is, in a way, self-interested and therefore unavailable. Moreover, showing trust in and consideration for the natural world, if proved to be vital for our survival as well as needed for the enrichment of knowledge and understanding, is not about obeying or be naively optimistic about nature. Similar to the personal Thou, the natural Thou does not call for fideism or submission. Of course, one could question the relevance of the idea of mutual trust when it comes to the natural Thou. In other words, does it make sense to think of our relationship with nature in terms of ethical reciprocity? Can we envisage any entrusting dialogue between human being and the natural world? At first sight, to suggest that human being must be trusted by the natural world sounds like an obvious logical non-sense. The earth and the sky are not ethical entities whose sense of selfhood would depend on how they are willing to relate to some otherness. However, the dialogue *can* take place if one believes in nature's quasi-ethical stance. Nature does not *intend* to control us; nor is it a *standing reserve* waiting to be used. Those are the facts to bear in mind for anymore wanting to establish a healthy relationship with nature, based on quasi-ethical principles of reciprocity. This applies to the I and the Thou, be they human or natural.

Dwelling in the light of the Thou is what allows the I to take shape. For Jaspers, "there where I am most myself, I am no longer

only myself,"<sup>14</sup> and for Marcel, "what is deepest in me is not of me."<sup>15</sup> The creative presencing of the I takes place by making itself available to the Thou. This is no passive contemplation, nor the *apatheia* of the Stoicists, but active attentiveness, accommodation and renewal — a paradigm echoed by the *Wou Wei* of Taoism,<sup>16</sup> whose principle of non-action is the art of mastering circumstances without showing any resistance; the principle of warding off a coming force which cannot thereby reach its target or its prey; the acceptance by means of integration and never by means of refusal.<sup>17</sup> With the dialogical essence of dwelling in the light of the Thou also come trust and reciprocity, a principle that can be best described with a concrete example. Needless to say, the dialogue at work can remain silent, or what Buber called "sacramental."<sup>18</sup>

When one walks through the Alhambra of Granada, from the Court of Myrtles, to the Sala de las Camas, and around the Court of Lions, the presencing of meaning that emerges from such an experience is not about seeing in the architectural ensemble a 14th century historical document that confirms what is learned beforehand in abstraction. Nor is it about a pleasurable perceptual experience in front of the visual richness of the beautifully crafted decorations on the buildings. The presencing of meaning stems rather from another kind of craft: that of the dwelling of a Moorish community that reveals itself as such to the viewer who responds to its appeal in a considerate manner, or, to put it differently, who is prepared to dwell in the light of the place. Thus, knowing how to dwell is to take the time to be attentive to the Thou, the work of art, an author, human beings, and at another level, nature, the earth and the sky. There is no meaningful ontological experience without the ability to make oneself available to the Thou. The space opened by the walking of the visitor through the different buildings, rooms, and paths certainly stems from an embodied perceptual experience, but such a space is not only physical. The opening is equally that of the space that gathers the historical horizon of the location and the witness who makes him or her available to it.

Soon, however, the visitor faces the breaking-off of dwelling, both historically and at present. Charles V's palace stands in the middle of the Alhambra over a Nasrid building. The Western, Christian palace stands as an act of victory over the Moors, as an act of *having* the Other, or of *defining* a space against the self, to borrow again Nishida's expression. But the breaking off of dwelling is not only historical: the sight and noise of a plane in the sky — a reminder that we can see the Statue of the Liberty and the Alhambra in one single day — equally breaks off dwelling.<sup>19</sup> Both cases are forms of unavailability that prevent dwelling in the light of the Thou.

Technology enables us to build more and more bridges in less and less time. As Heidegger was wary to warn us, the more we give forms

<sup>12</sup> On the concept of 'Existenz' see Jaspers, K. (1955) in *Reason and Existenz* (1955), trans. W. Earle, New York: Noonday Press; and Part 3 Section A of *Philosophical Faith and Revelation* (1967), trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Harper & Row.

<sup>13</sup> In particular, see Marcel G. (1998) 'Moi et Autri' in *Homo Viator: Prolgomnes une M taphysique de l' Esp rance*, Association Pr sence de Gabriel Marcel, pp. 15-36; Jaspers, K. (1932) *Philosophie*, Vol. 2, Berlin: Verlag von Julius Springer; Buber M. (2002) 'Dialogue'; 'The Question to the Single One'; 'The History of the Dialogical Principle' in *Between Man and Man*, trans. R. Gregor-Smith, London: Routledge, pp. 1-21, pp. 49-97 & pp. 249-244; and *Ich und Du* (1923), Leipzig: Insel Verlag, translated as *I and Thou* (1970) by W. Kaufman, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; and Ebner, F. (1985) *Das Wort und die geistigen Realit ten*, Frankfurt: Surhkamp.

<sup>14</sup> Jaspers, K. (1932), op. cit. , Vol. 2, p. 99.

<sup>15</sup> Marcel, G. (1951a), op. cit. , p. 227.

<sup>16</sup> See Cooper J. -C. (1972) 'Wou-Wei' in *Taoism, The Way of the Mystic*, Wellingborough: The Aquarium Press, Chap. 7.

<sup>17</sup> See Lin Yutang (1998) *The Importance of Living*, London: Quiller Press.

<sup>18</sup> See Buber, M. (2002), op. cit. , p. 5: '... where unreserved has ruled, even wordlessly ... , the word of dialogue has happened sacramentally'.

<sup>19</sup> In her book *But Is It Art?* Cynthia Freeland mentions that a modern day tourist to France "can make short train trips from Paris to visit medieval Chartres on one day and Versailles the next." The modern day tourist to France has obviously forgotten how to dwell, how to be attentive, and how to respond to the appeal of the art. See Freeland, C. (2001) *But Is It Art?*, Oxford: Oxford University press, p. 43.





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to dwelling the less we learn how to dwell, the less we know how and when to listen, to look, and to lend ourselves to the Thou. The price to pay for not knowing anymore how to dwell is high. Unavailability increasingly characterises contemporary culture. The art of the opening space, with its duration and demanding attentiveness,

has turned into the practice of the ephemeral, parodies, irony and casualness. For the time being, dwelling in the light of the Thou has become anachronistic. The ruthless infiltration of technology as an instrument and, sometimes, a weapon of the market economy has made any responsible humanism dangerously irrelevant.

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