

RELATIONS AND STATES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to re-interpret the concept of relations as such and examines their actualization in relation to the relations of states. It is divided into two parts. In the first part, it examines past interpretations of the concept of relations and provides a different understanding of the concept. It argues that relations should not be perceived solely as that which occurs either as an extension of things or as between things, rather that relations are such phenomena that can also actualize as autonomous existents alongside of other existents that constitute reality.

Furthermore, it argues that to adequately understand relations as such one must study conditions such as de-relationism, arelationism, and not-relating, conditions that are not necessarily the binary opposites of relations but forms of realities that coexist with relations as such. It further aims to develop a relational way, a method per se, that can best be utilized in the relational analysis of relations, in the ways in which relations exist, and in the ways in which relations relate and un-relate. In the second part, the dissertation primarily focuses on certain broad categories of the relations of states and of the world. For instance, it examines the concept of the world, the current state of the relations of the world, the concepts of relations of states, inter-state relations, as well as categories such as the state of incompleteness, uncertainty, and relations that are oriented towards the future.

For my mother

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Introduction

Introductions, by way of presenting, introduce the reader to the author, the text, the author's ideas, the expressions of those ideas, and the style of those expressions. The author introduces the frontiers of what they have become; and the readers, who are eager to expand their own limits, are introduced. Or, if we were to think of an introduction in relation to a book, rather than the author, the introduction, as a short form of writing that comes before the main body of a text, although is in itself a part of this body of work, ultimately functions as a glimpse and sample of a totality of something, a written something. Essentially, introductions are the initial point of relations. In the author's absence, the author, the text, and the reader encounter and initiate relations, which are further enriched and enhanced by their encounter with the already existing relations that constitute and produce introductions and the act of introducing a book. In summary, it can be said that introductions are a collection of organized ideas and the ideas about ideas, which consist of words, the coming together of many related and unrelated words, memories, pictures, and imageries, through which the author enters into and attempts to invade the mind, and thus the life of the reader in manifold ways, through a variety of strategies. If a book were to be described as an invasion, the introduction, then, is a moment of decision before the invasion. A moment where the author decides to invade and change a life in some ways and the reader decides whether the text is worth reading. Introductions are a complex form of inventions like every other human invention. Their complexity, which lies beneath simplicity and familiarity, simply entails a sheer multiplicity of relations. What is introduced to the reader in an introduction is not a mere stream of an author's thought and imagination about what is to come, more is involved here: an author's identity, being, thought process, vocabulary and the limits of

such vocabulary, life experience, fears and anxieties, hopes and dreams, accumulated social relations, and so-on, are being introduced.

In essence, introductions, then, should be perceived as a relation or a sum of relations between the author, the text, and the reader, basically as a human activity that contains innumerable relations like a fountain that keeps pouring and streaming. What an introduction contains, alongside the other constituents of the text, is meant to stream endlessly, even though many dry up in time. It does not end or cease to exist after a reader reads it, the second reader reads it, or the third. For the first reader it may end but it remains as the same when the second or the third reader reads it. What an astonishing way of immortalizing relations writing is! A reader reads, glances, gathers, absorbs, stores, and retains an introduction's contents, which can trigger or bridge the already (un)stored feelings, ideas, experiences, dreams, and reflections, and it may or may not expand and enrich the scope of their knowledge and open up new horizons, new windows for their mind, in their mind, for their being. Through this short but dense and lengthy process of relations and relations of relations, the author, that external being who is relating by ways of relating, by not being physically present, becomes a part of the reader, of their imagination, their fabric, their being. A being lives in another being; two beings merge and relate, a part of one becomes a part of the other. Think of a believer who repetitively reads a religious text. The believer memorises the text, internalizes it, believes in it, acts on it, talks with it, and dies for it. So many relations: relations *within* relations, relations *for* relations, relations *towards* existing and non-existing relations. Difference and identity, wholeness and partness, one and many, full and empty, the physical and the metaphysical all are intertwined here, all become indistinguishable, all are related. They do not become one, many, a set, or a complexity; they are

just relations, clouds of related and unrelated relations that surround beings, that which constitute and make beings.

Along with the relations that are involved in making, inscribing, and reading it, an introduction, which in itself, by way of tradition, precedes the body of a book and succeeds the title and the table of contents, introduces and summarizes the contents of the text and maps out its topography, is in a way an existential activity or a mimicry of manifold other activities that allow the mind and the being to grapple with its self and the world and the world of relations that surrounds it in a gradual manner, rather than an abrupt and swift way. Gradualism, thus, as an ontological condition, represents the way in which human beings experience their existentiality and relate to themselves and to what lies beyond the selves. In the case of inscribing an introduction the author gradually, step by step, sentence after sentence, welcomes and invites the reader to their own world; the reader is not rushed to the conclusion, as the core ideas of a text are often kept from them.

To have access to these core ideas, the details and implications of these ideas, the necessary and unnecessary extensions of these ideas, the reader must continue. In certain instances, particularly in the case of philosophical texts, these ideas are hidden, intentionally, beneath concepts and sentences, scattered, dispersed. Gradualism also functions, aside from being an existential condition and a function of introductions, as a utility, as a telos. Its aim is the mastery of something, a mastery, a teleological relation that is particularly active in the relations of doings, like being a master cellist, that can only be achieved through gradual practice, experience, and repetition. To reach a totality, an end, a sense of completing something, one gradually often needs to achieve a mastery of something. Although one may never be able to truly master something, the entirety of something, one always strives towards achieving it. Such

is the case with the modern practices of specializations in a given research area or a vocation that demand from the expert not only a form of mastery but also expect that the master continue, as their time passes, to expand their knowledge and expertise, which becomes a lifelong gradual activity aimed towards achieving a total understanding and the know-how of something. Thus, to fully grasp and to fully avail oneself of the contents of a book, one is introduced to it first, one introduces it first. Without an introduction the reader is forced to maximise their efforts to map out the text, in which case the reader ventures into an unknown world, a world whose map and approximate totality were not presented to them beforehand at the introduction, and thus are left with the burden of piecing the ideas of the text together as they read and re-read it. Ibn Khaldun, for instance, wrote over a five hundred page introduction, *al-Muqaddimah*, translated as ‘introduction’, to his voluminous text on history, *Kitab al-‘Ibar*, to outline his philosophy of history to the reader before presenting his text.

Let us look closer into the relations that are involved in introductions, in the production of this preliminary stage of introduction where one gets in, stays in, and gets out, and see what is active and present, and what is intended to be activated and instilled. One of the essential relations that exists between the introduction and the reader, between words, a series of carefully gathered words, and a mind, is that introductions seek to transform the mind and aim to guide and transport it beyond the limits of a few pages, or words, where the mind has never been before. They function as vessels carrying one into the future, into a text that has not been read yet; and as much as authors often hope to be direct and succinct in introducing the introduction, they also connect the reader with what they already know, thus providing a sense of familiarity, or orient and guide the reader’s attentions towards unfamiliar horizons. When Livy Visano, for instance, begins his introduction with the phrase “Connecting crime and culture”¹ the reader’s

mind, particularly if this is their first encounter with such a relational idea and approach, is forced to not only establish a relation between crime and culture but also go beyond that mere fact and establish and see new relations that the reader may have never thought to be there. The “and”, a monumental human invention in itself which is indicative of *logos*’ appropriation of relations before the development of any understanding of the concept of relations, here contains and assumes indefinite relations, between crime and culture, two major categories, and its role is to create and represent a bridge between them, and forever connect what initially appears as two unconnected islands of human inventions. As crime and culture are linked, they are also given a primacy over other linkages they may have and may have thought to have. In sum, a relation can lead to infinite other relations; relations construct, destruct, or deconstruct new relations, real or presumed. A word or a phrase can lead to many words and many phrases and relations. Through such relations the mind expands and enriches, redefines its past relations, experiences, and practices. A phrase, crime and culture for instance, becomes a book in the mind, before the reader reads the book itself. The mind, now, reconfigures its certain relations, it rearranges the order of certain relations; its understanding of reality is enhanced, it relates differently with different sets of relations.

Quite often, when thinking in scientific or philosophical terms about a given subject-matter, which is the writing of introductions in our case, and to relate and derelate towards the relations in and of such matter, the enterprise of knowledge production demands that the mind relate to and towards it in a very particular way, which is: the mind habitually aims to find, see, explain and uncover a new aspect or a new condition, which was unknown, or forgotten, or ignored, or under-developed and under-thought. So when we see introductions, or prefaces or whatever form of writing that precedes the actual body of a text, as things – often beginning with

broad generalizations then narrowing the conversation to the subject at hand and attempting to satisfy the reader's traditional expectations which principally are, as Hegel states in the preface to his *Phenomenology*, an "explanation of the author's aim, why he wrote the book, and the relationship in which he believes it to stand to other earlier or contemporary treatises on the same subject"² to which we may also add the summary and the breakdown of the text, and its map – we are actually seeing the material, the apparent. And when we attempt to go beyond the immediate thingness and other physical attributes of the introductions and prefaces and begin seeing them as mere habitual activities practiced within the broader culture of book writing, or expand the scope of the notion of introductions and see similarities between it and other human activities, like introducing oneself or another to others, we are sensing what may lie beyond what appears. If we examine the works of the majority of the Islamic and western philosophers, we will find that their mode of thinking and their way of investigation fall under the first or the second approach or a synthesis of them. In truth both approaches are not in any way unique to philosophical and scientific endeavors as they are essentially extensions and representations of the everyday modes of outwardly relations; in other words, just as a philosopher utilizes these two modes so does a farmer in their encounters with their everyday reality. One of the aims of this text thus is an attempt to show that there are other possibilities, other possible ways of thinking and investigating, and to show that human beings relate and can relate in indefinite ways and forms, and that the human mind is not and should not be confined to two, three, or four forms of relating. My intention here is not to simply point out the multiplicity of things or indicate that we can think in multiple ways and see multiple things, but it is to show that we are relational beings who relate and can relate in indefinite ways already, even in moments of sheer

solitudes, and that such a relational existence should not be confined to the notions of singularity or multiplicity.

Further, in writing or reading an introduction we often encounter the phenomenon of exposing. The author exposes and reveals their thoughts about a subject-matter, their thought process, a part of their identity, their personality, temperament, state of mind, linguistic proficiency and eloquence. The reader's mind, on the other hand, while venturing into the unknown, the uncertain, the unexpected, and understandably unprepared, is being exposed or exposes themselves to a new self, mind, form of writing, and stream of thought. In this encounter with the new, that desire to add and invite new content and new relations into the self, memory, and imagination, to go beyond the familiar and everyday understanding, which is already present in the self and mind, the self is restlessly joyful. This restlessness and joyfulness that accompany other relations, which can be quite subjective, while encountering and reading an introduction to a book, refreshes and rejuvenates the state of mind, it forces the reader to summon into the present moment what was already there, what was gone. The relational mechanics of this relationship that exists here between the reader and the introduction can be described as causal, as non-causal, as transcendently causal, etc. From the relations of exposing and revealing can arise a sense of seizing and overtaking in the reader while they read an introduction, which contains more than a mere glimpse of what is to come after it.

Relations related to relations. In this sense, introductions are not necessarily written, as Derrida claims, "in view of their self-effacement" or "Upon reaching the end of the *pre-* ... the route which has been covered must cancel itself out",³ but they are intrinsically linked with the rest of the text, without which, at least in the traditional sense, the text remains incomplete. Certain relations continue, while others cease, and manifold others emerge in the transition from

an introduction to the body of a work. While all these sorts of relations are actualizing and disappearing and reappearing, the reader, in order to grasp the content of the introduction, to prevent repetition and thus rereading, and to collect at once what is in there, what the author has stored inside those words, must derelate themselves along with their mind from outside the text, from what is beyond the text. This act of derelationism is of course not a complete form of derelationism, which is unique to death, but it is an attempt at isolating the mind and the senses and confining them to the text.

Last but not least, in the act of reading introductions we observe the relation of retaining. The reader aims to retain from reading the introduction what the writer had wanted the reader to retain. This retaining process may include the retention of the core concepts and ideas of the text, the overall map of the text, the author's ultimate aim in writing the text, that core underlying idea(s) aimed by the author which if understood correctly and seized quickly may allow the reader to comprehend the text better and rapidly, in the least it may ease the comprehension of the text. Most texts have such an underlying telos, ultimate aim; while some authors express it explicitly in the introduction, others do not, particularly certain philosophical traditions. This relational process, this flow of relations, which is at times chaotic and at times linear and at times circular and at times infertile, leads to the formation of a state of overpresence, a pivotal point and instance not only in the mind, although it often is, but also in the self, a relationality towards which relations gather and from which relations emanate. Through the state of overpresence, the mind and the self conduct and oversee what they deem important, like essential ideas, concepts, a text's map, these are kept and retained. What is retained along with the relations of understanding, seeing, analyzing, is overseen and controlled by the state of over-presence throughout the act of the reading of a text.

To illustrate this point further, Vico, in his introductory chapter, 'Idea of the work', to *New Science*, begins with a tableau, an image, "*Tableau of civil institutions*". In the first paragraph he addresses the reader: "Before reading my work, you may use this tableau to form an idea of my New Science. And after reading it, you will find that this tableau aids your imagination in retaining my work in your memory."⁴ What Vico is appealing to here is pictorial memory and understanding to prevent forgetfulness. This traditional understanding of retaining an image in memory and holding onto it throughout the text to ease the comprehension of the text, functions as an element of the notion of overpresence. This state of overpresence is developed as a consequence of the gathering of manifold relations, and as a state it affects, oversees, commands, and conducts infinite other relations that follow it once such a state is formed. Multiple states of over-presence coexist in one's everyday. For instance, reading a text, a text that has a direct effect on one's actions, can affect all sorts of relations, it has overpresence; or an altercation between two individuals which could lead to a state of aggression in both, where even after they part ways this state of aggression tends to be overpresent across manifold daily relations; or think of the role of religious thought or that an ideology plays in the lives of those who believes in it. Similarly, an idea, a concept, a summary, a text's map, which are often introduced in introductions, are retained in the self and develop into a state of overpresence which guides the eye towards what it wants it to see, commands the mind towards what it wants to retain and what not to, determines the pace of reading, etc. What is read is often understood in relation to what is retained in the state of overpresence, which eases comprehending the text but also limits what is being comprehended and what is being kept. It is for this reason that a mind may struggle in reading a text in the absence of an introduction.

That said, I should introduce this text's map and structure now. The following pages will be presented to the reader as two related and somewhat unrelated parts. The first part will primarily serve two aims: a) understanding the phenomenon of relations and the relations of relations b) an attempt to develop a way of thinking, that is *relatology*, which in short can be described as the *study of relations relationally* and *the study of the relatal state of relations*, the implication and the goal of which is to pave the way towards perceiving and understanding relations not only as a mental exercise, under the hegemony of the mind, but as a path and a journey by way of which the self understands itself as a relational and non-relational being, and understands its relations, relations that predate itself and its relations, relations that surround the self like clouds and oceans. To achieve this, I, first, briefly survey some of the interpretations of the phenomena of relations in the western, Islamic, Greek, and other non-western and non-Islamic philosophies. More particularly I will look at the works of Aristotle, Lao Tzu, Ibni Sina, Locke, Marx, Tarski, Badiou, Nietzsche, and sociologists like Weber, and Schutz, and certain works in indigenous philosophies. I will also look at the ways in which the notion of relations is examined in the traditions of logic, sociology, and science. I will further develop an understanding of relations and the building blocks of a relational outlook, and I will examine the relationship between relations and entities and beings; the ways in which relations lead to the formation of other relations; how relations sustain themselves in relation to other relations; how relations can be defined and interpreted through their own relations; how relations flow and may transcend physical reality; the relatal mechanics of relations and of how relations manifest themselves; the relationship between relations and the realities of time and space; the notion of the derelation and derelationism of relations; absorption and overcoming of relations by other relations; the hidden, unseen, seen, inexplicable, and the ignored forms of relations; and finally

the phenomena of unrelationism and non-relationism in relations or towards relations and entities.

In the second part my focus is narrower and more empirical as I will primarily engage with the politics of the world. I will apply my findings in the first part to the relations of states and to the relationships of relations and states. Since my conception of relations resembles clouds and oceans, meaning that we exist amidst them and continuously generate them, at the outset I should point out that relations which constitute the world and the politics of the world are indefinite, fluid, discrete and continuous, short term and long term, physical and transcendental, linear and non-linear. Thus, my principal aim in the second part is to only examine certain relations and relationalities while I leave out indefinite other relations and relationalities. What I primarily desire to achieve in this second part is to show why we should interpret the world and inter-state relations through relations, and begin our analyses with relations, however and whatever they may be, and not through specific phenomena or principles that may constitute the essence of the relations of states. I will thus look at the existing relations between the world and states; the ways in which states relate to already existing relations and to the relations of other states and non-state entities. I will further examine the relations of the phenomena and conditions of uncertainty, futural relations, and the state of incompleteness of the world. Lastly, I will explore the phenomena of care and life on the one hand, and the relations between the state and the people in relation to the mechanisms of decision making on the other.

PART I: RELATIONS

CHAPTER I: Sketches of Past Understandings of Relations

Before I begin examining past conceptualizations of the concept of relations, I should clarify the scope of this chapter's title and what it encompasses. The phrase 'understandings of relations' encompasses philosophies, however implicit or explicit they may be, that examine the concept of 'relations' or concepts that are derived from the word 'relate', or words and phrases that contain the meanings and indications of the word 'relate', or entail meanings that are close or similar to the meanings and senses that the term 'relate' indicates and represents. In other words, since most human actions, the words humans utter, the thoughts and perceptions they have or develop, the understandings of this or that and the feelings they have, the relationships they inherit and build, the relations that they find themselves in, and so-on, are essentially relations and relational. And since I consider the phenomenon of relations to be in all likelihood the most important ingredient of existence, alongside of existence itself, insofar relations are at the very fundamental level what make, sustain, transform, and contain what we call "existence", what glue it into a meaningful whole, and so-on, any form of thought – which in itself is a relational activity – about human existence and activities, and about all there is, or is assumed to be there, or will be, or there is not, is always already a relation, always already a theorization or an expression of relations. Thus, investigating and interpreting any subject matter, whether it is politics, philosophy, history, or something more concrete like a rock, house, moonlight, satellite, or an animal is always already a relational act; this act of interpreting is in one way or another about some form of relations, such as the relations that constitute the reality of scholarly investigation, relations that the given subject matter has or is assumed to have, etc. In sum, although existence is primarily because of relations and through relations, which is to say that all

there is has and have a relational aspect or component, and although all ideas, theories, and words already are either relations or about relations, I will nevertheless limit my brief examinations in this first chapter to analyze certain aspects of some of the major philosophies that deal with the concept of “relation” directly and certain other philosophies which may have lacked the exact word of “relation” but have dealt in some form with notions that resemble our modern notion of “relation”.

In relation to, towards something, and between things

In the studies of relations perhaps the first philosophical discipline that directly examines the topic of relations as an independent subject matter is the tradition of logic. In *Categories*, Aristotle begins chapter seven with the following statement: “We call *relatives* all such things as are said to be just what they are, *of* or *than* other things, or in some other way *in relation to* something else”.⁵ Commenting on this definition Ibn Rushd states that “it is said that this was Plato’s general description”⁶ of relatives. Whether this definition was Plato’s or Aristotle’s, Aristotle, nevertheless, provides his own definition of relations in the later parts of that chapter, which we will examine after we unpack first this definition of relations that Ibn Rushd attributes to Plato. Aristotle uses the word $\pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \tau\iota$, which essentially means ‘being toward it’ or ‘being toward something’, to refer to the phenomena of relatives/relations, concepts that we use in our modern age. This act of ‘being toward something’, *pros ti*, which essentially indicates some sort of motion or orientation, and the existence of something other than *relata* towards which the *relata* is oriented, an activity which in itself implies the dependence of the relative/relation on something for its actualization, thus reducing relations/relatives to a mere extension and consequence, is quite different and has different implications than the modern concept of *relation*

whose etymological origins are not Greek but Latin. A *relation*, like the Greek word *pros ti*, indicates some form of motion and orientation, but it also (and this is where *relatio* significantly differs from *pros ti*) indicates a sense of back and forthness of something between this and that individual(s), this and that other object(s).

Although Aristotle discusses the presence of some form of reciprocity between certain relatives and correlatives,⁷ what is reciprocated is not one and the same as the concept of relation often indicates. The Aristotelian definition, which should be read both as an ontological and a linguistic category, covers three domains: *of*, *than*, and *in relation to*, which essentially describe and represent what the modern concept of “relatives” entail, rather than the modern notion of “relations” and what it constitutes. This should not in any way mean that the notion of relation, in the modern sense of the word, is completely non-existent in Aristotle’s definition or in what he says later in that chapter. For instance, he considers “state, condition, perception, knowledge, position”⁸ to be relatives, two of which in particular, namely perception and knowledge, are quite relational phenomena, particularly when he uses knowledge for instance, not in the sense that ‘an individual is more knowledgeable than the other’ but in the sense of ‘someone having the knowledge of something’. What is clear from the (non)simultaneity and reciprocity of relatives/relations in Aristotle, is that relatives/relations cannot exist independently of what they are in relation to; their existence is dependent on the existence of things, words, and objects. Furthermore, on the question of whether a substance can be a relative/relation, he argues that “neither wholes nor parts are spoken of in relation to anything”,⁹ yet he finds certain phrases such as “someone’s head” as contradictory to the argument he makes.

It is this last problem and apparent contradiction that leads Aristotle to develop a new definition of relative/relation through which he attempts to resolve the problem of ‘what is in

relation to something' and 'what actually is relating'. Despite all his efforts this new definition remains both under-defined and underdeveloped, a fact which he himself concedes at the end of his discussions.¹⁰ His definition goes like this: "Now if the definition of relatives given above was adequate, it is either exceedingly difficult or impossible to reach the solution that no substance is spoken of as a relative. But if it was not adequate, and if those things are relatives for which *being is the same as being somehow related to something*, then perhaps some answer may be found"¹¹ (translation and italics are Ackrill's). Pamela M. Hood translates this last sentence as: "but if it [i.e., the former formulation] was inadequate and if those things are relative for which being is the same as holding in some way toward something".¹² What Aristotle intends to capture here in this supposedly new image of the relative/relation is that there are three key constituents of each relative/relation, namely a being, an existent, which is to say that a relation exists, an existential orientation of such being towards something, and the existence of something else without which the relative cannot exist. In other words, a relative/relation is that which exists only in relation to something; it is that which cannot exist without the existence of another reality. A relative/relation is always a double, two things; it is not a singular independent phenomenon. According to this description then, if a word, lacks an orientation towards something else for its very own existence it is a substance, not a relative. However, this second definition by Aristotle does not truly advance the question of what relation/relative is nor does it truly overcome the images of relatives/relations stated in the first definition. What it broadly does though is attempt to clarify the difference between relative/relation and substance. This separation of relation and substance is problematic in itself, for reasons that I will touch on later.

Aristotle also engages with the question of relatives/relations in *Metaphysics*. He primarily focuses on different types and forms of relatives/relations rather than advancing a more

satisfactory definition of relations. In this text, as in *Categories*, he grapples with what is and what is not a relation; his central concern and struggle in both texts is the question of how to describe relatives/relations, the identities and differences that may set them apart and distinguish them from other phenomena. Despite some apparent similarities and differences between these two texts in relation to their treatment of the notion of relative/relation, what is quite illuminating in *Metaphysics* is the distinction he makes between two distinct forms of relatives/relations when he states that “relative terms which imply number or capacity, therefore, are relative because their very essence includes in its nature a reference to something else, not because something else is related to *it*: but that which is measurable or knowable or thinkable is called relative because something else is related to it.”¹³ A relative is not a relative because something else, other than itself, is relating to it, but it is what it is simply because in its very nature it refers to something else, relates to it. Dependence on something for its existence, being in motion, an orientation of some sort, or being extended, appear to be the key characteristics and qualities of what constitute the essence of relative/relation for Aristotle. Relatives/Relations are relatives/relations, so long as they are not confined to themselves and isolated but are in continuous relation to something, are in motion, and are in a constant state of extension, relation. In sum, what the treatment of relative/relation in these two texts, *Categories* and *Metaphysics*, ultimately shows is that Aristotle’s conception of relatives/relations is not identical to modern conceptions of ‘relative’ or ‘relations’, but it is certainly closer to ‘relative’ rather than ‘relation’. He perceived relative/relation to be that which exists by virtue of its reference to something else. Which is to say: what does not by its very essence go beyond that which constitutes the boundaries of its totality, of its physical reality, cannot be relative/relation. This, of course, is a spatial and materialistic understanding of relative/relation.

This Aristotelian conception of relatives/relations, broadly speaking, persisted through the Islamic golden age until the early modern period in Europe. Its influence on Ibn Sina in this regard is quite clear. In *Kitab al-Shifa*, Ibn Sina approaches relatives/relations from a linguistic or to be more precise from a logical perspective, essentially developing an understanding of something by examining words and what they signify. Instead of using the Arabic word “*ala’qah*” though, which is closest to the modern notion of relation, he uses, like other Muslim logicians, the word “*idhaf*”, which is much closer to the word ‘relative’. Words, of course, can be the sites of illuminations but also of confinements. And instead of providing a detailed examination of the phenomenon of relatives/relations, he primarily focuses on the relation between relatives/relations and their accidental, not essential, existences. Nonetheless, there are two key aspects of relative/relation that he advances which are quite significant. The first is on the question of whether relatives/relations exist in the mind or exist concretely in things and beings; and the second is the question of the relatability of a relative/relation to other relatives/relations. After discussing various viewpoints put forth by other Muslim logicians on these issues, Ibn Sina argues the following: “Thus, the relative in concrete things exist. Moreover, it has become evident that its existence does not necessitate that for [each] relation there should be another [relation] *ad infinitum*. And from this it does not necessarily follow that whatever is intellectually apprehended as a relation should have a [corresponding] relation in existence.”¹⁴ Here Ibn Sina is not concerned about the concrete existence of relations as independent phenomena, as such a concern and characterization of relations, as I will soon show, will only enter the debate in the 19th and 20th centuries, primarily in the two fields of logics and sociology. His primary interest here is the relationship between things, the mind, and the relatives/relations, particularly the spatial location of relatives/relations. His conclusions, as the

above quote shows, are: spatially, relations can exist in things and human beings, or in both; the existence of a relative/relation does not necessitate its relationship to another relative/relation; and relatives/relations can exist independent of other relatives/relations.

I have briefly sketched out the treatment of the subject of relations in the works of Aristotle and Ibn Sina and showed that their understandings of relations were mainly concerned with relatives, in the modern sense of the word, that their philosophies were primarily linguistic and logical in content, and that they originated from and were grounded in the logic of words, in the usages of words. By examining the spatial field of what words signified and represented, and by following the chain of connections that existed between words, they were essentially attempting (a) to determine what a relative/relation is and what is not, (b) whether a relation requires a correlative for its existence, (c) and where exactly a relative/relation is located. Although it is difficult, if not impossible, to map out a whole chronology of the development of the notion of relations in the history of thought in general, one must concede that the tradition of logic since its inception has consistently made the relative/relation phenomenon a subject of investigation for itself, as it sees the impact of relative/relation, particularly in terms of the spatial limits of the meanings of words, on the formation and the structure of languages.

Despite the obvious shift in the analyses of relatives/relations in the tradition of logic in the last two centuries, we should not assume that there is a complete break between the traditional Aristotelian philosophy of relatives/relations and the modern logic treatment of relatives/relations. This is not exactly true. Modern logic does remain under the influence of the Aristotelian form of argumentation and its language-oriented approach to relatives/relations. At the same time, we cannot ignore the development of a new understanding of relatives/relations in modern western philosophy and logic, which is: the conception of relations as a connection

between two or more things, a conception that in my view largely stems from the adaptation of the Latin originated word ‘*relation*’ rather than the Greek word ‘*pros ti*’. John Locke, for instance, tells us that “the *nature* therefore of *Relation*, consists in the referring, or comparing two things, one to another”,¹⁵ and a little later: “there must always be in relation two *ideas*, or Things, either in themselves really separate, or considered as distinct, and then a ground or occasion for their comparison”.¹⁶ Of course, a relation as something that which occurs in-between things in the form of referring (note: the etymologies of both ‘relation’ and ‘referring’ can be traced to the Latin word “*referre*”, to bring back or to carry back; the ‘*re-*’ prefix generally indicates againness and backness, repetition and return, recurrence and re-receiving) or comparison, basically something happening in between two separate entities, is not a complete break from the Aristotelean or Ibn Sinaian understandings of relatives/relations. The Aristotelian ‘relative’ is that which always appears and exists alongside with what it refers to. There is a repetition to the re-appearance of what a relative refers to. In Aristotle and Ibn Sina there are two components to a relative/relation, a relative and what it is in reference to; whereas, in early modern western philosophy there are three components to a relation; two things or beings and a relation between them.

This modern philosophical interpretation of relations as that which is between two things would only be introduced to the literature of logic in the 19th century. Augustus De Morgan along with Charles Sanders Pierce are considered to be the pioneers of this development.¹⁷ The concept of relation was no longer limited to the notion of relative in the logical discourse. Relations were no longer confined to ‘than something’ or ‘in relation to’ situations, they were now representing the phenomena that occur between two or more individuals, two or more objects, etc. Despite this late development in the expansion of the scope of relations in logic, the

modern symbolic logic's overall approach to relations largely remained within the confines of the logical mode of thought, which can be clearly observed in the structural ordering of relations, their classifications, and their properties, which is where, in my view, the modern logic's contribution to our understanding of relations ultimately lies. There are classifications, classifications of classifications, orders to these classifications, properties of these classifications, and so-on, an endless endeavor. Logicians, for instance, classify the properties of binary relations into the categories of reflexivity, symmetry, and transitivity,¹⁸ classes that supposedly capture the how and the content of binary relations. There is also the debate about the externality and the internality of relations, a division which essentially stems from a classificatory approach to relations. In such debates questions such as "are relations external or internal?" often guide the course of discussions.¹⁹ Furthermore, relations are often classified and ordered under different orders: the first order of relations: relations "which hold between individuals"; the second order of relations: relations "which hold between classes, or relations, of the first order".²⁰ Lastly, relations are often classified as binary (between two), ternary, and many-termed relations.²¹ These classificatory instances reveal that logic's contribution in this area is limited to the classification and the naming of various forms of relations, which is to say that they did not advance the philosophy of relations, relations always understood to be that which occur between two or more things. In addition, they reveal that mathematized and classificatory approaches to relations can have no end, no final destination; they essentially are endless pursuits.

I will briefly emphasize two key points here as a way of critique of these philosophies: first, most of the phenomena which are considered to be actual relations, particularly forms of relations that are inferred from situations of 'than something' or 'in relation to', are best described as *assumed relations*, forms of relations that we as relational beings assign to certain

situations. These forms of relations, which we assume to have an actual existence, have no concrete existence of their own; they are products of our relational imagination, a faculty that tends to invent and enforce relations onto reality for various reasons. Additionally, these non-actual relations represent the way of our very own being as we tend to relate, indefinitely, in real and imaginary ways. The surreal, the imaginary and the non-actual are ultimate expressions of our human creativity. The real or the actual, on the other hand, are merely given to us by existence. In the final analyses though, these “assumed relations”, in relation to human existence, are no different than actual relations that have concrete existence, and they are simply one of the infinite ways in which relations manifest themselves. Secondly, an orderly classificatory approach to relations, which in itself is a relation and in itself contains manifold relations as human beings attempt through such relational mechanisms to simplify complex phenomena, is not the way in which I approach the phenomenon of relations in this text as I am of the opinion that relations are indefinite realities, they can be quite fluid, insofar as their classification and ordering would ultimately limit our understanding of them, and it is simply impossible for the human mind to fully capture such prevalent unfolding phenomena.

Social relations

The assemblage of relations of the ‘social’ under broad concepts that encapsulate manifold relations is largely a 19th and 20th century western phenomenon, e.g. social relations, family relations, economic relations, and international relations. Logical and philosophical traditions, as I have briefly shown, had quite a distinct understanding and way of looking at relations. Their key concerns were to identify the existence and the location of relatives/relations by investigating the content of words and the orientation of the meaning of such words, and to

identify relatives/relations not as independent phenomena but always (a) in reference to other things and beings, or (b) as dependent realities existing between things and beings. In both interpretations relations were secondary to things and beings. Relatives/relations were thus seen as extensions, as accidental existents, and as that which occurs between things. Beginning in the 19th century there is an extensive use of the concept of relations in philosophical, economic, and sociological writings. Yet, assuming that one is at times permitted to make a general observation about something before presenting that something, 19th century thought, in its treatment of the notion of relations cannot be said to be primarily concerned with the existence of relations as such, its ontology, etc., rather its foremost occupation and concern were to identify, clarify, and define the assemblage of relations, such as economic relations, labour relations, and production relations.

Prior to 19th century thought, the study of ‘social relations’ as a subject matter, was a limited endeavour with the exception perhaps of Ibn Khaldun who lay ground for a new discipline which he called *Ilm al-Umran*, the science of civilization and socialization, where he studied the organization of the social under the broad categories of *badawa*, the bedouin social formation, and *hadara*, the sedentary social formation, *asabiyyah*, social solidarity and bond, and so-on, categories that, according to him, encompass and also determine, along with ecological, geographical, and natural factors the extent and the nature of social relations.²² He may not have used the concept of “social relations” per se, he nonetheless analyzed a range of social phenomena utilizing categories such as ‘social bond’ and ‘social change’. One may of course go even further than Ibn Khaldun on this issue of the study of social relations if one is willing to consider for instance Plato’s or Aristotle’s works on the *polis* and politics as the examination of social relations as a distinct category. In all truth, when it comes to the category of social

relations and its studies, one thing is quite obvious that determining their origins, their points of departures are never easy, one could trace such studies back to the ancient Sumerians and Egyptians.

I will briefly look at the writings of a few thinkers of the last two centuries, sociologists Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Alfred Schutz in particular, and see how they use(d) the concept of relations or social relations more specifically, in relation to what, in what forms, to capture what, and most importantly how they interpreted and described the concept of relations as such.

As one of the leading thinkers of 19th century European thought, Karl Marx made extensive use of the concept of relations in various forms to represent different social realities. His approach to the notion of relations was understandably social in character as his body of work was primarily concerned with economic and social questions. Relations were social phenomena for him, and as a consequence he considered them to be the product of human interactions and conducts; in his view an “animal does not enter into ‘relations’ with anything, it does not enter into relations at all”,²³ and “for the animal, its relation to others does not exist as a relation”.²⁴ Relations were human, they were human inventions, hence, for him only human beings can truly enter into relations, and develop relations. A relation is a relation only for a human being. In Marx’s view, what enabled human beings to develop, enter into, and produce relations was their consciousness, that they are conscious beings.²⁵ There is a chain of reductions here of course. Marx first reduces relations to human beings and then reduces them to consciousness in human beings. This limited understanding of relations, aside from being anthropocentric and logocentric, which in itself has a blinding effect on perceiving the true nature of relations, has a number of problems, including: first, relations are neither the property of human beings nor are human beings always their originators; second, consciousness,

perceived relationally, in itself is a distinct relation and it may or may not be the source of certain relations; third, human relations can emanate from manifold sources and can actualize in manifold forms, which is to say they can be conscious, unconscious, non-conscious, anti-conscious, sub-conscious, conscious and unconscious simultaneously, and so-on; and lastly, all living beings, including animals and plants, can develop relations, enter into relations, and emanate relations. Relations are neither the product nor the property of human beings.

Despite these fundamental problems with Marx's conception of relations, we can still extract some important points from the ways in which he uses the concept of relations and the contexts in which he uses it. To begin with, he considers certain things, things that are often perceived to be non-relational and static, as relational entities. This perspective of course was largely influenced by Hegel's dialectics which espouses some form of a relational understanding of things, of reality. To a dialectician like Marx, the social is relational, it is determined by relations and can be changed through some form of organized relations. In Marx's writings, we observe a constant reference to the concept of relations, which in itself illustrates how Marx's thought in many ways had advanced beyond the borders of Hegelian dialectics. For instance, he states that "capital, also, is a social relation of production"²⁶²⁷ and, "interest is a relationship between two capitalists, not between capitalist and labourer".²⁸ "Capital" and "interest" here are no longer mere objects, they are relational phenomena whose relations include their relations to the social, to the phenomenon of production, and to capitalists, respectively. Yet, despite this relational view of some social phenomena, and despite the constant usage of the term 'relations', it is still difficult to consider Marx a strictly relational thinker, as his relational view of things and beings remains limited to certain social and material phenomena. His relational worldview

does not encompass all things and beings, it does not extend beyond the social or beyond a few social realities.

The second important point in Marx's understanding of relations is that social relations can exist independently of what they are relating and what they are linked to. He writes: "in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will"²⁹ and, "But in the course of historical evolution, and precisely through the inevitable fact that within the division of labour social relationships take on an independent existence, there appears a division within the life of each individual, insofar as it is personal and insofar as it is determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it."³⁰ Here in these lines, Marx assigns life to social relations, an independent form of life that can almost sustain its existence and continuity independent of an individual's will and outside an individual's control and reach. Certain social relations thus almost exist concretely, like the individuals themselves, in the reality into which individuals enter. His notion of 'entering' into a social relation, into something that was already there, as if one is about to enter a house, into a concrete thing, is an innovative way of looking at the phenomenon of relations to say the least. Individuals enter into relations, they initiate relations. Marx's conception of reality is of course material. It is this material outlook that permits him to assign a degree of concreteness, materialism, and tangibility into what is generally perceived to be ideational and abstract, i.e. relations. To see the material, the actual, the real, the tangible in a phenomenon, is certainly not unique to Marx, such an outlook has a long history in the development of thought. For instance, Aristotle's empirical and rational approach towards the subjects he investigates; Ibn Khaldun's realism and empiricism in his sociological analyses; the experiment-based investigations of modern scientific research; and after Marx, Heidegger's existentialist ontology and

phenomenology. These modes of investigations are of a similar philosophical attitude and departure, seeing the material first and foremost, which in itself is a unique form of relating towards reality, one of many ways of relating towards reality.

Unlike Marx, Max Weber's way of examining things, including his understanding of social relations, is more exact, calculable, and exhaustive, particularly his definitions and classifications. For instance, he defines the concept of 'social relationship' as a "situation where two or more persons engaged in conduct wherein each takes account of the behaviour of the other in a meaningful way and is therefore oriented in these terms".³¹ Here, a social relation is imagined as a "situation", which in itself indicates a multiplicity. In such a "situation" there are persons, conducts, and relations of 'taking account', 'meaning making', etc. This account of social relations, despite Weber's exhaustive efforts to capture it as accurately and inclusively as possible, and to cover as many relations as possible, excludes, quite explicitly, relations that a self has, a majority of which are social in character and orientation, and are a form of relations that do not constitute and require a form of conduct between two or more selves, that are not necessarily reciprocal, and that can be devoid of any sort of meaning, and so-on. What this definition essentially shows, is that Weber's understanding of social relations encompasses those relations that occur between two or more persons, therefore his conception of it remains limited to the realm of in-betweenness, which is not in any way different than how modern philosophy and 19th century logic perceived relations to be before him. Nonetheless, his description of a 'social relationship' as a "situation" rather than a dependent accidental occurrence, and the manifold phenomena and relations he sees in a given social relationship, such as meaning making and taking account, were an important contribution to the study of relations.

Furthermore, Weber adds various other dimensions to the concept of ‘social relationship.’ To give a few examples: he introduces the principle of “mutual orientation of the conduct”,³² and considers this principle to be a definitive criterion for the constitution of such a relationship. A social relation then, if we were to take this principle into account, is not a one-way of relating and relation as it requires a back-and-forth movement and orientation, but a two-way relationship, which is to say: what is carried across into the other self is also carried back. There is almost a hidden agreement on a given relationship between those relating while relating. Although such an interpretation of relations excludes forms of social relations that are not mutually oriented, it nevertheless recognizes the back-and-forthness of the content of social relations. Second, building on his principle of “mutual orientation”, Weber adds that “all parties who are mutually oriented in a given social relationship do not necessarily manifest the *same* subjective meaning about it”.³³ This dimension is given in social relations; ‘love’ for instance is not mutual at all times, which shows how significant the interpretive realm is for social relations in Weber. This new dimension, new layer of social relations, which Weber characterizes as “asymmetrical”, and which, according to him, is far more common than a symmetrical relationship,³⁴ interjects a sense of relativity into what is carried back in a social relation. By this account, a mutual relation may contain numerous and different meanings, responses and reactions. We cannot think of a singular mechanistic relation any longer. A social relation is where meanings produced can be different and diverse. There are of course certain similarities between Weber’s interpretation of ‘social relations’ and the definitions and classifications of relations suggested by modern logicians, particularly regarding the issues of relations existing between two and more things or persons, their symmetry or asymmetry, and the transitory nature³⁵ of certain relations. Third, for Weber, social relations can experience change, continuity,

or permanence.³⁶ Meanings that are attached to social relations thus can change. A social relation may mean one thing in a given environment and time and mean something different in another context and time period. As time passes, metaphorically speaking of course, a social relation may not change but the meanings it contains or are associated with it can change.

With other sociologists we encounter a different set of classifications of social relations. Building on the works of Husserl, Weber, and Buber, Alfred Schutz, for instance, divides social relations into two major categories: the ‘Thou-relations’ and the ‘We-relations’. In the Thou-relations, according to Schutz, “I am aware of another human being as a person. I am already Thou-oriented from the moment that I recognize an entity which I directly experience as a fellow man (as a Thou), attributing life and consciousness to him”³⁷ and this relationship “consists merely of being intentionally directed toward the pure being-there of another alive and conscious being”.³⁸ The We-relations, are a type of relations “in which the partners are aware of each other and sympathetically participate in each other’s lives for however short time”.³⁹ By such classification, it seems Schutz intended to broaden the scope of social relations to encompass relations that are not necessarily reciprocal and mutual, such as the social relations that actualize when an individual walks by or stands across from someone unknown to them. This interpretation of social relations, which contains phenomenological imprints, despite its ambitious attempt to capture unspoken and already existing relations, is still limited to relations that actualize at the intersection of experience, consciousness, and intentionality. It reduces social relations to a singular form of relations, ones that are intended. One recognizing the other as a fellow human being is a relation, but is that all there is when two strangers encounter? A couple sleeping in a bed, side by side, are there any (thou, we, you, us, mine, ours, I, neither) social relations in such an instance?

Sociologists from the second half of the 20th century onwards however have largely abandoned these overarching classifications of social relations into classes and types. Instead, most have shifted their attentions towards multiplicities, fluidities, repetivities, marginalities, continuities, habitats, signs, symbols, actions, basically broad categories rather than endless classifications; although concepts such as family relations, labour relations, ethnic relations, relations that have an overarching presence across the social are still present. It is the sociology of this, of that, of law, of politics, of health, of environment, and so-on; like philosophy, like law, sociology aspires to be everywhere. To see multiplicities and fluidities necessarily leads to the seeing of coexistences, intersectionalities, and crossings; to the finding of many things in a single location and event; to expecting many relations contradict, coexist, and intersect with another.

Most sociologists are no longer interested in linear straight lines. Lines are boring and simple. What piques their interests are roads, yet not any road, not any spatial point on a road, but an interchange junction, where streams of many roads and directions are encountered. Essentially they are eager to see complexity. Visano, for instance, locates the production of youth at the intersection of three major categories, *ideologies, identities, institutions*⁴⁰ and in *ideas*. Any given social and cultural phenomenon, according to him, can be explained through these four pillars upon which society stands. This schema or mode of relating, this seeing of multiplicities interacting, coexisting, and intersecting, which truly represents the *modus operandi* of contemporary sociological analysis, critical or not, and which is far more relational and encompassing in comparison to the sociologies developed by the likes of Marx and Weber, sees a social phenomenon in multiples and as a site of coexisting and intersecting multiplicities, of intersubjective and intersectional relations, produced by multiplicities and that produce multiplicities and subjectivities. In this mode of thinking, any given social phenomenon is only

interpreted and understood through its relations and the multiplicities it contains. An isolated phenomenon can exist no longer, it should be thought of in relation to many, a network of relations replaces singularities. In such a perspective, the presence of the intersecting and intertwined multiples is given. These distinct and different yet coexisting multiples are already there, waiting to be discerned and explained by an investigating mind. The investigating mind seeks no longer, searches no longer, pursues no longer, as the content of the thought is already predetermined, one is looking for binary relations, for causal relations, for intersecting multiples, for ideologies and identities, for traces and differences; it is all there, it is put there, prepackaged and pre-found. All one has to do is to name them. Such an apparently comprehensive categorical and intersectional perspective is not without shortcomings, without constrictive ideational attitudes. For instance, it gives primacy to causal relations, in the sense that what is there is caused by the presence of multiplicities. Causality is embedded in such perspectives. Secondly, it is only capable of seeing a few social categories out of an indefinite number of categories, in any given social reality, which, regardless of how relational a thought is, in the final analysis, limits what can be seen, what should be seen, and what can be examined. Lastly, such an intersectional and somewhat relational worldview forces the mind to approach any given social phenomenon to always be in-between something, at the intersection of somethings. 'Youth' is only understood when it is centred between 'ideologies', 'institutions', 'identities', and 'ideas'.

'Being-with', relations between 'apparents'

Philosophy, unlike logic and sociology, never truly concerned itself with the concept of relations as such. One is hard-pressed to find specific philosophical texts on the concept of relations for instance, at least in the Islamic and western traditions. More often than not relations

have been either ignored altogether or examined in passing in bits and pieces, as sub-topics, hidden beneath major philosophical categories and concepts. This understudy of relations largely stems from the perception of relations as extensions of beings rather than having an autonomous being of themselves. As such, relations were always discussed in these texts in relation to something, as that which exists between somethings or beings, and, in certain cases, as one of the accidental constituents of existence. To have a better understanding of western philosophy's appropriation of the concept of relations I will briefly look at the writings of Martin Heidegger and Alain Badiou and examine how they perceived this concept or concepts that are close to it in indications. Heidegger first. In his texts, which are primarily concerned with the question of being,¹ Heidegger engages with various relational situations, although he never terms them as such, concerning being's relations with tools, the world, temporal moments, other beings, etc. For our purposes though, I shall limit my focus to his specific concept of *mitsein*, being-with. Since for Heidegger "the 'substance' of a human being is not the spirit as the synthesis of body and soul, but existence",⁴¹ he generally examines some existent or some event by focusing on the very existence of something. More specifically, he utilizes the conditions of the how-ness, what-ness, when-ness, and who-ness of such existents, four forms or tools that largely constitute the very foundation of his thought process. When dealing with the question of who is *Da-sein*, human being, a being who as Heidegger claims is distinct from other beings, he introduces the notions of *mitsein*, being-with, *mitda-sein*, and *Da-sein-with*, to capture certain existential relations that human beings have in relation to one another. He argues that "the world of *Da-sein* is a *with-world*. Being-in is *being-with* others".⁴² With such a statement Heidegger is drawing our attention to a very basic condition about human existence, the fact that we exist and live with

¹ Isn't all knowledge somehow related to this question, the being(s) of being(s)?

others. Human being, a being that exists in the world and is defined by worldliness, is whose existence in the world is always characterized as being with other human beings. So the being that is simply 'there', which is essentially what the word *da-sein* means, is also with, with other beings, with other objects and so-on. Although this existential condition that Heidegger is bringing our attention to is common knowledge and all too familiar, what it indicates is that *is-ness* and *with-ness* are not two separate moments of human existence but are constituents of human existence itself. Certain relations of human beings are not viewed as extensions of beings but are essential components of being themselves. A human being thus is a being who is with other human beings, one who is always in relation with others. This idea of togetherness, this condition of human beings being with one another, is of course not a new idea, as similar ideas can be seen in Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun, Hobbes, Vico, Marx, and others in explicit or implicit terms, ideas that often led to conclusions such as: human beings are in need of one another, they cannot exist *without* the other, they need to relate to others, and be with one another. There is however an additional dimension to what Heidegger claims: the condition of 'being-with' is not necessarily a process within and through which human beings attain a form of sociability, on the contrary, his understanding of human existence is almost anthropological and trans-historical in the sense that a human being is a being who attains its being by being with other beings. The social is a fact of human existence and not necessarily a consequence of some other human relations, such as need for instance. No doubt, by defining human existence in terms of 'being-with', Heidegger is essentially attempting to overcome the I/other separation, where the I and the other are no longer two separate and distinct beings but are a kind of beings whose existence can only be defined and described in relation to another being. As profound or banal as this relational description of human existence may be, to equate human existence with a human being's

relations with others, the implication is that a human being cannot be perceived without their relations with others.

Further, for Heidegger, the notion of 'being-with' does not always indicate being with someone physically in terms of spatiality. For him, "being-with existentially determines Da-sein even when an other is not factually present and perceived. The being-alone of Da-sein, too, is being-with in the world".⁴³ Although this point, that even when one is alone one is always with other(s), may appear to be important at first concerning the phenomenon of the 'being-with' of beings, it does not contribute in any meaningful way to the concept of relations, as the phenomenon of being-with, in Heidegger's phenomenological ontology, is always already given, it is already there, regardless of if one is in relation to someone or not. In the world, in this totality, we are all with one another. This statement is not in any significant way different than saying "we are all human" or "we are all equal". Such statements are similar because they are primarily concerned with the sharing of something, with similarities, with commonalities. Thus, it is difficult in certain regards, to consider the phenomenon of 'being-with' a relation at all, a relational phenomenon. The concept of 'being-with' here is more synonymous with the concept of 'common' rather than 'relation'.

Occasionally, Heidegger, interprets 'being-with' as a relation and expresses it through the concept of 'relation'. For instance, he states: "in being with and toward others, there is a relation of being from Da-sein to Da-sein. But one would like to say, this relation is, after all, already constitutive for one's own Da-sein, which has an understanding of its own being and is thus related to Da-sein",⁴⁴ and that "The relation of being to others then becomes a projection of one's own being toward oneself 'into an other'. The other is a double of the self."⁴⁵ With such an interpretation, 'being-with' becomes a peculiar relation, or rather somewhat of a relation. 'Da-

sein' through this relation relates to one's own self by understanding and projecting one's self as they are existentially with and towards other beings. The 'Da-sein' by being in relations with others is also relating to one's own self, as both the self and others are 'Da-sein'. Despite this double relation, the other does not become or is not the self, but is the double of the self; identical, same, yet another 'Da-sein', another being, but sharing the capacity of being-with all together. Heidegger advances this I and the other relation further by introducing the concept of 'they': "In being absorbed in the world of taking care of things, that is, at the same time in being-with toward others, Da-sein is not itself. Who is it, then, that has taken over being as everyday being-with-one-another?"⁴⁶ It is the "they" who takes over, according to him.⁴⁷ The self disappears in others, becomes same. And if that is the case, then a human being is no longer an autonomous independent subject as its relations are no longer its unique relations. In fact, if one were to subscribe to how Heidegger describes a human being, I am not so sure if one would even be able to speak of relations any longer as while 'Da-sein' achieves unity with all, the self disappears into the 'they', the social, everyone. The 'they', that othering concept, becomes 'us', becomes all same. In modern western philosophy there was, particularly in the Enlightenment era, an obsession with the autonomy of the self, and that obsession is being replaced, in Heidegger, with an obsession with unity, sameness, identity, but not in any deterministic sense. Individuals, for Heidegger, are no longer independent islands but are part of a totality, part of a society, an idea that is not in any significant way different than the social individual of Marx. With Marx at least an individual or a society could reform. In any case, if we were to take Heidegger as our guide towards understanding the relations of the self who has just disappeared in the all, we should assume that individuals continue to have relations, yet these relations are no

longer one's own relations. The individual, the 'Da-sein', one who is there in the world, relates to this person, to that object, to oneself, in ways that are no different than the ways of others.

Unlike Heidegger whose primary ambition was to overcome the subject's full autonomy, of I's separation from others by characterizing the condition of 'being-with' as a common existential phenomenon that can be found in all equally, regardless of whether there is a direct and physical contact between selves or not, and by minimizing the role of distinction, uniqueness, and difference of the relations of selves, and thus describing them as almost the same in all, as individuals melt in the pot of everyday, in the unity of the sameness of all, in what is common to all, Alain Badiou's approach to relations, despite some of his innovative contributions to the study of relations, remains largely within the framework of the logical tradition, which essentially interprets relations in terms of in-betweenness. In his *Logics of Worlds*, both concepts in plural, signifying the importance of the notion of multiplicity and multiples in his thought, he states that "a world is ontologically assignable by that which appears, and logically assignable by the relations between apparents".⁴⁸ First and foremost 'the world' is perceived here as that which consists of apparent objects and beings as they have *ontos*, sensible beings; and secondarily as the relations between them, and this is not so because of their *ontos* but because logic determines them as such. The what and the content of the world, from an ontological vantage point, is determined and 'assigned' by the fact that the what and the content appear and reveal themselves; and what appears makes sense, only logically speaking, by the relations that exist between apparents, appearing beings and the assigned relations between them. In such thinking, relations are perceived to be fundamental to the world as long as they allow us to make sense of what appears, the apparent, which essentially is what constitutes the world.

Relations here have anthropological origins, as *logos* can only make sense of the appearing reality by projecting relations onto/into *ontos*.

For Badiou, “a relation, within appearing, is necessarily subordinated to the transcendental intensity of the apparents that it binds together”.⁴⁹ Here it becomes more obvious that his conception of relations is more in line with the conventional understandings of relations. Relations are subordinated to appearing phenomena, to certain characteristics of appearing objects; they merely exist as extensions of entities and beings, and as secondary to the existence of entities and beings. Relations are assigned the role of binding objects together like glue, they serve a purpose, a function; but is not the phenomenon of binding in itself a relation? If it is, then by this logic we should be able locate this relation of binding in all existing relations. Badiou further claims that “being-there – and not relation – makes the being of appearing”.⁵⁰ This ‘being of appearing’ which materializes and manifests itself through the phenomenon of being-there, simply existing, implies that the ‘being-there’ precedes the ‘being of appearing’. Objects are there first. Then they appear. Then they are bound by relations. An existent has a double dimension to it, but a relation has a singular function. It is certainly difficult to separate the thereness and the appearance of an apparent, as what appears is always already there, both taken in the literal sense, although the same cannot be said of what is there, as what is there may appear and may not appear; but that said, the larger issue with Badiou’s statement is that he ignores the role that relations play both in the process of the actualization of the ‘being-there’, the ‘being of appearing’ and in whatever relations they may have. In other words, ‘Being-there’ cannot be ‘there’ and cannot lead to the “being of appearing’ without some form of actual relations. Besides, how are we to explain the being and the appearance of a toddler without relationally examining all the relations that have preceded or accompanied its birth?

Finally, concerning the ontology of relations, Badiou contends that a “relation draws its being from what it binds together”.⁵¹ He assigns an existence to relations, but this existence is not attained independently by themselves and for themselves, as they can only exist after and through the existence of concrete appearing entities without which there can be no relations as such. It is for this reason he tells us that “a relation creates neither existence nor difference”,⁵² its role, its function and purpose, according to him, are that a relation “preserves existences and safeguards or augments identities (that is, maintains or diminishes differences)”.⁵³ Unlike Aristotle and Ibn Sina, Badiou seems quite clear, like Weber, on what a relation is and what its functions and characteristics are. He further provides us with two definitions of relations: a negative and a positive. A negative relation is “an oriented connection from one object towards another” provided that the “existential values” and transcendental measures of the identity of the first object are not ‘inferior’ to the second object.⁵⁴ A negative relation is an orientation of a relation, oriented from one object to another. The positive definition, on the other hand, is “a relation between two objects is a function that conserves the atomic logic of these objects”.⁵⁵ Both of these definitions, the positive and the negative, the good and the bad, may appear broad enough to capture the entirety of relations, particularly natural relations, but they only represent certain characteristics and attitudes, subjective attitudes, of certain relations, which are either oriented from an object to another or they simply exist between two objects.

All related, All relative

Of the many universals, to use Hegel’s concept, that represent the everyday worldviews, outlooks, and attitudes of today’s globalized individual, and that which encapsulate the spirit of the age, of our age, two notions, two phrases among many should be singled out in relation to

relations, namely ‘all is interconnected and related’ and ‘all is relative’. Despite the existence of relativistic and relational methodologies and theories in modern scholarship, and even though one may trace their footprints to certain cultures and philosophical writings, the everyday use of these two phrases, and the manifold attitudes that stem from them, lack grounded theories, and hierarchical classifications, and more than often reveal themselves as sheer consequences of modern conditions. They reside in the shadows beneath the unconscious, above the conscious, behind the worlds of certainties, of observables, of differences, of immanent presences, and so on. They are not necessarily philosophies, ideologies, or religions with rituals and cemented ideas, in the sense that they cannot be applied to everything each time; they, like many other modern or postmodern universals, co-exist with their opposites, with many other prevalent universals. Why have such attitudes, such silent and hidden senses, such realizations, and such descriptions of reality? To think that all is related, that all is relative. The resurgence of conceptions such as these, aside from the fact that they are consequences of our scientific, technological, and secular realities, also indicates on the one hand, the expansion of the self’s horizons beyond the ego, the cultural, the familiar, and the geographic confinements; and on the other signifies the mindset of the contemporary self as it faces existential transformations, and perhaps crises, that our age is experiencing and coming to terms with, where in the absence of ultimate answers and certainties the self has confined itself and lost its own self in the present, in the now, where the real appears related and relative. The present is closely and intently observed and recorded.

The idea that the all is related and interconnected, an idea that attempts to encapsulate existence, reduce the how of existence to a singular characteristic, can be found in the

philosophies of Buddha, Ibn Arabi, Leibniz, etc., and in the traditions of North American indigenous cultures and Chinese Daoist worldviews.

The Ojibwe people for instance, perceive and imagine a somewhat interconnected world. In such philosophy, human existence is not separate from the being of nature; it is part of it, not an essential and constitutive part but just a part of it. To view beings as equal and interconnected as such eliminates the need for differentiation between human existence and the existence of other beings. This inter-connective philosophy can be discerned from and located in the following Ojibwe practices and understandings: first, in the relationship between the animate and the inanimate, between human beings and the natural world. Assigning a relationship to and between worlds, the animate and inanimate, in itself, which I think all cultures and philosophies do in one way or another, is indicative of a relational consciousness. It is a consciousness that is not only conscious of itself and of others, but it has gone beyond itself to discover a relation between existents such as the relation of harmony professed by Ojibwe philosophy: “Harmony and balance with the natural world are an integral part of the Ojibwe way of being. If we harvest too many fish in one season, there will be fewer fish to eat in the future... This wisdom is really quite simple and direct: respect the plants and all the inanimates, which were the first in the creation of this earth... Respect our elder brothers the animals.”⁵⁶ Respecting a rock or an animal, harvesting fish based on one’s need to maintain a balance, seeing an animal as a brother or as a sister, these relations and worldviews are radically different than the traditional philosophies produced, in the Middle East and Europe for instance, where a human being is the ultimate creation, a master of other beings, a savage towards other beings. For the Ojibwe, to respect is to recognize, to assign equality. One must respect a rock, the most familiar of all things, because it predates one on this earth; the rock has witnessed more, seen more,

experienced more. To respect, recognize, share, and co-exist, all entail the equality of beings. In such an ontology as Diamond Jenness states “Not only me, but animals, trees, even rocks and water are tripartite, possessing bodies, souls, and shadows”,⁵⁷ in short “all objects have life”.⁵⁸ Equalities and identities reign supreme in this ontology, not differences. All is equal because all exists, because all is identical, consisting of bodies, souls, and shadows. All becomes similar here. The physical, the material, is no longer a lifeless and feeling-less category but a universal animate category. The universe is no longer divided into the animate and the inanimate opposites but defined in terms of life. A human being therefore is no longer different than a rock, they are no longer privileged, they both have shadows; all is related by the relation of sameness and life through shared properties, similarities, and equalities.

Second, in the Ojibwe world, the dead and the alive have continuous relations. Death thus is not the cessation of all there is, relations or otherwise. Nothingness is not absence or total extinction but presence and existence in other forms. Vecsey tells us that “The Ojibwa attitude toward their dead was ambivalent. The dead had potential power which might help or harm the living; the living Ojibwa would approach a dead one with some wariness but would accept aid, if offered... Deceased humans were still only human for the traditional Ojibwas.”⁵⁹ We should not interpret this relationship, between the dead and the alive, simply as mystical and spiritual but also as real. Reality thus consists of the material, the physical, and immaterial, the spiritual. To a non-indigenous mind this relationship may appear as impossible and unreal, or may even be classified as a hallucination, but it is as rational as the rituals practiced in most world religions, where the real, the imaginary, the non-existent have all been rationalized to a point where all seems real and true, where doubt cannot lurk.

Like the Ojibwe philosophy, Daoism too has a relational cosmology, albeit a vastly different one. For instance, the *Tao De Ching* imagines and portrays existence and its inherent interconnectivity in the following way:

The Tao Begot one.
One begot two.
Two begot three.
And three begot the ten thousand things.
The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang
They achieve harmony by combining these forces.⁶⁰

The *Tao*, or Dao, is the starting point, the beginning, the originary fountain from which existence emanates; but its contents, its beginning, and relations are unknown to us. It begins the beginning but it has no beginning; like the Abrahamic God who creates but cannot be created. Since there is nothing that precedes the existence of *Tao*, we are not given any clue about the relational circumstances within and through which the *Tao* operates. It is simply there, it “is hidden and without a name”,⁶¹ yet somehow we, the human mind, know(s) it exists. It is a way, not necessarily an entity, but a way that is active insofar as it produces and gives birth to ‘one’. Once again, the what of the one is not clear; it is unknown, hidden. Is it possible to think that the ‘one’, that which Tao begets, may be just another *Tao* or a new *Tao* or is it simply a new born entity that has a being of its own? A clear answer cannot be discerned from the above statement. Interestingly though, the ‘one’ shares a common trait with *Tao*: the act of production and creation, as both give birth. There are no causal relations involved here; we are not told of any. Since the modern mind, at least of most cultures, is often built upon the foundations of causal thinking, it may get confused as to how ‘one’ can produce a ‘two’ without any relations to something or someone else, unless of course if we are to think of *Tao* as the God of Abraham, a God who needs no relations, causal or otherwise, it simply wills and the will becomes a reality. The ‘two’ produces ‘three’, but why three and not four, its reasoning is not stated. And the three

produces ‘ten thousand things’. A sudden explosion of multiplicities. The ‘one’ first begets its similar, but soon after it begins giving birth to things. The only apparent relation here is the relation of begetting. Relations that constitute and maintain such relations are not provided though. We are also not told of the nature of *tao*, ‘one’, ‘two’, and ‘three’, whether they have a being of their own or not; nor are we told if they are relational or non-relational. The ‘thousand’, however, is described as ‘things’, that which have beings. We are in the realm of the known, of the familiar now. We know ‘things’.

This quote, which in a few lines tells us how existence came to be and how it exists, further provides us with the constitution of the “ten thousand things” and the relations between them. Each thing contains *yin* and *yang*. A singularity consists of duality. These two concepts or principles coexist, side by side, not as indifferent, but as constituent forces of existence, the existence of the ‘thing’. Their content, which I assume could be material or immaterial, can be the content that constitutes the thing itself or is complementary to the materiality of the thing(s). They are not confined to the thing itself, meaning a thing and its *yin* and *yang* are not isolated, they also present themselves as that which allows the coexistence of things, as that which defines the how of existence and sustain existence. Beyond their mere existence across things and existence, and enabling things and existence to exist as they exist, a fact that in itself reveals the relatedness of existence as *yin* and *yang* exists as relations and as what relates things and existence, there also exists the relation of harmony between things and in existence as a consequence of these two principles. The harmonious, that perfect balance in each thing and between things, is dependent on the presence of these two forces, the *yin* and the *yang*. The cosmic picture that this Daoist philosophy draws and imagines is that first, existence begins with *Tao*, the way, whose fluid and boundless being is creative without its need of relating to any

other being other than itself for such relation of creation. The act of creativity is the only relation given to us, as we cannot, at this stage, even speak to whether there exist relations between *Tao* and the 'one' after the 'one' is created. We thus have no conception of relatedness in what exists at this phase of existence. Second, things, which were produced by a multiplicity, sustain their own existence through the relations of two complementary forces or principles of *yin* and *yang*, and they sustain their coexistence through *yin* or *yang* insofar as these harmonious relations of things constitute the existence at large and the harmony of such existence. It all becomes interconnected and related. In Daoism 'the all related' is achieved not by the existence of existents but by other forces that are embedded in existents; in Ojibwe philosophy, however, the sheer existence of existents assumes relatedness in existents, there are relations of balance and sameness from which rise the relations of respect to all that exists and recognition of the animate and inanimate as same.

In contemporary western culture, "the all is connected" has more diverse manifestations and applications while containing many elements of Ojibwe and the Daoist philosophies. "The all is connected" takes a spiritual form in the sense that all is in unity, all is in sublime unity with all, which assigns balance and equilibrium to existence. This spiritual appropriation of interconnected existence produces a sense of peace and togetherness in the self, in such equality and harmony of existence the self no longer feels alone, they are no longer isolated. This interconnectedness of existence understood as togetherness, equality, harmony, and balance replaces the senselessness that the self may have in the absence of religions, in other words perceiving existence in these terms gives meaning to existence. Furthermore, this notion, this philosophy, also, perhaps in stark contrast to the spiritual appropriation, finds a scientific and materialistic expression, which is a more dominant form of expression of the relatedness of

existence, in the sense that the all consists of chemicals, atoms, and energy, and that the one cannot exist outside the whole, as the interconnectedness and interdependence of many ones constitute the whole existence. This scientific expression perceives the interconnectedness in terms of in-betweenness, similarities, continuities, and coexistences.

The second philosophical attitude that I want to touch on which is also quite prevalent in our age is the notion that ‘all is relative’; to say to that ‘all is relative’ entails that things, events, beings, are all relative in some form. For our purposes here, I will briefly look at the writings of two thinkers whose relativist and subjectivist philosophies had a profound impact on the 20th and 21st century western thought: Fredrick Nietzsche and Albert Einstein. Before examining how these two understood relativism and subjectivism and to what end, however, we need to look at what the concept of relativity may be and what it may entail. Relativity as a mode of relating – which should not be characterised as a relational mode of relating in the sense that to think relationally in many ways means to attempt to understand something through its relations – ultimately aims to think about something, to determine something, and to capture the is, the what, the how long, the how much, etc., of something not necessarily by intuiting into the essence of that thing, that practice and event, or by locating the essence of that thing in its parts and wholes, but in relation to something or someone else. In other words, relativity argues that the what, the state, and the experience of something are different than of something else’s. To say that ‘truth is subjective’ means that truth is different and exists in multiples; similarly, to say that ‘time is relative’ means that the experience of time is different and exists in multiples. In both cases of course, time and truth remain as realities, as existents; however, the way they exist, their certain relations or states are relative and subjective. What and who something and someone is largely depends on the existing relations the observer or the thinker may have

towards that thing, and on certain relations that thing may have at any given time and space. Relativity then is a temporary and a situational mode of thought; what the relativistic mode finds and concludes is primarily dependent on the how, the when, and the where of something. If we were to take this relativistic conception of reality as a true and absolute representation of reality, it would be logical to conclude that algebraic knowledge or the knowledge produced by other mathematical forms, and their very foundations, for instance, are also relative. Secondly, the notion of relativity can also be viewed as that which determines the something of something as relative, and not necessarily the genesis and totality of such thing being relative. So when we say that 'X is relative' we do not mean the existence of X is being relative as it is already existing, there is thus a degree of certainty to its existence; what we mean by this is that certain aspects or qualities of X are relative, which is to say, the b or the c aspects of X exist as this in such and such time and place while it is in relation to such and such, but these b and c aspects of X are, or can be, different if the X were to exist in a different environment, time, and place, or its relations were to change. This condition shows that relativity, as a mode of thought, is essentially concerned about the what or the how of something in the now, in this present moment, not in the past or future, or in this very condition, environment, situation, and in relation to this, etc.; to a relativistic mind that something may exist differently in different instances, situations, and conditions as its existence or certain aspects of its existence depend on what exists around it in the now, where it is existing, what it is relating to, when it is existing. In more essential terms, relativity is not interested in uncovering relations that constitute such beings, which surround such beings, only perhaps when they matter to the relativity of certain aspects of such beings; its primary concern is to determine something and the something of that something always in relation to something else. Reality is no longer singular and determinate but conditional and

situational. These points bring us to the following conclusion: what follows 'is' is no longer certainly determinable as it differs and changes, and it can only be determined by relativities and subjectivities.

In one of the famous passages in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche warns us “against the snares of such contradictory concepts as ‘pure reason’, ‘absolute spirituality’, ‘knowledge in itself’”,⁶² concepts that are primarily Kantian and Hegelian, and according to Nietzsche, “demand that we should think of an eye... turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces... are supposed to be lacking”.⁶³ Nietzsche’s outburst here is against the absolutist form of thinking which sees and describes in a singular way. Against this singular mode of thought, Nietzsche shows us how he thinks: “There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective ‘knowing’”.⁶⁴ What we know and what we see are relative and subjective as they only represent our point of views in relation to other perspectives that can also know and see. What Nietzsche is demanding from us is to see and know that there are multiple interpretations and perspectives. This multiplicity perhaps is the only thing that he sees for certainty. His relativism though is pragmatic, it serves a purpose: “the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity’ be”.⁶⁵ Multiplicity here should not be equated with chaos and dysfunction; more opinions, ideas, and perspectives mean enrichment, better understanding, and higher chances at capturing truth, if there is ever one for Nietzsche.

While with Nietzsche, knowledge about something, intrapsychic relations for instance, is thought of in relation to the subjectivity of the first person, and thus the relativity of knowledge produced by such person, in Einstein what something is depends on the position of the observer, the first person, an idea that is similar to Nietzsche’s. Einstein however goes further and

considers the how, and in certain instances the what, of something in itself to be relative and subjective depending on the environment that the something finds itself in. For instance he writes the following on the relativity of space, time, mass, and gravity in a single relativistic field: “The body (*e.g.* the earth) produces a field in its immediate neighbourhood directly”.⁶⁶ With this sentence Einstein is attempting to determine an object’s relations towards its surroundings, which includes time and space. An object physically affects its surroundings; it creates a field with unique characteristics. An object is given a profound power here as it affects everything around itself. The relations that inform this argument are causal relations, the relations of cause and effect, which in itself reveal the margins of this argument. From a relational point of view, the encounter of manifold such realities under normal circumstances indicates that each such reality has indefinite relations independent of other realities and indefinite more relations when in a relation with other realities. Einstein’s goal here of course is not about pursuing all the relations that manifest themselves in such cosmic encounters. He is not interested, for instance, in the time and space that exist in the object itself before it produces a field or in the relations that have produced the object in the first place. In the statement above, his perspective is oriented towards the now, the final product, the how and the why of such a product, not broadly of course but only in certain relations that are active in the now, how, and why. At first glance, this form of analysis may appear to us as relational, meaning that it attempts to understand something through its relations to something else, but relationism in this relational thinking is limited, it is guided by a single mode of relating, namely the relativity of a phenomenon, the seeing and uncovering of what may appear to be relative and why and how such a relative becomes relative. Relativity here is enforced and projected onto reality before such reality is empirically observed. As much as this form of relating appears to be flexible and open to seeing the world of objects beyond

how they appear to us and beyond their absolute existence, such a perspective only sees certain causal relations, only certain beings, and only from a very particular perspective.

As a consequence, he continues, “the intensity and direction of the field at points farther removed from the body are thence determined by the law which governs the properties in space of the gravitational fields themselves”.⁶⁷ The encounter of objects of this sort may be prevalent across the cosmos but the contents and the conditions that any given field can produce are local, depending on what such a field contains and how it exists. All these realities, relativities, and unique fields are produced by a singularity, by an object. It all begins with an object. The object causes changes. It changes the nature of what was already there through a chain of causal relations. The one leads to many new realities. For instance, “spacetime in the vicinity is very curved... the curvature is transmitted through spacetime, from region to region” and this results, in the end, in the production of the phenomenon of gravity which “is nothing but the warping of space and time”.⁶⁸ Time and space are unified as a consequence; they are not separate entities any longer. Their unity, their becoming one and the same, at once erases the possibility of relations between them, as different objects produce different relations when they encounter. In such encounters, the contents of space and time, what makes time time and space space, are not transformed, as they already are one and the same; however, the way in which they exist changes. The time of time, the space of space, the time of space, and space of time all become relative in such encounters, as a consequence of an object. Space and time do not transform to become something else of course; what changes is their how, and their certain relations. Which illustrates: in a relativistic perspective, space, time, and earth remain as space, time, and earth, their substance is not relative; what is relative is their how. Before the object, the space was already there; after the object, the space remains as space, only curved. Of all the possibilities

that exist in existence, space chooses to curve, is forced to curve. It all began there. A caused B. So much power is assigned to a single object. Such a relativistic perspective is informed by causality and it gives us causal relations, which is nothing but a singular form of a relation that has an ability to produce differences and multiplicities. In short, Einstein's relativity achieves its relativity through a chain of causal relations. In such a perspective, relativity is no longer relative, it is determined, it is absolute. It gives primacy to a singular object. It assigns particular relations to such cosmic encounters. It assumes that space is singular, that it lacks layers, forms, etc. It indirectly rejects the idea that there can be space within or with space, or the possibility of gravity being a consequence of other phenomena, spatial pressure for instance, and relations other than the encounter of matter with space and time, as if such matter was outside space and time in the beginning.

Overall, in Nietzsche and Einstein we may encounter some new ideas, but in terms of a pure mode of thinking and relating neither subjectivity nor relativity is unique to them. Western thought has historically, dating back to the times of Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle, wrestled directly or indirectly with two common modes of thoughts: absolutism and relativism. All what appears is how it initially appears; the "is" of what appears is not always how it appears. In Einstein we see, somehow less than Nietzsche, perhaps due to the former's training in the sciences, relative relativism, which is to say: only a few things and conditions can be relative. Bertrand Russell thus is correct to argue that one should not deduce from this Einsteinian relativistic worldview that "*everything* in the physical world" is relative "whereas, on the contrary, it is wholly concerned to exclude what is relative and arrive at a statement of physical laws that shall in no way depend upon the circumstances of the observer."⁶⁹ In Nietzsche, relativity and subjectivity is primarily concerned with the first person, rather than the relativities

in what exists, with the exception of social realities. In terms of the relationship between relativism and relations as such, I should say that relativism generally begins with the notion of 'in relation to' but stops there; it does not pursue and exhaust all possible and existing relations.

CHAPTER II - Relatology of Relations

Phrases such as ‘everything is connected’ and ‘all is related’ can neither do proper justice to nor do they adequately capture the existence of relations and the complexity of their existence. They merely point towards a characteristic of existence, that it is connected, a singular reality, yet they do not tell us much about relations themselves. Such encapsulating totalities, if we are to trace their origins, are ultimately the consequences of worldviews and existential attitudes that are informed by and built on categories of all sorts that categorize and encapsulate existence, including human existence, with all its intricate actualities, as different and as autonomous beings, like time, space, energy, self, instincts, atom, speech, and so-on. The dictionary is an ultimate expression of such a worldview. Against this backdrop, and because of it, relations, it is assumed, by both philosophers and scientists alike, operate between these encapsulated categories, and serve as a function to connect beings and objects in order to give meaning to existence as a whole. Without the presence of relations there can be no existence as such, as it will be just realities, dispersed and isolated. There are beings and there are their relations that connect them. Contrary to such perspective, these categories themselves can be relations and be perceived as relations depending on the situations and the relational environments they may find themselves in. They are also surrounded by relations; relations relate them. They relate them to other entities and to themselves, or simply transcend and encapsulate them. The eye, for example, generally sees things, objects, planets, galaxies, cosmos, light, tea, tables, computers, and so-on. This is the initial, the unfiltered, the most immediate, and the most primordial description of a human being’s encounter with the world. The eye sees but it cannot see in complete darkness. A newborn is looking at its mother, seeing a separate and autonomous being; perhaps the mother is all it can see; the mother is all that exists. An eye’s orientation is outward

looking, it sees the surrounding, the objects that constitute and fill the surrounding, before orienting its gaze on the self which produces and commands it. The eye, or what substitutes it, is not a mere window into the self or out of the self, it is at the center of human existence, it helps the self to actualize, to define, to relate, and to differentiate. In this sense then, the eye is not a window into the soul, as the saying goes, but it is a window for the soul to have access to what is outside the soul. The eye becomes a fundamental component of a continuum.

The problem however is that when the eye sees, its sight often sees objects, totalities, beings, and wholes. It rarely sees relations initially. Rumi in his *Fihi Ma Fihi* writes: “When one passes beyond this world and sees that King without these ‘veils’, then one will realize that all those things were ‘veils’ and ‘coverings’ and that what they were seeking was in reality that one thing.”⁷⁰ To Rumi, there is more to things than them being just things, soulless and purposeless; they are veils that prevent us from seeing God, they exist as God’s manifestations, and they have a purpose: to seek their creator. God does not reveal itself directly; we thus cannot see him, cannot immediately meet him face to face, an existent present across an existent. Yet despite the presence of this iron curtain of existence between human beings and God, a Sufi must strive to transcend what appears, what immanently and physically exists with us and around us. The Sufi thus must reach out to what lies beyond what is present, what cannot be seen, touched, and sensed. The Sufi must not trap and limit themselves to the confines of attempting to understand the thinghood of things, as philosophers and scientists often do, they must see through them, must not see them, they must uncover (*kashf*) them or remove them, like curtains, in order to meet the real existence, the true existence that matters, from which all emanate. This is how the great poet describes the relationships of the self and the external world, the world of objects, which he characterises as “veils” and “coverings”. Ultimately, in terms of relations, he prioritizes

one single relation, the relation to God, an encounter with him over all other relations. God must be reached. And to reach that destiny, existence should no longer exist. When Aristotle looks out and up into existence, unlike Rumi, whose primary interest lay in reaching what lied beneath and beyond what exists, he sees existence, or what constitutes existence: substance, quantity, quality, relative/relation, place, time, position, state, action, and affection.⁷¹ Kant, on the other hand, in response and in opposition to Aristotle, develops his own table of categories, namely: Quantity (unity, plurality, and totality); Quality (reality, negation, and limitation); Relation (inherence and subsistence, causality and dependence, and community); and Modality (possibility-impossibility, existence-non-existence, and necessity-contingency).⁷² These actuals are what Aristotle and Kant see or can see in existence, as that which constitute existence. If we were to approach existence relationally, and instead of identifying relations as one of the constituents of existence, which they also are, begin with the fact that looking into existence in itself is a relation, we will be able to see existence as a reality that is there in indefinite ways and forms, existing as things, as relations, as things and relations, and as the consequences of their relations. Relationally then, what constitutes existence may be defined as a veil or be considered as veiled itself, may be perceived as close or as distant, or described as that which is constituted by ten or fifty or billion constituents; the primary task then would be to get close to it/them or bring it/them close to ourselves in order to see what may be there while knowing that we cannot have access to all there is, to understand and appreciate what is there, to see and seek relations in there, and so-on.

Before we embark further on the significance of relations for existence, its position in existence, or what a relation is, or the question of how to study relations, the following question comes to mind: why study relations? The short answer is that relations as fundamental constituents of existence and as consequences of existence need to be repositioned in relation to

other existing phenomena. The longer answer lies in the entirety of this work. I should note though, by reinterpreting the concept of relations I do not intend to overcome past understandings of the concept in any exhaustive way. My primary goal is to simply contribute to our understanding of relations, to enrich and enhance that understanding. As such, I do not consider past philosophies of relations as incomplete and impractical – philosophies which are not strictly concerned with the question of relations to begin with as their gazes are primarily oriented towards the essence, the phenomenality, or the materiality of things, of what exists and how what exists actually exists. Relations for most of these philosophies are secondary to things, are extensions of beings, and are that which exist between things. My goal is to seek new ways of enriching our relations and understanding of relations of relations, and to ultimately set the ground for relational thinking, for how to prioritize relations, how to see relations, to see things also as relations, to see the world and existence at large as realities consisting of relations, and to relationalize a situation, an environment, an individual, an event, and so-on.

I should therefore begin with, before I present my understanding of relations, what I mean by the concept of *relatology*, a mode of thought that I am developing here to study relations and the relatal state of relations.

Relatology

What is a method? What is the method of a method? A method, a mode of relating, of thinking, of seeing, of selecting, is a regulated and paved way of looking at or abstracting some thoughts, observations, conclusions, and information from a thing, a relation, an event, and so-on. In doing method one is giving primacy to ‘about’ something over the something itself. In doing method, a relationality, a thing, or any given reality and unreality, remains a totality, which

is to say it exists either as a total physical body or as a scattered reality, while it is being examined through the lenses of a given method or methodlessness. The mind, a relationality that never ceases to gather and observe, that wondering reality, often tends to freeze a phenomenon in time and with time, in one's mind, like a concrete slab, like a picture; it is only in such a manner, in freezing reality, as it is trained, morphed and molded, can the mind describe and understand it, understand the it of it and what constitutes the "it". What was/is being observed and inquired is being summoned to the presence of the mind and then stored in the mind; it is, then, dissected, deconstructed, and compartmentalized, or its bits and pieces, and its relations are linked, stitched, and glued together by a methodically relating mind. An analysis of something that a mind develops, the conclusions and convictions that a mind reaches, all of which could be external to the body, existing as something outside the body and the mind, happen not in the thing or outside the mind but in the mind itself. As it is morphed by a pre-regulated and pre-structured method, each abstracting mind finds and sees something and some relation in such a totality, often isolated from other realities. Although a mind can never capture the totality of a totality, it survives to capture a totality totally. The mind presumes that it captured the entirety of something, the entirety of the part of something, or something in everything. However, despite a thinking mind's grandstanding what is captured is always something of and about something. Ibn Khaldun, for instance, sees social formations; Hegel sees dialectical movements; Marx sees inequalities and materialities; Heidegger sees existential qualities, the whats of phenomena, and words; Husserl is struck by the transcendental, the phenomenon, the consciousness; Foucault finds dispersed practices and evolving traces of structures; Deleuze sees rhizomes and intricate multiplicities; Derrida encounters diffusions, deferrals, and texts; and a Sufi finds God in everything with one's heart, not the mind but heart.

As a mode of thinking, a method is not only a relation in itself, consisting of manifold relations, but it is also, as an invention of the mind, quite a unique form of relating. As a relational form it has defined boundaries and predeveloped contents, even when it is claimed otherwise. It has a purpose, preconceived road signs and road names, and so-on. It knows what it seeks and it desires to find what it seeks. An ethnographer may sit silently amidst a tribe, acting as a non-existent and non-perceivable, they are nonetheless searching for what they are determined to see by utilizing predetermined means. To be methodical, therefore, by its very constitution, entails a limitation of the human mind, to its abilities and functions, to its capabilities and desires. At first instance the concept of 'method', its development and applications, may indicate an academic and a philosophical belonging and association, but an ontological examination of it would reveal its wider implications and representations. As an ontological category it defines the attitudes that our minds utilize and represents the existential orientation of our very own being. It should not be surprising then, if a non-philosopher, a non-scientist, sees and experiences certain philosophical categories and relations developed by philosophers and scientists in everyday life, in everyday discourse, etc., without having any knowledge of philosophy and science. For instance, one could argue that the difference between the multiplicity that a non-philosopher sees and experiences, and the theory of multiplicity that Deleuze develops is that what is observed and seen by a non-philosopher more than often is not philosophised, at least not in details, which is what essentially philosophy is, to think in details. To think methodically on the one hand indicates having an analyzing, examining, and deducing mind, an actively creative mind, and on the other indicates possessing a mind that takes the given event as way of human life, as familiar, learned and stored but rarely examined. In this sense then, all human activities are methodical, including philosophical and scientific thinking. In both

instances, being methodical in the everyday or being a methodical philosopher, method limits and confines thought. It limits the ways in which a human being can relate, can see; it narrows our thoughts and horizons, blinds our vision as it sets an inquiring mind onto a predetermined path. Worse than this is when a mind utilizes a method developed by another mind; in such an instance the former no longer speaks for themselves but becomes a mere mouthpiece of the latter. The devotee mimics the master in thinking, seeing, feeling, and acting, which is not a freedom of the mind but the chaining of it. Lacan: “All of us here at this gathering share an experience based on a technique and a system of concepts to which we are faithful, as much because the system was developed by the man who opened up all of that experience’s pathways to us, as because it bears the living mark of its stages of development. In other words, contrary to dogmatism with which we are taxed, we know that this system remains open as regards both its completion and a number of its articulations.”⁷³

If we interpret method at the most basic level as a way of doing things, going about things, as a procedure for knowing things, we should begin seeing method not just in the philosophical and scientific texts but also in the social realm, in existential attitudes, and in one’s everyday psyche and acts. A child, for instance, is taught how to hold a spoon when eating. A student is taught how to relate to and think about a subject matter. A novice is taught how to operate a machine. As one grows and develops one may attempt to expand or modify what was taught but a mind is such that it would rather repeat than begin everything anew. The changes in the mind and in the ways in which a mind minds and wills are to a great degree linked to cultural developments and innovations. Culture, therefore, is a colossal method in itself, so are law, norms and protocols. It, on the one hand methodizes practices and relations, ways of thinking, and on the other always innovates, in an organic manner, new methods, new ways of thinking,

new ways of doing things, new ways of desiring and enjoying things, etc. The room, thus, for an individual to isolate themselves, to develop their own methods of doing things, to be totally autonomous, to live outside the methods synthesized by culture, by way of bringing together many dispersed practices and relations to construct a cohesive method, a way, to invent something that has no past, and so-on, is quite impossible. To achieve such total autonomy one must first de-humanize oneself. Every action, behavior, speech form, and relation, and the ways in which they actualize and become reality are a result of cultural ways, and, to a lesser extent, of a calculated personal method. When encountering another individual a person greets them methodically. It is for this reason that we cannot think of philosophical and scientific methods outside cultures, existing cultural or other conditions, they are informed by the social, by the relations and dynamics of the social.

One can also observe this methodization of actions and relations in the natural world, where phenomena relate and interact in methodical ways. The way a tree orients towards sunlight, an object collides with another object, gravity attracts, particles bond and un-bond, and so-on. Everything has found a path for what they do and desire. Even collisions occur in a certain way. A mind thus is always in the process of mimicking a cultural current, someone, and something. To such mimicry one adds different subjective tastes, styles, and experiences.

Furthermore, the philosophical and the scientific often will to achieve exactitude, completeness, newness, etc., when inquiring about a given relationality. Once such knowledge reaches a desired exactitude about the what of something, a mind ventures into the world of the contents that constitute and differentiate that something, it then orients itself towards other considerations, how to cure or solve something for instance, it further ventures into predictions, potentialities, possibilities, and so-on. The knowledge of each exact finding, of each piece of

information, excludes what is ignored, what has been deemed useless, what cannot be found, what cannot be seen, etc. Production and exclusion coexist in knowledge production. A thinking mind often orients itself towards defining the present state of a given object, being, and relationality, and to what and how such relationality is at this very particular instance. Derrida introduced the concepts of “trace” and “deferring”,⁷⁴ or “displacement”⁷⁵ to overcome the constraints imposed by being present in the present. Neither traces nor deferrals, though, are always present, unless one enforces them onto a situation, as Derrida often does. Relationally speaking, a given relationality is not simply in a state of a fixed existence but in a state of constant relating. A relationality is interacting with this now, interacting with many things now, it is ceasing manifold relations now; it is oriented towards the past, the future, and neither.

What I aim to develop in this text, a way to study relations, a relational way to see the world, namely *relatology*, should not be taken as a revolutionary way of thinking rather it should be perceived as a consequence of a need, to enrich existing knowledge further, to develop a way of thinking, a mode of relating, which does not see existence, phenomena, beings, and so-on, as singular and static totalities, but sees identities, differences, and contradictory modes coexisting, singularities and multiplicities coexisting, and where the seen and the unseen have claim to truth and reality. Above all, the most essential purpose of this form of thinking is to pave a way to study relations, as it is my view that relations are best studied with a relational mindset.

To begin with, *relatology* is *relational thinking*, thinking relationally, thinking about relations, and can be read as *a way that studies the ways of relations*, etc. It aims, amongst other things, not to necessarily replace or displace existing modes of thoughts but to complement them, to enrich them; its primary orientations are to study relations, see and seek relations, see all as relations, including its own relational procedures, and study the *relatal* state of relations. To have

a clearer picture of relatology I have gathered some of its key preliminary hypothesis below, which are primarily derived from both inductive and deductive thought processes:

i) Relatology contains within itself indefinite possibilities and is open to indefinite possibilities, each of which in itself can be perceived as a mode of relating. In other words, relatology does not have a singular path and a singular way of doing things: lifestyles, revolutions, laws, chemical interactions, natural laws, methods of inquiries, pre-determined everyday practices, trends, attitudes, and so-on, all are ultimately relational phenomena, and in themselves are all also relational modes of thoughts. In the strict philosophical sense, a sense that is primarily related to the mind, there are also indefinite relational possibilities that contain potentialities for being or producing relational modes of relating. As the mind relates, however, before it begins its act of uncovering and discovering, relates to itself in order to understand itself, and uncovers its preconceived relations that exist in it. In short, it should examine itself before examining what it set itself to examine, it should remove or in the least recognize the presence of the veil of humanness, culture, prejudice, subjectivity, and familiarity that surround the already existing relations which constitute the mind's outbound orientations. Only then perhaps can the mind determine its own path, its own way. Once the mind's overall mode – which may be critical, interpretive, descriptive, overcoming, deconstructive, aesthetic, genealogical, explanatory, adaptive, prescriptive, collective, disruptive, appreciative, or a combination of all these – is determined, provided that it is willing to relate to itself in such a manner, it can initiate its relating to the matter of concern. As the mind determines its mode, its way, its procedure, it should be aware that a mind is such that it ceaselessly relates.

ii) A relational mind or self sees and seeks relations. To see and feel relations is not as easy a task as it may appear. We often see things not relations. The mind, and the senses thus need to be

trained and morphed. One may wonder: how can a mind detect relations while most relations are either invisible to it or are things in themselves? There can be no manual for detecting relations, but perceiving what exists also as relational and as a relation, and orienting the mind towards relations, seeking them and looking for them, is an appropriate first step. As existence dictates, the farther the mind is from what it desires to examine the less it will be able to see; the opposite can equally be true, the closer one is to a picture the blurrier it gets. Nevertheless, to see the manifoldness and the interwovenness of relations, their singularities and multiplicities, the mind must immerse itself in the subject matter at hand. Immersion can be spatial or otherwise; through machineries or otherwise. Machines though can only detect what they are meant to detect. Patience, therefore, is the highest virtue here. The ‘veil’ or the fog of appearance, beneath, through, and around which relations lie, will submit itself to an inquiring mind; ultimately, the world of relations will reveal itself.

iii) Not all is related and connected, unless one considers the sheer existence of existents as a singularity. A relationalist is suspicious and cynical of such totalizing and singularizing worldviews. Not everything in existence or every existing relation is connected to everything else and every other relation. Even in a given field or a network of relations not all relations are necessarily related to one another. Such fields, networks, webs, etc., may exist or appear to exist as a unified totality but a mere spatial coexistence does not, in my view, necessitate a form of overarching relatedness, where everything is connected and related to everything else. In spatial fields, certain relations extend beyond their boundaries, certain others are in relation with relations that exist outside them, and certain relations relate to only certain relations in them.

iv) Relations are present everywhere; in atoms, in minds, in space, in water, and so-on. They are present as they sustain the existence and the non-existence of beings within the presence of

existence. They are essential to all existence. Even the God of Abraham relates and communicates through texts and angels. Without relations there can be nothing, and 'nothing' cannot be without them.

v) A given mind cannot capture the entirety of relations that exist in a field of relations. A mind may pass a judgement on this or that, may discover a new object or a cosmic relation, but it is limited to see, absorb, and abstract some relations, in full or in part, that surround that object and relation. It is sheer absurdity and naivety then, to think that one can develop 'a theory of everything' or reduce existence and the ways it exists to a few relations and phenomena, or assume that 'it is all' this or that. The human mind may be one of the most intriguing and advanced beings in existence, particularly in relation to the production of relations and to the ways in which it can relate, but the reality of the mind is that it exists in this world, on this earth, hence: its relations are products of its interactions in the world, in response to what constitutes this world, what surrounds it.

vi) Relations can exist in manifold forms. They can be physical, metaphysical, assumed, spatial, meta-spatial, pure, impure, and so-on. In the realm of the physical, relations may be confined to the spatial boundaries, to the confines of laws that regulate reality, and certain relations, can transcend such confines and boundaries. Similarly, in the realm of the social, relations take indefinite forms. These social relations can exist as tangible actualities and as transcendental like the relations of love, of care, and so-on. If we go a step further and look into the relations that manifest themselves in a human body, a very complex world of relations, we will witness relations appearing and disappearing, relations extending into the past and stretching into the non-existing future, a relation becoming relations, relations becoming a relation, and so-on.

vii) Relations can reveal themselves to us as singular phenomenon or as multiple phenomena, but in themselves they present a multiplicity, existing as clouds, clouds within clouds, clouds with clouds. They rarely exist as a singular relation with no relations to other relations and relationalities. Thus, power, if we are to perceive it as a relation, is not just pure power, love is not pure love, and gravity is not just gravity. The constitution of all these relations contains manifold relations that may be visible and sensed or invisible and not sensed. Here of course I am not speaking of external relations, as logicians often do; both power and gravity and love contain in their very own constitution manifold relations, and the assemblage of these relations allows these phenomena to distinguish themselves from other phenomena and relationalities. Relations within relations. Often a self perceives such phenomena (power, etc.) as singular actualities, in most instances not even as relations; this way of perceiving largely emanates from the existential habit of appropriating and perceiving entities and phenomena as separate and distinct beings, a habit that has contributed immensely to the development of languages, of words, which in turn has constituted and informed our perception of the world and our relationships with ourselves, with others, and other phenomena and relationalities.

viii) Everything can also be a relation; everything can also be perceived as a relation. Such potentiality always exists in existents. For this reason, one can never reach a complete judgement about an event or a being, as there is always a possibility of this event and being extending further, containing or having relations beyond what a mind can capture. To be clear, this thesis, that everything can be a relation, is not indicative in any way of the philosophy of the fluidity of all existence, of everything being in flux and being elastic, a philosophy that allows all to relate to all things around it or beyond it in indeterminate ways. Fluidity and fixity, as states of

relations, as forms of existence, represent certain realities, but cannot be generalized to all there is, what there is can actualize in manifold ways.

ix) *We should free relations from the confines of the conventional conceptions that perceive relations as extensions or as that which exist between two or many things.* Relations can exist between two and more things, as outward orientations from a source, e.g., being, thing, etc., towards nothing in particular, as external phenomena orienting towards things and beings, and as orientations towards nothing or towards things that we assume to exist. In short, relations can manifest themselves in manifold ways. They should not thus simply be perceived any longer as extensions of existents and that which happen in between things, transmitting something from one thing to another in the form of reciprocation or transference. Deleuze and Guattari write: “Natural history can think only in terms of relationships (between A and B), not in terms of production (from A to x).”⁷⁶ Both of these viewpoints confine relations to particular forms of relations. Relations cannot and should not be viewed simply as mediators or as transporters; they have more depth, more purpose, more meanings, and more forms than to be confined to few conceptions. To actualize, they may need two things, many things, one thing, or nothing. They exist as two-way, multi-way, one-way, or no-way phenomena.

x) Relatology does not classify relations as external or internal and considers such approaches as largely inaccurate. Perceiving relations in such terms, being either internal or external, a form of classification found in numerous disciplines, is a consequence of a traditional understanding which perceives beings and things as self-contained totalities with a few external relations or internal relations. From a relational point of view, what is internal can externalize itself. What is outside can have a direct impact on the inside. In our attempt to overcome the internality and externality of relations, we are not mimicking the contemporary philosophies which attempt to

overcome binaries. For us, relations may or may not exist as binaries. Certain relations exist as binaries and certain others do not.

These are some of the points and perspectives I have towards relations, and as we move forward new attitudes, conceptions, categories, and premises should emerge.

Relatology and other modes of thoughts

Since I will not be able to do justice to the whole ontological tradition here, and one would have hoped to study in greater details how thinkers like Aristotle, Molla Sadra, and Heidegger interpreted and approached the question of being or the being of beings and to see what forms of relations constituted such relational modes of thinking, I will have to limit my analysis to Aristotle, someone who is conventionally considered to be one of the early founders of the ontological outlook. In particular I will examine certain aspects of his definition of “being” in *Metaphysics*. Aristotle, as it is well known, does not use the concept of ‘ontology’, but his thinking generally is oriented, perhaps influenced by the earlier Greek philosophers like Parmenides and Plato, towards the study of substances, the being of such substances. Aristotle begins book four of *Metaphysics* with the following statement: “There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature”,⁷⁷ and this “science” “will examine not only substances but also their attributes, both those above named and what is prior and posterior, genus and species, whole and part”.⁷⁸ I will leave the examination of the notions of substance, whole and parts, and so-on, to the next chapter, where I hope to investigate the relationships of relations and things; as such I will primarily limit my discussions here to this ontological mode of inquiry, a form of inquiry that attempts to study the being of beings and describes what constitutes the being of beings. Since all forms of modes of

inquiries necessarily are relational as they are oriented outwardly to gather some form of information, I should begin with the following question: what is involved in the ontological relation? What kind of relations cause and motivate one to think ontologically, and, further, what type of relations constitute this relation that we call the ontological?

To begin with, Aristotle has already told us that this “science”, ontology, is a study, a deliberate investigation, a mental effort and orientation, a relation that orients the mind towards something and on its return to the self it contains more than it initially did. This is the first relation that initiates the chain of other ontological relations, the sum of which are called the ontological. The location of such relationism is the mind, it originates from the mind, is developed by the mind, etc. This ontological relation then, according to Aristotle’s definition, is distinguished from other human relations that do not emanate from the mind and in the mind. It is, for instance, different than the relations that one has towards an apple while eating it or selling it. Second, the ontological relation is oriented towards something(s), some substance, some phenomenon, the being of such something, the division of such something, and the how of such something, and so-on. This form of orientation once again contains a singular relation; it sees entities and it seeks substances, that which differentiates this from that. The ontological is already pre-programmed and pre-destined. It knows what it seeks and how to seek it. It knows what to look for and what to find. The four *pre-predicamenta* divisions of beings into kinds and then the ten categories of *predicamenta*⁷⁹ do not only represent what is being found but also a logic that seeks beings and their divisions. A relational orientation such as this, by necessity, omits and ignores relations that are active in the making of the orientation itself, and it further overlooks relations that a mind absorbs while relating to, orienting towards that something(s).

Third, the ontological relation is oriented towards the being of something. This relationship first and foremost presupposes that there is a something to something, which is the being of that something. This beingness, which is not necessarily a relational reality, in the sense that it simply exists, as it is there waiting for us to examine and investigate it, is a reality that should not be understood as something other than itself, stripped of all relations that such reality may have towards other existing or non-existing relations and relationalities. Fourth, the ontological relation, or relationism, at its inception consists of relations and it relates in manifold ways once the I orients itself towards the being of something, one can already sense the power and the hierarchical relations in such perspective. Soon after however, it loses or limits its relational attitude and capacity, in the sense that as the I reaches into the being of something, without any permission from that something, does not seek relations in that something, instead it occupies itself with the description, classification, and the compartmentalization of the being of such substance. The real achievement of the ontological relation is that it sees the beingness of an existent in an existent. It assigns a new and different dimension to the existent beside the obviousness of it already being there and being sensed by us through its sheer existence. We are confronted by two realities of a reality. I often wonder though how a scholar of ontology would study human ashes, would they study them as ashes, as a human being, or as the ashes of a human being? The fifth and last point on ontological relation, a point which may seem self-evident but needs to be stated, is that the ontological relation assumes the existence of a pure, different, and universal being to beings. It assigns a universal identity, 'existence' or 'being' for instance, to realities in order to extract differences. Through singularity it seeks to harvest and appropriate differences. In Heidegger's ontology, for instance, we first encounter the category of 'being' and then the category of '*Da-sein*'.⁸⁰

The second mode of thought that I want to examine in relation to relational thinking is Hegelian dialectics. It should be stated at the outset that the dialectical mode of thought is one of the most relational modes in the history of ideas, of methods. As a mode it is active and dynamic, it thinks of things and events, particularly events, always in relation to something else, and considers temporality to constitute its terrain. Through temporal progression one is able to map out movements. Like other modes, however, it limits itself to certain specific relations, it studies only certain relations and relationships, and sees only certain relations. For instance, in *Science of Logic* Hegel writes of the relation of pure being and pure nothing: “that they are undistinguished from each other, that, on the contrary, they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, and yet that they are unseparated and inseparable and that each immediately *vanishes in its opposite*.”⁸¹ And: “That truth is, therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one in the other: *becoming*, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself.”⁸² What Hegel is attempting to achieve here is to establish some sort of relations between being and nothing such as the relations of becoming, merging, differing, replacing, displacing, etc., and with such a strategy he prevents and dismisses any understanding that may perceive the two as unrelated phenomena, which simply replace one another mechanistically and compulsively after a series of invasive relations. This dialectical relation sees and seeks triangles and operates within a triangular structure. The relation of the two related phenomena lead to the emergence of a third phenomenon which is “becoming” in this case, which, as Hegel puts it, is an “immanent synthesis of being and nothing”,⁸³ and as the “vanishing” of one in the other. The ontological substance, that unity and totality we saw in the ontological, is replaced by a multiplicity in dialectics; in the presence of a singularity, of one, one is always in search of the other two absentees. What is absent must be

found and made present, as one cannot exist without its other. To this triangular relational and anti-relational structure, he further adds the phenomenon of contradiction. The two contradict, perhaps must contradict. Of all the things that a phenomenon may come in contact with one must find a thing that would contradict with the phenomenon. One often wonders about the psychology of this mode; of all the existing indefinite relations Hegel and his followers obsess over the relation of contradiction, and the resolution of contradictions. A reality (*yin*) must have an opposite reality (*yang*). A Daoist sees harmony between these two realities; Hegel sees conflict, contradiction, destruction, overcoming, overtaking, strength and erasures in them. A few decades after Hegel, Darwin developed a somewhat similar understanding of reality: “A corollary of the highest importance may be deduced from the foregoing remarks, namely, that the structure of every organic being is related, in the most essential yet often hidden manner, to that of all other organic beings, with which it comes into competition for food or residence, or from which it has to escape, or on which it preys.”⁸⁴ Such a violent, competitive, destructive, yet imaginative interpretation of reality. At any rate, I think the following lines summarise the core of dialectical relation and thinking: “becoming is the vanishing of being in nothing and of nothing in being and the vanishing of being and nothing generally; but at the same time it rests on the distinction between them. It is therefore inherently self-contradictory, because the determinations it unites within itself are opposed to each other; but such a union destroys itself.”⁸⁵ What this quote reveals in essence, as vulgar as this interpretation may be, is three key universal phenomena (being, becoming, and nothing) all relating through the relations of contradiction, displacement, unity, separation, merger, interaction, opposition, dissipation, becoming, etc.

The dialectical thus is relational and dynamic, and consists of a chain of relations, yet it cannot be considered a truly relational mode of thought. It begins its investigations by seeing a number of phenomena, provided that they are related in ways that the dialectician wants them to be; and by presupposing certain relations and imposing them onto the phenomena and events, it presumes that it can access and determine the extent of relations between them. By proceeding in this manner, the dialectical, in many ways, limits its horizons and scope when it only seeks certain relations such as vanishing, contradiction, and becoming; and it overlooks the ways in which related things and events are not related.

The third tradition that I want to look at in terms of its relational procedures is phenomenology. The concept of phenomenology is a modern invention coined in the 18th century, but as a mode of thought, taken at the most elementary level occupies itself with the study of the mind and its relations towards what appears to it, can be traced to earlier histories and cultures. Our interest though is in its latest contemporary form originated in the early 20th century, primarily in the writings of Edmund Husserl. Let us begin with the most obvious question: what is the phenomenological? It is difficult to draw lines around its scope, around what it really wants and desires to achieve, as Husserl himself, I believe, was never truly certain of its scope, which for him continuously evolved and enhanced, until perhaps the publication of *Ideas*. The phenomenological began as a critique of the psychological, when it in itself was quite psychological, in the *Logical Investigations* in particular, but evolved into what studies consciousness and its experiences, and found its final and mature form in the writings of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, where its scope expanded beyond the mind and its constituents and found expression in the existential and the physical. The underlying trajectory of phenomenology thus had three major shifts in the span of four decades: the psychological (the

mental), the existential (the ontological), and the physical. In the foreword to *Ideas* Dermont Moran writes that phenomenology should “be understood in terms of acts... and their intentional objects... considered in their purity, precisely as uncovered through the phenomenal reduction, namely stripped of everything empirical and every reference to factual existence.

Phenomenology was to be a ‘pure’ science, a ‘new idetics’.”⁸⁶ In the phenomenological, thus, if we were to loosen some of its relations and see what it primarily relates to, we find categories of ‘experience’, ‘intentional objects’, ‘phenomenal reduction’, ‘pure’, ‘ideas’, and so-on. An experience in the everyday does not need to be a mental experience, it can be physical, spiritual, mental, personal, social, aesthetic, and so-on, but in Husserl each experience is an act related to consciousness, to the mind, to the mental, which is also the source of intention. An intentional experience, which excludes the unintentional experience, has, for the lack of a better word, two sides, two poles, to it. On the one hand there is *noesis*, a process or an idea of something, say of perceiving, occurring in the mind; and on the other end we find *noema*, the perceived, that which occurs as a result of or in the process of an experience.⁸⁷ What Husserl was attempting, or rather struggling, to achieve here, was to develop a method that was different than what was produced before him particularly in Kant, to ideticise a concrete relation in idetic terms (Heidegger, a few decades later, existentializes and materializes this ideational mode, as Marx did with Hegel’s idealism, and as Aristotle did with Plato’s thought). Husserl is problematizing here the relation of perception that one has towards a phenomenon in a given experience, and what one experiences in the mental realm during an experience. By limiting himself to this very particular state or relationship, he overlooks the concrete aspects and relations of such an experience and instead solely orients his intentions towards what was in the mind and what happens in the mind or consciousness when the mind encounters reality, experiences a given phenomenon. From a

relational point of view, the interesting point that the phenomenological raises is that Husserl sees a relation, a relationship, which is any given experience, as something the content and the relations of which are not necessarily to be only found in the human mind nor do they solely stem from the mind. He does not see an experience, an intentional act, as a one-way relation; quite the contrary, he perceives intentional acts as the combination of what originates in the mind and what the objects cause the mind to produce.

Husserl further attempts to expand the scope of the phenomenological relation, although from a relational standpoint he limits it, by introducing the notion of ‘phenomenological reduction’, a notion that can in a nutshell be defined as an attitude that a mind should utilize to capture the idetics of an experience by excluding the empirical and historical aspects of such experience. Such an outlook is supposedly meant “to set aside the limitations to knowledge” in an “investigation” until such time where “we have eventually before us the free outlook upon ‘transcendentally’ purified phenomena”.⁸⁸ Whether such an exclusionary and reductive attitude is possible or not is certainly open for debate. According to Merleau-Ponty “The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction”;⁸⁹ what he means is that a relating mind cannot completely free itself from the actual experience, from the concrete aspects of such experience, from the history and the surrounding of such experience. Reduction cannot confine and exclude all relations regardless of how one trains one’s mind. Overall, the focus of phenomenological relation, despite its immense contribution to 20th century philosophy and to other disciplines, particularly sociology, and its contribution to our understanding of certain experiences, such as ‘intentionality’ and so-on, remains limited to human being, to the human mind and consciousness and its attitudes, to certain relations and realities in the human mind, to seeing only select relations, such as intending and experiencing,

to ideational relations. It may appear as open and emancipating but as Derrida puts it “In phenomenology there is never a constitution of horizons, but horizons of constitutions.”⁹⁰

Phenomenology confines the self to self, to an instance, to a field, to a descriptive mode. It ignores relations oriented towards human beings that are external to the experience, and ignores relations, at least a great majority of them, that human beings find themselves amidst.

Lastly, I want to touch upon a more contemporary approach, the Actor-network theory, and examine from a relational point of view, how it presents its images and linkages. The foundation of this approach, we are told, lies in the following premise: “the social is *nothing other than patterned networks of het-erogeneous materials*.”⁹¹ The “networks”, which is one of the building blocks of this approach, “are composed not only of people, but also of machines, animals, texts, money, architecture”.⁹² With this approach we are not dealing with the mind, consciousness, subjectivities, that is all that constitutes the humanness of human beings, in isolation any longer. To understand the human one must think of them alongside of and through entities and non-human beings, and see them as equals to human beings as the object of any sociological analysis. A machine thus is not subordinated to ‘the other’ or to the self. To understand a self, one must also see the cellphone. This approach further recognizes the existence of relations between the organic and the inorganic, a relationship we also see in Marx’s theories of commodity and capital. In such an approach, individuals are relational beings as they “are never located in bodies and bodies alone, but rather that an actor is a patterned network of heterogeneous relations, or an effect produced by such a network.”⁹³ Although one can see certain similarities between this worldview of the subject and the scientific understanding of human beings as that which consist of chemical elements like everything in existence, it assigns certain privilege to causal relations amongst all existing relations between the organic and the

inorganic. That said, we must bring attention to certain problems within this approach particularly, from a relational point of view, as it presents itself as a relational mode: it sees everything as related; it gives primacy to causal relations; it assumes that there exist categories of “networks”, like the “fields” of scientists, and “patterns”, like Weber’s network of social relations, etc. Despite its certain important contributions, such as that a human being should be examined in the context of its relations to organic and inorganic beings, and that the social landscape is a relational landscape and consists of human beings as well as machineries, this approach, in terms of relations that constitute it, cannot be considered a fully relational mode of thought, as it limits itself to certain structures, certain categories, certain relations, certain things, and so-on.

In an age where we witness great advancements in sciences, technologies, quantum worlds, chemical structures, the natures of the cosmos, in the political and socio-economic structures, and so-on, the ontological, the dialectical, the phenomenological, and the actor-network modes of relating, modes that are oriented towards things, *ontos*, totalities, categories, and towards certain relations of these things and totalities, are, on the one hand, incapable of capturing all forms of relations that the world and the cosmos are presenting to us, and on the other, as specialized forms of relations focusing on certain relations and relationships, do not advance our understanding of the phenomenon of relations sufficiently. To say that beings or events are related and have relations does not tell us much about relations, they just point to a fact about existents in a narrow spatial field. We, therefore, are in need not only of new understandings of relations but also new ways of studying and investigating them.

What is a relation?

Medieval Muslim philosophers,⁹⁴ under the influence of Platonic and Aristotelian ontologies, would use the signifier *mahiya* to refer to the essence of something. This concept is slightly different than the concept of *jawhar*, which is a Persian term indicating the ‘substance’ or the ‘core’ of something. The word *mahiya* is actually a question and consists of two words: ‘*ma hiya*’?, meaning ‘what is that?’, the “that” here is feminine. However, over time, perhaps due to its frequent use, two words became one, the space between the words disappeared, and the question mark was erased. Originally, the essence of something was to be the answer one would have in response to the question of *ma hiya*?, but as this question lost its question mark, space, and double word-ness, its meaning also shifted, it has come to represent and refer to ‘essence’, that which was supposed to be the answer to the question. The distance and the space that existed between the question and the answer diminished. These changes in the word of *mahiya* in certain regards represent the changes in the ways in which human beings relate to objects and other realities. The first encounter with something can be described as the state of ‘*ma hiya*’, ‘what is that?’, a state of confusion, not knowing, and curiosity; and the second encounter, as we develop a certain familiarity with the object, is more about the whatness, *mahiya*, of that object. There are other relations of course involved in such first encounters, but these two modes of relations give us a glimpse of the overall structure of our encounter with what is first encountered and what is unknown to us. They are existential as well as philosophical attitudes.

This initial relationship which we develop in first encounters and the responses, the logics, and the understandings we generally produce or are taught during such encounters often times remain with us, without experiencing any significant changes, throughout our lives. The ways in which we generally relate to an apple, to its taste, its shape, its texture, its origin, its

location, and the ways in which we imagine it to differ from other fruits go through minimal changes. Certain aspects of such initial-relation or relationship may change, may expand, and may disappear, but the overall relation that we have established at the outset remains. It is, I presume, due to the persistence of these initial relations and their persistence that we find it extremely difficult to overcome our pathologies, prejudices, the status quo, and what we know and how we know. It, further, must be due to this initial relation that we find it quite challenging to introduce a new aspect, a new interpretation of something that we are accustomed to.

Foucault, for instance, writes of power: “power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual’s consolidated and homogenous domination over others”,⁹⁵ rather, he argues, “Power must be analyzed as something which circulates... It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hand... Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization.”⁹⁶ Foucault here is reinterpreting and re-relating the notion of power; he attempts to overcome an everyday understanding and relation that we tend to have towards the phenomenon of power. The danger in these re-relatings, however, is that often times the re-interpretation replaces and becomes the initial-relation. Whereas, relationally speaking, re-interpretations and re-relatings can be numerous and diverse, they should be multiplied and enriched continuously.

I have yet to answer the question I initially posed: what is a relation? Put differently, what is our initial relation of the phenomena of relations? Finding an answer to this second question is quite straightforward: we relate as such, we simply relate to relations, and we learn how to relate before we have any understanding and awareness of any relation of any sort; in short, there is a relation before that relation is identified as a ‘relation’. To the first question, however, there exists no direct and linear answer. Before we begin putting an understanding, not a definition, of relations forth, we should further ask ourselves the following question: is it

possible to find an interpretation, an answer, to the question of relations, considering how vast, how complex, how multifaceted, how universal relations are? It is true that we may speak of the existence of relations, as existence is only possible through and with them, but can such recognition and identification warrant us to develop a universal definition that can capture the entirety of relations? In the philosophical tradition, there are philosophers who argue that certain concepts are better left undefined as it is impossible to do so. For instance, Molla Sadra, a 16th century Muslim philosopher who wrote extensively on the question of being and existence, while examining the question of being wrote the following: “The reality of *wujud* [being] is the most manifest of all things through presence and unveiling, and its quiddity is the most hidden among things conceptually and in its inner reality. Of all things, its concept is the least in need of definition... [due to its] clarity...[and it] being the most general among all concepts in its comprehensiveness.”⁹⁷ Later, in the same text, he argues against any definition of ‘being’: “the reason is that a definition is by means of either logical definition or description.”⁹⁸ ‘Being’ cannot be defined logically because it “has no genus and no specific difference”, and it cannot be described “because it cannot be conceived through anything that is more manifest or better known than it, nor through a form that is equal to it.”⁹⁹ In philosophers like Plato, Heidegger, and Derrida, we find similar attitudes and resistances, a sense of hesitancy, and unwillingness to provide a definition of certain concepts. Derrida, for instance, while deconstructing the relationship between law and justice argues that “Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible”,¹⁰⁰ which is to say: it cannot be destabilized, defined, or adequately examined. These of course are just perspectives, one of the many ways in which a philosopher may relate to a subject, perhaps out of respect for the subject, or out of a lack of clarity on the subject. Interestingly though, despite such reluctant attitudes, none of these

philosophers remained silent or ceased their engagement with these concepts. What they did not do was provide us with clear definitions of the concepts they were engaging with.

It is generally a matter of subjective decision whether a mind has an absolute image (definition) of something or not. In regards to the concept of relations one may define or not define them. In the end, these mental attitudes are in themselves forms of relations. The key question, however, is if we as human beings are even capable of defining relations, their instabilities, uncertainties, diversities, multiplicities, unities and differences. Now, one may attempt to define relations as *that which represents the movement of what exists*, or as *that which enables existence to exist the way it exists*, or as *that which produces unity or difference in existence*. Such broad definitions, however, ultimately only capture certain relations or certain aspects of certain relational existents. Any general definition(s) of relations, phenomena that can manifest themselves in indefinite ways, will always be partial and incomplete. Perhaps, the soundest way to engage with the concept of relations is to attempt to define and interpret each distinct relation independently, as relations, most of which at least, despite their relatedness can be distinguished, although never completely, and can actualize in their unique ways. For instance, the relation of love can somewhat be distinguished from the relation of finding, and upon such uniqueness and difference its content and relations can be defined.

To conclude: to say that one practices or thinks from the point of the relationality of relations means that one studies relations and the relational state of relations, a phenomena that without which nothing can be possible or be without, or sustain itself. While a relationalist studies relations, or any given relation for that matter, they are well aware of the fact that they are simultaneously relating at each instance of conducting such study; that when one encounters something one necessarily has or develops some forms of initial relations towards that

something, and that these initial relations also contain within themselves other accumulated relations as one lives on; and that relations as such are manifested in indefinite ways, only few of which are captured, incompletely I may add, at any given time. In thinking relationalogically, one is not aiming to overcome or replace another mode, as all modes are already relations and relational in themselves. Many modes can coexist; many relations, even if they are opposites, can coexist; there can be one relation and there can be manifold relations. Is it possible to understand relations through its opposite, as we often understand things? Relations as such have no opposite, no mirror, through which they could be reflected. But a relation can have an opposite. Certain relations can manifest themselves as opposites certain others cannot; certain relations have relations while certain others cannot.

CHAPTER III - Relations and Entities

I have already stated that my understanding of relations is different than how relations are often perceived as ‘phenomena that exist between two or more things’. In such an understanding, relations are confined to the in-between; relations have a location, a space, the empty space that is not filled with beings and objects. Relations though are neither limited to ‘between two or more’ nor to a space of in-betweenness where relations roam; relational potentiality is assigned to things and beings, insofar things and beings in themselves can be relations, can act as relations, and can be imagined both as autonomous totalities and as relations. Relations then, are no longer confined to emptiness or to that which fills the emptiness, rather they exist everywhere, in everything, and can be anything. They have total freedom and an unhindered plane where they exist and actualize. In this chapter, thus, to further and substantiate these points, I will examine a) what relations mean for us human beings, which is to say their significance for our existence; b) how and why we relate to reality in terms of entities, by seeing them floating in empty space, rather than seeing reality as relational or seeing it as that which consists of relations alongside of materialities; c) why we should perceive entities as relational relationalities and as totalities; d) and, finally, I will look at our relational existence and the world we live in, which is the primary source of our relations and the relations we have towards beings and objects. A human being is a relational being, a being that is always in relation of some sort, or is a relation of some sort. This is the starting point of our conception of human existence. This existent is a being of relations, a product of relations, someone who consists of relations, and who can only sustain its existence through relations. But this existent is also someone who is a being of non-relations, meaning it is a form being that has the capacity not to relate, not to produce relations. A human being, therefore, is a relational and a non-relational being simultaneously. It relates, re-relates,

derelates, un-relates, etc., to objects, dreams, hopes, entities, beings, non-beings, imaginary beings, the past and the future, visible and the invisible, and so-on. And it is such a being who can relate and not relate through the medium of manifold phenomena, e.g. senses, body parts, thought, physically and transcendently, and so-on.

Relations to entities

What does an entity, or a phenomenon, an object, a physical body, what appears, a whole, a something like plasma, dark matter, or a magnetic field, mean? What is that which constitutes the entity or the substance of something? What is something, the something of something? Entities are that which have a concrete existence, existing as a contrast to non-presence and to emptiness as they fill the expanse of space, regardless of whether they consist of matter or not, they have a being and they are a being. The being of their being is often perceived as a whole, a totality, as the coming together of many same things in a given spatial field, a perception which emanates from an existential relation that sees existence and non-existence in reality. We identify the moon as a moon in contrast to the expanse and apparent nothingness that immediately surrounds it. The assemblage, the coming together of things, manifold things, identical or otherwise, to assemble an entity indicates non-separability, limited difference, and a lack of distance, all of which by extension indicate the lack of or limited presence of relations. This is the first common tendency through which one so often relates to entities, to phenomena. The second tendency is primarily informed by the notions of distance and spatiality; an entity is either kept at a distance so the senses can have a total and complete view of such an entity, or the entity is brought closer to the self by certain mediums so the senses can see the constituents, the elementary particles, and parts of that entity. The third common tendency, a tendency that is

common particularly in certain philosophical and sociological traditions, is to see an entity as a totality in relation to other total entities, existing in/as a field, a network, a context, and in present conditions. These three tendencies which are largely the product of modernity can be contrasted with certain traditional religious views, Abrahamic religions in particular, which perceive entities not primarily as assemblages but as something that is there, placed there, and created there. From a relational stand point, however, what we call 'entity' is what can appear to our senses as the presence of many things, same and different things, interlinked together by manifold existing relations, manifold relations that existed prior to the presence of such entity, and the manifold relations that exist around such entity and help such entity to sustain its being. With such an attitude, beings, time, particles, and so-on, not only consist of relations but are also to be perceived and considered in relation to one another as the existence of each is in need of another, is related to one another, and is dependent on one another. Through relations existence is present, it is able to present itself as present, and through them entities are entities.

The world of entities or the entities of the world, assuming that we can speak of them as such, are not homogenous worlds by any means. Not every entity that we encounter in our world is a consequence of the natural, given to us by natural processes or evolved through natural laws and procedures. In our world we encounter multitudes of constructed and produced entities that are morphed and produced by us. The relationship between these two worlds of entities, one being natural the other post-natural, is that of intertwinement, at least that is how we perceive them to be, we see them as co-existing, and design and order our world according to such prejudice, assuming that all are simply entities, equal and similar. To be surrounded by our own products, our inventions and creativities, is certainly a unique development in our own history, to be surrounded by cars, buildings, etc. more than by trees and animals, particularly in cities. We

thus can no longer simply speak of human-nature dichotomy, an illusionary dichotomy which persisted across many cultures. The differential lines that existed between nature and the human, particularly in the West, are blurred now, and rightly so, as we were never separate to begin with. This blur though is as much as it is a consequence of advancements in the sciences it is also a consequence of the coexistence of entities produced by nature and by the natural relations alongside of the entities produced and introduced to nature by us. With this point in mind, modern inventiveness has brought us closer to nature and reduced the illusionary distance that once existed in the West between the human being and the natural world.

Let us expand on this last point a little further. The reality that surrounds us and that we find ourselves amidst consists of entities of all sorts, e.g. particles, mountains, ocean, planets, animate and inanimate beings, etc., they are there, here, out there, they have relations, they are surrounded by relations, and exist as a consequence of relations. Amidst this reality exists the human being, the human body, whose chemicals are no different than the chemicals that constitute entities. How can we relate to such a physical being, to ourselves, and how are we to understand it relationally? One of the most obvious facts about this being is that this being relates. Its relations are such that they cannot be reduced to a mere subject-object relationship or subject-subject relationships, its relations are far more complex. Take for instance our relation to oxygen, water, or to some other essential entity, essential to our existence. A relationship such as this cannot be understood adequately with the conventional understanding of relations, which we have already outlined in the previous chapter, as our relations with these entities are not simply biological necessities, or external realities which we want and desire, they are us, our own very being. Without the oxygen the 'I' or the 'we' cannot be, cannot exist. The water that I need to drink soon, therefore, is not simply a mere necessary chemical substance that exists outside my

body and to which I relate through the relations of thirst, etc., it is the very constitution of my own being, the water becomes I after I drink it; it, thus, loses its own identity of being an entity that which exists independently in the world as it merges with my own being, and becomes one with my own being. Once ingested, water does not become an addition to my physical being, it is not something that I carry with me wherever I go, like a book, it becomes me, it is me. Relations to water and to oxygen, and to phenomena that are in the similar position to us, are different forms of relations, different than, for instance, relations such as one wanting to buy bread, or to pay debt. Existential relations as such that exist between us and the water we drink are not sorts of relations that exist between two separate beings, us and the oxygen, they are more than that, they are the umbilical cord that links the fetus to its mother, they are neither separate nor singular beings. Not all relations and relationships that a self has can be described in these terms of course, as there are indefinite forms of relations that a self emanates or finds itself in. A self relates, to entities, to itself, to other selves, and it is only through such relational existence that the self can be a self and be called a self.

Further, a self is such a being that it relates to and unrelates from indefinite entities, existents, in indefinite ways. The scope of this relationship, and the relations that constitute this relationship, is such that it is simply impossible to reduce it to a way or a form of a relation, as each relation is fused with other relations. Attempts such as abstracting a general relation, like mastering or controlling nature, the commodification of things, the utility of things, the beauty of nature, seeing God in things, and so-on, are just a few broad relations of self-entity and self-reality relationships that only capture certain particular relations and not the entirety of them. Therefore a self's relations with property, for instance, should not be simply deduced to a singular form of relationism as Hegel and Proudhon do. Hegel reduces this relationship to the

following: “The rational aspect of property is to be found not in the satisfaction of needs but in the superseding of mere subjectivity of personality. Not until he has property does the person exist as reason”;¹⁰¹ Proudhon, on the other hand, reduces it to “theft”.¹⁰² Furthermore, this self-entity and self-reality relationship/relationism cannot also be classified simply as a ‘mental relation’, for while a mind may orient its gaze to other selves on the streets or be oblivious towards them, which in itself is a relation, the eye is weary of the road and the pavement, the body is burdened by the weight of gravity’s pull, the lungs crave for fresh air.

A different example/situation: the tree across from my balcony whose existence I am aware of at this very particular instance, and which over the long years I have never truly inquired into its kind, although occasionally I thought it may be an apple tree, yet it may not be there in another instance as my mind often orients or reorients itself to its other concerns as it reduces the role and power of other senses to their mere biological functions and routines. Thus, I may see the tree, the people walking behind it, the car passing by it, all at once, or just see the tree and nothing else. These are certain particular relations active in the relation of seeing. But as I see, I also do not see, and also cannot see. And as I see I also admire, listen, think, and so-on. What this complexity and multiplicity shows is that any attempt to capture all relations active in an instance of self-reality, self-entity relations is not only impossible but also always incomplete. The mind often captures what it minds. A novelist captures this: “The small room into which the young man stepped, with its yellow wallpaper, geraniums and muslin curtains over the windows, was brightly lit at that moment by the setting sun... The furniture, all very old and made of yellow wood, consisted of a couch with a massive curved back, an oval table in front of the couch, a dressing-table with a little mirror between the windows, chairs along the walls, a few two-copeck prints in yellow frames depicting young German ladies with birds in their hands –

and nothing else.”¹⁰³ A phenomenologist captures: “I am thinking of the Cartesian *cogito*, wanting to finish this work, feeling the coolness of the paper under my hand, and perceiving the trees of the boulevard through the window. My life is constantly thrown headlong into transcendent things, and passes wholly outside me.”¹⁰⁴ (A novelist and a phenomenologist so often think alike). While a scientist may capture and are often convinced that they are capturing: “In contrast to electric and magnetic fields, the gravitational field exhibits a most remarkable property, which is of fundamental importance for what follows. Bodies which are moving under the sole influence of a gravitational field receive an acceleration, *which does not in the least depend either on the material or on the physical state of the body*. For instance, a piece of lead and a piece of wood fall in exactly the same manner in a gravitational field (*in vacuo*), when they start off from rest or with the same initial velocity.”¹⁰⁵ In these three forms of orientations, filled with manifold relations, we see that the novelist describing the surrounding and capturing materials and furniture relating to each separately and allowing us to furnish an imaginary room with him; the phenomenologist, somewhat similar to a novelist, is attempting to describe what he senses and sees, but in contrast to the novelist the phenomenologist is a narcissist, overly concerned with his consciousness and the relations that surround such consciousness, amidst the flux of presence he remembers his own self and existence. In the third instance the scientist is describing and imagining what is distant, vast and unseen to consist of certain phenomena, to have certain distinguishing characteristics all the while overlooking his very own existence and his own subjective imagination which is actively shrinking what is vast and bringing closer what is afar.

In our relations towards entities, towards reality at large, we often encounter a peculiar relation, namely the relation of entity-relation, the something-relation. As the self orients,

expands, and relates and unrelates, it is also, in conscious and unconscious ways, relating to entities as entities. I see a tree, a person, a physical body; I hear a voice; I sense fear, happiness, and anxiety; I am told of an event, of someone's death, someone's birth, and so-on. The outwardly oriented relations of the self are informed by and build on the foundation of this relation of entity-relation. This prevalent relation is often established and internalized not necessarily in *a priori* way but as a process of learning and in the process of the self's initial encounter with an entity as an entity, as a totality, as a body. A given rock may have a distinct colour and shape, a different texture and size in relation to other rocks, but this given rock is always a rock, a something. The recognition of a rock as a rock, as an inanimate object, is a relation in itself, but beneath such a relationship lies a deeper layer of relation, the entity-relation. As one recognizes a rock as a rock one also always recognizes it as an entity, a totalizing description of something as a whole, which the rock shares with infinite other entities, including human beings, bodies. They are all just entities, filling or occupying a region of space, of what appears as emptiness. Henceforth, when one walks in an area, which one is also a part of, one is in constant relation to their surroundings through this entity-relation. This relation of entity-relation is not a consequence of modernity, capitalism, or secularism, it is not a modern invention nor is it a consequence of modern inventiveness; quite the contrary, despite culture and species specific nuances it is an existential relation unique to animate beings, a recurring and hidden relation, passed on from generation to generation, a relation that not only predetermines and regulates a majority of our relations to our surroundings but also predetermines and regulates our position, our own standing as living beings amidst the animate and the inanimate. Furthermore, the entity-relation is such that it accompanies other everyday relations we have towards what constitutes reality. It is an invisible shadow. This relation neither describes what it captures as

fixed and static, nor does it presume that ‘all there is’ is never mechanistic and structured, hence fluid and relative. Therefore, thinking in the following fluid terms, “there are no longer any forms or developments of forms; nor are there subjects or the formation of subjects. There is no structure, any more than there is genesis. There are only relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds”,¹⁰⁶ does not really eliminate or replace this prevalent entity-relation.

Naming is another dominant relation we have towards reality. A verse in Qur’an states, “He taught Adam the names of all things” (2:31), this divine act of teaching of the names occurs right after Adam is created, before Adam has any experience of the world, of the things of the world. Ontology, anthropology, and language; creativity and the act of naming; invention and teaching/learning, are all related acts. This is the theological origin and theory of naming. God is the origin of names. But what is the philosophical interpretation of names, of naming? To begin with, the naming of entities is not just some mental exercise, it is a fundamental relation which consists of the manifold relations we have towards entities. Wittgenstein tells us the following on the traditional understanding of naming: “One thinks that learning language consists in giving names to objects. For example, to human beings, to shapes, to colours, to pains, to moods, to numbers, etc. To repeat – naming is something like attaching a name tag to a thing. One can call this a preparation for the use of a word.”¹⁰⁷ After providing a series of examples, shapes, and games, mind games, “language games”, he introduces his position on the notion of naming – and those of signifying, meaning, and the use of language in general – by pointing out to the context, the use, and the rules as determinants of word and meaning production and use.¹⁰⁸ Language, for him, is more than just naming objects by words as a consequence of a certain calculation;

language is an activity, a life form, a game, context, and difference. Language, from a relational point of view, is of course more than just a game, a context, a simple procedure of the naming of something, it is as a whole a product of indefinite relations and consists of indefinite relations. Each word, name, has a history, history of relations, relations, which may have had absurd and coincidental origins, that played a role in its production, in its development, in its dissemination, in its differentiation, in its transmission, in its teaching and learning and memorization, in its mutation and multiplication, in its mimicry, and so-on. As people name an entity for the first time, they are learning, needing, sensing, copying, translating, caring, using, incorporating, differentiating, identifying, separating and unrelating, memorizing, seeing, and so-on. So many named things, so many unnamed things, so many new and old things named and unnamed. What concerns us here in these processes of language, name, and meaning productions is the relation of naming of an entity as one of the defining moments of the relations we have towards entities. This activity and relation of naming, which historically developed organically, or more methodically in the age of nation-states and nationalisms, as need or policies necessitated, and which has taken a more complex form in the contemporary age largely produced by experts of all sorts as new things emerge in uncontrolled fashion, familiarizes us with entities around us, reduces our fear of them, our ignorance, as it brings the self and the entity closer. They know each other now.

By naming entities in order to recognize them during future encounters we, in a way and as a consequence, tame the mindfulness of our mind and limit the relations we have towards the entities. The self relates to a rock as rock, this fundamental relation largely determines all other relations we have towards a rock. The word “rock”, as inventive as the activity of naming of something may be, constrains the self-rock relationship. The use of a different word, for instance

'*kevir*', 'rock' in Kurdish, does not change this fact about the relation of naming. The limitations that the relation of naming causes are present in each use, in each language. In many ways then, language imprisons the mind. It imprisons the self to certain relations, it imprisons entities to certain words, and it imprisons the self's world of entities. Language, therefore, is a prison. We may attach different meanings to entities or attach no meaning at all; entities may mean something for self A and nothing for self B, but such multiplicities do not change the fact that entities tend to have a name, often a singular name. In certain regards, the relationship that exists between naming and attaching a meaning to such naming or between our relations towards entities and attaching meanings to those relations may not always be as straightforward as it may appear. In fact, most of our everyday relations with entities are devoid of any meaning. But there is another aspect, a negative aspect, to these relations of naming and attaching meanings, etc., that we have towards entities, which is that by these relations we contain entities and draw boundaries around them, we cut them off from whatever relations they may have had. Entities have a boundless existence and identity before we name them, they are part of an endless existence. They have something mysterious about them. By naming them, however, we confine them, we assign a location to them, an identity to them; from our point of view at least, the view of those who name things, they do not have anonymous universality any longer, we separate them from the expanse, the endlessness, and the boundlessness.

We should interrogate this self-entity relationalism a little further. Since entities are, or we presume them to be, of material compositions, consisting of particles, energies, forces, and so-on, we tend to relate to them, think of them, and treat them in relation to space, in and through space. Spatiality here should be perceived as a relation in itself which accompanies our other relations, and not in the Kantian sense "a ground of all outer intuitions",¹⁰⁹ which exists as a

priori before we have any sense of existence, nor in the Leibnizian sense where space exists as relations between things.¹¹⁰ What our mind essentially does is convert a reality that it assumes to be out there into a relation and attach it to all other relations. The degree to which this spatial relation is present in our everyday relations depends on what we are relating, and on our subjective moments. Its presence in our relations to a tree, for instance, could be less dominant than in the relations we have towards a rock; similarly, the temporal and ontological relations we have may take precedence over spatial relations. Whatever the case, the relation of spatiality is essential to our relations towards entities, existents. We see mountains in space, we refer to them in spatial terms, we locate them in relation to the spatial position of other objects, etc. And as we relate to them spatially, we also limit them to geographic and geometric spaces. The CN Tower. Mount Ararat. The tower and the mountain are located in certain parts of the world, separated from one another and other entities by spatial references and diameters.

Further, life too, which is the very essence of our existence and distinguishes the animate from the inanimate, can become a relation and be manifested as a relation as it is central to how a self perceives and relates to entities surrounding the self. The self before everything else is alive, has life, and relates as a consequence of life, and relates through life. This life-centric relational state treats entities primarily as inanimate. They are inanimate, they have no life. They have no souls, no feelings, no speech capabilities, no consciousness, etc. We break them, throw them, step over them, burn them, and so-on. They mean nothing unless we attach certain values to them. One wonders, however, why time, a phenomenon whose existence far predates the existence of human beings, a phenomenon that has cosmic presence, should have no consciousness of its own, as we often believe to be the case, and it should blindly obey the presence of matter, of space, and so-on, and have a singular function, singular purpose, to allow

existence to exist the way it exists. Yet a child is capable of indefinite relations. What is concerning here in this life-centric relation of the self-entity relationship is that this relation contains degrees of ignorance and prejudice and is an immensely short-sighted relation. In this life-centric relation towards reality we are, when we relate to them, essentially concerned about their chemical and material compositions, about their inanimate characteristics, as something that lacks life and thus is limited in emanating relations.

These relations show that our relations with/towards entities, often begin with or are informed by certain facts and prejudices that we existentially hold, by virtue of being the animates, against the inanimate insofar that we see them as entities, simple, underdeveloped, singular, confining, limited and limiting. Entities are often considered to be ir-relational beings, not that they lack any relations but that they do not exist as relational beings (except perhaps for a few relational phenomena such as gravity, magnetism, etc.), treated as entities, identified and named, in most cases with a single word, related through spatial relations, and are perceived to be inanimate soulless beings.

Relations to relationalities

Not all self-entity relations are entity-relations; nor can they always be characterized as purely relational. When we think of a 'cell phone', for instance, we tend to think of it, often quite mechanistically, in relation to communication, to certain phone calls we had, to certain brands we owned, brands we could not own, and so-on. So, as much as we think of a cell phone as a physical entity, of this or that brand, which has this or that feature, we simultaneously, think of it, in most instances, in relation to something else. Or, when we say 'house', we tend to think of our own house but also think of every other house, the house we saw, the house we can remember

for some odd reason, the house we liked, the house we do not have. A single word refers to manifold entities, connects us with numerous physical bodies, it triggers existing memories, wishes, pleasures, regrets, events. The word 'house' takes us to many houses, to their outside and inside, to their surroundings, to the people who lived in the neighbourhoods. This linguistic production of multiplicities, relations, and generalizations does not necessarily indicate the existence of a relational reality, as these instances are mere moments of entity-relations and in relation to something. If anything, it reveals the depth and complexity of memory and its manifold functions; it also represents the ways in which a self relates to its own self, within its own confines. A name, a word, represents a multitude of similar entities; a shape reminds us of another. This process reveals how relational a mind can be, how reality, knowledge, memory, forgetfulness are called upon, are related and triggered. It does not indicate an existential relationism, a total relational attitude, in the true sense of the word though. Even when we say 'spacetime', to use a scientific notion, we may initially think of relations of time and space, but what this phrase essentially indicates is the unity of time and space, basically an imagining of a new entity that is no different than the word '*kevir*'. Despite the existence of what appears to be relations or relational existence, our languages, the ways in which we conduct ourselves, and the modes of relating we have and utilize are primarily informed by the entity-relations enterprise, which is to say: we confine our relations with existents, due to cultural ways or biological constraints, to certain dominant relations, relations that prevent us from achieving a truly relational existence. Even in instances when we are relational, our languages are such that they do not do justice to our relational moments. And they do not do justice to relations as such, as they are limits to our understanding of relations. We know of relations to the extent that our languages allow us. Relations that exist beyond words, also exist beyond the limits of our minds.

After all, relations predate languages, which in themselves are relations, expressions of relations, and representations of relations and phenomena.

The question of course is how can we begin thinking of entities and relations in a more relational way and see them as relational phenomena, while knowing that we have to operate and think within the limitations of our understanding and the linguistic means we possess, and while knowing that we always already are in relation to reality whether we call it as such or not? As a first step, seeing entities as relationalities, that which contains condensed relations, layers of relations, clouds of relations, and so-on, might help both in terms of paving a new path forward and repositioning the existential attitudes we have towards existents that surround us. A being, a thing, an object, a phenomenon, an event, a human being, time, galaxy, rock, gravity, apple, ant, and so-on, all can be considered as relationalities, composed of indefinite sets and layers of relations. In such a relational logic, a human being is not just a biological body composed of molecules and cells, or a being which consists of social, biological, and psychological categories, but a being composed of relations, of all sorts, the sum of which makes what a human being is alongside or in addition to categories and molecules. But which relations and where are we supposed to look for in a given relationality to unearth these supposedly existing relations? And even if we were to detect them how are we supposed to extract them? Traditionally relations were categorized as internal and external, which in many ways made it easy to detect relations, as one would either gaze into either the inside or the outside of a body. In our interpretation of relations though, they have no confines and borders per se. Their geometries and topographies are not limited to internalities and externalities, interiorities and exteriorities, although they can be at times. Below I have compiled some strategies that may be of help in developing a more relational existence and attitude:

i) Relationalities exist in the midst and alongside of indefinite relations which may have predated them, may be in a state of constant flux of appearing and disappearing, and may or may not have any effect on these relationalities. These extant-relations that have existed before, or come to exist during or after the presence of a relationality do have a potentiality of relating. Thus any given relationality cannot be imagined in an unrelated and autonomous mode of existence as they already are amidst these extant-relations. However, we should be careful not to infer from this relational condition and reality that any given relationality is in immediate relation with all the existing extant-relations that surround it as relationalities may relate to this or that relation or may never relate to any of them. Whatever the case, however, we cannot think of relationalities independent of such extant-relations, regardless of whether these extant-relations are social or physical belongings to the world of the inanimate. Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* speaks of his life experience living as a black man in a racist society: “I don’t believe it! Whereas I was prepared to forget, to forgive, and to love, my message was flung back at me like a slap in the face. The white world, the only decent one, was preventing me from participating. It demanded that a man behave like a man. It demanded of me that I behave like a black man – or at least like a Negro. I hailed the world, and the world amputated my enthusiasm. I was expected to stay in line and make myself scarce... I don’t believe it! Whereas I had every reason to vent my hatred and loathing, they were rejecting me? Whereas I was the one they should have begged and implored, I was denied the slightest recognition? I made up my mind, since it was impossible to rid myself of an *innate complex*, to assert myself as a BLACK MAN. Since the Other was reluctant to recognize me, there was only one answer: to make myself known.”¹¹¹ In the presence of such social extant-relations, racist relations that western societies have constructed around colours, Fanon is not interested in maintaining social harmony, a harmony that demands of him

to act and think like a slave not like a philosopher. These forms of extant-relations are not just prejudices, onetime events, but are sorts of relations that recur persistently, transmitted from generation to generation; one must hate a skin colour, that is the extant-relation in this instance that Fanon finds himself. Fanon's reactions, his anger and defiance, are also extant-relations, relations that one has towards injustice, degradation and humiliation. But his will and determination to disturb and shatter these chains of extant-relations is an authentic moment, an authentic relation. At the beginning of chapter five Fanon tells us: "When I came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I am an object among other objects".¹¹² In the end, his desire was to be a philosopher and he became a philosopher, not an "object". This will, this relation, to be oneself against all the existing relations that demand of you otherwise, is a dominant and noble form of relation. But in most cases the self relates to itself not as it wants to but precisely how the extant-relations dictate, which shows to what extent a self is at the mercy of extant-relations, relations that are there in the air constituting the fabric of societies. These extant-relations encompass a majority of our everyday relations, regardless of whether they are conscious acts or not, they are the sort of relations that in most instances predate the self and into which the self is born. These extant-relations, relations that are simply there until they are changed and eradicated, are not limited to the social world. Reality, the natural world, also consists of these sorts of relations, which are often called 'natural laws' or 'causal relations.'

ii) The relational attitude that we often have towards entities, which I have already described as a form of attitude that often perceives entities as totalities and as singular bodies which may or may not have relations, like tentacles, tends to consider relations as secondary to physical realities, as a mere detail of the existence of realities, even when this worldview deconstructs and

examines the whole and the parts, the atoms and the molecules of an entity. Against such misappropriation of relations, and reality by extension, my thesis here is to approach reality as that which consists of relationalities and relations, which in themselves are composed of indefinite relations that constitute and maintain their existence. A rock, for instance, should not appear in our minds only as a solid totality, a uniform existence which appears to lack emptiness, fill space, lack an internal movement, and whose existence only obeys certain natural phenomena such as gravity, and so-on. Rather, our minds should contain the images of a rock, and see it both as a rock and as a relationality which contains indefinite relations and indefinite particles perceived as phenomena. And imagine a rock to have the capacity to become relations, and to exist amidst indefinite relations. So, according to such a relational outlook, a cellphone, is not only a physical totality but a relationality that contains relational mechanisms that operates it, that receives signals, that is in constant relations with what surrounds it, and so-on. These relations concerning a cell phone may already be known to many, but many still perceive a cell phone as a totality with certain relations, like its need of charging, receiving, and sending signals, etc.

iii) Each relationality has a capacity to orient itself or something of itself outwardly and produce and emanate relations. In the self-entity relationism, aside from the relations that we have already touched on above, there are also manifold relations that emanate from the self and the entity or are produced by them independent of the other. These forms of relations are not limited, for example, to the appearance of a relationality and to the relations that actualize as a consequence, rather we should seek these sorts of relations at a far deeper level beyond what immediately is captured by sight or appears to the senses. We cannot of course, since each relationality yields and emanates different relations, identify and point towards a set of exact relations that any given

relationality emanates and produces. It should suffice to say though that every being, event, relation, entity, object, and so-on has and emanates and produces relations that are unique to it.

iv) There exist forms of relations that are emanated and produced by a given relationality and are oriented towards a different relationality. A self, for instance, can exert manifold relations upon an object or onto another self, and can relate to them in indefinite ways. These forms of relations are best described as one-way relations insofar they have a single direction. One may break a cup, use a cup, carry a cup, buy and sell a cup, fill a cup, toss a cup, and so-on. Similarly, one may hurt a person, or love them, talk to them, agree with them, understand them, hear them. These sorts of differing relations can exist as forms of relations that are oriented from a relationality to another without the ‘another’ countering such relations with similar or different relations. The second relationality, the related relationality, may not even be aware that it is being related.

The logic of presenting these points/strategies is to show that as we relate to entities, persons, etc., as entities and as persons, but also as relationalities, we are not only enriching our horizons and perspectives and worldviews of realities, but we are also contextualizing them, understanding them differently. To perceive reality or realities relationally and see them as that which consists of relations and relationalities can reduce our dependence on our life-centric or one-dimensional hierarchical relations that we conventionally hold towards and against our surroundings. This relational attitude does not mean the cessation of relations to things as things, or the universal eradication of differences and distinguishing characteristics; rather, the point is that as we continue perceiving things as things let us also perceive them as relations and relationalities. Things, relations, and relationalities: two new forms of perceptions and attitudes added to the existing one. As a result, our relations should expand and enrich further, and we will

be in a better position to understand ourselves, our relations, our relationships and relationisms. It, a relational attitude, may also help us overcome our deepest and most ancient prejudices and shortcomings and enhance our very own existence.

Relational self and the earthliness of the self

I have established a somewhat sufficient ground, a relational ground, from which I can begin looking at the relationality of the self, the human being, and see what, from a relational standpoint, being a self means, and some of the relations that this self has towards relations.

First of all, and before all else, a self is a relational and a non-relational being. This statement is one of the series of statements and one of the many ways in which a self can be defined. With this statement the ‘who’ of a self is determined through the indefinite relations it has. Thus, when Aristotle says that a human being is a “political animal”,¹¹³ he is only capturing certain realities of human existence, that one can see certain commonalities between humans and animals, as they both live and breathe, they have biological necessities, and so-on. But the individual is also distinguished from the animal for it has an ability to socialize and be political. In the Abrahamic religions, on the other hand, a human being is one who is created in the image of God, who represents God on earth. These godly qualities, though, have limits and are conditional. For instance, the Qur’an states: “We have certainly created man in the best of stature” (95:3), but this perfection of ‘man’ is dependent upon his belief in God. Infidelity, for example, reduces a human being to the level of an animal, even to a level beneath them: “They are like cattle; rather they are more astray” (7:179). This relationship between human beings and God, as the image of human existence, can also be found, in ancient Egyptian writings, for instance to the incoming king Merikare the retiring king instructs the following: “Shepherd the

people, the cattle of God, For it is for their sake that He created heaven and Earth. He stilled the raging of the waters, And created the winds so that their nostrils might live. They are His images who came forth from His body, And it is for their sake that He rises in the sky. For them He created plants and cattle, fowl and fish to sustain them.”¹¹⁴ The ‘animal’ image of human beings in all these three instances indicates different relationships and meanings. In the Egyptian case, the human being is the animal, “the cattle”, of God, and for whom the God has created the actual animals. In the Qur’an, and thus in the Abrahamic religions by extension, the “animal” indicates, beside animality, a state of disgrace, of worthlessness. In Aristotle, on the other hand, the human being is an animal, a different kind of animal, an animal who is social and political.

Interpreting human existence in terms of relations of all sorts, should allow us to view human existence in the historical, anthropological, and biological sense, a sense that contains a whole lineage of relations, manifold relations, and it should help us access the subjective conditions and relations which are, to a great degree, determined by the extant-relations and one’s own subjective relations and experiences. With such strategy, which has no defined procedures at this stage, we allow ourselves certain flexibility in our investigation into human existence, an ever relating, changing, and expanding relationality. Similarly, such a relational attitude would give us the means to examine human existence in all its forms: egg-sperm, fetus, birth, growth, etc. So relationally speaking, a human being is one who has relations, any relations. A human being is an animal, a believer, and so-on.

The ways in which I have spoken about relations above, particularly about the self’s relations, has in all likelihood given the impression that the existence of relations is beyond doubt, that they are as real as any real phenomenon in existence. How do we really know that there are relations, and that relations actually exist though? The roads of epistemology are paved

by the notions of doubt and certainty more than anything else. The knower, the known, the unknown, and the unknowable. One can certainly doubt, no doubt, which is a relation in itself, the existence of relations, and one can be doubtful and certain simultaneously of the existence of relations, or of certain relations. To doubt or to be certain of the existence or the non-existence of something, are all forms of mental relations. Rene Descartes in *Discourse* begins his inquiry with doubt, with being sceptical of beliefs, ideas, thoughts, and so-on, he ends his inquiry with certainty however.¹¹⁵ A few centuries before him, al-Ghazali had a similar thought process in his *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal (Deliverance from Error)*, doubting human senses, human reason, and logical judgements.¹¹⁶ Al-Ghazali too ultimately finds certainty, truth. Both al-Ghazali and Descartes invented a method, a way of thinking: in order to produce a body of knowledge, to know about something, one must first doubt. Doubt here is what cleanses the mind, what leads the mind towards truth, towards knowledge. It is an instrument through which one tames the ambitions and inadequacies of the mind, one questions the mind, its content, what it knows and what it thinks it knows. Only after rigorous re-education and the emptying of the mind, can the mind be free and acquire true and accurate knowledge. Interestingly though, al-Ghazali's truth, his certainty, is light, sent by God, in the presence of which the I disappears; Descartes's truth, the certainty which he discovers, on the other hand, is the I, the ego, the thinking ego. From a relational point of view, one may begin an inquiry, relate to a given reality, however one deems it necessary or however one wishes. There are no guidelines set in stone in relational thinking. Further, one cannot completely eradicate doubt from an inquiry; doubt as a relation in itself is always there, lurking in the background, even in the mind of the most religious individual. Therefore, in this regard I doubt that both al-Ghazali and Descartes eliminated doubt completely even when they achieved certainty. To get back to our original question, the question of "how

can we be sure of the existence of relations”, to live is to relate, life therefore is a sum of relations; if one ceases to relate one no longer is, this is where I think we can begin establishing the reality of relations; relations as something that is already there, before everything else. To say that human existence is a relational existence means that we cannot limit this existence to certain obvious everyday relations like seeing, communicating, thinking, etc., it encompasses all forms of relations involved in such existence. It, for instance, means amongst other things: a self as a relational being is one who constantly emanates relations and absorbs relations. It means: the mind, the heart, the body, the imagination, dreams, senses, are all always in a state of producing, emanating, and absorbing relations, while existing amidst an ocean of relations.

Not everyone relates equally. There are those relations that are commonly practiced in a given society, such as mimicking one another and previous generations, and there are unique and specific relations, unique to self, to family, to factory workers, to religious organizations, and so on. There are relations unique to a given age, a given society, or a given self. The most striking and unique quality of the contemporary self, in relation to previous selves of past ages, is that the modern self *over-relates*, not only does this self have access to indefinite relations and to things that enables them to produce indefinite relations, but it also finds itself in the midst of indefinite produced and emanated relations. These forms of relations can be intentional, unintentional, accidental, existential, imaginary, phantom, illusionary, real. In short, there are all forms of relations that emanate from this over-relating self which are oriented towards reality. This condition of over-relating of the self has consequences, one of which is that the over-relating self often neglects itself, neglects self-relating, which can lead to regretfulness, forgetfulness, lack of self-control, disappointment, emptiness, etc. This obsession and attitude of to relate and over-relate, this culture of constant production and emanation of relations, at the most existential

level, defines the contemporary mode of social existence. In such an environment the self has limited autonomy, has limited freedom to live outside this culture of over-relating, this ever rising ocean of relations. The other existential consequence of this excessive relational existence is that it prevents the self from the states of de-relating and non-relating. One must always relate. “Remember that time is money” says one of the founders of modern America. But our existence is such that as much as we need to relate, we also need to de-relate and non-relate, which unfortunately is often not the case with the contemporary self, a self who over-relates.

To be sure, the phenomenon of over-relating is not a total loss for the self or of the self, nor is it a purely negative form of social existence. There are positivities to this existential attitude. Over-relating, among other things for instance, enriches and enhances our capacities as relational beings. When we over-relate, which we often do as a consequence of extant and prevalent relations and other technological and scientific developments, we are also, in some ways, forced to develop new relations and relationships as we are constantly presented with new entities and phenomena, and as we are constantly assembled into cities, presented new ways of communications. This sheer multiplicity of relations which is achieved by over-relating, additionally, compels us to layer our relations, to give more depth to them. It is thus rare to see for the contemporary self to relate in a singular and unidimensional fashion to a given situation or entity. There are always ‘buts’, ‘ifs’, ‘maybes’, ‘if onlys’, ‘then agains’, ‘everyone is different’, ‘we don’t always know’. While relating we also lie, manipulate, develop metaphors, act clandestinely, calculate ahead, predict. Each of these situations and relations has additional layers to them as they are also additional forms of relations to other existing relations. But let us not get ahead of ourselves, let us be aware of our limits as living beings, as thinking beings, as feeling beings: over-relating, which appears to be the way of the contemporary existence, will

ultimately have consequences, grave ones, for the self, as at no time in history have we as living species ever reached such a state of over-relating. Like an overheated car, over-relating in likelihood will impact our bodies, mental states, cause physical and mental dis-functioning, withdrawals, and severe debilitation.

It must be due to the contemporary complex existence of ours, that we have so many fields that study human beings, fields that study certain aspects and relations of their existence. There is still more to be done though, particularly in relation to relations. We need to study relations. We need to think relationally. Our relations are extensively different and have deep layers to them. There are extant and prevalent relations, which are already there beyond our own subjective relations in which we find ourselves. A reaction to an event, a past event for instance, and the relations that were developed in the midst of such a reaction, can remain with us in our everyday conduct. There are manifold relations that we are not even aware of exist; the 'relation of life' for instance, a stealth relation, a relation that we do not speak of, that we do not even sense perhaps, that exists between living beings as a consequence of simply being living beings, a form of relation that is beyond our reason and control. It is life relating to life. This relation is not confined to our feelings, empathy for the other for instance or sorts of relations as subjective selves that we produce and emanate, it is a far deeper connection that life, as an existential category, has and experiences beyond and beneath our everyday relations, beyond who we are and have become. Life at the most abstract level is connected and related to itself.

Furthermore, there are also forms of relations that are emanated from and produced by other selves. Even in our state of non-relation, a state where we cease or limit our relations or where our relations are disrupted and put to a stop, as difficult as this may be amidst the ocean of relations that envelop us, other selves and the world at large continue to emanate and produce

relations. It is no longer possible to limit our relations, and the relations that surround us. Our world has expanded beyond earth; our imaginations and ambitions and the relations they produce. Relations produced, relations emanated, existing relations, relations everywhere, the expanding world of relations, their indefinite forms, relations of relations, layers of relations: we are like fish in an ocean, the ocean of relations. That is how the relational existence of a self is. We swim in the ocean of relations. We are relations. We are also relations. These relations are an ocean into which we are born and amidst which we exist. We can no longer, therefore, view our world simply as composed of objects and events, or ourselves simply as certain independent beings moving, interacting, and remaining still.

Beside the questions of what relations a self has and in which forms those relations exist, there are also the issues of how we relate, what kind of mechanisms we have through which we manifest our relations and the question of how we get related, and so-on. These are some broad categories of course, so I will limit my discussions to few general observations. To begin with, when physical and biological relations are concerned, upon which our very own existence depends, and which are our very own existence, we can easily describe them as continuous and flowing relations that sustain our existence. In other words, these forms of relations are real, are concrete, are constant, are physical, and they are with us from our birth until our death. They do not exist as extensions to our corporality; they are neither separate nor separable. We can neither describe these as internal nor as external, as we simply exist through them and as them. In this sense then, human existence is existentially relational. On the other hand, there are other forms of relations, relations to others and to entities for instance, relations that we initiate, relations that we build, cut, regulate, shape, hide, and so-on. Such relations are best examined independently in relation to other relations and phenomena, if we wish to get a good sense of them and of how

they actualize, how they are temporalized and spatialized. We have to look at how and where we maintain and store such relations and for how long we keep such relations, how many times such relations become actual and real and then dissipate and then recur again, how often we emanate or produce such relations, and so-on. There is a very complex mechanism(s) we have when it comes to relations that are not constant (e.g. biological relations). When we encounter someone we know, for instance, the relations we have towards such someone, the judgements, the information, and the shared events and experiences that we have stored in our minds come to fore, they become present in such an encounter, regardless of whether they are emanated or produced. There are also those relations that emanate from us as human beings, from what constitute our being, such as the ability to recognize someone, this ability is there within us, a part of us, we carry it with us, and as soon as a need for such an ability arises, we immediately activate and trigger such ability by way of a relation. The ability to recognize, to relate to something or someone in a way wherein that something and someone are linked to past histories, a very temporal instance, is there at all times, in us as a potentiality, but it achieves a physicality, it becomes real, it can be observed, only when it becomes a relation, when it orients outwards and reaches something and someone and links them temporally to who and what is past. The past is present here. The person and the thing of the past are also in the present. Encountering someone, additionally, provides an opportunity for the self to accumulate further relations, transform previously existing relations, and so-on. So there is always a spatial – where and how a relation is located, and a temporal, how often and for how long – dimension to such manifested relations. These newly acquired relations are kept spatially, within us, and temporally, in the sense that an event, a story, or an experience is kept as it had occurred, relationally and temporally. What such dimensions of this particular relation and experience of ‘encountering’

reveal is that, although we are in a constant state of relating and in a constant state of absorbing relations, there is a limit to how many things we can think of simultaneously, how many voices we can hear, how far we can see and the extent to which our mind processes what our eyes see, how many people we can talk to, and so-on. With the exception of continuously flowing relations, a majority of the relations that we have in our everyday are produced and emanated when they are produced and emanated.

Lastly, an essential source and an important characteristic of these relations we have, perhaps all the relations we have, relations that make us, relations that we think are our own constructions and belong to us in their entirety, is their earthliness, their earth-full formation. What does the earthliness of relations mean? It means that a great majority of the relations we have are a consequence of living on earth, are extensions or mimics of the natural relations we find on earth, and are forms of relations that we produce and emanate in relation to what we encounter on earth. We owe so much to the surface of the earth, to its terrain, its water resources. In many ways then, our relations are earthly, are of an earthly character, they reflect the earth, are responses to what the earth offers, and so-on. As species, we may have traveled, a few of us physically and the rest mentally, beyond earth, but we remain bound to earth in terms of our relations. The relations we have are surface relations, surface of the earth. Not inside the earth, nor outside it; not beneath it nor beyond it; but the earth's surface, to which we belong, on which we wander, upon which we depend, in which we dwell, and beyond which we reach. The future advancements in technologies and scientific explorations, should impact, destabilize, and transform our existing earthly relations.

CHAPTER IV - Relatal Mechanics of Relations

Relations at their origins emanate from the cosmic fact of the coexistence of manifold existents. The togetherness and the multiplicity of existents is what primarily necessitate the existence of relations and leads to the development of relations. This is one way, a causal way, to read the development of relations. But relations are also in play, actively, in the coming together of these existents, of their very own development and emergence. What we have here then, is the difficulty of temporally and spatially locating relations as such. The reading of relations as such is perhaps best articulated in terms of them substituting one another, leading to one another, coexisting with one another; them playing an active role in the emergence, development, and existence of existents, of reality. As much as they are caused and cause, they also assist, sustain, ease, prevent causalities, exist aimlessly, and are free or unfree. They are not all consequence, aftereffect, and product of existents; relations can have independence and choice, they can predate existence. We often tend to think of reality, as per scientific logic, in terms of certain natural laws that regulate existence; but relations, at least some of their forms, are best freed from such regulatory and orderly logic as what we often call natural laws that can in themselves be considered and described as relations or as consequences of certain relations. Hence, unlike physical bodies such as the earth, the human body, and so on, whose behaviors can be made sense of and predicted based on certain recurring laws, relations may not always obey the laws of nature or of reason for that matter. Similarly, we cannot strictly think of relations as some phenomena that exist within the traditional boundaries that conventional coinage of 'space and time' signify, as both space and time, from a relational standpoint, are in themselves part of the gathering of existence as such, which exists by virtue of relations, and which also leads to the production and the emanation of relations. Yet if space is a relational phenomenon, of course not

in the Leibnizian sense, who perceives space “to be an order of coexistences”,¹¹⁷ but in the sense that it is both a relationality, a distinguishable physical phenomenon that can have a concrete existence and contain relations, and a relation in itself, meaning that it can relate, mediate, coexist, and so-on, then we should perhaps better imagine, theoretically at least, that space in itself may or may not have outward relations that it emanates or that link it to what may lie beyond its boundaries. However, since we cannot determine what lies beyond but also beneath space, therefore, it is safe to assume that relations cannot all together, at once, be determined and contained by space and spatial determinants and boundaries. Now that we have argued that we cannot think of and about relations within spatial and temporal confines, or within the confines of the categories of natural laws or the laws of reasoning, we can begin our presentation of the ways in which relations exist. It is near impossible to find, trace, and locate the exact coordinates and geometrics of each relation in the most precise and accurate manner (in other words, what follows is an incomplete treatment of the relational existence of relations), but that should not stop us from examining the fundamental mechanics of relations and speaking of the relational mechanics of relations. By “relatal mechanics” I mean the relational mechanics and dynamics of the behaviors of relations, their motion and movement, their encounters and interactions, their inner workings, the ways in which they may coalesce and merge, their physical and morphological dimensions, their inventiveness and causality, their effects and abilities to enable other phenomena to relate, and so-on. The mechanics of relations is that they are relatal, they are in a state of continuous relations, and should be understood in terms of their subjective relations and the expanse of relations they find themselves in.

My goal in this chapter is to examine the relatal mechanics of relations in terms of a) *the existence of relations in and within relations*; b) *the relations of relations*; c) *the layers of*

relations; d) *the encounter of relations*; e) *relations to relations*; f) and finally the phenomenon of *relations with relations*.

Relations in relations

The notion of *in* as in “water is in a cup” as a spatial category is a common form of perception, a ground for perceiving, and is one of the fundamental categories through which we relate to existence. Such perception perceives existence not as that which consists of the coexistence of manifold existents but as that which consists of space and time within which other existents exist. For instance, in our everyday we assume that there are internal relations inside a totality, think that relationalities of all sorts exist in time and space, that the ‘in’ category is a dimension of cosmic existence rather than a consequence of our earthly existence, and construct our languages and conduct our activities based on extensive references to the notion of ‘in’. However, in the context of relations, the notion of ‘in’, despite its linguistic lineages, has a slightly wider function and signifies different meanings, in the sense that the in-ness of relations does not always entail that some relations exist inside certain relations spatially. Thus, the phrase ‘relations in relations’ is not the traditional ‘internal relations’, as ‘relations in relations’ does not necessarily and only cover relations that constitute a relation per se, they also encompass relations that are simply out there in manifold ways, even if they have no relations towards each other. The conventional wisdom operates on the assumption that the in-ness of something generally implies that because A is larger, bigger, wider, or has more capabilities, than B, A, therefore, surrounds, covers, holds, etc., B. But when it comes to relations vis-à-vis other relations, the in-ness of relations, things are more convoluted. To begin with, most existing relations consist of manifold relations. The being of relations is such that they abhor loneliness,

isolation, and singularity, as they tend to exist in multiples and as multiplicities. The most obvious, accessible, and immediately perceivable relation in a given relation is a distinct-relation, a dominant and obvious relation that generally designates and constitutes what is being perceived. The relation of power, for instance, has a distinct feature, distinct relation within itself, that differentiates it from other relations and phenomena, and gives ‘power’ its distinctive and distinguishing identity. Thus, power, which is a relation, has manifold relations within itself. In it, though, of all the relations that constitute such a relation of power, there is a distinct-relation, which we call power, which gives ‘power’ its name. In many ways then what we call ‘identity’ is just a dominant relation, thing, in a given thing and relation. Identity and distinct-relation are not that distinct. Within itself, this distinct-relation may or may not contain manifold other relations beside itself, and may or may not be joined by or merged with manifold other relations. In the relation of power, for instance, we may find and encounter relations of desire, will, influence domination, ego, hatred, pleasure, the good and the bad, and so-on. All these diverse relations exist alongside of and within the distinct-relation. Now, if we revisit Visano’s fourfold categories which I alluded to in the first chapter, namely the categories of ideas, identities, ideologies, and institutions, we will find a certain truth to them and in them and find them in manifold relations and relationalities that exist in the social world, but the reach of these categories and what they contain is not widespread enough to encompass and to exist along with every social distinct-relation, and certainly not with every non-social relation. Similarly, Derrida may see in the concept of *différance* “differing and deferring” and “other phenomena”,¹¹⁸ essentially a multitude in one, but it would be a mistake to assume that the phenomenon of *différance* exists along with every other relation and relationality. Its prevalence is more of a matter of human perception not of reality itself.

This phenomenon of 'relations in relations' should not be confined to human relations, to what is human, and to what is of human. It has wider implications including for the ways in which reality exists. I mean two things by this statement: first, in the relations that we find and witness in the world of existence, relations that are neither related to human existence nor an extension of such existence, there exist relations that coexist alongside of the distinct-relation, after which a relation is often named. The bond between two objects, therefore, is more than just the 'bond', which is a distinct-relation of the relation of 'bonding', there are relations that are involved in the making and in the preservation of the relation of the 'bonding' that occurs as two objects come together and conjoin. Second, cosmic phenomena such as space, particles, gravity, light, time, and so-on, all have a potentiality to exist within one another, to exist in what is human, in human relations, both as relationality and as a relation. Time, for instance, exists in all that exists. Almost every distinct-relation has a time relation embedded in it, attached to it, and so-on. But what sorts of relations exist in time, or in space, or in gravity, phenomena that are often considered to exist as singular and homogenous block of existents? These phenomena may exist in one another, alongside one another, have certain properties of all sorts, but what other relations could possibly exist in them? The thing about cosmically prevalent phenomena such as these is that they are not some distant existents. They are immanent to human existence and to all that exists. Their seeming immateriality, their continuous presence in almost every relation and relationality, and the entity-relations we have towards reality and what constitutes it on the one hand, makes it difficult for the human mind to grasp them as there is no particular point of differentiation in their existence, and on the other, they are so given and familiar in our relations that we have to virtually ignore their presence and existence in our relations, as each attempt of grasping them always already involves the presence of time and space and gravity. One may find

certain similarities between this second point, the fact that phenomena of space and time, etc., exist within the relations we have, and Kant's interpretation of space and time as forms of intuitions.¹¹⁹ For Kant though space and time are forms of inner and outer intuitions existing as a priori, which is true to an extent. The relations we have though, a majority of them at least, contain space, gravity, time, etc. as relations within themselves. When one kisses someone, the act and relation of 'kissing' already contains time, space, and gravity.

Furthermore, 'relations in relations' does not mean that every relation contains all existing relations. If that was the case, we would not have at our disposal the indefiniteness and the manifoldness of relations, as the entirety of existence would have been a colossal singular totality, lacking differences, relations, etc., which is not how reality exists or presents itself. The general picture of relations I have been developing here is that almost every relation consists of certain relations alongside of its distinct-relation. To be sure, such multiplicity of relations in a single relation is not altogether unknown or foreign to our languages. Words such as brain, help, human being, state, galaxy, philosophy, solar system, and so-on, are assumed to contain entities, parts and wholes, and in certain cases relations. Such encompassing and general words and concepts along with words that signify narrower and singular phenomena and relations, however, tend to be used in complete and totalizing ways while ignoring most relations that are involved in the development and construction of such words and concepts, and of such realities. So a rock is a rock, reading is reading, buying is buying, and so-on; beside certain images that appear in our minds when we use such words, these words do not necessarily and immediately point to relations, they point to entities and totalities which may or may not have relations. From a relational point of view, when we examine the relational mechanics of reading, for instance, we see that the relation of reading consists of a distinct-relation, which is reading – a relation that

distinguishes itself from writing, eating, looking, moving, etc.– and manifold other relations that we are aware or unaware of. This distinct-relation of reading within itself may involve the gathering of some knowledge into oneself or experiencing a joyful moment beyond oneself, and so-on. Nelson Mandela captures this complex reality of what appears as a singularity, but which consists of a multitude of relations and experiences, when he reflects on his very own being as a political being: “I had no epiphany, no singular revelation, no moment of truth, but a steady accumulation of a thousand slights, a thousand indignities, a thousand unremembered moments, produced in me an anger, a rebelliousness, a desire to fight the system that imprisoned my people. There was no particular day on which I said, From henceforth I will devote myself to the liberation of my people; instead, I simply found myself doing so, and could not do otherwise.”¹²⁰ Not a singular spontaneous instance where there is a big bang of relations, but a gradual accumulation of all sorts of relations that generated all sorts of other relations.

A crucial yet elementary question here is why do relations tend to contain manifold relations rather than existing or remaining as distinct and singular phenomena, and a larger question is why do we so often ignore, at least in our languages, the relations that exist in relations. First, the most obvious answer is, this is what we find ourselves in. Existence is such that it allows the coming together of relations, many relations, the coexistence of relations, the displacement or the eradication of relations, the absorption or the merger of relations. Such is existence; as there is an indefiniteness to relations there is also an indefiniteness to the relational states of relations.

Second, relations often precede languages and namings, which is an advantage for languages. A language, however, more than often only names what is perceived first, what dominates and overwhelms the human senses with its presence, and what it can access. In

addition, the common culture of using a single word, composed of a few characters, to identify and name what appears to be a single phenomenon and relation, also contributes to this common exercise of overlooking the manifoldness of relations. A word is over ambitious as it envelops many. In some philosophers we even encounter a character, a single character, enveloping manifold phenomena and relations; think of Heidegger's *B*, Lacan's *a*, Derrida's *a*. Such singular words and characters, so much is stored in them, and so much is lost and ignored in them, by them.

Third, we are not always conscious of the manifoldness of relations when we are relating, which is perhaps due to our existential limitations. For instance, the relation of 'awareness' as a relation, which in itself contains manifold other relations, is often oriented towards a specific phenomenon or relation, which is why this human capability is identified as awareness, it can only be aware of something, a few things, at a time. But as awareness is guided towards a relation and a phenomenon, it becomes aware of them, it brings them closer, it captures what was intended to be captured, but as it captures it also boxes, confines, cuts off relations.

Fourth, each relation contains both controlled and uncontrolled forms of relations; the distinct-relation of each relation which is often the named or the intended and the willed relation may accompany other relations that are in harmony with it and support it, but it may also contain relations that are beyond its control, as the environment may necessitate the distinct-relation to coexist with other relations. Fifth, at its inception, each relation becomes real, comes to fruition out of the gathering of manifold other relations. As each relation develops and becomes a distinct-relation, it develops its own distinct identity, already always contains the traces of prior relations from which it is emanated, or in certain instances it carries the exact relations that preceded such relation. Sixth, in each relation we may also encounter intrusive-relations, forms

of relations that intrude and disrupt the flow of the distinct-relation and other relations that accompany it. It is due to this intrusive-relation that no known relation, particularly human relations, can exist with perfect symmetry, balance and harmony. The origin of intrusive-relation could be anything, emanate from any source, or originate from any time frame; a mere memory could emerge from the depths of our brain for no particular reason and disrupt our everyday relations. Lastly, the effects of the relations existing in a relation on that relation can vary. Of course there is no concrete way, no barometer or thermometer, to measure such effects as what happens in a relation can be fluid, chaotic, and boundless. For instance, the presence of ego or of pleasure in the relation of power can impact the ways in which this relation of power actualizes. Manifold factors, including subjective and environmental conditions, can determine the degrees to which the relations that exist in a relation impact such a relation.

In essence, all these observations and annotations point to the direction of the complexity of a given relation, of the content and the mass of a relation, of the ways in which certain relations exist in a relation, and of the fact that certain relations may coalesce with a distinct-relation of a given relation, but this does not indicate the complete existence and coalescing of these relations with the distinct-relation. In other words, relations exist in relations but not every relation in a relation can be present completely and utterly. As such, a distinct-relation of a relation may coexist alongside of another distinct-relation of a relation, but the presence of the first can be limited to the background of the latter, existing beyond the veil; yet such a coexistence does not always translate into the merger of two distinct relations hence become a single relation. In such a co-present situation, there is the coexistence of two separate and distinct relations, which illustrates that the presence of a multitude of relations in a given field or event should not always lead to the conclusion that all that coexists in an event or field is related.

Relations of relations

The condition of 'Relations of relations' does not refer to the relational reality I alluded to in the previous section, where relations that constitute relations, essentially or inessentially, consist of distinct-relations and manifold other relations. Rather, the 'relations of relations' refers to those forms of relations that have as a whole or in part relations of their own. The question of why relations should or could have relations of their own is a redundant and unnecessary question, as existence presents itself as together and intertwined. Yet I should nevertheless touch on two important aspects of this reality, aspects that permit and play a role in the actualization of the condition of relations having their own relations. The first is space. Space, a relationality which permits relations to relate, become a reality, and have other relations, has two distinct qualities: its seeming immateriality, fluidity, and flexibility generates and allows relations to relate and unrelate, be related and be unrelated. As such, relations of all sorts have relations and can have relations simply because of how space exists and what it permits to actualize. Had space had a different constitution and formation than what it presently has, we would have in all likelihood be examining relations differently, as they would have actualized in different forms. The other distinctive quality of space is that space, due to its vastness and seeming immaterial existence perhaps, surrounds and envelops relations in manifold ways insofar relations remain within space and with space, as space itself becomes a relation. Since knowledge concerning the constitution of space remains limited¹²¹ it is thus difficult to predict whether the ways in which space exists and how it envelops relations has any direct or indirect effects on the constitution of relations and on how relations tend to exist. Everyday wisdom dictates that space is something that is simply there, existing indifferently to what occurs in its midst. Things float and swim in and through it. Is space really such an indifferent being though? Can it not have pressure on what

exists in its midst; can it not limit the extent and the forms of what exists, be it an object or a relation, to actualize?

The second aspect of reality is that relations exist and can exist in proximity with one another. In this sense, space is not preventive, it permits things and relations to be how they are and where to be; but space is also invasive, it desires to be present everywhere, in everything, within itself. The phenomenon of proximity is essential for both the actualization of relations and for relations to have relations. Sure, there are human relations, longing or missing for instance, that are capable of overcoming the boundaries of space and of proximities as they are emanated, but the majority of relations that actualize and have relations of their own can actualize and have relations as a consequence of proximity. By proximity I do not simply mean spatial proximities but proximities of all sorts, such as the proximities of resemblances, similarities, attractions, and so-on. Spatial proximity, however, does indeed play a fundamental role in the modes and types of relations that relations have and can have in relation to relations and relationalities that surround them. As significant as spatial proximity may be to the reality of relations, it does not mean that (a) all relations relate to one another when they exist in spatial proximity to one another (b) that the relations that have relations in a spatial field will have identical relationships in a different spatial field of proximities, as each proximity consists of different relations and relationalities (c) and that not being in spatial proximity prevents certain relations from actualizing, as certain relationalities may have relationships even if they were not in close proximity to one another.

The relational mechanics of the relations of relations will have to begin by inquiring into the very phenomenon of the relational capacity of relations to have relations. Not every relation has a relationship with every relation and relationality that surrounds it. The earth's atmosphere, for

instance, exists amidst space (although it is composed of space and other entities, its boundaries have limits within the expanse of space), and consists of particles, molecules, and so-on, but the coexistence of manifold existents does not mean that every particle relates to every other particle that exists in its proximity; existence is such that every particle relates to something and not necessarily to everything. However, we should not imagine a relation, based on these analyses and on the phrase ‘relations of relations’, to exist in the image of an octopus: a center, a body that has tentacles stretching out and reaching to things that the core cannot. A relation is not an octopus. A relation, if we are to draw its image, can resemble all the images that a mind can produce. A certain relation could be imagined as a mountain, while another as an ant, another as a bright light, and another as an octopus. In this regard Deleuze and Guattari’s description of signs as: “All signs are signs of signs. The question is not yet what a given sign signifies but to which other signs it refers, or which signs add themselves to it to form a network without beginning or end that projects its shadow onto an amorphous atmospheric continuum”¹²² is not an accurate picture of signs, endlessly relating in a continuum, as certain signs may exist in an endless referring but others may not. To get back to our initial point, to the relation-ability of relations: the most important feature of this form of relationship is that each relation has the capacity to relate and to be unrelated, just like any given object and being, which also has an inner capacity to relate and unrelated. The degrees and forms of such relational-abilities are of course relative and subjective determined by existing relations and relative capacities. Imagining the existence of relations in such a manner should not be difficult, as we have already freed relations from its traditional conceptions which perceived relations as phenomena that exist between two or more things and beings, or as extensions of beings. Relations should not be confined to a spatial category of in-betweenness. When we think of relations of relations here,

we are not talking about a relation that exists between two poles. Two poles, two phenomena, that envelop relations may or may not exist for a relation. Relations can relate and unrelate. The form of such a relationship can be determined by indeterminate possibilities and phenomena, and by whatever phenomena or relations that a relation may find in its surrounding can determine the form of such relationism. For instance, when we are speaking to someone, consider ‘speaking’ a relation that consists of manifold relations, we are assuming that someone is listening; ‘listening’ here becomes a relation of relation in certain regards. But if we are speaking to ourselves, which we often do in the absence of another, we assume that no one is listening to our conservations with ourselves; in this instance, the ‘absence of listening’ becomes a relation of a relation in certain regards.

Although we should under no circumstances perceive relations and the condition of the relations of relations solely from a functional or teleological standpoint – for not every relation has a purpose and not every relation has a cause – the condition of relations of relations can nevertheless serve manifold purposes. One of the purposes that these relations of relations may have or serve is that they maintain the relationality of such a relation. They maintain the wholeness of the distinct-relation of a relation or complete such distinct-relation. Thus, for this distinct-relation to remain in existence it must preserve its existential relation with such relations. If one of these relations of a distinct-relation were to fail or were to disappear, the distinct-relation would transform itself, would become something that it was not. The essential point here, is that relations of relations can have manifold functions, they can support a relation, they maintain a relation, and they can constitute a relation; in all these cases these forms of relations are essential to the reality of a relation. What this complex reality of relations reveals is that the mechanics of relations and the ways in which they exist and manifest themselves can be

extremely convoluted; they are not as clear and as distinct as the world of objects appears to our senses. And it is due to their convolutedness, complexity, and stealthy nature, that they so often evade our senses and minds.

That said, and as much as one wants to stay clear of the practice of categorizing relations as I believe their categorizations disturb and disrupt the world of relations and in fact in most instances they inaccurately draw lines and boundaries around them which is contrary to the will and logic of relations as they, in essence, are what transcend boundaries and lines, it is still nonetheless possible, for the sake of clarity and ease, to think of many forms of relations having different forms of relations with relations that they are related. For example, we can think of the existence of continuous-relations, relations that exist in a continuous flow such as the majority of the natural and physical relations and like those of the biological and physiological relations that we as human beings have to sustain our existence. These forms of relations, in their continuity, unless an intrusive-relation disrupts such continuum, maintain their relations indefinitely while also continuously relating towards relations and phenomena that come in close proximity to them. We can also think of relations that recur, that appear and disappear, which have more complicated relations with their relations. Each recurring relation is accompanied by its own specific relations, as it is these extended relations, these relations of relations, that make such a relation what it is. This conception of relations existing as multiples leads us to another form of multiplicity in relations, namely the layers they contain, which I will discuss next.

Layerity of and in relations

The condition of layerity is a prevalent structure within which relations express their existence across social reality and existence at large. It actualizes at various levels, such as in the

layering of the distinct-relation, of the relation itself, in materializing above and below the relation, alongside of the relation, complementing the relation, enhancing the relation, constituting the relation, weakening or strengthening the relation, and so-on. In short, layerity is and can become an actuality in the constitution of relations and in the ways in which relations manifest themselves. Layerity may be layered externally or may be layered organically by itself and for itself. We should be careful not to think of this phenomenon of layering as a supplement, addition, or an excess to relations, as it is an existential characteristic of relations, in the sense that they layer relations or are in themselves layered. It is beyond my capabilities, and I do not think it is even possible if one were to attempt it, to prove a statement such as “all relations contain layers”, but it is nevertheless safe to suggest that a majority of relations have layers, particularly human relations. By accepting this proposition of the layerity of relations we are as a consequence suggesting that we can never truly seek or find a pure relation, a singular relation that is independent of all there is, that lacks relations of itself and in itself. Even light in a vacuum cannot be perceived as a pure relation, pure phenomenon, as it is always already in relation to space, which allows light to travel through itself at a constant rate in relation to itself for reasons that are dependent on the existing relations between space and light.

There are, of course, many ways to make sense of this condition of layerity in relations. I should touch on a few here, especially in relation to the layers of human relations. Our initial encounter with relations is best described in terms of our recognition of relations existing in multiplicities. It is not inconceivable then to draw from such an initial understanding that the sheer multiplicity of human relations allows and should allow layers to materialize in relations, and that this indefinite multiplicity, due to spatial considerations or otherwise, should pressure relations to form layers when they manifest themselves. Secondly, temporality plays key roles in

the coming together of many relations; our temporal life does not have an infinite time and capacity to relate in/and through singular relations at a slow pace, we can only relate so much during the timespan given to us. Thirdly, human relations do not cease to multiply, mutate, increase, and so-on. This increase and expansion – which in many respects can be perceived as a positive development as it increases human complexity and advances human mental and physical capabilities but in certain regards could also be perceived as a negative development in the sense that it reduces simplicity, purity, and predictability – forces relational beings such as ourselves to adjust to changes and develop mechanisms, such as layerity and organization and ordering, and so-on, in our relations of all sorts. In a restaurant scene in *The Godfather*, Sollozzo, after attempting to assassinate the godfather Vito Corleone, tells Michael: “I am sorry. What happened to your father was business. I have much respect for your father. But your father, his thinking is old-fashioned. You must understand why I had to do that. Now let’s work through where we go from here.” The assassination attempt in this scene of tense relations is not considered a personal act, an act of hatred, by Sollozzo, rather, it is a business act, a transaction, a painful one nonetheless. For Michael though, the act was very personal, he avenges his father. A singular event is layered by perceptions, reflections, responses, or their lack thereof.

This condition of layerity or layering can also be found and detected in manifold other human relations. Although some of these layers in relations are easily perceived and experienced, others can be hidden and veiled from our reach and from the talons of our senses. In *The Art of War* Sun Tzu teaches us the following: “A military operation involves deception. Even though you are competent, appear to be incompetent. Though effective, appear to be ineffective.”¹²³ Commentator Wang Xi expands this relation of deception further: “When strong, appear weak. Orderly, appear chaotic. Full, appear empty. Wise, appear foolish, Many, appear

few. Advancing, appear to retreat. Moving quickly, appear to be slow. Taking, appear to leave. In one place, appear to be in another.”¹²⁴ What these strategies and teachings demand is for relations to be layered and they reveal that there can be manifold layers of relations in each relational activity. There is the relationality of war composed of indefinite relations, which already exists in the background and envelops all relations actualized during it, the relation of advancing but appearing to retreat (double relation), relation of deception, and manifold other layered relations that actualize in each of these relations. Although Tzu and Xi picture these relations as the actualization of two opposite relations, full and empty, etc., hence curtailing the potentiality of these relations, the layering of relations is not limited to the negative of a relation, to its other, its opposite; which is to say, relations can be layered in manifold ways with multiple relations, and so-on. For instance, in modern warfare relations such as deception are further layered as, on the one hand, each soldier is already trained in the art of deception, which does not only necessitate the multiplication of relational strategies of how to deceive, as there is no longer this or that way (double relation), but manifold ways, each consisting of manifold relations, beyond two singular opposite relations. And on the other, the complexity of the opponent’s strategies in countering such deceptions further layers the relations of deception.

Not all layered human relations can easily be detected as the relation of deception. Relations of deception are often countered by anti-deception relations, which are meant to unmask deception, and as the relation of deception is already known to contain layers of relations, to deceive one must reveal and must also hide. Additionally, not all relations exist as localized and purposeful phenomena, essentially existing to serve a single purpose or to accompany a certain other relation. Relations such as self-interest, for instance, a prevalent-relation that can be found in a multitude of human relations, or attitudes such as cynicism for

instance, can exist as layers to manifold relations. Relations such as these are not local; they cannot be confined to a singular relation, environment, or timeframe. A self who sees the world through the prisms of self-interest, and makes self-interest their lifelong guiding principle of action, for example, layers a majority of their relations towards other selves and the surrounding world with the relation of self-interest, which determines the end goal and the certainty of a given relation, as all relations are guided to serve a purpose, to serve and enrich the self. And let us not forget that along with self-interest there are manifold other relations that layer such self-interested relations. Layers within relations, layers within layers, layers over layers, layers around layers, and layerings and mis-layerings.

The layers of the field of relations and the relationships of these layers are enormously fluid and blurry. They can take manifold shapes, forms, etc. So, the ways in which these layers actualize, relate and interrelate in relations do not, in any way or form, resemble the layers of a cake, where each layer is distinguishable from other layers. We may have power and influence in shaping and regulating certain behaviors, like drinking tea or walking, or certain events, through certain procedures and regulations, and through the gathering of many relations, yet we have very limited power over the content and the layers of relations. This layerity in relations can be linear and/or non-linear, circular and/or non-circular, orderly and/or chaotic, and complex and/or simple and singular, and so-on. The relations these layers have towards one another is even more indeterminable, they may complement one another and/or contradict one another.

Lastly, and this point is more oriented towards subjective relations and the ways in which one attempts to layer one's everyday relations, when we imagine the layers of relations it is possible, at least in relation to how a self relates towards the relations they emanate and produce, to think of them in two ways: the layering of a single relation (we should not confuse this

condition with the condition of layers that already exist in a single relation, layers only through which this single relation can actualize after all). An example is when a self attaches the relation of self-interest to the relation of helping, a relation that already contains manifold other relations and layers over which this self has minimal power. The second way, which I think is quite easily recognizable and observable and of which we are more conscious, is when we layer our overall relations with someone or something, or when an object relates to some other object in some ways but differently in other ways. To illustrate this point, if we were to look into our everyday relations, say relations with a close relative or a close friend, we tend to layer and compartmentalize our relations with both the relative and the friend. We limit certain relations, we open up about certain issues and relations yet remain silent in relation to many other issues and relations, we do or do not develop certain relations, we act normally when it comes to certain relations but act differently when it comes to certain other relations, and so-on.

Encounter of relations

I should begin my analyses of the phenomenon of ‘encounter’ in relation to relations with a distinction. There is the encounter of relationalities and there is the encounter of relations. These two encounters are the same and different in manifold ways. In the encounter of relationalities, beings, objects, etc., we encounter the presence of indefinite relations, where manifold relations encounter. This encounter, from a relational standpoint, cannot be described as the encounter of two but as the encounter of indefinite manifold. When two human beings or two objects encounter, our minds tend to abstract and perceive the most apparent relations in such an encounter. Two human beings are looking at one another, talking with one another, the voice, the laughter, the banality. Two entities gravitating towards one another; two

entities are colliding with one another. If we were to look closer, however, we would see manifold relations occurring and actualizing, being produced and emanated, during such an encounter. A majority of relations in such encounters go unnoticed by our minds as our minds are so often at the mercy of our senses, which are often oriented towards what is obvious, what is sensible, what is unveiled, what can be sensed by multiple sense organs, and so-on. Our interest thus in this section is not so much about the encounter of objects and beings but about the encounter of relations as such and about the encounter of relations during the encounter of beings and objects.

The concept of 'encounter' should not be taken in the traditional Latin sense of the word, which signifies 'the meeting of adversaries', but in the everyday sense of the concept, which indicates all forms of encounters, and encompasses all points at which one comes across one another, one meets another, one stumbles upon another, one comes close to another, the points of encounters that may result in manifold relations or no relations at all, and all the real, imaginary, and virtual encounters. In other words, the 'encounter' is what refers to what is eventful and non-eventful. As always there are exceptions to the rule, that not all relations are encountered and countered by other relations. This exception has profound implications for human relations in particular, and to a lesser extent for non-human relations. What I mean by this statement is that relations that relationalities emanate, particularly human beings, expand into an abyss, the abyss and the vastness of space and existence, without any meaningful encounter with other relations. Such relations, and they constitute a vast number of relations at large, simply dissipate and disappear, like our sun shining light, where some photons travel to earth and are absorbed by trees, whereas other photons simply travel into the abyss of existence, into the expanse of space. In everyday human existence, selves produce and emanate indefinite relations, while some

expand beyond our bodies oriented outwardly, some others do not; while some are oriented towards entities or beings, some are oriented towards our own selves. But selves also produce and emanate relations in manifold forms and kinds that are not oriented towards any particular object or being; they are not produced and emanated for any particular purpose, they do not have any function, we produce them voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously, we are, simply put, in a constant state of production and emanation. This existential form of relations is not any significantly different in existence at large, like in our relational reality phenomena produce and emanate manifold relations some of which are encountered by other relations and relationalities while others are not. What this fact about relations reveals is that relations do not always serve a function or purpose, they do not always have an effect, they are not always caused or triggered by something, as they at times can simply appear and disappear for no particular reason, or they can simply relate or remain unrelated.

Now that I have clarified a few points I should begin examining the relational structure and the mechanisms of countering relations particularly in relation to human existence. Let us begin with a few questions: Is it possible to speak of the encounter of human relations, relations encountering other relations? And if they do, then where and how do human relations meet, what forms do such encounters take? In relation to certain relations, their encounter takes place inside the body, inside the mind. Someone's speech and utterance, for instance, is encountered by hearing and seeing (hearing waits while seeing is ever so invasive and mobile as it gathers), processes, faculties, that are located inside the body but are outwardly oriented. This form of encounter does not occur in a middle point, spatially speaking, somewhere between interacting individuals, somewhere in the open where it may be observed and sensed by other selves. Conversely, it occurs in the body, to the body. What is outside touches the outside and then

reaches the inside, where the encounter occurs. This condition perhaps is one of the sources of human subjectivity, of subjective attitudes, responses, relations, and so-on; it is perhaps this existential condition that allows multiplicities of actions, reactions, and relations, as the circumstances, situations, and histories of each self are what determine how to counter a relation once a relation reaches in and invades the body, the sense, and the mind. These forms of social relations, these encountered relations that seem to be common, that seem to be out there in the open for all to see, that seem to be co-experienced, like conversing for instance, tend to occur in a back and forth manner. In conversing one talks while the other listens then the listener talks and the first person listens. The encounter of relations here is interior in many regards.

The encounter of relations may also actualize outside the body, on its surface, or away from it. This is primarily true for certain externalized relations and extant-relations, relations that are sustained over long periods of time in the social and transcend the subjectivity of the selves. The point of the encounter of such relations is completely relative, and the forms of such encounters can be manifold. If we were to look into the relation of power, and look at how it actualizes, how it overpowers other relations, how it is countered and encountered by manifold relations, be it obedience, disregard, or indifference, we will see that the relation of power is not a singular relation but a manifold relation that actualizes in the form of encountering many forms of other relations. Or if we were to look into existence and see the relation of force, and see how it presents its self, we would find that force is a common name for countering a relation.

One may deduce from what I have said on the question of the encounter of relations and under what conditions it occurs, that the human mind and natural laws are two primary mechanisms that regulate the interaction of relations, the encounter of relations. At the surface, and at an initial glance, the mind appears to monopolize relational activities, receive and analyze

what is being sensed, and develop counter relations as a way of responding to relations. Similarly, in existence we find that relations obey the force of natural laws which appear to determine the location and the types of relational encounters and monopolize the activities of relations. This deduction is only partially true, a deduction which in itself is the product of a deducing mind as the mind tends to sense and recognize repetitive patterns and recurrences. Relations and their interactions and encounters are more complicated than that. It is true that the mind is present in manifold human relations, not just because of its desire to control, but also because the self allows the mind to oversee manifold relations as it often entrusts its survival to the mind. In a similar vein, natural laws tend to regularize and regulate the encounter and the interactions of certain relations, in the event of a gravitational encounter, for instance, the larger mass overtakes the smaller mass, and it overpowers and incorporates the relations of the smaller mass as natural laws dictate. Neither mind nor natural laws, however, have full monopoly over relational activities, relational encounters, the location of such encounters, or the consequences of such encounters. For instance, Badiou tells us that “Evil is possible only through an encounter with the Good”,¹²⁵ this encounter can neither be confined to the mind nor to natural laws. Their range of influence over relations is limited to what actualizes repetitively, to causalities and intentionalities, from which we infer the roles of the mind and natural laws. In the end, both, as realities and potentialities, actualize or are constantly present as a result of the gathering of relations and the encounter of relations. A mind always encounters and is encountered, and a natural law is a law as a consequence of certain encounters.

Since we are examining the condition of the encounter and the interaction of relations, we must also look at the phenomena of causal-relations, their place in the realm of relations as such and their connections and roles with and in the encounter of relations. One cannot deny the

importance of the phenomena of cause and effect to our everyday interactions, our understandings of our own selves and the world that surrounds us, and to our scientific and philosophic inquiries. It is thus largely inaccurate and incomplete to see causation in terms of “custom” and “habit” as Hume does.¹²⁶ This phenomenon, which consists of cause and effect, two realities, and which should be perceived both as an extant-relation and as a prevalent-relation to a great degree determines how we think about a happening of an event. It is not that by way of habit we see cause and effect, it is the reality of cause and effect that causes us to develop such a habit in the first place, the mimicry of nature. The relation of cause and effect, and the habitual desire to search for such a relation, is triggered when something happens, something moves, something changes, something assimilates, etc. A medical doctor, for instance, searches for a cause of an illness when there is an illness; a criminologist looks for the causes of deviant behaviors when there is deviance; a depressed individual searches for the causes of their depression, and so-on. Somebody dies, someone had an accident, and it is raining in winter. What these relational moments reveal is that when nothing happens we often tend to not think in terms of cause and effect. There is then an essential connection between change and what ‘causes’ us to think in terms of causalities and effects. Put in another way, when something happens as a consequence of something, this happening in itself becomes a cause for our thinking, which in turn inquires into that happening. A chain of changes and a chain of causes and effects. But do all things happen because of something, because something caused such something? This is an essential question, more significant than how we think in terms of causalities. In my relational view, causal-relation should be perceived as an important human invention and discovery which helps us understand and make sense of the manifold relations and relationalities; and we should see it as something that blinds us, due to its over-presence in our

everyday or otherwise relations, from the complex and the manifold ways relations encounter and interact with one another. When two objects or beings encounter, many relations actualize and encounter in such an encounter. Of the indefinite encountering and interacting relations only a few of them can cause the chain of ‘cause and effect’ to materialize and hence produce causal-relations. Thus, when we say that “human aggression, nature, causes war”, we are selecting a single relation, which may or may not even exist, to be the cause of a social phenomenon, of a condition of human existence, while ignoring manifold other relations that are active in the making and the sustenance of such conditions and phenomenon. We can neither reduce war to such a singular causal-relation nor can we ignore the role that human biology plays in the making of wars. Second, changes, activities, events, and so-on can be a result of accumulated relations. Thus, what appears to us, in an event, as an encounter of two specific relations, where one causes something in the other (and this is assuming that there is a cause), may very well be the tipping point for something to happen, or a missing link that was needed to complete what is happening, what has just occurred. Third, since most of what exists, be it a relation, an object, etc., is already coexisting, it should not be too otherworldly if something simply happens, if relations just encounter, if something changes by virtue of itself without any specific cause.

Relations to relations

The relational mechanics of relations *to* relations. The *to* has manifold implications but for our purposes here it indicates the following: first, the outward orientation of a relation towards a relation or phenomenon. Relations orient and are oriented in manifold ways towards manifold relations and phenomena. It should make sense then, to consider such an orientation towards something, which may be spatial or non-spatial depending on the relation at hand, a form of

relation in itself, which is to say that the state of ‘relating to’ is a relation which accompanies other relations as these relations relate. We should think of this relation of towardness of relations as such independent of the notions of intention and consciousness, as not every oriented relation towards something is an intended or a conscious relation. The constitution of the notion of *to* constitutes, in its very essence, a sense of direction, an orientation, a form of motion, and so-on. The *to* of relations in many regards is one of the most common and definitive relational quality of relations as such, regardless of what form such relations are.

Relations, a great deal of them at least, cannot exist or be imagined without the notion of *to*, without a direction or an orientation towards something or towards nothing. The *to* of sight, for instance, is its orientation towards what can be seen and what is seen, and the *to* of narration includes manifold temporal, spatial, eventful orientations. So when Marx says “Thus we see that machinery, while augmenting the human material that forms capital’s most characteristic field of exploitation, at the same time raises the degree of that exploitation. Machinery also revolutionizes... the contract between the worker and the capitalist”,¹²⁷ he makes the point that the machinery, the object, the material, by virtue of its relations, leads to the development of relations such as augmentation, exploitation, transformation, etc. In the technological era, however, this materiality by becoming “immaterial” and thus “virtual”, according to Žižek,¹²⁸ produces different forms of relations and realities. In essence what we have here is: relations leading to other relations, relations developing other relations, and so-on. The *to* of relations does not always serve a purpose or logic, a teleology or function, it should rather be perceived as one of the constituents of a given relation, a property of a relation. A relation that actualizes in the form of *to* is its *to*-ness. Such a relation cannot actualize until it initiates such *to*-ness, which transforms a happening into a relation, which is a happening in itself. Without the *to* and before a

relation becomes a relation, what exists is a mere presence of that which is neither purely something nor nothing, it is neither pure existence nor a pure non-existence, neither a pure *sui generis* nor otherwise. This pre-*to* state of a relation, when a relation is not yet a relation, let us assume for a moment that such a state exists, and if we were to temporalize such a presence which is not yet present, is embedded in phenomena, in beings, and in relations. To be able to relate is a capacity which manifests itself as a relation, regardless of whether or not we are conscious or not of such an embedded relational potentiality.

Second, there are two considerations for the movement of *to* in a relation that need to be noted: one is that a relation orients itself towards a relation or a phenomenon but it does not engage with or relate to what it is orienting towards, in a way, the *to* of a relation, hence the relation itself, comes to a stop before interacting with other relations and phenomena. There are manifold motives and explanations for the end and cessation of a relation; it could be because this relation has reached its desired destination, it could be that other relations and relationalities cease its movement. Whatever the sources and causes, the tracing and the locating of which in themselves are endless endeavors, some forms of relations are not continuous indefinitely and are not always causal or serve some utility. These forms of relations simply stop, they can be stopped. Even intense relations such as the desire for revenge, if desired and willed can be stopped. This point of and about relations, the point that certain relations can be stopped and ended before their articulated destiny is reached, illustrates a different dimension of the way in which human relations exist. A great majority of them have some sort of an on and off switch, including our most tangible and dominant relations, including the relations we have towards life. What may appear as impossible and unimaginable may very well be possible and imaginable. A liberal subject can cease obeying the laws of the land; a slave/worker can cease perceiving the

master as master. In short, relations of social nature are ceaseable. The second consideration is that a relation has the capacity as it relates to other relations and phenomena to change or assimilate them. Here we have the condition of a relation eradicating another, assimilating it, changing it, replacing it, and so-on. The degree of change in both relations is relative, meaning it depends on their constitutions, and on the existing relations that surround them. If we were to examine the phenomenon of 'force' relationally, for instance, we see that this relation, both in the social world and reality at large, has proven to be the single most efficient relation in replacing one relation with another. But why is force so forceful? What forms of relations are involved in the making of force? Force, perceived as a prevalent-relation, is a form of relation that can co-exist with any or manifold relations. Any relation can be forceful, but not at any given time. And not every forceful transformation in a relation means that both relations are the same in terms of their constitutions. A military force can be defeated by non-militaristic forces. An idea can be refuted and replaced by non-ideas.

But what in a relation can enable it to overcome and transform another relation? The answer is in manifold and has manifold layers. To begin with, extant-relations, forms of relations that are simply there in the social world or in existence as such that form a web of relations where individuals or objects enter and exist without minimal effect on the content of such a web, play a major role in transforming a relation to a relation. These extant-relations simply exist for long durations and determine the degree to which a relation replaces another relation. Yet as much as the world of objects and of the social depends on such relations, they, nevertheless, are reversible and transformable if interfered and disturbed by relations and phenomena that impact their distinct-relations. Second, in relation to the transformation of a relation to a relation we should not confine our understanding to the relations of force, where only force is perceived to

be capable of transforming and replacing something. The phenomenon of force, relationally speaking, essentially represent a relational state of a relation or a phenomenon, as it is either present or not; any given relation can be forceful. Love, for instance – that pleasant, torrid, non-conflictual, disturber of boundaries, etc. – can have a forceful character if forcefulness is added or attached to it. Third, existence is such that a relation, without any external force or cause, can transform and change itself through its own dynamics and relations to a different relation. Lastly, and this is more of an everyday intuition, not all relations-to-relations are successful transformations; put differently, the phenomenon of relation-to-relation is not necessarily a universally positive phenomenon. For such reasons, I believe, we should be suspicious of grand statements such as Newton's third law of motion which states: "*To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction: or, the mutual actions of two bodies upon each other are always equal, and directed to contrary parts.*"¹²⁹ Such statements, regardless of the opinion of science on the matter, from a relational point of view, are only true when there is some form of reaction and opposition; such statements may capture certain end-results and certain repetitive or recurring happenings but they tend to ignore what does not recur, repeat, or happen. Therefore, when a 'body exerts a force on a second body', assuming that there is some sort of force attached to the body, the second body may 'react' and may not 'react', it may laugh and it may not laugh, but even if it 'reacts' it may 'react' in manifold ways depending on manifold existing and non-existing relations.

Further, we should be mindful of two things, two caveats, when we examine the phenomenon of 'relation to relation'. The first is that when we speak of a relation replacing or changing a relation, we should not always take this as a complete and successful replacement and transformation, as existence can be more complex than that and as there lie indefinite relations.

The operation of *to* may not be fully achieved, thus the first relation begins to coexist with the second relation rather than changing or replacing it, especially if the relations in concern are of human relations, the world of relations where relations do not completely eradicate, change, replace, transform, and so-on, other relations. The second caveat is that as a relation orients itself towards a relation or relationality, there are, beside these two relations, other relations that surround them, that already exist. It is always difficult to predict the aftermath of a transformation, of an encounter.

Relations with relations

The last image that we have in relation to the relational states or dimensions of relations, is the image of *relations with relations*. To be 'with' is both essential to the constitution of relations and an endless source of relations, from which relations emanate and are produced. Natural, cosmic, social, personal, emotional, gravitational, atmospheric, relations of all sorts, exist and can exist with one another, and can come into existence as a consequence of things coming together and being with one another. This 'withness' does not, in any way, mean that all relations are all together at any given time and thus be described as 'existing as with', nor does it mean that all relations are related to all other relations at any given time while they are in a state of 'with'. Rather, it indicates that relations as a whole, by virtue of being together, by simply existing in proximity to one another or sharing the condition of existing, constitute reality at large regardless of whether they have any relationships aside from them being together or not. As they are together and with one another, spatially speaking, these relations may crash into one another, attract one another, absorb each other, overcome one another, etc. This reality reveals two aspects of relations: that while relations and phenomena are 'with' one another they can

emanate and produce relations as a consequence of ‘being with’, and the second aspect is the fact that relations are and can be with one another. Within the realm of such with-ness, relations can be orderly, regulated, convoluted, simple, complex, on top of one another, side by side, within one another, separate from one another, and so-on. The ‘with’ of relations is concealed by the veil of with-ness, by the givenness of with-ness. It permits relations to exist as with one another even when some relations destroy and replace other relations. This veil of with-ness primarily manifests itself in two ways. First, in a very physical sense, meaning if a black hole or a human being were to destroy what surrounds them, their destruction remains enveloped and wrapped by a veil of with-ness, which ultimately is what localizes and limits the impact of such destruction, it limits it to a spatial region while existing with it. Second, the with condition of relations is such that they are largely veiled from our senses. This condition of being veiled has to a great extent to do with the condition that most existing relations are not sensible, they are veiled from our senses and hence we seldom uncover their presence and traces, and furthermore they exist with one another.

The other unclear aspect of this condition of relations existing with one another is the ways in which the condition of ‘with’ exists and actualizes. For instance, the way relations experience being with one another, or the way relations are stored in a self is different than the way relations are with one another in the social world or in existence. In selves, particularly in relation to the emanation and the production of relations, relations are often present as a capacity or as a memory, many relations are activated, brought to life, a singular relation is being manifested, one is frustrated by something while one is reading, while one is seeing, while one feels suffocated by the burden of debt, and so-on. All together, all at once, or all after one another. The role of space is limited when it comes to the emanated relations of selves, but it is

essential to the relations of the social and existence as such. For social and cosmic relations space is not only where relations happen but also space, with its constitution, becomes a part of these relations, it is active in their production and actualization. As much as these relations are in space, they are also with space. Only with space can they exist in indefiniteness, in being able to extend, in existing as with one another rather than all becoming a single relation. The category of space, however, may help us understand the how of 'with' of social relations but is insufficient in helping us make sense of those relations that we call social, the sum of all relations that occur in a society. Imagine a city at night, assuming that all are asleep, the streets are empty, the stores locked, lights off, can we still speak of social relations? Can the concept of space or the notions of 'between two or more' and 'in-betweenness' explain the state of social relations in the silence of night, beneath the curtain of darkness? Have relations fallen asleep too, or have they ceased to exist only to be brought back to life at dawn by the birth of light? Here we can see the imaginary aspect of certain relations, where the imaginary coexists with the non-imaginary. In this silent city, even though most relations are taken and put to rest, in the storage of minds, in the storage of bodies, we still speak of the with-relations of the social. Society does not disintegrate and disperse at night; its relations continue to exist in different realms, in different shapes, with different realities.

Furthermore, on the one hand, the sheer multiplicity and indefiniteness of relations necessitate them to exist with one another, and on the other because they can exist as 'with' and as multiple and indefinite. By this logic then, space both exists with them and it forces them to coexist with each other. Relations are bound and bonded by space here, while they bond space itself. Then, of course, there is the presence and existence of the human body and what constitutes it and its role in containing indefinite relations, human relations or otherwise, and

allowing, through mind, memory, senses, etc., relations to actualize with one another. Our bodies contain relations, store our relations, carry them around, emanate them, they allow us to relate, unrelate, derelate, and so-on. Relations out there in the open, relations veiled, manifold relations, different relations, identical relations, linear relations, absurd relations. The space with and of relations, the noise of relations, continuous flowing relations, appearing and disappearing and reappearing relations. I sense a relation, I sense many relations, I can distinguish them, I see them all as one singular relation; they are in me, they are around me, they are going through and over me. There are people walking, many people, I can see many relations appearing and disappearing; the people are silent now, they are mute, they are immobile, they are not relating, maybe relating in different ways, I see no relations when everyone is mute and immobile, I sense manifold relations, new relations, when everyone is mute and immobile.

Amidst all this beauty, this chaos, this orderliness, this scene of destruction, this expanse, these structures, these boundless existents let us not forget, let us invent a new relation, that we should also view the 'with' of relations a relation in itself. Being together, sharing a spatial field, being contained by similar objects and beings, and so-on, leads to the development of a state of relationism for relations: coexisting as a cloud of relations. By no means, should this representation of coexisting relations as a cloud indicate that every relation and phenomenon is related to all relations and phenomena existing in such a vast cloud. This is not true. Even in a state of coexistence while sharing space and manifold things with one another, the relational mechanics of relations and of each relation and relationality varies. For relations being different and having a certain degree of autonomy in what to relate and not to relate does not contradict or diminish the possibility of with-relation for all relations involved. For one, relations that manifest themselves along with other relations, some of them at least, would not have the capacity to

manifest or enrich if they were not with other relations. One may conclude, considering these points that relations ultimately exist as one and all, as parts and whole, as the unity of many, and so-on. Such a description is not entirely true either. The with-relation, relations existing as together, is really not about an all, a many, a whole; on the contrary, it is just a condition, one of many, that reflects the reality of relations being together. In such with-world, relations, as they are with one another, they also relate to one another or unrelate from one another. They also, as a consequence of the condition of witness, produce new relations in relation to relations surrounding them. Relations have manifold relations as they exist as 'with', they are neither purely separate nor contained, and nor purely an independent cloud of relations that exist as 'with'.

To conclude this chapter: I have attempted to broadly show the existence of a relational dimension to relations, the relational mechanics of relations, the relational ways in which they contain manifold relations and exist within one another; how and why they have relations of their own; how the phenomenon of layerity manifests itself in relations and between relations; what may or may not happen when relations encounter one another; how relations-to-relations, a condition that indicates the stopping of a relation by a relation, a relation replacing a relation, the transformation and the mutation of a relation to another; and finally the ways in which relations exist as with one another, and the origins of such witness. Now that I have preliminarily explored how relations exist and was thus able to draw an image of relations, in the following chapter my goal is to examine the relations between time and relations and the phenomenon of the flow in relations.

CHAPTER V- The Flow and Time of Relations

*This world must long survive our poor departure,
Persisting without name or note of us.
Before we came, it never grudged our absence;
When we have gone, how can it feel regret?*

*The caravan of life passes in strangeness.
Come, seize one moment passing joyfully.
Why mourn for friends and their tomorrow, Saki?
Pour out more wine: the night is passing too.¹³⁰*

So many relations and relations of relations, such history, such beauty and philosophy, a philosophy of life, contained in these two passages of Khayyam's. Against the passage of life, of time, the passing of friends, the worries for the future, burdens of the past, those unceasing movements, Khayyam finds meaning and hope and fulfillment in the present, in seizing the present, in permanently living in the present, and in making the present one's dwelling, a dwelling that is frozen and abstracted from temporality and reality. To be in time but also to live outside the movement of time. In a way, to be timeless in time, to be in the world without experiencing the world's pain, concerns, and worries. In a way, to cease one's relations that are oriented towards the future and towards the past, and simply orient and dedicate all relations towards this very instant, the present. Khayyam is aware that having such an existential attitude, to cease all sorts of relations with time and reality, is not possible, as to be human is to be with time and to be of the world in the world, and it is exactly for this reason that he seeks the assistance of an external object, an intoxicating object that numbs one's existence as one faces life and time, the challenges and the pains they present. Against such an entangled existence, he encourages us to re-evaluate and reconfigure our relations towards time, towards life in time. One must cease relations with the time that has passed and with what is yet to come; one must live in the present, continuously be present.

It should be asked: are we not already always in the present, a temporal realm where we dwell and exist? This question, which essentially concerns our relations towards and with time, is the starting point of the discussions that will follow, but we should also, briefly at least, go beyond the scope of this question and investigate the relations between time and relations as such. I have already touched on the relations of relations to space and to other phenomena, such as objects, conditions, and so-on, but I have yet to examine the relations of relations towards time, relations of time, and the relations between time and relations. In this chapter thus my goal is first to examine linkages between relations and time, if there are any, and next touch on two significant aspects of relations, namely their *flows* and *successions*.

Time of relations

Since my understanding of time does not give time an independent existence insofar that time exists in what exists, we can at the outset stop imagining two distinct realities, one being time and the other the phenomena of relations, coexisting or existing in the other. With this view of time, we need not struggle to construct a reality that demands of us to find proper places for these two fundamental constituents of existence. The relationship between time and relations, though, is not as harmonious, straightforward, or orderly as it may appear in the first encounter. To say that time exists in and with relations may be an important point of departure in initiating our analyses, but it is not sufficient in giving us a foundation from which we can build a cohesive understanding about the life of relations and the existence of time.

To begin with, to say that time exists in relations, means that time is not external to relations, is not outside relations, rather time is embedded in relations, it exists in them. Of course this existing in, should not be understood in terms of something existing in something,

like tea in a cup, as this phenomenon of in-ness is more fundamental than that; the very existence of relations, in its entirety, is consumed and enveloped by time. Time is in relations, in the midst and depth of them, in their edges, in their cores. Each relation is always already time, with time, exists as time. Therefore, the relationship between time and relations is an organic relation, and this relationship is more essential, particularly in the case of human relations, than the relations that exist between relations and space, meaning: it is possible to imagine certain relations without spatial categories and boundaries, but a relation without time is inconceivable. Although I have suggested earlier that we should consider entities and beings as relations too, and that they are not some independently existing unrelated phenomena, relations can be quite complex. They can be tangible and/or intangible, they can be apparent and/or absurd, they can be physical and/or imaginary, they can have three dimensions and they can exist beyond these dimensions, they can obey the natural laws and the natural laws can be perceived as relations in certain instances as well, and so-on. The question then is, if relations can exist in manifold ways and forms and if time is already embedded in them how can we access such multiplicity and infer from them conclusions? If relations have taught us one thing, it is that all forms of knowledge are incomplete, and that what we know is always incomplete, which is to say, our task therefore is to gather as much knowledge as possible while being conscious of the fact that ultimately we will always fall short of completeness and total understanding, even when one is filled with the sense of completeness, as we often do when we learn something about something and when we have a total image of something inside our heads. With such an epistemologically relational attitude one can only achieve and gather so much. That said, in order to move forward and develop an understanding about the relationship of time and relations as such, we need to first clarify certain distinctions.

The first distinction that I want to pursue here is the existence of beings and entities and the relations they emanate and produce. These existents appear to us, in our initial encounters with them as total and singular beings that exist temporally or in temporality, yet throughout their existences they emanate and produce indefinite forms of relations, whose continuity in existence largely depends on what/who emanates and produces them. As such, their relation to time depends on the relationship between what emanates and produces them and their times. When Kierkegaard says: “In the evening, I went to the restaurant I had frequented the previous time and, no doubt by force of habit, had even found satisfactory. Coming there every evening as I did, I was thoroughly familiar with everything: I knew when the early guests would leave, how they would greet the brotherhood whom they left”,¹³¹ he is speaking of certain existing relationalities, like his own self, the guests, the restaurant, etc. but he is also telling us of certain repetitive relations, forms of relations that happen, actualize, and end, like going to a restaurant, revealing one’s perspective of the experience, eating, finishing the food, and leaving. These relations that are emanated and produced by selves are dependent on the selves, as writing about one’s repetitive activities cannot actualize if one no longer is. The time of these relations, relations that we emanate and produce in the everyday, despite them appearing as repetitive and as same, ultimately are distinct in each time, with their own unique time, but their very own existence and the time they have are essentially extensions of who and what emanates and produces them. I say “what” because relations that exist as extensions are not unique to human beings, rather all that exist as concrete reality can produce and emanate, voluntarily or involuntarily, such relations.

The second distinction is that there are tangible and intangible relations. Relations, especially human relations, can have an intangible existence, they do not always exist as concrete

physical realities, such as in touching, speaking, holding, and so-on. Relations between time and these forms of relations, be it tangible or intangible, is that of similar; both forms exist and manifest themselves as temporalities that require time to actualize. In Tagore's *The Home and the World* Bimala tells us: "I entered the room. I knew Sandip could hear my footsteps as I went forward, but he pretended not to, and kept his eyes on the book."¹³² Here in this moment of manifold relations we have, at least in what immediately appears to us, tangible relations of making noise, hearing the noise, moving, walking, seeing, knowing, etc. But we also infer intangible everyday relations such as pretending while reading, or recognizing the relation of pretending, a relation that has layers of actual and assumed relations. Beside these relations, there of course are more relations, explicit and implicit, cultural and otherwise, such as the meanings that the noise of a woman's footsteps entail, involved in the actualization of this moment of relations. Time is in all these relations. And they all exist as time, as each relation occurs with a certain timespan, a temporal temporality.

The third distinction is between the relations that flow and exist continuously and those that exist discretely in the form of appearing and disappearing or appearing and reappearing as the repetition of the similar and not of the same. This distinction is quite fundamental in understanding the existence of existence and the reality of how human relations are transmitted from a self to a self or from a generation to a generation, and the role of learning, teaching, mimicking, and knowing etc. in such transmission. In other words, there are relations that exist continuously, for instance magnetic relations between certain objects and the biological and physiological relations in living beings. To this category of continuous relations we may also add certain psychological and sociological relations, which of course can be highly relative and subjective. Then there are relations that are not continuous, relations that constitute a great

majority of our everyday doings, wants, etc. The relationship between time and continuous relations is similar to the relations between an existent and time. Both the existent and continuous relations exist in a timely manner, time is a description of how they exist. In the case of relations that exist discretely or exist as similar, however, each relation, each occurrence, each event has its own time despite the similarities. So when we read about an encounter between two ancient Egyptians as it is narrated in *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*: “Now the peasant was travelling along the public road, / and Nemtynakthe said, ‘Watch out, peasant! Do not tread my clothing.’ Then the peasant said, ‘I shall do what pleases you, for my path is good.’ So he went toward the higher ground. Then Nemtynakhte said, / ‘Is my barley to be a path for you?’ Then the peasant said, ‘My path is good, but the bank is steep, so my way (must be) through the barley, for you are obstructing the road with your clothing. Will you not let us pass on the road?’ He had just finished speaking these words, when one of the donkeys filled / his mouth with an ear of barley. Then Nemtynakhte said, ‘So now, I shall confiscate your donkey, peasant, because he is eating my barley. Behold, he will tread grain because of his crime.’”¹³³ we understand this exchange, this interaction, and the set of relations involved. We are able to visualize this historical event in our minds. It is not just what occurs that is understood because of linguistic significations but also because what occurs is familiar, it is something we still do, and it is something that can happen to us. Thus, on the one hand, we understand the dilemma that the peasant finds himself in, but we can also make sense, from a legal point of view, of Nemtynakhte’s attitude and his desire to punish the trespassing of his property. In relation to the time and relation relationship, what occurs in this story, despite the obvious fact that millennia later we can still understand it and resonate with it, is actually past, it has long disappeared. It disappeared before it was inscribed. It disappeared long before we read the inscription. We

therefore cannot speak of continuous relations here. What is happening here is the appearance and disappearance of relations in each instance. There is another unique relation involved here, in the ways in which we tend to relate to events past, to history. We look back, we look down; we either see history as a long line of continuity or as a deep well, an endless pit. That is how we so often relate to the past, to events past. There is a different way of looking at history though, towards history: to look straight into the expanse of the earth's surface. To see the surface as a stage where things, beings, relations appear and disappear, flourish and perish, on a plane of a surface, the earth's surface. History then is no longer a 'well' or 'downhill' but a 'plane', upon and in which existents and events along with their times come to appear and disappear.

There is a fourth distinction, which in some ways is related to the previous three distinctions, particularly the third, and which, I think, is more unique to human existence: the distinction between relations that have occurred in the past and have disappeared without a trace in memory or in other forms of storages, like in inscriptions, and the relations that have occurred in the past but continue to exist in memory and yet somehow relate to present conditions. In both instances of course, the time, the actual, that accompanied either forms of relations is in the past, existed while those relations were actualizing but such time no longer exists as the relations it was associated with no longer are present. The re-emergence of these relations in the mind in the form of remembrance or in action in the form of mimicry or repetition only occurs with its own unique time. The time of the reminiscence of a past experience then, which is also the time of the mind's activity as it orients itself towards such experience, is different than the time of the experience itself. The more significant relation here, an existential in that, is holding on to certain experiences that we experience, as the majority of human relations and experiences, that occur

on a daily basis, are often forgotten, are gone, never to be remembered again, and disappear into oblivion regardless of whether they leave a trace or not.

The path of relations

Let us begin with a set of questions. What images of relations do our minds have and generate? Do they resemble roads, bridges? Do they exist as dots and instances that appear here and then there, now and then in the future? Or do they resemble continuous lines, be it thin or thick lines, or lined dots that appear as lines? What would be the best and appropriate way to mentally capture relations? For those who imagine relations as a connection and linkage between two or more things – and this includes most logicians, philosophers, scientists, and sociologists – a line or a bridge may best represent their image of relations. For those who perceive reality to be intricate, multiple, and complex, relations too are represented in such terms. Deleuze and Guattari, for instance, perceive reality in the form of a rhizome, a plant stem, which “assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers”.¹³⁴ The image of this plant stem, in their view, is such that “any point of rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be”, that it consists of the “principle of multiplicity”, a “multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature”, and that “There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines.”¹³⁵ In this imagined world relations resemble rhizomes and they exist as multiples and lines, and are intertwined. This image of reality is largely informed by the traditions of subjectivism in philosophy and relativism in science and it represents the philosophical mood, perhaps even the social mood, of the post-World War II era. The death of German philosophy

was followed by the rebirth of French philosophy. The former ended by the force of war while the second was built from the chaos left by war, where structures were no longer standing, they had been shattered into pieces, destroyed and eradicated.

In any case, from a relational vantage of imagining, the existence of relations is quite complex. A keen study of their relational mechanics will show that relations are such existents that they can have manifold forms and manifold ways. We may find or imagine certain relations actualizing in the form of a line, some in the form of dots that appear and disappear or appear and disappear and reappear, some manifesting themselves as complex realities or part of a complex system, and while some others reveal themselves as simple and singular existents. Further, some relations, particularly those of a social nature, manifest themselves transcendently, beyond spatial confinements and natural laws. I am not referring to the transmission of information without any sensory medium of course. Rather, my point is that there are certain human relations, if we were to loosen their knots and examine them intently, we would see that they do not actualize physically as in the case of sound waves traveling when one speaks. These relations are such that a particular self or what a self is emanating appear in another self without the mediation of senses or physical determinants. These relations could be in the form of feelings, worries, thoughts, etc.; and they could be more intense and frequent if two selves have close relationships, like parent and child, like husband and wife. Evidently there is no way to infer for certain that what appears in self A is the exact same as what appears in self B, nor can we assume that all that appears in self A will appear in self B, nor can we assume that what appears in self B is actually what has appeared in self A. Then we cannot logically find an exact description of this form of relationship nor can we draw a precise map of relations of such relationism; what we can do, however, is observe the presence of such relationships/relations.

These relations are neither a consequence of the conscious or the subconscious, they in some ways exist beyond the realm of consciousness, they are forms of relations that I have identified as the relations of life earlier, forms of relations that exist as a consequence of being living beings, being animate. This transcendental dimension of human relations can also be encountered in more concrete relations, in love for instance. Love, although as a relation has physical characteristics as it exists in the self and is manifested through senses, speech, etc., and materializes in the other self, provided that this other is also in love, nonetheless also exists as something that simply appears as love in the other. In a way the capacity to love already exists in most if not all, but such capacity is only activated towards someone and something in the presence of someone or something that initiates such activation, such awakening. Relations such as these have a capacity to actualize beyond the immediate mediation of senses, of the physical. Therefore, what is here in this body, in this self, can be actualizing in the other self or selves without any sensory intervention and mediation, which shows that we cannot always speak of and imagine human relations in terms of lines, paths, dots, bridges, linkages, etc.

It is also possible to perceive and imagine relations, at least certain relations, to actualize as paths and having paths. The structure and character of such path can vary, which is to say, it can be wavy, bumpy, straight, traveled or untraveled, paved or unpaved, and so-on. Its width and depth varies as well; it may have straight edges without relating to anything as it cuts through other existents and relations, or it may be such that it continuously relates towards its surrounding and thus accumulates more relations as it advances forward. These sorts of relations may or may not take the forms of mystic paths like Daoism's *way* or Sufism's *tariqah*, as these forms of mystical paths, ways of life, constitute manifold relations, religious and mystified relations, and they determine the way manifold everyday relations actualize. These overarching

paths, which in my view are mere attitudes and states of mind that consist of manifold relations and in turn regulate the majority of produced and emanated relations in the everyday, may be perceived as relations and roads that lie beyond and beneath manifold relations, relations that guide and regulate all other relations. The same of course can be said of worldviews and religious and ideological systems; these condensed relationalities present themselves as paths and attitudes that determine and guide social and subjective relations. To understand the relational logic of such paths, such relations, through certain concepts, for instance intentionality or rational action, may not suffice. To have a worldview and a path, and to think of one's relations and everyday as a path is not simply about intending something or rationally determining certain acts, it is about manifold relations regulating intended or unintended rational or irrational relations. To have a path means the prevalent presence of what constitutes such a path (such as moral principles, pillars of faith, principle of self-interest, etc.) in all that one produces and emanates in one's life. Besides, even if a relation were to resemble a path, of any form, and were to have an intended target, we can still speak of pure intentional relations that are oriented towards something particular. Purity in relations is a rare phenomenon. An intentional relation can always become an unintentional relation; an intentional relation can always have the potentiality of going beyond what is intended; and an intentional relation can always be corrupted on its way to its destination, and so-on. In sum, we may speak of certain relations actualizing in the form of paths, roads, bridges, and coalescing with manifold other relations, but their paths can rarely be paved meticulously. When I intend to see what my eyes are seeing I am not simply seeing that something, as my mind and the relations that are oriented from myself towards that something are always already related to a sea of relations.

Further, great sums of relations, particularly those relations that are not produced by sheer coexistence, as a consequence of being with one another, manifest themselves not as paths, bridges, or roads, but in the form of continuous emanation. In existence, relational entities such as gravity, energy, and heat are simply emanated and emitted from a source. Such emanation has no particular destiny or objective. Similarly, the ways in which social or subjective relations, such as desire, want, anger, love, voice, and so-on, even if they were intended for a particular being or an object, originate, flow, and orient is represented by the act of emanation. Anger, for instance, may be caused by a particular event or an individual, and it may be oriented towards a certain other, but in the end this anger is emanated from/by a self's body, affecting most organs and senses. As this anger emanates it infects and invades other emanated relations, and it may affect not only the intended other but all selves that surround the self. It is for this reasons that emanated relations are often exposed to various other relations. Such relations can be manipulated, misguided, transformed into something they were not; they may increase and decrease in density and intensity.

The succession of relations

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears. And how else can it be? The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven? And is not the lute that soothes your spirit the very wood that was hollowed with knives? When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight. Some of you say, 'Joy is greater than sorrow,' and others say, 'Nay, sorrow is the greater.' But I say unto you, they are inseparable.¹³⁶

The sheer multitude of relations, of the relations of relations, of the production and emanation of relations permit relations to appear and disappear, to exist with one another, to

replace one another, to succeed one another. A relation ends, and a new and different relation bursts into existence. A relation exists for a long duration without being succeeded. A relation exists for a short duration and is replaced with different relations. A relation exits but mutates and expands, one becomes many, many become many, and many succeed many. This is the way of the existence of existence, and the existence of relations. The succession of relations means that although existence consists of manifold continuously existing relationalities and relations it (the existence) does not cease to change as a whole despite the restlessness, movement, and expansion of space. This cosmic change – which in a way is the change of the same as what is changing in the present is largely the same as that which was changing right after the birth of the cosmos – manifests itself through the appearance and disappearance (or reappearance) of relations, relations succeeding relations, relations following relations. Our human relations are no different; they ceaselessly replace and succeed one another. One awakens in the morning, brushes their teeth, makes coffee, has breakfast, goes to work, and so-on. One reaches into a shelf, picks a book, sits, and opens the book, eyes wide open, mind hungry. As one reads, words are no longer only inscribed on a paper; they, their duplicates, their doubles, their synonyms and antonyms are also present in the mind, appear in the mind, words have just doubled and multiplied themselves through relations. Each such activity contains manifold relations and can only be possible by containing such relations. The ways in which these activities exist and are completed are by these manifold relations actualizing in succession, by each relation adding a further layer to such activity. An act is the sum of many succeeding relations that can actualize in linear or non-linear, in orderly or chaotic fashion. This phenomenon of succession, which of course is not universal and certainly not the only way for relations to manifest themselves, is

what completes activities, turns many things into a cohesive whole, and permits manifold realities and activities to become reality.

Take the act of making coffee, for instance. If we were to interpret and see this activity from an everyday view of seeing totalities and entities, which we tend to do, we would see the coming togetherness of the machine, coffee, water, sugar, cream, cup, spoon, etc.; but if we were to investigate this process relationally, we would find ourselves amidst a whole different world. A world that begins with the desiring of coffee, already existing relations of the know-how of the making of coffee, recognizing and distinguishing coffee from other objects and things, and the manifold relations that succeed one another in the making of coffee, such as timing, mixing, adding, smelling, moving, touching, lifting, carrying, seeing, enjoying, desiring, waiting, watching, and so-on. All these acts and relations, tend to occur in succession, one succeeding another or many succeeding many, to complete the process of making a cup of coffee. Succession here does not necessarily entail any form of continuity, or evolution, or accumulation; it simply reveals the reality of the succession of relations in existence.

In acts related to habits, routines, obsessive behaviours, etc., this phenomenon of the succession of relations is more apparent and visible, as the self follows a particular order of relations through repetition to complete an activity, to fulfill an obsession, to do something, to do nothing. Here, emanation and production of the manifold same relations correspond to a singular will and doing. Although I have earlier stated that the majority of human relations are the re-actualization of the initial-relations, the repetition of the similar, the re-enactment of what is known and familiar, and I have also stated that relations despite the existing similarities between repetitive relations actualize differently as each occurring relation has its own unique relations and is surrounded by different relations, one rarely changes the way in which one drinks a cup of

coffee throughout their life. Most of our relations are always already routinized, habitualized, and contain a degree of obsession, structure, and regulation. These realities can only be possible through successive relations and the ordering of such successions. In such a regulated and structured everyday, not in the sense that we do the same things over and over every single day but in the sense that what we do often resembles how we did that earlier, each relation actualizes but then disappears and such disappearance is immediately followed by the emergence of another relation, almost religiously, compulsorily. In Adam Smith's pin example where "One man draws out the wire, another straightens it, a third cuts it, a fourth points, a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; to make the head requires two or three distinct operations; to put it on, is a peculiar business, to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put into the paper",¹³⁷ the repetition of successive relations is compartmentalized and delegated to different workers. Succession is mastered here until it is no longer a succession; it has faded into a continuum of the same. What is demanded of the worker is the erasure of time and space between each succession as succession equals break, disunity, non-productivity, and inorganicity. One must eliminate succession in such a work culture.

Similarly, if we were to examine the processes of the human mind, where we encounter some of the most fluid, intense, chaotic, and uncontrollable forms of succession of relations, and where relations are most susceptible to relations and relationalities that surround it, we will find that relations generally, perhaps due to biological limitations, tend to occur one at a time, particularly when the mind is intending and is orienting itself towards a specific phenomenon. The human body may be able to relate in various ways through manifold relations, multitasking for instance, but it is difficult for the mind to think intently about multiple things simultaneously. Generally speaking, a thought succeeds a thought, a remembrance succeeds a remembrance, and

a doing succeeds a doing. Any attempt at overthinking, over-imagining, over-remembering, and over-doing often short-circuits the mind's processes and thus brings it to a halt. The brain as a tangible object can operate at various levels of course, sending and receiving manifold signals simultaneously for instance. The relational capabilities of the mind, however, are more constrained and limited when it comes to multitasking or over-relating, yet it is in the mind where, perhaps due to its fluid nature, the succession of relations is most frequent, is most far reaching. In the same vein, our everyday activities can become a reality through the succession of relations. The stages that animate beings go through, for instance: birth, growth, decay, and death; the ways in which we organize our social world, our subjective lives; the ways in which we order our certain activities in successive orders, like the well-known saying attributed to Julius Caesar "*veni, vidi, vici*", "I came, I saw, I conquered"; or the ways in which we organize or go about our daily routines, the way we construct our sentences, a word is followed by another, the way we walk, a step follows another, the way we structure our conversations, we listen and then talk, and so-on. All these realities, relationally speaking, actualize in succession or through the succession of relations that constitute them. And with such successive existence they contribute to the assumed passage and movement of time.

Furthermore, in relation to existence as such, the succession of relations is primarily related to what and where a phenomenon is and with what existing relations and phenomena it is surrounded with. Gravity, for instance, which in essence is the continuous existence and flow of the relation of gravitation that actualizes as a consequence of the coming together of manifold phenomena and relations, reveals itself and its relations as the continuous presence of the same relations, that of pulling and attracting objects and relations towards its source for instance, and it may be succeeded and displaced by other relations only in the instance of the disappearance of

relations and phenomena that produced it in the first place. This condition of succession, however, is more recognizable in existents that are in constant motion and a state of interaction. An object, for instance, has relations X when it encounters object A, but those X relations disappear and are replaced by a new set of relations as this object encounters different objects. In short, existence is such that its dynamism and continuous active existence allows the presence of such conditions which both constitute it and enable it to be different at each stage of its existence.

It is manifest now, that the succession of relations and the ways in which they succeed one another have profound implications for existence, all existents. I should speak to a few of the implications here. The first is the fate of the relation that is being succeeded. What happens to these sorts of succeeded relations, do they simply disappear into non-existence, hence becoming extinct, or do they evolve, mutate, merge, and so-on? Second, what is the relationship between the succession of relations and time as the concept of succession in essence indicates some form of temporality, and is it only possible within temporal horizons? Put differently, is it time that enables and forces succession to materialize in relations? If that is the case, then, are we to assume that relations simply obey the laws of reality, and the limitations and the confines that time presents? Understandably, there is no simple and complete answer to any of these questions. Regarding the fate of succeeded relations, there can be no singular path, which is to say the situation, the event, can be relative and subjective. For instance: a) a succeeding relation can be identical to the succeeded relation; in such a case we may speak of some form of a repetition of relations, either in the form of the repetition of the same or of the similar. b) A succeeding relation is different than the succeeded relation, which is the most common form of succession in relation to relations. In such a case the succeeded and the succeeding relations may or may not

have a concrete relationship, although it may contain, particularly in the case of human relations, an assumed-relation, such as the relations that constitute an event or an activity for instance. c) A succeeded relation can invade the succeeded relation and thus mutate into a different relation; in such a case we may be in a position to speak of some sort of a continuity between relations. The question of time and the succession of relations can be approached in two ways. First, each succession of relations can have its own time, assuming that both relations are related and not simply replacing one another, in which case each relation will have its own time. For instance, when day succeeds night, a step follows step, autumn follows summer, and so-on, each phenomenon is distinct and has its own time. Second, some relations exist temporally and almost trans-temporally particularly if they are being emanated from an existent. For instance, a social relationship such as friendship can be perceived as a temporal relation but also as a trans-temporal relation.

Additionally, the succession of relations, as the concept of “succession” already indicates, is not a smooth, peaceful, and an orderly replacement or displacement. Which is to say: what succeeds is always open to disruptions and interruptions, to banalities and absurdities, to peaceful transitions and differences. It is in this instance of succession where the phenomenon of uncertainty of and in relations originates. And it is for this reason that we cannot and should not take causal relations as universal and as an absolute reality of existence, as causality is what essentially captures what already happened, only partially of course, and what may potentially happen. The “may” here is uncertainty. It is between certainty and uncertainty where causality lies. In relation to the succession of relations, therefore, succession should be understood as what envelops all relations that succeed one another including causal, certain, and uncertain relations, be they related or not. What succeeds may be predicted based on past experiences and repetitive

actualizations but it is also always open to other possibilities, especially in the realm of thinking and minding where the contents of thought and mind do not necessarily succeed one another as a step follows another. The same can also be said of social relations; they can be chaotic, incomprehensible, unorderedly, etc., regardless of how obsessive, routinized, or habitualized our everyday relations are. As similar as our everyday may appear in the first encounter, and as much as we tend to believe that our tomorrow is as same as our today, the relations that are produced and emanated in these everydays are distinct and always different, open to manifold interruptions, existing with their own times. We thus cannot truly speak of a pure flow of relations, like river, like light, like water, one replacing another.

CHAPTER VI – Conditions of the Absence of Relations

To this point, I have attempted to examine the phenomenon of relations, its ways and forms, its actualizations and encounters, from varying vantage points and angles; I have provided a preliminary definition of relations, examined their relational mechanics, their relations to temporality, and the ways in which they actualize or manifest themselves. In this chapter my goal is to look at different dimensions of relations, examine under what conditions relations are unable or incapable of becoming relations, and explore the conditions in which beings and objects determine or are enforced not to relate or to cease relating. To begin with, existence is such that as it shows us its relational dimensions and its dependence on relations in order to exist, it also simultaneously reveals to us its different dimensions and capacities, namely its abilities to permit the existence of indefinite conditions and situations where relations do not exist, where what constitutes reality voluntarily or involuntarily has a capacity not to relate and not to emanate or produce relations. I have thus far largely described existence, human existence, the social world, and animate and inanimate beings as essentially relational realities, my intent in this chapter is to show that realities are such that as much as they are relational they are also non-relational and derelational.

In reference to my analyses, I will first present two preliminary conditions that reality presents. The first condition pertains to what exists, whatever that may be and however form it may have taken, we encounter a *condition of an inability to relate*. Relations and relationalities exist with such a condition, where they lack the capacity to relate to this or that for this or that purpose, or for no purpose. This inability to relate does not indicate the complete absence of relations, which is not correct as relations are present in almost every sphere and stage of existence. Rather, what this existence of existence indicates is that a self, for instance, despite

being capable of relating in manifold ways in the everyday to itself and to manifold other realities, simultaneously exists with a condition, which is the self's inability to relate to this or to that. The question of whether this self has any subjective desire or will to relate in such a condition, or how such subjectivity and relativism may affect this condition is beside the point here. The key point is to show an existential dimension of reality insofar as existence is such that it contains within itself an incapacity to manifest certain relations, to relate to certain things.

The second condition relates to what exists in the encounter – a dimension, a reality, a condition where relationalities and relations are *unable to relate*. In relation to the first condition, this second condition is not permanently out of reach, it can be overcome. It is a temporary condition where a given existent lacks will, energy, power, and the capability to relate to certain things. This condition is such that it often occurs not permanently but discretely, and it cannot always be reduced to this or that cause and effect, to this or that relationship. A tree may struggle to reach and absorb light in order to survive, a caged animal may be unable to roam forests, a self may be unable to travel, to acquire something, to express itself to another self, and so-on. The temporariness of this condition, of being unable to relate, should not in any way reduce its significance for human existence and existence at large. It is a condition that simply unveils a different dimension of existence and what constitutes it. If everything in existence were to have a capacity and ability to relate to any given relation and relationality at any given instance, there would have, in all likelihood, been nothing, as existence would have self-destructed, or been a colossal singularity. Additionally, these two conditions of existence and what constitutes it should not in any way be perceived as negative and limiting realities of existences; quite the opposite, to be unable or having an inability to relate, in many ways, allow what exists to contain, produce, and maintain manifold relations, the actualization of which would have been

impossible otherwise. Conditions of inability and un-ability, then, necessitate creativity and thus force what exists to reach beyond the limitations set by these two conditions. Poverty, for instance, is defined by Sen “as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes.”¹³⁸ In this view, and rightly so, poverty is described not as a human condition where the poor individual has an innate inability to achieve or have access to certain things, but as a condition where they are unable to overcome such a reality because of the socio-political conditions that this self finds themselves in, a condition where the poor is unable to develop certain “capabilities”.

The point of presenting these two preliminary conditions was to show, by way of an introduction, different conditions that beings, objects, and relations have and experience, alongside of them being relational. In this chapter, my goal is to first look at how and why a given existent *derelates* from a relation or relationality while relating. Second, I will examine the state of *arelationalism* in a relation or relationality, a state that is as significant to existents and relations as their being relational. Third, I will examine the condition of *not-relating*, a condition that does not necessarily lie between being relational or being arelational, but a condition that is equally determinant for the existence of relations and existents.

Derelationism

Derelationism, derelating, or derelation are essentially relational processes in which and through which a given phenomenon de-relates, ceases, de-constructs, postpones, or reverses a given relation. In a condition such as this, the given relationality is already in the process of relating, it is in relation, yet for some odd, absurd, or logical reason or for no reason at all, voluntarily or involuntarily, the existent ceases this process of relating temporarily or

permanently. We encounter this condition and dimension of existence in manifold moments of what exists. For instance, a star ceases to glow and emanate light; a tree sheds its leaves; a cheetah stops chasing its prey; an anaconda ceases to care for its offspring; a human being sleeps, is intoxicated, withdraws and isolates itself, cuts and ends relations, takes vacations, experiences a coma, is anesthetized, becomes homeless, and so-on. What these instances essentially contain and reveal is that the process of derelationism is a fundamental constituent of existence; it defines a continuously recurring dimension and condition of existence as it experiences its existence; it is not, therefore, a rare exotic event. A self thus should be perceived both as a relational and as a derelational being; existence and the social should be perceived such that they not only contain relations and maintain themselves through them but they also exist in a derelational way, contain indefinite instances of derelations, and are what they are because of this condition of derelationism. This condition however does not indicate that every actualizing relation has a capacity to derelate or be derelated. There are relations that continue flowing until their extinction and their disappearance into nothingness; and there are relationalities while they derelate from certain relations continue relating in manifold other ways. Yashar Kemal, for instance in *Memed, My Hawk*, describes a village at night in the following manner: “At this hour the whole village, with its horses, donkeys, cows, goats, sheep, insects, hens, cats, and dogs, was fast asleep. Its hatreds, grudges, loves and fears, cares and courage, all were smothered in a deep sleep. Only its dreams were stirring with life at this hour.”¹³⁹ It is at night, that timeframe of darkness in which the social tends to wither away, that the condition of derelationism is most present and most easily felt and becomes the site of all sorts of derelational processes. It is in the darkness of night that most living beings withdraw to their own selves, to their own bodies, to the safety of their inner lives, and thus derelate from everyday activities and interactions, and

from the indefinite relations that constitute the social world, the world that we call ‘us’ and ‘we’. The only relation(s), according to Kemal, that actualizes at night, which envelopes us, is the relation of dreaming, a type of relation that brings the world into the self rather than introducing the self into the world, an instance where the self is not in the world but the world is in the self. “Houses, trees, rocks, stars, moon, and earth, whatever there was in the world, all was lost, melted in the darkness.”¹⁴⁰ “All was lost” and all was “melted in the darkness”, this is how Kemal perceives and interprets the night and the experience of life at night. A night is where everything disappears, all becomes one, becomes dark, becomes nothing, only darkness can be visible while everything else is invisible in the darkness of night.

For Freud too, sleeping and dreaming do not entail total derelationism where one completely derelates from everyday life and withdraws into the self. In his view, “Unsolved problems, tormenting worries, overwhelming impressions – all these carry thought-activity over into sleep and sustain mental processes in the system that we have named the preconscious.”¹⁴¹ While “the power of movement” is “paralyzed during sleep”,¹⁴² the realm of the preconscious and the residues of the everyday remain active during sleep. From a relational standpoint, the worlds of the unconscious, the preconscious, and the conscious, do not have any privileged position in relation to other conditions of the human existence. Yet, if one is determined to recognize the existence of such worlds (preconscious for instance) then one must also accept the multiplicity of such worlds in a given self, the presence of worlds within worlds, and the possibility of a world consisting of many worlds: the world of secrets, the world of memories, the world of words, the world of imaginations, the world of fears, the world of hopes, the world of the forgotten, the world of the disappeared, the world of what no longer exists, the world of ambitions, the world of stored relations, the world of active relations, and so-on. There are also

the worlds of intentions, accidents, coincidences, habits, rituals, absurdities, obsessions, desires, and so-on. That said, the phenomenon of sleeping is as much a relational moment with manifold relations as it is a derelational instance of human existence where a self derelates itself from relating, from the world and others. This derelationism is not a complete form of derelationism, which is the case in the instance of death in relation to life. While asleep one continues to breathe and perform other biological necessities, one continues to relate to the affairs of the past, the present, and the future by means of dreaming. These emanated and produced relations that occur during sleep must be studied as relations and viewed also as relations.

Besides sleep there are other forms of social, existential, and psychological realities that can be described as derelational or identified as sources that produce derelationism. For instance, in most world religions, believers often orient their energies, times, and relations towards the creator and the afterlife, and as a consequence while these selves produce new forms of relations they also in many ways derelate themselves from their own selves, the world, and others. We find similar derelational conditions in modern capitalism. In describing the working conditions of his time, for instance, Marx tells us that “Children of nine or ten years are dragged from their squalid beds at two, three, or four o’clock in the morning and compelled to work for a bare subsistence until ten, eleven, or twelve at night, their limbs wearing away, their frames dwindling, their faces whitening, and their humanity absolutely sinking into a stone-like torpor.”¹⁴³ This historical reality reveals, on the one hand, how capitalism produces and invents relations, and on the other how it generates derelational conditions, alienation being the most obvious one. The overall working conditions may have gotten better in our times, particularly in certain parts of the world, in relation to the conditions of the 19th century, but work continues to

constitute a major part of our lives, and as we workers dedicate our lives to work we simultaneously derelate from a multitude of social realities in manifold ways.

Three points may be abstracted from these examples: a) the condition of derelationism does not necessarily mean that when a self or an object derelates they also derelate simultaneously from all their relations. A tree, for instance, continues to grow while it sheds its leaves. One may live in solitude, but solitude does not prevent the self from relating to past relations and relationships or from new relationships that this self develops in order to substitute ceased relations. b) Relating and derelating do not necessarily occur successively, they may occur concurrently or in successive order. c) For every actualizing relation there are indefinite relations that fail to materialize, that cease to exist, that are postponed. The existence of existents therefore is such that it allows the co-existence of relation and derelation, and it is thus best described as relational and derelational.

We should now inspect the dynamics of this phenomenon we call derelationism a little closer and see how it actualizes, what relations, if there are any, may be leading to its emanation and production. First, a given relationality, particularly a self, while in the process of derelating tends to retreat towards itself rather than continuing to extend itself through further relations. This retreat to one's own world, which may actualize in the form of a decisive act, or abandoning, ceasing, or replacing of a relation, permits the self to be about the self and cease its own extension and expansion through relations, and thus allow the self to be in control of its own self, and gather its extended self to its own self. Second, as derelationism occurs, a being blocks its self and its senses from relating in relation to that derelated relation or certain relations that constitute such a relation. This attitude of blocking is not a complete cessation of all relations involved in the derelated relation. So, when a self cuts off its relations with a person, the self

does not completely derelate from that person as this self continues to think about that person and continues to emanate and produce certain relations while derelating. Third, in moments of derelations, a being develops a sense of need to fill the void left from the now ceased relations. In certain respects then, the dream state should be interpreted as that which fills the void created by the manifold derelations that actualize during sleep. This existential desire to fill the void produced by derelating with new relations reveals to us an important dimension of our relational existence: a compulsion to relate. One is always compelled to do something, talk to someone, look at something, protect and destroy things, etc. We are dependent on relations, in all moments of our existence. The power of relations, and the force of relations. We may guide them, decide over them, determine them, but we cannot exist without them. Relations compel us, force us, and guide us. Therefore, as we relate we also derelate, and as we derelate we also relate. Locke says that “Whosoever therefore out of a state of Nature unite into a *Community*, must be understood to give up all the power”.¹⁴⁴ To relationally and derelationally read this statement indicates that the modern political is such that by establishing new political relations, we cease our manifold other existing relations. Modern politics then is both a relational and derelational process. One must give up something in order to achieve something.

Furthermore, we live in an age where selves tend to over-relate. They have and seek indefinite relationships. They have families, distant and close; they have friends: virtual friends, high school friends, university friends, best friends, co-workers, acquaintances, neighbours, business partners, and so-on. There also exists a world of entities towards which selves relate in manifold, predictable and unpredictable, ways and forms. And as selves relate they are also related in manifold ways, where they find themselves amidst the ocean of relations oriented towards them emanating from other selves, inanimate entities, institutions, etc. This is a constant

state of doing more, wanting more, having more, acting more, moving more, and extending more. Such an intense and immense level of relatedness. Such over-extending and over-reaching. Yet, something we should all be concerned about. The condition of derelationism, however, may offer a sort of a remedy to this over-related world and reduce the intensity of relatedness. This condition can be appropriated as a lifestyle, a philosophy, a cure, a form of resistance, a form of strategy. The self practices derelationism in the everyday to balance over-relating. Philosophies such as “time is money” preach constant relating. What the reality of derelationism teaches us however is that life and existence as such are not simply about relations, hence relational, but they are also about derelations, hence also derelational. It also teaches us that relations can be derelated, derelations can be related.

Arelationalism

It is clear now that existence is not a simple container that holds relations within itself. There is more to existence and to the world of relations for that matter than just relations. A self is relational, a rock is relational, space is relational, time is relational, a tree is relational, a platypus is relational, but they are all also simultaneously derelational and arelational realities. With the concept of arelationalism I have the following conditions in mind: a) arelationalism is an actual state of reality where a relation or a relationality lack a certain capacity or will to relate to certain relations and relationalities. While a self may be able to laugh, cry, and have fun while relating in manifold other ways, or may relate to a car, cellphone, spoon, and so-on while waging an internal war with themselves, this very same self concurrently lacks the capacity to relate to existence the way time relates to it, or the way a snake relates to its surroundings, for instance. As much as it is difficult to understand and interpret notions such as apathy, indifference,

carelessness, apoliticality, and so-on as purely relational states, as they are mere attitudes that a self habituates in the everyday for various reasons, it is equally difficult to interpret them as purely arelational states. To be apolitical then, does not signify the absence of the capacity of being political; and being careless does not indicate the total absence of care. These states as much as arelational are also relational. The condition of arelationism that I am attempting to explore here however is more prevalent and has a more concrete presence in existence and what constitutes it than these instances and states that a self experiences in the everyday. Put simply, arelationism refers to an existential condition where even if a self or an object were to desire to relate to something, they existentially lack such a capacity and capability of relating. As far as we know, a snake does not giggle or laugh at something. b) Arelationalism can also refer to a temporal state where a being, a phenomenon, may relate to certain things at a particular time, but does not relate to certain others within that particular timeframe. Each relational state, then, is also an arelational state. Selves, for instance, may emanate or produce manifold relations or relate to manifold phenomena and selves at any given instance. Yet there is a limit to such emanation, production, and relating.

The condition of arelationism is such, that it coexists with the condition of relating, with the state of being related, with the state of derelationism, and with the state of finding oneself amidst the ocean of relations. As two phenomena encounter, as two individuals meet or interact, each emanates and produces relations towards the other or towards nothingness, yet they both are at the very same time in a state of arelationism. This condition of relationism must not be equated with a void, a bottomless pit of existence, like black holes existing amidst existence. Quite conversely, arelationism is a persisting state of existence, a constitutive dimension of existence. While a relation actualizes manifold others do not, while a relationality relates in

manifold ways certain other relationalities lack a capacity to relate in a similar fashion. Secondly, these existential states and conditions of existence being relational or arelational does not correspond to the ancient ontological categories of 'being' and 'nothingness', where only one form can actualize at any given timeframe. Something either exists or it does not. Arelationalism is not nothingness or non-being; and it is not being either. Arelationalism is simply a different category and condition of existence that exists outside the boundaries of the traditional concepts of being and nothingness. Arelationalism exists alongside of being and nothingness. It can also function as a descriptive condition of being and nothingness, insofar that nothingness is arelational in the sense that what does not exist also does not relate. It is more sensible then to interpret arelationalism as a condition, a state, a potentiality, a hope, a dream, a possibility, a function, a fundamental constitution of reality, and so-on. In the world of ontology, things either exist or do not, hence the concepts of being and nothingness. But in the world of relationality existence is relational, existence is derelational, existence is arelational, and much more.

Furthermore, from an epistemological and pedagogical standpoint, arelationalism is such that it can help us identify relations. The reverse is equally true: relations by their very existence point to arelations. But how can a non-actualized phenomenon such as an arelation lead to the unveiling of actual relations? When beings and objects relate they produce and emanate relations, and it is these actualized relations that are often sensed. We judge the personality and character of a self, for instance, based on their past and present behaviours, on words they utter(ed), etc. Likewise, a geologist examines the earth's structure, properties, and constitution based on the relations the earth presents, relations that the earth has, relations that are active now in the present, even if they are mere traces of past histories and relations. Therefore, what determines our relations with other selves and objects are the relations that we observe

actualizing in the self and objects and emanating from them: relations determining relations and the relations of relations. However, approaching a given being from an arelational and a relational standpoint, and defining such a being based on what it lacks or on what it cannot manifest, would give us a new form of relationship that actualizes between the thinker and the being: a form of a relationship that is based on arelationism emanated from an arelational attitude. Further, in the context of social and subjective acts, arelationism can reveal itself as a source of motivation and creativity. One often strives for what one does not have. Interpreted in this way, the condition of arelationism can be seen to be closely related to the phenomenon of relating. Meaning, they are no longer apart and unrelated; they simply coexist or succeed one another. Arelationalism can also be a source from which manifold anxieties, fears, senses of worthlessness, etc. emanate. Such anxieties and fears which essentially emanate from the conditions of lacking a capacity to relate or inability to manifest certain relations are quite present in everyday existence. In short there are manifold negative and positive realities that are related to this condition of arelationism.

Not-relating

We encounter relations regardless of whether we define them as such. We see existence and what constitutes it. We see a building being constructed, a road getting paved, light being emanated, books being lined on a shelf. We see human beings: they relate, they chat, they assist, they stare, they think, they produce. A self walks, feels, breathes, spits, prays, and senses the invisible. All these, what we witness, what we see, what we observe, what we are shown, what we experience are what constitute existence, what constitute the present, the sum of it, the totality of it, the bit of it, a small bit. This is *the* existence, an existence that we see, we can see,

and that we make sense of. What we call existence then, is our own creation as we imagine it through what it has given us. Existence is very human, very present, and very real. But let us re-stare and re-see. We should encounter, alongside of all the actualized relations that constitute existence, a world of relations that has never actualized, relations that were never emanated or produced, and relations that never became part of everyday life, part of existence. This colossal non-existence, which is almost as large as the world of relations and entities, remains in the shadows of relations, in the background of what exists, beneath what exists and has become real. This world is the world of not-actualized relations, not-related relations, the sort of relations that never achieve an existence. These relations were nothing and remained nothing, and it is they that essentially constitute the *condition of not-relating*. This condition is not the equivalence of nothingness but it gives nothingness a different dimension insofar nothing in this situation is immanent in proximity to existence and is what essentially supplies existents to existence.

As a given being relates it only relates through certain relations, it only emanates and produces certain relations. Yet as this being, animate or inanimate, relates it is also simultaneously and spontaneously always already occupied with withholding certain relations, preventing them from actualizing. One of Orwell's characters utters the following in an address to his fellow animals: "I have little more to say. I merely repeat, remember always your duty of enmity towards Man and all his ways. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend. And remember also that in fighting against Man, we must not come to resemble him. Even when you have conquered him, do not adopt his vices. No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade."¹⁴⁵ What is preached here is a call to withhold certain relations, to avoid mimicry, to prevent assimilation. In short, this is a call to not-relate.

The condition of not-relating is continuous. Its non-presence has a constant presence. The present and the real are what have become present and real. For every relating and relation that becomes real and present, there are manifold not-relatings, there are manifold relations that never achieve reality. Time contains so many relations, but only a few become real and present, and it is that few that constitutes the real and present. The self and the social are no different. They are the sum of what has become real and actualized. The social: that invented and largely invisible world. It exists as that which consists of relations and as that which is observed repeatedly. This is the real and present dimension of the social. But what would become of the social had all that one thought, desired, and wanted actualized. What could have been of the social then?

One wonders, why a living being or an object would withhold, organically or inorganically, certain relations and not others? Why are certain relations released into existence while others are not? Some of the readily available answers to these questions are: some relations are not manifested simply because they are impractical, they serve no purpose, have no meaning. Some relations do not actualize due to the presence of external forces and relations. For instance, in the social there is society, law, state, the other, etc., all of which often prevent the self from freely relating or emanating and producing all sorts of relations. Some relations are prevented by existential and biological constraints. Lastly, certain relations are canceled, certain relations are deferred, certain relations are postponed, and certain others are kept hidden. In sum, regardless of what prevents certain relations from actualizing, and regardless of whether there is any causation for such non-actualization, the condition of not-relating is such that it is present in every instance, in every situation, in every event of any sort, in every stage of history. A being or an object, at any given instance, produces and emanates manifold relations, yet what is actualizing and becoming real is what is selected, what is chosen. It is, however, what is left out, what is

ignored, hidden, canceled, deferred, stored, and so-on, that constitutes the world of not-relating, and produces the content of this condition. A self therefore consists of what it relates and what it does not relate.

By this rationale then, the expansion of the content of relations of the social and the self as much as it indicates an enriched everyday and multiplied relations at any given moment, also indicates the exponential expansion of the world of not-relating. For every emanated and produced relation there are manifold omitted relations. The key question here is, spatially speaking, if the world of not-relating is expanding, inflating, and constantly increasing, where do these non-actualized relations go, what happens to them? Do they have a location like that of the imagined subconscious and unconscious of psychologists, where the banned and the hidden etc. are supposedly stored? The world of not-relating is a world that has no concrete existence, has no particular location unless certain relations are stored in memory. Most omitted and not-related relations disappear into an abyss, into nothingness, forever forgotten. They thus become inaccessible and un-manifestable. Some relations however may resurface and materialize. On occasion, it may be possible to witness and observe the traces of these not-related relations, traces that appear, disappear, and reappear. What may be considered incomplete relations or not fully manifested relations are generally the traces that these non-actualized relations leave behind in the world of actualized relations. Psychologists often talk of ‘slip of the tongue’ and ‘speech errors’, sociologists of ‘contingencies’, and philosophers of ‘the accidental’. All these expressions are largely related to the world of the not-related relations.

Common sense, especially one that is informed by causality, may dictate that there can be no relation of any sort between the actualized and the not-actualized relations, between the world of relations and the world of not-related relations. This is not entirely true. Relations that

actualize can carry within themselves traces of these not-actualized relations, the parts and pieces of them. Some actualised relations can even be in relation to not-related relations in some form. For instance, they can be a response or a reaction to them; they can be a continuation of them, their representation; they can be veiling them. The essential point here is that we cannot always interpret actualized relations independent of their relations to not-related relations. We cannot and should not consider actualized relations to be that which solely constitute the totality of a self, of an object, of the social. A self is both the product of the actualized and the not-actualized relations. Although, it may be very possible to establish certain relations between these two worlds, it will be a challenge to establish relationships between the not-actualized relations themselves as they often tend to disappear into the abyss. And if they had any relations, they must have developed them before their disappearance along with whatever relations they themselves had.

It is imperative therefore to recognize the existence of such a realm, a realm that exists in the background, in the shadows; a realm that is ever changing and mutating. Such recognition would not only assist us in appreciating what actually exists, it would also reveal to us the existence of a non-existent realm that lies beyond the veil of the apparent, the perceived, the observable, and the material. At a more subjective level, this realm of not-related relations can help us better understand the world of actualized relations, particularly when we contextualize them, which is so often conducted in relation to the actualized rather than the not-actualized. The realm of the not-related relations is an origin, a ground from which the actualized relations are often selected and chosen, and from which relations often burst into existence. Human actions, events, behaviors of all sorts, and their relations emanate from this silent and invisible world. We do not invent our relations every time we relate, we simply reach into our inner world then select

and determine a relation to actualize, provided that such relations are not already predetermined by the force of causality.

To conclude this chapter: I have examined three conditions here particularly in relation to, first, existence and what constitutes it, the content of which is commonly perceived to be relations and relationalities, second, to relations and their fates. My aim was to show that as existents relate, a condition that is largely observable and accessible, they also contain three distinct conditions in relation to their relatability: they derelate some of their relations in manifold ways while relating in other ways. They experience the condition of arelationism when they lack a permanent or a temporal capacity to produce certain relations or to relate to certain relations and phenomena. Lastly, existents experience the condition of not-relating when they relate, a condition that is timeless as it does not exist, and a condition that is neither lived nor exists simply as a potentiality.

CHAPTER VII – The Reality and Unreality of Relations

Relations take manifold forms to become a reality. But what is “reality”? What words distinguish and encapsulate it? To become a “reality” means to become real as opposed to being nothing. The real by becoming reality therefore becomes part of the present existence, which shares its existence with what emerges into it and becomes real (in other words, the real is determined by both being and nothing). Real therefore is what exists, visible or invisible. This is how “reality” is often conceived. Relations on the other hand are such that they can be real, transcendental, imaginary, assumed, and unreal. Put differently: some relations are real and some are unreal, some have a reality and some have an unreality. Interpreted in this way, the concept of relations includes both the relations that are oriented towards what is real and the relations that are oriented towards nothing, from which no relations are carried back to the self. It also encompasses assumed-relations, types of relations, commonly seen and observed in the social world, which are assumed to have a reality but in actuality do not. In everyday discourse for instance we assign notions of “resemblance”, “big”, “heavy”, “similar”, etc., to existing phenomena or to ourselves, and henceforth assume that a book is bigger than another, a road is similar to another, and further build a whole discourse around these designations. Such relations are only linguistically real, invented to fill certain gaps in the making of the social. Also, the concept of relations refers to relations that constitute the realm of not-relating, forms of relations that disappear into oblivion before actualizing unless they are stored in the memory only to actualize at a later timeframe. This complex and multifaceted existence of relations shows us that of all that constitutes existence relations have the most diverse, most elusive, and most fluid forms of actualizations. Water, for instance, as a tangible substance may exist in solid, liquid, or in a gaseous state, but the relations that water has and can have at each state are manifold.

That said, my goal in this chapter is threefold. First, I will examine the classification of relations and whether they should be classified at all. Second, I will study some broad categories of relations. Lastly, I will investigate the ways in which relations actualize.

Classification of relations

Classifying things is a common practice, so common that one may be tempted to identify it as an existential dimension of human existence. We classify, for instance, what is edible and what is not. We classify others based on their deeds, personalities, colors, ethnicities, ideologies, faiths, etc. We have typologies for our debts, incomes, books, and for all that we own, that we desire, that we dislike. At universities we have departments, research fields, subfields. Naturally, relations are not immune to this almost existential act of classification. They are classified into categories, into tables by disciplines, scientists, and philosophers. In John Locke, for instance, we encounter the “Relation of *Cause and Effect*”, ‘relations of time’ and “duration”, ‘relations of place’ and “Extension”, “*natural Relations*”, and “*Moral Relations*”.¹⁴⁶ In Kant, we are introduced to different forms of relations. He first identifies relation to be one of the four titles under which the functions of thought are classified when he examines the function of thought and understanding in judgements. He then further classifies relations into three “moments”: “Categorical”, “Hypothetical”, and “Disjunctive”.¹⁴⁷ In a different chapter, he draws his own table of categories, as opposed to Aristotle’s ten categories, where relations are classified as a third category, and further divided into the relations “Of Inherence and Subsistence”, “Of Causality and Dependence”, and “Of Community (reciprocity between agent and patient)”.¹⁴⁸ Max Weber provides us with a different classificatory process of relations, different taxonomies. In *Economy and Society* he examines two key social categories of relations: “social

relationship”¹⁴⁹ and “economic relationship”.¹⁵⁰ Under the category of “social relationship” we find: mutually oriented relations, reciprocal relations, symmetrical and asymmetrical relations.¹⁵¹ The category of “economic relationship” is classified as either “open” or “closed”.¹⁵² Furthermore, in the traditions of mathematics and logic we encounter an incessant tendency to classify relations. Bernard Russell and Alfred Whitehead, for instance, classify “identity of relations” into the categories of “reflexive”, “symmetrical”, and “transitive”.¹⁵³ They also argue that relations exist as either “universal relations” or “null relations”,¹⁵⁴ and that they have “domains”, “converse domains”, and “fields”.¹⁵⁵ In terms of the “classes of relations” they offer three sets: “one-many relations”, “many-one” relations, and “one-one” relations.¹⁵⁶ They further identify certain relations as “ancestral relation” referring to the “relation of ancestor and descendant”.¹⁵⁷ It is also quite common in these two traditions to classify relations as ‘internal’ and ‘external’,¹⁵⁸ a form of classification that can also be found in other fields, such as in economics, philosophy, sociology, religious studies, and so-on.

In recent decades, however, this attitude of classifying has been criticized by certain continental philosophers. For instance, in *The Order of Things* Foucault critically examines the evolution of the enterprise of classification in natural history and the relationship between language and concepts developed in those research fields.¹⁵⁹ From a relational standpoint, the phenomenon of classifying is not a mere mental act or an epistemic instrument invented in the history of writing and in the production of knowledge. It has far reaching implications with a determinate presence across the manifold aspects of human existence. As much as it is an epistemological act it is also an existential category. To begin with, to classify and to develop taxonomies, in existential terms, function as ways of existing that simplify what appears to be complex and unrelated and undifferentiated. They thus ease our understanding of ourselves and

what surrounds us. Let us imagine ourselves sitting in a university classroom for a moment: we find ourselves surrounded by walls, enclosed; we see a professor standing, students sitting. We further see chairs, tables, lights, books, pens, boards, signs of all sorts, doors, windows. We hear sound, feel warmth, take pleasure in learning, etc. Yet if we were to rethink this experience in terms of classification being an existential category, we will find that the ways in which we have described our experience in the classroom is essentially a classification of our reality, a reality that consists of manifold classes: room, chair, light, students, teachers, tables, sounds, etc. When we relate to our surrounding from the entity-relation point of view, we are simultaneously classifying the reality that surrounds us. This is not an instance of double-relations but an instance of relations existing within relations. As a consequence, identifying and classifying a table as a table gives us comfort in the classroom and allows us to develop relations accordingly. Our everyday primarily consists of such experiences, where classificatory relations coalesce with manifold other everyday relations.

The presence of these classificatory relations in our relational existence therefore is quite forceful, as each instance of classifying also opens up new horizons and generates new relations. A relation leads to manifold other relations. There is also another dimension to these classificatory relations that needs to be underlined, which is: to classify, by its very essence indicates the recognition of diversity and difference, rather than seeing a unity and sameness of all that exists. Having such a relational attitude towards realities, to distinguish and to see similarities both at the same time, undoubtedly enriches and enhances our relational capabilities and the very relations we already have. It is through such relations we thus see the different, the similar, the same, the unity, etc.

Further, such classificatory relations also have negative aspects and at times produce inaccuracies. When a certain phenomenon is classified, classed alongside of what is similar to them, it inevitably leads us to assume that what is being classed shares everything with what it is classed with. When we class a being with what is similar to it, we bring forth the knowledge we have of the properties, characteristics, and the relations of such class of beings and attach them to this classed being. What is occurring here is that the absence of knowledge about A is replaced with certain assumptions and information that are unique to what is similar to A. Further, a classificatory relation as it links a phenomenon to what is similar to it, simultaneously initiates the process of exclusion and delinking of what is not similar and the same, an operation that evidently has existential and social consequences. For instance, when we identify an individual as a Muslim and another as a Christian, this process of identification helps us understand these two individuals as we already have a degree of knowledge about each class, we at the same time separate the world into irreconcilable, different, and distinct classes. Yet the existence of human beings is such that there are more similarities than there are differences. These similarities are found not only in the biological but also in what differentiates and in what identifies.

That said, we still need to study the methodological and epistemological implications of classifications and see whether they are the proper instruments in conducting research. Speaking relationally, to classify is a relation and the act of not to classify is both a relation and a derelation. Therefore neither is superior to the other; both are equal instruments of inquiries, of inferences. The only danger here is considering one of these relational instruments as the only way to interpret reality.

When it comes to the classification of relations themselves the situation is more complex. Should relations be classified or should each relation be treated as an independent phenomenon

and thus be examined accordingly? My subjective view on the matter is that one should rather stay clear of the classification of relations unless it is necessary. The obvious reason being the sheer multitude of relations and their relations renders tables, classes, and taxonomies of relations useless and pointless activities. Each singular relation is so manifestly complex and relational that if one were to classify relations they would be forced to classify every single relation as an independent class of relations. There are political relations, love relations, family relations, international relations, economic relations, spiritual and religious relations, personal relations, sexual relations, existential relations, and so-on. Each of these classes also has layers of other dependent and independent classes of relations. There are relations involved in driving, reading, speaking, seeing, hoping, gravitating, breathing, eating, and so-on. The list can be extended indefinitely.

Further, classifying the world of relations can distort and misrepresent reality. The relation of love for instance can be present in religious relations, economic relations, in eating, in reading, in hating. There are also other relations, beside the relation of love, present in these relations. Considering how complex and intertwined the world of relations, especially social relations, can be, I thus find the obsessive attempts of mathematicians, logicians, and sociologists to capture and classify relations to be futile and incomplete attempts. Such approaches are not only incomplete they also isolate relations from their own relations. If we were to examine 'transitive relations', for instance, a class of relations or the property of a class of relations that has the formula of: if A has a relation with B and if B has a relation with C then A is related to C, provided that this relation is a singular unique relation. First, to assume that there is some form of transitivity, some form of relation involved in A, B, and C is a relation in itself regardless of whether such a relation is actual or not, assumed or not. So, at the outset we should concede that

a transitive relation can be considered, in certain instances, a form of an assumed-relation, a mental relation that has no actual existence. Second, there are the issues of indefiniteness and relatedness in relations. Each transitive property we assign to relations, to certain relations, will lose its significance in the face of the indefiniteness and the relatedness of relations. To say that A is greater than B, and B is greater than C, therefore A is greater than C, loses its meaning when we consider what might be greater than A or what C might be greater than. When we say that A loves B, and B loves C, are we to assume here that A also loves C? The answer is: they may or they may not. In the first instance the relation of love is transitive, whereas in the second it is not. Relations are such existents that one can easily produce indefinite mazes and labyrinths out of them. But to what end?

Second, relations are relational phenomena that relate. The classification of relations thus, though an impossible, arduous, and paralyzing endeavor, produces a state of un-relatedness in certain relations when that is not the case. If we study the relations of exchange for instance, we would notice in them, beside the relation of exchange, the relations of interaction, labor, hatred, power, dreams, necessity, love, need, hope, profit, money, misunderstanding, negotiation, reason, calculation, prejudice, disappointment, remorse, outsmarting, overcharging, ripping off, taking and giving, location, and so-on. Even the broadest class or set of relations are mere relations in the end, either assumed or actual, and in themselves they contain manifold relations, and by themselves they relate to manifold other relations. Additionally, since the world of relations is so fluid, so uncertain, so certain, and so open to influences, any relation may relate to any new relation at any given time and place. How are we to classify these relations? To see the relations of power everywhere therefore is an important step towards an incomplete understanding of the world of relations. But one must also see the manifold relations that are

involved in the making of the relation of power and see that the relation of power can always relate to unexpected new relations as it is actualizing. It is only then, when we recognize the fact that our attempts of capturing relations (classifying them) are always incomplete can we begin to truly understand the phenomena of relations.

The hidden, the inexplicable, the unseen, and the not there yet

When examining and imagining relations one of the first attitudes one must have towards them is that they actualize in manifold forms. This manifoldness is not simply a condition that describes a multiplicity in relations, rather it indicates that each phenomenon contains this possibility of actualizing in manifold forms. Existence may have found a singularity in its sheer existence, but its ways of existence are manifold. When a self orients towards an existent and pursues the relations involved in it, they immediately find themselves amidst dominant relations, forms of relations that reveal themselves to them due to their distinct and overwhelming presence. Their over-presence often entails accessibility. When we examine the act of reading for instance, an act that links the mind and the book, we immediately encounter the act of reading itself without considering other relations that are involved in the actualization of this relation, such as the relations of looking, seeing, holding, sitting, focusing, and so-on. At the initial encounter, these relations and the relations that constitute them do appear to our senses but are blurred by the overwhelming presence of the relation of reading.

If you want to “know” someone, make him speak. Then you can “know” him for what he is from his speech. What if he is an imposter and, having been told that a man may be known by his speech, intentionally refrains from speaking in order not to be found out?...

Now...how am I to know him for what he is? The answer is to be silent in his presence. Give yourself over to him and be patient. Perhaps a word may escape from his lips. If not, a word may inadvertently escape from your lips, or a thought or idea may occur to you. From that thought or idea you may "know" him because you will have been "influenced" by him. It is his "reflection" and his "state" that will have showed up within you.¹⁶⁰

Jalal al-Din Rumi

The hidden. There are hidden relations and there are in relations and phenomena relations that are hidden. In all initial encounters, and perhaps also in all familiar encounters, with any given thing, regardless of what such encounter may constitute and under what circumstances it occurs, we gradually and ultimately discover, incompletely, the presence of relations that are/were inaccessible to our minds and senses. Such relations are hidden beneath or beyond the manifested relations which appear to us at first encounters, and which ultimately become familiar relations. This condition of hiddenness is not non-existence but existence, a veiled existence. Therefore, questions concerning as to why relations are hidden are irrelevant here as certain relations are simply hidden, hidden in a relation, behind a relation, and so-on. This is their reality. There are also relations that are hidden not because hiddenness is their actual condition but because an external existent hides them. Someone or something hides relations insofar as it may be a secret that is meant to be hidden, it may be related to the self thus kept to oneself, it may exit in an environment where it is prevented from revealing itself, and so-on. What is hidden essentially evades the immediate observation and encounter, and the claws of our senses. Our sensory mechanisms are thus incapable of accessing what is hidden. A relationalist, therefore, is always mindful of this condition of the hiddenness of relations in their relational endeavors. Any conclusion drawn, judgement reached, conviction materialized, theory developed, law discovered, thus, is always incomplete. These human acts are ultimately the consequence of earthful surface conditions hence unable and ill equipped to unearth the entirety of the hidden

relations that exist there, right before one's eyes, surrounding one's own presence, and waiting for their veils to be removed.

Furthermore, when we immerse ourselves in the world of relations of all sorts we immediately realize the presence and existence of incomplete relations, relations that lack a degree of cohesiveness and sensibility, relations that appear as one thing then appear as another as they reveal themselves to us. This incomplete scene of what appears to be complete, broadly speaking, stems from the fact that certain relations that constitute this picture and scene are hidden from us. Even a great sum of human relations, be they social or subjective, are hidden relations. Sociologists have built the foundations of their field on the notions of 'social relations', on 'the social', realms that are primarily constituted by the hidden. Relations that exist as metaphor, as subtext, as secret; relations that are kept in one's home, kept to oneself, kept as part of history, of memory, and so-on. Even the very relations that appear to us and are captured by our perceptions, are hidden to many, are not seen and thus unknown to many. In human relations only certain such relations gain concrete actualization, like speaking, touching, fighting, etc., while the rest have a very hidden character, or are partially hidden. A great sum of our relations is kept within ourselves and carried by us wherever we go, which shows that what we call 'social relations' are sorts of relations that actualize as social, that are meant to be out there for all to see, entertain, and appropriate. Yet most human relations are generally hidden. I know nothing of the relations of the person sitting across from me in the subway. I know nothing of the relations of the people that walk pass by me on the streets. I know nothing of the relations that the people of Nairobi have/had/will have. I know nothing. We know nothing. We all know something, some relations. We are only certain of the existence of certain social relations. If we were to examine the relations of 'care', for instance, we see that as a relation 'care' can actualize in concrete

ways, and hence be observed in the very act of one caring for someone or in the utterances of ‘care’ for someone. Yet despite these discrete and sensible manifestations of care, a majority of the relations of care, relations that make such relations possible, are hidden, unobservable, and inaccessible.

The question however is: how are we to access or can we even access these hidden relations, these relations that are unsocial, that never become social but are considered to be social? From a relational point of view, and as the existence of relations dictates, one can only access some of these relations. At each encounter one may access different relations. Each self may encounter and find different relations. Some of these relations may reveal themselves to us if we are patient enough to gain access to them, hence the significance of time. Persistent and repetitive attentiveness should unveil some of these relations to us, hence the significance of repetition. Loosening the knots that tie at least some of these relations together should help us have access to some of them, hence the significance of involvement and immersion. The sheer increase in the number of inquiring selves should also increase our chances to gain access to some of these relations, hence the significance of the multiplicity of perspectives. Similarly, some selves may be more attuned, due to their personality traits, histories, and experiences, to capturing some of these hidden relations. Some who have experience, long engagement, and deeper insight in/with a given subject of inquiry may have easier access to these relations than selves that lack such insight and experience. In conclusion, what these preliminary techniques and strategies of accessing hidden relations ultimately reveal is that there is no easy way of capturing this hidden world. It has taken us so long to simply discover the existence of gravity but we still know nothing of its hidden relations.

The inexplicable. Inexplicable relations are such that they can neither be rationally explained nor adequately understood. In encountering such relations we often tend to express awe, bafflement, confusion, the inability to explain, shock, uncanniness, ignorance, humility, and utter phrases such as ‘God only knows’. These reactions generally stem (a) from the fact that the existence of existence is such that it offers indefinite forms of relations where the mind is unable and incapable of either comprehending or explaining some of them; and (b) from the failure of certain rational attitudes. Reason, for instance, is such that it dares to conquer. It wills to confiscate the essence of what surrounds it. And its belief in its ability to explain and understand what there is and what is in there is unshakable. Failing in achieving what reason has set upon itself to achieve, particularly in moments where reason is faced with inexplicable situations, it resorts to disappointment, and rather than admitting its own failure it substitutes such shortcoming with moments of awe and shock.

Beyond these encounters with existence, reason also encounters the explicable in its relations with the self. We often have those loud and silent conversations with ourselves. We often violently interrogate our acts, their origins. We often attempt to make sense of our relations that simply manifest themselves beyond our control.

These inexplicable relations are not hidden, as their inexplicability is expressed upon our encounter with them. They are out there, explicable to themselves and in themselves but inexplicable to us, to some of us. They are seen, observed, and experienced. Yet they continuously evade the mind’s conquest. They are neither captured nor tamed; they simply do not let themselves be taken hostage. They simply stand there, right in the open, readily available to consciousness and the senses, yet distant from the mind’s grip.

It is inexplicable that we may be aware of such inexplicable relations, we may even speak of them, yet we rarely presented them in our writings. Writing and the production of knowledge so often limits itself to what is discovered, understood, and explained. What is inexplicable is left out, left unwritten.

The unseen. In our social interactions, philosophical and scientific inquiries, imaginations of all sorts, evaluations of our own selves, our problems, contradictions, attitudes and conditions, we encounter that which is there, that which is available to our senses, yet remains unseen. What I mean by this is not the category of what is seen yet ignored, an existential condition that is fundamental to our everyday existence where at any given instance we see indefinite phenomena and relations yet what is being ignored far exceeds what is being captured and stored by us. Rather, what is being referred to here is the unseen, that which cannot be seen, that which is not seen. If all was readily seen, and thus capturable and discoverable, there would be no enrichment and development of our selves. Without this phenomenon of the unseen, the knowledge that we have produced this far would have been identical, singular, and repetitive. What a philosopher or a historian, therefore, sees and examines, is what they see and are able to see, regardless of whether what is seen is accurate or inaccurate.

Existence presents itself to us both as seen and unseen. What is unseen and uncaptured are essentially what is left behind, what is not known, what is not captured, and what is yet to be discovered and be seen by others. For instance, when Hegel claims that “For the independent self-consciousness, it is only the pure abstraction of the ‘I’ that is its essential nature, and when it does develop its own differences, this differentiation does not become a nature that is objective and intrinsic to it”¹⁶¹ we immediately notice concepts such as “independent”, “pure abstraction”,

“difference”, “differentiation”, “nature”, “I”, “objective”, “self-consciousness”, and so-on. These concepts represent what Hegel sees in self-consciousness. Similarly, Ibn Khaldun asserts the following: “Now, royal authority [*mulk*] is a noble and enjoyable position. It comprises all the good things of the world, the pleasures of the body, and the joys of the soul. Therefore, there is, as a rule, great competition for it. It rarely is handed over (voluntarily), but it may be taken away. Thus, discord ensues. It leads to war and fighting, and attempts to gain superiority. Nothing of all this comes about except through group feeling [*asabiyyah*]”.¹⁶² In authority, Ibn Khaldun sees “pleasure”, “joy”, “good things”, “competition”, force, conflict, “group feeling”, “superiority”, and so-on. These are the realities that he sees in authority. Yet what is unseen by him is the most or all of what is written on this concept after him. By this logic then, what I present in this text, what I see in the existence of relations is only a glimpse of what the world of relations constitutes. I cannot account for what is not seen by me and I cannot write on it as it is simply not seen by me.

In the everyday, a self often experiences a condition where the self faces a dilemma, better yet a contradiction between the mind and the senses. In such situations where the self is reluctant and uncertain, the senses sense certain relations yet the mind is unable to grasp them, or vice versa. Relations are felt or thought to be there, yet the mind and the senses do not agree. Since as beings we have a tendency to assign existence to non-existing relations, it is quite possible that there may not exist any relations in these situations. But this possibility is not our concern here. The key concern here is the conflict between reasoning and sensing over the existence of certain relations. A few conditions contribute to such conflict. First, biological and physiological limitations constrain our abilities in determining and describing relations. Second, having a limited experience with what appears and with what appears to appear confines the self

to the obvious relations. Third, the self is such that it is often set to or accustomed to see certain relations. For instance, a business oriented individual tends to see money and profit in things, events, and other individuals; a power obsessed self sees and perceives the world through power, sees power in all relations. Lastly, the familiar blinds the mind and the senses.

The not there yet. Relations that exist alongside one another, in one another, and surround one another have a tendency to relate and develop further relationships with one another or with other realities. For such reasons and potentialities, one must always be mindful that every relation and relational field is pregnant with new relations. The gathered relations and relationalities contain such potentiality, a potentiality for these relations to become a new relation, develop new relations, and encounter new relations.

This condition of relations, this indeterminate certainty, necessarily leads to the possibilities of predictions. If we were to find ourselves amidst an event, assuming that we are familiar with it, under what conditions would it be possible to predict what relations may emerge from such an event? Two reflections should be considered here. First, we have already established that causal relations or causality in general are only present in certain relations and realities as the world of relations is such that it contains causation and manifold other possibilities. Causality, which is at the foundation of nearly all our predictions, therefore does not have any privilege over other existing or non-existing possibilities. Marriage, for instance, that condensed form of relationism, so often results in the production of offspring. The offspring are predictable here. But this outcome can neither be read or explicated by pure causal thinking nor can relations that are not here yet be predicted based on pure causal relations, as the phenomenon of outcome exists as a multiplicity rather than a certain unicity. Second, what is not

there yet may never actualize even if the history of causation tells us otherwise. This pre-actualized state, from which relations and outcomes of all sorts may emanate or may not, is prone to all sorts of mutations, transformations, new encounters, etc., which once again shows that predicting future relations is not free from speculations, assumptions, and causal prejudices.

States of actualized relations

My aim here is to examine the how of relations and primarily focus on two common conditions that they experience. First is that relations are such that once manifest they can have various states during such actualization, and the second, which is closely related to the first condition, is that relations once actualized are susceptible to what surrounds them. In examining relations of all sorts, we may encounter states such as increase, decrease, intensity, elevation, strength, weakness, extendibility, expansion, lessening, diminishing, stability, continuity, flow, consistency, and so-on. An idea that we may have developed at some point during our lives or has occurred to us in relation to something or someone, may remain unchanged decades later. The opposite is equally true: it may fluctuate in its states and degrees depending on the relations involved while relations are being manifested. Such rigidity and fluidity can also be observed in physical realities, meaning that their relations may remain constant and may not remain so.

We should not infer from these fluctuating conditions of relations that all is relative, that nothing is continuous and constant. Rather, my point here is that relations can remain constant and the same as they exist, but they may also not as the conditions of relations essentially depend on the relations involved in their existence. In human relations, for instance, we experience both continuity and fluidity as we exist. Meanings and understandings we develop in relation to a thing can remain the same throughout our lives. The conceptions that we develop of an apple at

an early age, for instance, often remain the same throughout our lives. There are also other aspects to our relations: they can be discreet, enacted, emanated, and produced; they occur one after another, succeed one another, and coexist with one another; they replace, displace, appear and disappear and reappear, or no longer exist. Human relations thus are such that they are produced and emanated in unique relational worlds where relations that already exist in such worlds, basically the extant-relations, coalesce with these emanated and produced relations and affect the states of these relations. As life progresses new relations emerge and surround such relations and come to affect the conditions that initially gave rise to the development of such relations. What this condition of relations reveals is that in order to make sense of the changes, the fluidities, the constancies, and the states of relations, the impact of extant-relations that surround these relations cannot be discounted, regardless of how old and grounded these relations are.

This non-constant condition of relations, a condition that coexists with the constant condition of relations, a condition that can change and is open to all sorts of possibilities, a condition that is unambiguously known and noticed and thus expressed and practiced in the everyday, reveals itself when relations do not remain the same. This condition of certain relations teaches us that relations are vulnerable existents and are open to all sorts of possibilities as they actualize. Seldom do we encounter relations that are immune to such a state of non-constancy, that have the strength and persistence of continuity and of the same. This also teaches us, particularly in relation to human relations, that the ability and capacity to manifest and emanate relations in different degrees, states, and shades reveals how advanced and convoluted the world of human relations is where relations are not only multiplied and expanded but also developed enough to coexist with other relations and shape the manifold states of a singular relation.

PART II – RELATIONS AND STATES

Introduction

Is it possible, or rather is it the right time, to at long last announce to ourselves and each other that as human beings we have achieved and constructed a world for ourselves, where outer space meets the earth's surface, amidst space but over the earth's surface? Has that not been one of the primary goals of human existence all along? Or was that not the ultimate desire of our creations and ambitions, meanings and purposes, thoughts and acts? World, that which was already there, and that which is being constructed and created. Achieving the world, filling the emptiness of the world, and creating and recreating the world; all above the earth's surface. A long-awaited creation which was made possible by the lives of billions, the annihilation of hundreds of millions, by the inventions of thousands of languages and hundreds of states and empires, by an unspeakable savagery, relentless creativity, inhuman enslaving, pillaging, exploitation, imagination, work, destruction, invention, and so-on. We have built cities on the back of the earth, the part that no longer burns, that is no longer hot, and that has solidified. We have invented machines to do what we can and cannot. We have somewhat overcome the constraints of space; somewhat achieved and found unity in the world. Developed laws and systems to manage and organize our gatherings and assemblages, drawn lines over the solidified surface of the earth to keep some in and some out. Perhaps it is time to declare: we have a world now, we live in a world now alongside of all the structures that we live 'in', like the homes in which we dwell, the families, the communities, and the nations, so many layers and covers, we keep covering ourselves. That desire to belong, to be a part of, to be drawn to each other, to be close, to be covered, to be surrounded, all amidst a space which cannot be parted, cannot be conquered. The emptiness and the sameness and the vastness and the infinite horizon of space

terrify us; we need to cover ourselves by more layers, we need to be together, be warm and full. We love the earth beneath us, we are from earth, and we belong to earth not to outer space. Is this not what Islam and other ancient religions teach us: that we were created from clay? We have an image of the earth in our minds now, the whole of it; we know the earth, how it looks, its shapes, its colours, its architectures and topographies, its constitutions, what it is made of. We are here now. We were always already here but the “here” was not ours, not our creation as we merely found ourselves in here, now it is ours. We have succeeded. Whether this was our purpose, the hidden purpose of life itself, all along is irrelevant. We may have intended to create the heavens but we ended up with a world, a cold and warm, brutish and happy, destructive and creative world. The question is: was it worth it? The answer would be subjective. For some, knowing the world, seeing the world, experiencing what the world offers, visiting the unseen parts of the world, owning manifold objects, desiring more, having more, being immersed in the future, being ambitious and hard-working have made it worthwhile. While for others, we were better off living in small tribes, isolated, struggled, where the future was short and almost non-existent, life was simpler, the present is what mattered, a small world but a happy one perhaps. Irrespective of where one stands on this existential question, as many will recognize we live in unique times, a truly historical juncture for human existence, before which we were marching towards achieving it with all our inventions and reproductions, and after which it will come define and invade all our realities. To be of the world is ideology for most now; it informs the contents of struggles, challenges, and resistances of all sorts. The world is the primary identity of our age not the *polis*. We belong to the world now not to the *polis*. But as we are at the cusp of achieving this long desired worldhood, and as we celebrate this historical moment, should we not be fearful of this unfolding world, of its enormity, its complexity, and its absurdities.

What subjectivities will this newly achieved world produce? What will become of us? We should be fearful perhaps. We should be cautious. We should be suspicious. We should be pessimistic. The future is still dark and non-existent. Of this world in the making, of these selves we are becoming, of these sovereign 'I's that are developing, we should be wary. Perhaps, we need to pause for a moment, ceasing all our activities, creations, and movements. Stillness over action. History has shown us, repeatedly: the more enlightened and capable we become the more savage and barbaric we are. We should be fearful of what lies ahead. Perhaps. We should let pessimism lead us. Perhaps.

Politicians, assisted by bureaucrats, diplomats, soldiers, taxpayers, and political scientists, have taken upon themselves to manage the world, to fix, diagnose, and solve the problems of the world. It is perhaps time that we recognize that this self-assigned and serving mission of the politician contains and constrains the inventiveness of those who constitute the world. It is time perhaps that we free the world from the claws of politicians. Free the world from not just the state but politics altogether, in all its forms, in all its philosophies and institutions. Let us no longer seek ways to transform politics and discover a "new political order" as Dussel¹⁶³ relentlessly searches for. Enough of politics! We are thankful to the Egyptians and the Sumerians for giving us the gift of the state, but the world has had enough of it. Politics that which annihilates, that which protects and preserves. We need it no longer. Let us replace it with technology, which will no longer master and rule but merely facilitate where all will become politicians, where politics is no longer. Are we not overburdening politics here? Are we not overestimating the power of politics here? What if the politician's self-assigned tasks of controlling and managing the world were just grand illusions? What if the world by becoming the world had already freed itself from the reigns of politicians? Whatever the case, the world is

larger than politics now, it is all that is human including politics; it contains all that we have invented and manufactured this far, where we have reached, where we have left our footprints, digital and virtual. The world is no longer confined to territory, the earth's solidified surface; its boundaries extend from the earth's core to outer space now. The world is an uncontainable horizon and reality now. To study the world, its inner workings, its contents, its dynamics, its history, the realities that it encompasses, the pathologies, the oppressions, the injustices, the personality types, the indefinite relations, the inventions, the imaginations, the machineries, the struggles it contains, where should one begin?

Many theoretical approaches study "international relations", a phrase that has lost its meaning and allure as 'the world' emerges to define our existential and worldly reality, our very own existence. Of these approaches, realism and liberalism present themselves as the theories of 'international politics', of 'international relations'. They tend to focus on the 'is' of things, as if the "is" is eternal, and investigate a number of common and recurring phenomena (power, interest, cooperation, etc.), or certain dimensions of these recurring relations. While realism sees in "international relations", among other things, "human nature", "interest defined in terms of power", "interest", "morality"¹⁶⁴ or the lack thereof, liberalism sees in it networks of "complex interdependence",¹⁶⁵ institutions, liberal values, etc. Approaches such as feminism, Marxism, and post-structuralism, on the other hand, are critical of both the traditional approaches to the study of "international politics" and to the ways in which the politics of the world is. Feminist thinkers, for instance, notice the presence of the "political man", the "masculine state", the gendered world and worldviews¹⁶⁶ in world politics. Marxists are oppositional, dissenting, and cynical and thus see 'economic interests and relations', "power relations in societies from the angle of the power relations in production".¹⁶⁷ Post-structuralists primarily concern themselves with

diffusions and decenterings in order to overcome the ways of world politics. They also have a keen interest in the writings produced by the “theories of international relations”, theories that these thinkers consider to be “expressions of an historically specific understanding of the character and location of political life in general”.¹⁶⁸ The written matters for these thinkers. All these approaches represent the spirit and the way of knowledge, modern western knowledge: accumulative, engaging, overcoming, critical, concerned, ambitious, and coexisting. Thinkers of each age often concern themselves with certain relations, certain concepts. Think of the concept of ‘power’ for instance, it is essential for western thinkers, and their philosophies. The western mind is intoxicated by the riches and the force of ‘power’. Ibn Khaldun too perceived the politics of his age through the peephole of power and domination: “Once group feeling [*asabiyya*] has established superiority over the people... it will, by its nature, seek superiority over people of other group feelings unrelated to the first... However, if the one group feeling overpowers the other and makes it subservient to itself, the two group feelings enter into close contact, and the (defeated) group feeling gives added power to the (victorious) group feeling, which as a result, sets its goal of superiority and domination higher than before”.¹⁶⁹

Relationally speaking, one cannot underestimate the significance of the concept of power or interest, of what is written, of being critical, of the male-dominated status quo for the contemporary world of politics. Yet, one must also for instance recognize that power, a desire for power, and the pursuit of power requires power. Power is thus a prerequisite of power. A relational examination of the politics of the world, therefore, is keenly interested in pursuing relations of all sorts, and of all derelations and re-relations. The politics of the world is as much relational as it is derelational, as much relational as it is arelational, as much relational as it is not relational.

My aim in this second part is to study certain relations and topics in the politics of the world, certain concepts and events of the world. To do that, first I plan to briefly, as a way of encountering the politics of the world, examine the concept of the world, a number of relations involved in it, its implications, and finally the place of states and politics in such a world. Second, I will investigate certain relations of states and see how they emanate, produce, and manifest their relations. Third, I will examine the realm of inter-state relations, a distinguishable yet not isolated realm, and look at how states enter into relations, and develop and regulate their relations. Fourth, I will study the phenomenon of the state of incompleteness of the world and its politics; the roles of anxieties and uncertainties in the making of the world in such an incomplete world; and examine how states relate to the future and develop their future-oriented relations. Lastly, I will examine the notions of care and life in the world, the significance of attentiveness to the relations of the world and conclude the chapter by exploring the gift and the curse of relations.

CHAPTER VIII - Relations, the World, and States

There are stark differences between our age and the previous ages, which is why it is so common to differentiate it by some measure and characteristic. In terms of relations it can be argued that we live in the age of relations, relations of all forms, physical relations, mental relations, virtual relations, distant relations, old relations, and new relations. Life in all its forms has always been constituted by relations, but what sets the contemporary age apart is the sheer increase of things, of populations, of entities, of machineries, etc., and of the exponential growth of new forms of relations that are generative of further relations. Phrases such as “the age of relations”, have a way of reducing one’s explanatory burden as they simplify complexities, define and differentiate totalities, and replace the infinity and the vastness of existence that are constitutive of the mind’s initial and default relations towards existence. Difference and identity then primarily serve as mental instruments to counter the sense of loss and incapacity that a mind experiences as it encounters and appropriates existence. Such phrases as much as they are programmed to contain multiplicities and so often what they contain is regulated, the extent of how much they should contain is often left unregulated. There is thus an indeterminacy to them as they need to be explained through other concepts and ideas. Concepts such as ‘politics’ and ‘culture’, for instance, lack defined margins. Even the concept of God, despite all the adjectives that are associated with it, remains boundless. The phrase ‘the age of relations’ is no different, it needs to be expressed and defined through other words, and regardless of how much content one pours into it its boundaries remain indeterminate.

My goal in this chapter is to first examine certain relations of this age of relations; second, search for ways to describe this age as *world*; and third, examine certain relations between the world, states, and politics as such.

The age of relations

It is all too common to perceive the world as globalized nowadays. It is embedded both in everyday discourse and in the knowledge produced. It is almost *a priori*, in the Kantian sense, a ground upon which and through which the contemporary subject thinks, acts, and interacts. The world is perceived to be global, meaning that it is interconnected, interdependent, and resembles a village, a “global village”,¹⁷⁰ a community, where everyone knows more people, more people are known to more people, where the dissemination of information is rapid and the impact of certain events is instantaneous. There are trade routes, air ways, railroads, internet networks, cellphone towers, satellites, travels, migrations. The internet for instance, surrounds the globe, signals travel, computers connect. We are no longer bound to the surface of the earth as the internet links the earth’s surface to outer space, and by doing so it has freed us from being purely terrestrial beings. The internet has thus expanded the boundaries of our world. While signals travel across the globe creating a web of relatedness in their path the same cannot be said of all that is human and that is of human. As there exists what is global there also exists what is not global that which lacks the relatedness of a signal, the freedom to be related, to expand relations. Our creations have outdone us, outperformed us. Therefore, what whirls around the globe, the earth, which itself circles around itself and around the sun, is a unique and specific reality. Furthermore, the everyday understanding of the global involves notions of relatedness, connectibility, simultaneous presence in manifold spaces, mobility, and so-on. It is movement that essentially constitutes the foundation of the global. That desire to move, to reach out, to expand; that desire to escape from ourselves and others; that desire to be somewhere we are not; that dislike of the present and the conditions we live in. Of the things that are global, my primary interest here is in the relations that are global, more specifically the description of this era as the

age of relations and as the time of the world. There is certainly a degree of relatedness to the globe and to certain things and beings that exist in and on the globe, but there is more to the world than the world simply being defined as global. The world that we have achieved, created, and found contains globality, un-globality, a lack of globality, the inability to globe, and so-on. Our starting point then is not that the globe is global, in the sense that the globe is spherical, that everything on it belongs to it, and something on it goes around it, but that we live in unique times, the times of the world constituents of which include categories such as the age of relations and becoming global.

I will start with the following question: what sorts of relations contribute to this age of relations insofar that this historical period is signified and differentiated? First, we need to look at the constitutive role that extant-relations, relations that continuously recur or constantly exist as the same for long durations, play in the making of this age. In this context, extant-relations refer to those forms of relations that each generation inherits and learns from the previous generation, and in each generation, where they are objectively and subjectively present; they may recur as the same, evolve, or mutate, and so-on. These extant-relations are neither easily destructible nor transformable. They are simply the repetition of what appears and what is similar. These relations are embedded in our everyday. It would be naïve of course to think that all extant-relations survive to be re-lived by the next generation, yet somehow through repetition, learning, nostalgia, etc., most survive to contribute to the relations of a given age. They are transferrable and repeatable. Therefore, as we invent new relations we can only do so through and in addition to the re-living of already existing relations. The desire to maintain the present as the present, which interestingly coexists with the desire to make the present somehow different than the past, and the desire to be linked with the past only contribute to the survival and the

repetition of extant-relations. Secondly, there are prevalent-relations such as power, self or national interest, globality, sorts of relations and relationisms that are generally autonomously present or coalesce with other forms of existing relations. Each age deems certain relations prevalent and thus produces and re-produces such relations actively. What is deemed significant today may be forgotten by the next generation or what is practiced this year by all may not be practiced next year. These relations, though generally produced and maintained by certain structures, political or otherwise, can be imposed, adopted, learned, taught, and so-on.

Furthermore, this age is quite dynamic and restless. What we witness is a continuous development of new forms of relations, multiplications and mutations of relations. The 'new' and the 'next' are what encapsulate the creativity, the restlessness, and the boredom of this age. New machineries are introduced, new philosophies are developed, and new products are manufactured. Difference not sameness is imposed and encouraged. The everyday is enriching and expanding. Chaos and control lurk in the background to tame and unleash this terrain. A terrain that is both frightening and promising; it generates the critical, the emancipatory, and the revolutionary, as well as destructiveness and destabilization. What if states lose their grip over control, over force, and over authority and sovereignty? In this age of subjectivities and multiplicities, collectivities and unicities, our newly achieved world appears to be on the verge of something. But then again hope and disappointment are not easily distinguishable.

The historical dynamism of this age stems from an existing environment that nurtures continuous and flowing relations. To be political, to communicate, to plan, and to be driven. One is amidst flowing relations, one is in a constant state of relating, and one is being continuously related by flowing and shooting relations from every direction, from all sources, animate and inanimate. These forms of relations, although they indicate a degree of relatedness, and perhaps

even represent an intense form of relatedness, should not misguide us into believing that the world is only intensely relational. The world is equally intensely fragmented, lonely, illusionary, and disjointed. The self of this world therefore is in a constant state of relating and refraining. So many relations, so many states of un-relatedness and derelatedness, all filled with a void, arbitrariness, absurdities, pathologies.

Below are two excerpts from two different historical periods. The first is from the Hittite king Suppiluliumas, addressing Aziras, ruler of Amurru:

He who [lives in peace] with the Sun shall live in peace also with you. But he who is an enemy of the Sun, shall also be an enemy [with you]...The deportees of these countries whom the Sun moved... [if] from Hattusa somebody, man or woman, escapes and comes to your country... You, Aziras, will seize [them] and hand [them] over to the king of Hatti land...[If...] before you, Aziras, somebody speaks [evil words concerning] the Sun, be it a [notable] or be it an [ordinary] subject of yours, (if) you, [Aziras] will not seize [him] and will not hand him over to the king of Hatti land, thereby you will transgress the oath.¹⁷¹

The next excerpt is from Barrack Obama's address to the United Nations General Assembly in 2016:

We see it in the headlines every day. Around the world, refugees flow across borders in flight from brutal conflict. Financial disruptions continue to weigh upon our workers and entire communities. Across vast swathes of the Middle East, basic security, basic order has broken down. We see too many governments muzzling journalists, and quashing dissent, and censoring the flow of information. Terrorist networks use social media to prey upon the minds of our youth, endangering open societies and spurring anger against innocent immigrants and Muslims. Powerful nations contest the constraints placed on them by international law. This is the paradox that defines our world today. A quarter century after the end of the Cold War, the world is by many measures less violent and more prosperous than ever before, and yet our societies are filled with uncertainty, and unease, and strife. Despite enormous progress, as people lose trust in institutions, governing becomes more difficult and tensions between nations become more quick to surface.¹⁷²

The first excerpt is from a treaty of alliance between the king of Amurru, located in modern day Lebanon, and the king of the Hittites after the latter's conquest of much of Syria.

The agreement represents the decision Aziras makes to break away from Egypt and join the

expanding Hittite Empire. Obama's speech on the other hand, is given at the annual UN Assembly meeting and largely summarises the American view of the current world conditions, including American fears, anxieties, and ambitions. In both cases the political, over 3300 years apart, share certain similarities: the commanding voices belong to political figures; God is present in both; both contain anxieties, concerns, issues of trust and mistrust, othering, diplomatic conduct, categories of friends and enemies, movements, etc. They also reveal the extent of relations and relationalities present. The political is different however in relation to the sheer number of relations involved in it and associated with it. In Obama's speech we encounter manifold relations and the manifold relations that these relations entail. The political is no longer simple, personal, purely political, and limited.

The indefiniteness of relations of this age enrich life, but they also generate uncertainties and fragilities. Relations break easily, cut impulsively, are produced instantaneously. Spontaneity is superseding the continuity. In such a colossal manifoldness and intense productivity and emanation, relations lose their significance, their meanings. When cultures were simpler, machineries non-existent, the world limited, relations had stronger foundations, longer lifespans, and a deeper meaningfulness. Yet, the nihilistic, fragile, and unpredictable state of the relations of our age generates the unknown and the uncertain. In such an environment the self is anxious and concerned. There is however something positive to these states of fragilities, indeterminateness, and indifferences: long standing relations are easily diffused and discarded. Permanence is challenged by the temporary, the long term by the short term. The same is repeated, destroyed, shelved for later use, or replaced by what is different. Instantaneity, secrecy, difference, indifference, and so-on, come to define the margins of the relations of this age.

The World

The concept of the 'world' is both undefinable and definable. It is a totality, real or illusionary. It covers what is on earth, what is assumed to be there, and what cannot be accounted for. In the modern world we have only one world, one that has defined and undefined margins and enumerable content, and one that is no longer an inaccessible expanse. The world is nearly known nowadays, it is conquered, and it is mapped out. Politics, that daring human activity, even talks of the 'world order'. The Ancient Sumerians had this world and the underworld, or the netherworld, a world which was "a land of [no return] ... those who enter cannot leave, On the road where travelling is one-way only... where those who enter are deprived of light, Where dust is their food, clay their bread. They see no light, they dwell in darkness, They are clothed like birds, with feathers."¹⁷³ For Plato there was the physical world and the world of forms.¹⁷⁴ The world, perceived as a relation, is a manifestation of a self's outward relations of all sorts, the limit of these relations, and the self's desire to locate and position itself within such an expanse rather than being confined to itself. Perceived as a relationality, however, the world contains relations, non-relations, relationalities, derelations, relationisms, and all that is human, inhuman, and that is of not human. It also, empirically, contains the earth, at least its surface and what lies beneath it, the atmosphere, the air we breathe, the food we consume, the water we drink, the sunlight we depend on, the civilizations we develop, languages we have constructed, machineries and technologies, hopes, ideas, dreams, the known and the unknown, the visible and the invisible, the past that we know of, the future that we are constructing, the knowledge we have, the metaphysical, and so-on. In short there are manifold ways to define the concept of the world, and there are many worlds that need to be defined. The world thus is a defined indefinable. Heidegger, for instance, provides four different meanings for the concept of the "world".¹⁷⁵

Others, such as Popper, have argued that there are “three worlds”.¹⁷⁶ These different understandings of the world reveal the fluid reality of the concept, the boundaries of which and the contents of which never cease to expand and transform. The ‘world’ is in motion, expanding and shrinking. A newly discovered star or galaxy, a new word, a new product, a new species, the extinction of certain species, the birth of a baby, the death of a living being, a new region beneath the oceans, and so-on, all push and contract the boundaries of our knowledge, of our world. The concept of the world is such that it always slips away.

How does ‘globalization’ fit into the world? What are its relationships? Globalization is perhaps best defined as a phase in the expansion of the world. It defines a certain dimension and characteristic of the world in the sense that in the age of relations certain processes, events, activities, and relations have a global character. There are varying approaches to the concept of globalization. In it, Saskia Sassen sees “two distinct sets of dynamics. One involves the formation of explicitly global institutions and processes... The second set of dynamics involves processes that do not necessarily scale at the global level as yet” as they “take place deep inside territories and institutional domains”, but they “are part of globalization in that they involve transboundary networks and entities connecting multiple local or ‘national’ processes and actors”.¹⁷⁷ Joseph E. Stiglitz has defined it as: “closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reductions of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders.”¹⁷⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, on the other hand, contrasts the concept of globalization with the concept of *mondialisation*, world-forming and creation, and argues in favor of *mondialisation* as the proper mode of creating a connected world as *mondialisation* indicates “immediately, without delay, reopening each

possible struggle for a world, that is, for what must form the contrary of a global injustice against the background of general equivalence.”¹⁷⁹ Nancy, as have many others, warns us against globalization as it, according to him, leads to “uniformity produced by a global economical and technological logic”.¹⁸⁰ There is no denying that globalization as it describes an era, also profoundly impacts numerous processes and relations. It is both a product and producer. The question of “uniformity” is not a modern phenomenon, Abrahamic monotheistic religions, which found their highest expression in Islam’s concept: ‘*tawheed*’, the oneness of God, for instance, replaced the polytheistic religions of the Middle East. In the context of globalization, “uniformity” becomes a concern in terms of its origins, as it originated in the west, and is shaped by western norms and logics. Yet globalization is such that as it contains and produces uniformities it also produces and contains multiplicities. To be global, which is the essence of globalization, is not as easily orderable and controllable.

Furthermore, the modern western world neither discovered nor invented the world. The world was always there as a reality, as a horizon, as a destiny, yet never “attained”, not until the modern era. The world is that which lies beyond the ‘I’ and the ‘we’, and amidst which the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ reside. In this sense, the world is very much a spatial category. Many kings and generals have dreamed of conquering it. Christians, Muslims, and communists fought to convert and control it, to reorder it. It is said that Deganawidah, before embarking on a journey, to his mother and grandmother said: “I shall now build my canoe, for the time has come for me to set out on my mission in the world. Know that far away, on lakes and many rivers, I go seeking the council smoke of nations beyond this lake, holding my course toward the sunrise. It is my business to stop the shedding of blood among human beings”.¹⁸¹ So many have dreamt, so much spilled blood, yet they all failed in attaining the world. Sargon of Akkad, Cyrus, Alexander,

Genghis Khan, and Napoleon all fought to conquer the world. They all failed, the world consumed them, and the world lived on. The world therefore does not belong to a single individual, religion, nation, or civilization. It cannot be tamed, it cannot be attained, and it cannot be conquered; it belongs to all, human and nature alike, it is the work of all, past, present, and future.

For far too long the world was inaccessible, unseen, and unknown. But certain aspects of it are within our reach now. We have the image of the world, the earth, in our minds for instance. We know how it looks like from a distance, its shape, its architecture, its design. From a distance human beings do not exist, there is only the planet and its colours, that is the essence of the world, a humanless blue planet. We have a rough knowledge of its geography and topography, of the species that occupy it, the cultures that shape it, and the sovereign states that have parceled it. Despite being an open-ended and expanding horizon, the world and worldhood can be said to have been achieved in certain regards. The question however is: what to do now, where to go from here?

Since my primary interest in the concept of the world here is its certain arbitrary relations I should highlight three key relationships. First is the relationship between the ‘world’ and the ‘age of relations’. The age of relations is not the world itself, it is, like globalization, one of the components of the world, a description and a state of the world. Neither the world nor the phenomenon of the age of relations can be understood without the other. The two complete and complement one another. To say that there is a world or that we have finally attained certain aspects of the world are only possible as a consequence of constant relating, and it is these relating that are what largely contribute to the existence of the world. Second is world-self

relationism. The world has a concrete reality only if it is known to a self as such, otherwise the world is a mere illusionary possibility or a non-existent. Since the world is a reality of this age of relations, the self in most instances does not choose to become part of the world, as it often either finds itself amidst the world or is forced into participating in the making of the world. The self can no longer shut itself off as the culture that surrounds such a self is soaked in the worldliness of the world. The world surrounds the self. Identities, languages, actions, fashions, ideas, personalities all contain a degree of world-hood, all contain a slice and a piece of the world. The world objectively exists as a dimension of what is human now. This existential dimensionality of the world presents itself in the manifold aspects of our everyday realities, and it presents itself in many ways. The worldly self reaches out beyond their circle, their space, beyond their body, their sensory field, into the far reaches of the world in manifold ways. This outward extension of the self in itself is a relational act, a global act. The self circles the globe as the globe circles itself. An act of imitation. It is through such act that the self becomes a global self. The worldliness of the self also reveals itself by simply existing without extending outwardly. Sheer existence is a contribution to the phenomenon of the world. It is primarily this aspect of worldly existence that contributes to the expansion of the world, to the growth of the world. The more there is, the more events happen, the more relations are produced and emanated, the more machineries and technologies are manufactured, the larger the world becomes.

Third, self-world relations are reciprocal in essence. The self ontologically strives for the world, desires and imagines the world. The self hates the world. As the self strives for the world, as it wants to be part of it, participate in it, contribute to it, and as it wages a war against it, the world also contributes to the selfhood of the self. It expands the self's horizons and adds

manifold dimensions to all there is in the self that constitutes the selfhood of the self. As the self already finds itself amidst the world, the world also becomes a part of the self.

These self-world relationisms have given us a sense as to what is inside the world, what contributes to the making of the world, this ever expanding and transforming horizon. Each self, each machinery, each animal, the mountains, the rivers, the grass, all contribute to the world. A given self's every act may not have a worldly character, may not be global and rotate around the axis of the earth, yet all acts, all existing or disappearing relations, all continuing relations are physically a part of the production of the world, they fill and expand the world. The world is around us and in us. It is in our dreams, hopes, desires, wishes, ambitions. It is a part of us and we are part of it. The world lies as a flat or a rocky terrain ahead of us, before us, and behind us; it is also hanging over us, pressuring and affecting us, changing and transforming us. The self strives to reach out to the world, into the world, to experience and live it. We love the world, we feel responsible for it, and we hate the world. The world has betrayed us, we thus are ever so eager to set it on fire and burn it. The world is a heaven, is a beautiful rock; it can be a better place.

Beyond the politicization of the world

There are worlds created within the world. The world of politics, the totality of what is political, is one such world. It contains institutions and states, rules and regulations, political interactions, the politician, the diplomat, the bureaucrat, the citizen, the taxpayer. There is something political about institutions and citizens, regardless of whether they are political or not. There are political relations, politicized relations, and politically managed and guided relations. There is something political to things, to many things. Schmitt defines the concept of the

“political” in terms of “friend and enemy”;¹⁸² Rancière defines the concept of “politics” as “a paradoxical form of action”.¹⁸³ Mouffe, on the other hand, makes a distinction between “politics” and “the political”: “by ‘the political’ I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by ‘politics’ I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political.”¹⁸⁴ Instead of defining ‘politics’ and ‘political’ we should perhaps first put the following question forward: What is that which makes an act or an event political? An inscription by Azitawadda of Adana reads the following: “Ba’l made me a father and a mother to the Danunites. I have restored the Danunites. I have expanded the country of the Plain of Adana from the rising of the sun to its setting. In my days, the Danunites had everything good and plenty to eat and well-being. I have filled the storehouses of Pa’r. I have added horse to horse, shield to shield, and army to army, by virtue of Ba’l and the Gods (El). I shattered the wicked. I have removed all the evil that was in the country... And in all my days, the Danunites and the entire Plain of Adana had plenty to eat and well-being and a good situation and peace of mind.”¹⁸⁵ What Azitawadda essentially is describing here is politics, the essence of politics, the reach of politics. The word ‘politics’ is not mentioned in this excerpt as the word itself is a Greek invention. However, he talks of being the father and the mother of people, he talks of security, governance, territory, protection, rules, well-being, war and peace, wealth, faith, control, punishment, stability, and so-on. A single individual does what many cannot. If we take this ancient understanding of politics, which is quite hierarchical and state-centric, as our guide to understanding the phenomenon of politics, it would essentially appear to us as a) the name of the gathering of many people and the organization of that gathering in manifold ways, and b) that which has manifold meanings, manifold references, and manifold functions and purposes.

Politics therefore is the name of many things. If those many things were to be named then there would be no need for the word ‘politics’. Also, since politics indicates the presence of manifold relations, in an unfolding world, politics enriches further and attaches itself to a multitude of other relations and realities. To that effect, politics in my view at once refers to all that is related to the state and what is contained in the state. It also refers to something becoming political when that something develops relations towards the state or mimics the relations of the state.

The phrase ‘politics of the world’ therefore, indicates the mothering and the fathering of the world. The most immediate impact of this form of politicisation, however, is that politics in its attempt to unify the world fragments it. The world may be one and many but the political is not. The political world consists of divisions, regions, realms, and spaces. Borders and movements over these borders are managed and organized through such fragmented and fragmenting logic, a logic that has been forcefully defined and observed with the rise of the modern nation-state. The exactitude of lines of nation-states in many ways has replaced the approximate borders of earlier states and empires. What overflows these borders is determined through international laws, which are nothing but political instruments, agreements between political wills. The legal here is political, it is an extension of the political, not, therefore, a neutral realm that stands above the political. What we call politics therefore has many heads and many faces (e.g., the political, the legal, the executioner, the legislator, the protector, the manager, the defender). Until the legal is fully freed from the political and becomes a non-political field, one should refrain from putting too much hope into it as the ultimate regulator of the political.

Furthermore, the mission that the political has burdened itself with by mothering and fathering the world has led to the politicization of the world. The phrase “politicization of the

world” does not only encapsulate what is purely political or relations that are initiated for political purposes, it also refers to those realities that are not in essence political or related to the political but are increasingly shaped by the political and the political will. The ordering of the world, for instance, assessing and managing its security, its financial health, its environment, and so-on, are the kind of activities and relations that are not necessarily political but are politicized by what is political. The political is highly invasive and assertive. Activities such as the knowing and the making of the world, are politicised. The political is present in them; it coalesces with them with the aim of managing them. Even products and ideas that are meant solely for the world, in order to help the world and contribute to it, such as arts, are often managed and ordered by the political. The dissemination, use, marketing, and exchange of art are regulated by the political. It is therefore quite rare to find a worldly thing that is not in some ways politicised, does not have the traces of the political. Even though the liberal self, the most dominant form of subjectivity today amidst the sea of multiplicities, is consumed by the economic, the political engulfs and absorbs this economic self and thus politicizes it in manifold ways. We can no longer hide from the political, it is watching us. We may have created and ultimately achieved the world, but by achieving it we have also politicized it. We live in it now. The Five Eyes are recording. Every attempt of transforming it will always be a political act, it will be the reproduction of not the same but of the similar. The question thus is not how to transform the world but how to depoliticise it and overcome its politicisation.

But why should any given self seek a less politicized world, or overcome it? The political as much as it has contributed to the advancement of societies and played a key role in attaining the world, has equally been destructive, controlling, and intolerant. It is the art of living in communities, but it is also what destroys communities. Only the political has been able to tame

the political, not morality or science. There is an almost existential trust in the political so much so that a life without it is unthinkable, which is why the absence of politics is often represented by chaos, death, and destruction. This deep-seated trust however must be questioned. It is true that the political protects but it also destroys, it competes but it also dominates, is confined into borders but its ultimate will is to conquer the world particularly when conditions are fertile. It is this fear of the political, this cynicism about its intentions, and this uncertainty about what it can and will do that necessitates the construction of a less politicised world.

CHAPTER IX- Relations of States

We live at a historically significant juncture, a juncture that is primarily shaped by the world, which is no longer a destiny, although the how of it still is. The world is a home to which we all belong and in which we dwell. The relationship is reciprocal: we have both created each other, and neither can survive without the other. We are thus no longer just shaped by subjective experiences but also by the world. In this chapter my overall intention is to examine a particular constituent of the world, to which we owe the fragmentation of the world, and from which we largely derive our fragmented views and philosophies of the world, which is the relations that states have. As rigidly structured assemblage's states are a fertile ground for the production and emanation of relations. Surely, there are many ways to examine the relationship that states and relations have. My goal here however is to essentially focus on relations that transcend the boundaries of state sovereignties, the sort of relations that are emanated by states outwardly, oriented beyond their borders, or the kinds of relations that lack any orientation but spread beyond state borders. I will first examine the phenomenon of the relations of states, as to what it means for states to have relations, and see what forms and categories of relations exist in such a realm; next I will explore the phenomenon of 'expansion' and its importance and implication for states; lastly I will reflect on the roles that the categories of *conditions*, *the will*, and *the historical* play in the emanation and production of relations in the confines of states.

Relations of states

a) Modern nation states are sovereign states. Sovereignty however is not unique to modernity as it is fundamental to the very logic of the state. The pharaoh therefore is the most extreme and the most supreme sovereign. What is sovereignty? According to Bodin, it is "the

absolute and perpetual power of a commonwealth”.¹⁸⁶ Sovereignty here assigns a hierarchical structure to the state, where the sovereign sits at the top. It also resembles the right of an individual: they both signify spatiality; they both assume non-interference and the freedom of action within the limits of sovereignty and right. The logic of sovereignty assumes power-over, as Bodin tells us. For a state to be sovereign it must have power over land, people, and institutions. The sovereign state therefore does what it does because it can, because it has power. Sovereignty is the freedom to do. It is the anti-thesis of invasion and disorder, which is why Hobbes¹⁸⁷ found in sovereignty a cure for the crisis of his times. The sovereignty of the political was something to be consented to by the people if they were to enjoy security and well-being. By this logic, the state is endowed with the functions of control and power not because it seeks them rather because the people have given their consent and thus legitimized such state functions. Despite the long tradition of the sovereign behavior of the political, sovereignty has not been the ultimate determinant of the *raison d’etre* of the political nor has it prevented the interventionist and domineering adventures of the political. It thus cannot be understood simply in terms of pure power-over any longer as conditions that necessitated it have changed. Nor can its boundaries be limited to Agamben’s notion of “state of exception”¹⁸⁸ as such a distinct realm is not sufficient to capture the complexities that lie in the relationships between the people, the state, sovereignty, and the world. Undoubtedly, the medieval understanding of sovereignty remains embedded in the very logic of the contemporary political, but there have emerged new conditions that not only coexist with sovereignty but also contradict the very logic of sovereignty. In the age of relations, sovereignty coexists with what supersedes sovereignty and with what undermines sovereignty. Absolute power coexists with other absolute powers. The principle of non-interference coexists with various forms of interferences.

b. A religious text, the Qur'an or the Bible for instance, has absolute power, an absolute divine authority, but these powers are contained within a text, they are revealed and written in them, and as long as these divine teachings are known, obeyed, followed, taught, and practiced in the community of believers, the revealed text emanates power and absoluteness over the community. The relation between sovereignty and the authority of a religious text over the conducts of a believer is thus dependent on the relations of believing, knowing, and learning, meaning the community communalizes the text and gives it its power of authority. In a way the community invents power beyond themselves to overpower themselves. The dominant category of relations here is being-related. Through being-related by manifold forms and varying degrees of relations the text persists and remains relevant, it remains active, and it continues to shape the everyday of a believing self. In the case of the state however, we encounter a constant state of relating. The constitution is enforced. The state never ceases to relate to land, to people, to its neighbors, to the income one has, and so-on. The state never ceases to be a part of what it has sovereignty over through the relations of managing, controlling, leading, protecting, and so-on. A state, therefore, in its very essence, is a highly relational body. It is a body whose survival and existence depends on relations, on constantly relating: it needs to collect, to punish, to govern, to organize, and to watch.

c. States ultimately are a slice and a layer of the world, in which they relate in indefinite ways. They are a fertile ground where individuals and institutions constantly contribute to the relations of states, to what constitutes states. By being productive, these bodies continuously expand the content of states, and as the scope of this constant production of relations expands, states, in response, develop further relations to manage such expansion. The contemporary logic of sovereignty is such that it not only demands constant intervention into what it sovereigns over,

it also requires the state to always be ahead, leave its mark on all that is being produced, and be a part of what exists within its boundaries. A state therefore is as much as it is a relational body, relating through institutions and other means, it is also a body that continuously expands by constantly producing and emanating relations. The emanation of relations however is not an enclosed and confined phenomenon; the emanated always overflows its intended borders. We cannot think of the relations of states as an enclosed totality, something that can be captured by a concept, like Foucault's concept of "governmentality";¹⁸⁹ which is why the world, the state, and their relations are best examined as relations along with their relations and other existing relations.

d. Beyond the everyday relations of a state lie extant-relations, those historical and cultural relations that surround a state, that are already present, dynamic and mutating. When a state bursts into the world, it finds itself amidst already existing relations, including certain relational facts like that of: states relate and states are relational. The ways in which a state organizes itself, builds its institutions, protects its borders, provides for its citizens, establishes diplomatic missions and means of communications with other states, reaches agreements with other states, regulates exchange and trade, and so-on, are all already there, practiced and exercised by existing states. So in many ways, a new state is no longer new, as it immediately adopts and mimics the extant-relations that link the existing states. Such produced relations are the relations of reproduction, mimicry, and repetition. A given state may isolate itself or may be sanctioned, yet such situations do not indicate the end of this state's relations with the extant-relations, as it simply means the absence of certain relations.

e. There are also layers of relations in states and to states that are not easily accessible and distinguishable. These layers of relations are very much embedded in the very constitution of

states in relation to other states and are what to a great extent differentiate a state from another. Instances such as sharing a border with other states, coexisting in the world with other states, having certain historical prejudices towards other nations, or certain deep-rooted perceptions of other nations, are forms of relations that are given, hence often un-thought of and all too often passed over in silence. Similarly, acts of eavesdropping and clandestine interferences in the affairs of other states, which run contrary to the logic of non-interference, may also be considered a part of this invisible realm. These inaccessible and secretive relations are neither unregulated nor disorderly; they are in fact necessary for the constitution of the state and thus hidden. It is for reasons such as these that citizens and researchers cannot have full access to the relations of a state as there are familiar yet ignored and unrecognized relations and relations that belong to the world of secrets, kept from everyone.

f. States as dynamic organisms have certain ready at hand attitudes, certain routine relations and behaviors, almost instinctual acts. One such relational attitude is the culture of response. States, particularly contemporary states, respond to events, to short or long term threats, to natural disasters, to developments emerging in other states, and so-on. Although at times we may observe silence on the part of a state, such unresponsiveness is a relation in itself. By not responding a state reveals its indifference and its policy of silence. This responsive attitude is not necessarily a reciprocal set of relations, although it can be at times, but in general it is a form of declaration of the position of a state on a given matter. The modern state responds, voices concern, announces a worry, threatens. It is constantly present and through such presence it legitimizes and affirms its existence and sovereignty.

g. Constant reevaluation and assessment. Although states as long-standing socio-political bodies tend to have stable and regularized relations, hence the development of long-term plans

and strategies, and where we also see the importance of the legal in regulating these long term relations and in achieving stability for a long duration (the legal-temporality relationship), states are also forms of bodies that constantly require reevaluations and assessments of their existing-relations and developing relations. This condition, a temporal condition in many ways as states need to consider both the future and the present simultaneously, leads states to operate both on an *ad hoc* basis in relation to certain events and in a comprehensive manner to develop long term strategies, annual budgets, etc. Agility and dynamism become important characteristics of the political. States are agile; they are capable of changing their existing positions and attitudes towards certain situations at any given moment. This agile state, which can also be interpreted as a fragile state, allows states to constantly redefine themselves, and redefine the limits of their relations. In a way, their continuity as structures and systems depends on their adaptability and agility.

h. Lastly, states often find themselves in a predicament. The sovereign state finds itself trapped between its own sovereignty and the world that it is a part of and that it has to be part of. This paradox is a source of the development of certain relations and regulations that regulate existing worldly relations, but it also necessitates states to layer and limit their relations. It forces them to both close themselves off to relations that orient towards them and limit the relations that they emanate and produce. In this sense, states are both borderless and with borders; they are open and closed simultaneously; they are autonomous but also a part of a borderless world. This paradox, this predicament, is at once an entrapment and a state of openness. Thus far, states appear to have negotiated a balance between these two contradictory conditions. They have also, to their credit, weathered the force of the world and have thus maintained their sovereignties amidst the flood of the worldliness. The question is: for how long?

In conclusion, this eclectic narration of the relations of a state and in a state was meant to illustrate that a state is a significant source of production, emanation, and maintenance of relations. Although manifold relations exist as a consequence of the state, manifold others exist regardless of its existence. Perhaps the state should be seen as a concrete division of the world, of its territory and people, and it should also be seen as an artificial construct whose existence has little bearing for certain relations.

Expansion

The phenomenon of expansion is an intrinsic tendency within the logic of the political, ancient or modern. In ancient times such a tendency was limited to certain adventures and conquests, in the modern world however advancements in sciences and technologies, the rise of capitalism, and the increase in relations have intensified this tendency. Individuals expand in various ways, they expand their knowledge, wealth, families; corporations expand their operations, revenues, markets, and growth; states expand their territories, power, influence, and economies; and the world expands as everything that constitutes it expands and enriches. Expansion can be interpreted in manifold ways. First, ontologically it is a given and a consequence of the ways in which we exist. Like other living beings human beings have an expansive existence. Our senses, for instance, are oriented outwardly more than inwardly. We see what surrounds us, hear what happens, and sense indefinite happenings in the world beyond our physical bodies. To sustain ourselves, maintain and enhance our existence, we depend on what exists outside ourselves and what exists around us, beyond our bodies. This outward dependence, this expansive relationism, necessitates an expansive mode of existence. Therefore, at the existential level we are not autonomous and self-sufficient beings as we can only exist

expansively. This form of expansivity is given, it is what we have, it is how life actualizes, and it defines our very being. It is also something we have achieved as living beings, to be able to extend what is confined to a body towards what lies outside. Second, expansion can also be interpreted as a necessary condition. This form of expansion goes beyond the given ontological expansion; it encompasses forms of expansions that are forced, that are temporary, and that are circumstantial. In such situations an individual or a society expands purposefully or forcibly. Third, expansion defined as more. This mode of expansion, which is quite prevalent in the modern world, encompasses attitudes such as having more, earning more, knowing more, owning more, wanting more, desiring more, aiming for more, and so-on. It is never enough, a constant act of fattening. The 'more', which is open ended and exists as a purpose and destiny, may never be achieved, and even if it is achieved more often than not a new more emerges instead. The role of capitalism in cultivating this mode is quite evident as capitalism presents the more as meaningful, as good, as fulfilling, and as progress. The rise of 'more' could also indicate the coming of a form of existence that has transcended necessity, or as a sheer reaction to the decline of the religious and the fading belief in the existence of the afterlife.

Fourth, expansion manifests itself as the expansion of the same. Rather than adding to what one already has and owns, expansion of the same entails the multiplication and the mutation of the same in some forms and ways. Selves for instance often have a desire to change people around themselves to make them the same as themselves. Parents educate and bring up their children to resemble themselves, to be like themselves so they can see themselves in them and witness their multiplication in a concrete sense. Similarly, states, dominant states in particular, after achieving domestic stability tend to expand outwardly by means of conquest and influence. Societies that experience such external imperialism often come to resemble their

conqueror as a consequence of force, mimicry, or adaptation. The Anglo-Americanization of the world in our times represents this imperial form of expansion expressed through the English language, liberal norms and politics, institutionalizations, and so-on.

Furthermore, expansion is not only the *modus operandi* but also a fundamental constituent of the contemporary political world. States have relations with other states. They trade, exchange, develop new relations, expand existing relations. Although territorial expansion is no longer as common as it used to be, the expansion of influence, cooperation, trade, and alliances remain dominant forms of expansive relations. Expansion of course is not always a peaceful activity; it can lead to confrontations and conflicts, war and peace, which also have the potential to lead to the development of the expansion of certain relations. Conventional logic often perceives war in opposition to peace; Plato, for instance, writes: “The greatest good, however, is neither war nor civil war... but peace and goodwill among men.”¹⁹⁰ While one exists the other is absent. War and peace are of those rare instances where an absence (peace) is desired over a presence (war), and where the most desired absence (war) continuously becomes present. This is a conventional binary view of war and peace between states. A relational view of the conditions of war and peace is that they are not default states of inter-state relations, where they define the eternal existence of these relations. It is not about the one or the other. War and peace are products of the development of relations between societies. Before the rise of war and peace as two significant conditions that define the relations of states, the absence of relations was/is the actual default state. War and peace therefore are consequences of the rise of the outward relations of states. No state is hardwired with war or peace. States may have peaceful relations, may have conflictual relations, may have both or neither. Clausewitz links war with politics and defines it as “*an act of violence intended to compel our opponents to fulfill our will*”¹⁹¹ and “War

is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means".¹⁹² Such a linkage of war and politics is only sensible because the political has monopoly over war. Yet in the absence of such monopoly war does not become extinct. Which is why, war and peace are best interpreted as conditions that replace the absence of relations and as forms of expansive relations.

A positive aspect of the age of expanded relations is that it offers manifold possibilities for improving or limiting certain conditions and phenomena, including the conditions of war and peace. Rather than viewing war and peace as the only two options available to them, states now also practice other possibilities such as the cessation of relations or limiting the scope of relationships. The total eradication of war may not be feasible in the foreseeable future (unless there is a will to overcome it) as things of the world are too unpredictable, too unknown, too secretive, too vindictive, and too chaotic, the sort of realities that often set ground for war. A leader, a state, an event, a mistake, a misunderstanding, a wrongdoing can all lead to conflictual situations. There is also the issue of the will to war, a situation where a nation or a leader itch for war, willing to go to war for various reasons, or simply because they can. In the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides narrates the following from Pericles: "It was evident before that Sparta was plotting against us, and now it is even more evident. It is laid down in the treaty that differences between us should be settled by arbitration, and that, pending arbitration, each side should keep what it has. The Spartans have never once asked for arbitration, nor have they accepted our offers to submit to it. They prefer to settle their complaints by war rather than by peaceful negotiations, and now they come here not even making protests, but trying to give us orders."¹⁹³ This will to war, which is different than being forced into a war, remains one of the biggest obstacles against achieving perpetual peace. There remains a desire to kill. Yet, since war

is a condition that consists of relations it can be overcome. A universal will to end war can eradicate it so the elimination of the conditions that often lead to war, or the development of the culture of *anaxcide*, the execution of political leaders who initiate wars.

The most common mode of expansion in this wealth driven age is economic. States produce, trade, and exchange. The concern, however, is that economic relations limit the scope of other relations between states, and it also, particularly when it is expressed in terms of national interest, affects and infects the content of other existing relations. The presence of one's products, one's creations elsewhere also means the presence of one's self. Economic expansion then, becomes the expansion of the state, a product produced in state A and sold in state B means the presence of A in B. For corporations whose primary aim is to profit from the mere physical presence of their products elsewhere amounts to little if the business is not profitable, but for states all forms of expansions indicate their expansion, their influence, and their presence beyond their borders. Economic and political expansions thus are not separate phenomena, they are intrinsically linked and both determine each other's scope. Let us not assume though that the economic expansion of states inevitably leads to peaceful conditions in the world. Montesquieu for instance argued that: "The natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace. Two nations that trade with each other become reciprocally dependent; if one has an interest in buying, the other has an interest in selling, and all unions are founded on mutual needs."¹⁹⁴ The history of western imperialism and colonialism has proven the opposite. It has shown that barbarity, politics, savagery, theft, and economy are interlinked, they complete one another. As Agathangelou and Ling state: "Liberals secure a particular 'world order' through Hobbesian fear and Lockean property. Who has property, who does not, and who uses fear to acquire, preserve, and/or expand property become crucial strategies in everyday interactions. Moreover, ideas about culture and

subjects play crucially into these calculations. Being fearful and desiring property, then, become legitimized as a way of being.”¹⁹⁵ The economic has not saved us from wars; it has simply given us more wars, more desires, more inequalities, and more fears.

Finally, state expansion cannot be interpreted as an organic development as more than often there are conditions that further it in the world. Two situations deserve mention: first is competition. States compete with other states to be better and to have more. Competition for power, wealth, control, influence, advanced technology, and so-on. Competition is a condition often found between individuals yet it is somehow adapted by the political as it serves its logic of expansion. Competition does not indicate equal opportunity for all; only those who can ultimately compete. Fernand Brudel: “The conquest of the high seas gave Europe a world supremacy that lasted for centuries. This time, technology – ocean navigation – did create ‘asymmetry’, an advantage on a world scale. In fact Europe’s explosion on to all the seas of the world raises a major problem: how was it that ocean navigation was not *shared* by all the maritime civilizations of the world once the demonstration had been made? Theoretically they could all have entered the competition. But Europe remained alone in the race.”¹⁹⁶ Competition, egoism, power, deceitfulness, fear... the political has borrowed so much from the individual. The second situation is that a state by virtue of coexisting with other states comes to realize its shortcomings and problems. This condition derives states to be more productive in emanating and producing relations, which often results in expansion by means of competition.

Conditions, the will, and the historical

The relations of states is a fertile ground from which relations, political or otherwise, emanate, and by which manifold others are shaped and regulated. Out of many categories that

constitute states three, namely the will, the historical, and conditions present a meaningful ground from which many of the relations of the state stem. When the relations of states are pictured it is helpful to think of the world not as an enclosed box but as a landscape, a parceled landscape, that consistently emanates and produces relations from and towards all directions regardless of whether these relations are intended for a destination, and regardless of whether they contain additional meanings or serve a purpose. Contemporary states are productive realms for obvious reasons, e.g., technologies, machineries, capitalism. For instance, it used to take six months for the pharaoh's messenger to deliver a message to the Mitanni king in ancient times, whereas in our times the same task is almost instantaneous.

But what do the concepts of 'conditions', 'will', and 'historical' mean and entail? Summarily, 'conditions' is what constitutes the present; all the things that exist, the states that these things are in, the functions they have, the categories that shape them. Unless specified, conditions contain an external dimension to them insofar as they envelop and condition what exists amidst them. It is in this sense that "conditions" also indicate a lack of freedom, as one is not because their 'is' is their organic state but because their state of 'is' is determined by the conditions that surround them. The notion of 'will' refers to desire, a moment of decision making and assertiveness that a self or a nation has, regardless of what the goal of this will is or how it achieves what it is determined to achieve. Lastly, 'the historical' indicates those past experiences, perceptions, and memories that never truly pass into nothingness and largely are not even one's own yet are learned and carried forward from generation to generation.

These three concepts may not suffice in decoding a state's doings; they can however be helpful in making sense of certain causal or repetitive relations. Machiavelli writes the following: "I am not unaware that many have thought, and many still think, that the affairs of the world are

so ruled by fortune and by God that the ability of men cannot control them. Rather, they think that we have no remedy at all; and therefore it could be concluded that it is useless to sweat much over things, but let them be governed by fate... When I think about this, I am sometimes inclined, to some extent, to share this opinion. Nevertheless, so as not to eliminate human freedom, I am disposed to hold that fortune is the arbiter of half our actions, but that it lets us control roughly the other half.”¹⁹⁷ Action, will, freedom, fate, God, all concepts and relationships that deeply concerned the medieval Christian and Islamic philosophies and theologies. Things may be different and perceived differently today but some of these categories remain relevant to the current politics of the world. “Fortune” is not ‘conditions’ as the concept of fortune implies the way of the world and is often used to refer to those long standing social attitudes and structures that tend to repeat themselves almost as the same over numerous generations: in a way the movement of the same, the movement of the ways of things. Whereas, ‘conditions’ refers to what exists and how it exists in the very present moment, regardless of whether this “what” is repeated over generations or not, and it often implies the difference in movements of the ways of the world. In intensely relational times such as ours the way of the world is continuously redefined, fortune and luck are continuously reproduced and reformulated. Multiplicities and complexities often rearrange things and their ways. ‘Conditions’ do not mean the rebirth of existence anew at every instance, it therefore cannot be isolated from the past and history, as the ways of the past and history are such that they leave and send traces, scars, memories, good or bad towards the future. The differences that exist between conditions and the historical, particularly in relation to social relations can be, in part at least, attributed to the force of ‘will’. Will here functions intently as the end or the continuity of the historical and the redefining of the

present, conditions or otherwise. The political thus often finds itself trapped in the relations and negotiations of these three key markers.

In relation to the relations of states, the historical, will, and conditions act as the sum of the primary sources for the production of such relations. They determine their how and what, and the functions and meanings they should contain. They also function as determinants of relations in countering relations that are oriented towards such states. These categories are also instrumental to policy making. A policy maker in response to a problem, a given event, and an unexpected situation negotiates these three categories in formulating a policy. The response of a state to past or emerging issues, the political environment, the state of external relations, the current public mood, existing interests, public will, the will of the leader, these factors help policy makers in determining the present and the future actions of states. The continuity of a past policy or the reformulation of a new policy is largely determined and negotiated at the intersection of these categories.

Whether we see these three categories as one, acting and functioning in unison, or as independent variables that are merely present alongside of manifold other variables, there is nonetheless an element of mimicry, continuity, and resemblance involved in the relations that are produced in light of these categories. Put differently, the relations of the political, particularly those that already exist and actualize beyond the horizons of the present, either simply continue to exist as the same or as next but similar, determined primarily by resembling past possibilities or mimicking similar historical situations. Even if the next relations were new, hence not similar, the constitution of the new should in some form resemble the previous similar or same situations. This is how deeply the political is rooted both in the past and present, where the past is always kept in the present, but the extent of its presence depends on the temporal distance between it and

the present as other categories such as forgetfulness, repetition, and ignorance come to determine the relationships between the past and the present. The present, meaning the conditions and the will, and the past meaning the conditions and the historical, together inform us of what relations or their absences are to be produced and what are not.

CHAPTER X - Inter-State Relations

The world as a horizon is neither simply a singular entity nor is it just a whole that consists of related and disjointed parts, it is also a forest consisting of related trees, a sea that consists of similar water drops. Worlds of a world and worlds within a world; all named “world” nonetheless. Their relationship is temporal and spatial, organic and spontaneous. From a distance neither is existent; up close their relations are innumerable, their differences are distinguishable and indistinguishable. The world and its relations are a point where both deductive and inductive thought processes merge. There is a world and its relations, there are the relations of states (a constituent of the relations of the world), and there are the relations that manifest themselves as happenings and linkages between states, the realm of inter-state relations, the theme of this chapter. The difference between the realm of the relations of states and inter-state relations is transparent. Its elasticity and translucency reveal a sea of relations. The inter-ness of the inter-state, which coexists with surroundedness, should not be interpreted as something that occurs between two or more things, not in things but in the empty space that exists between things, which would limit our relationism. Inter-ness is a mere approximation of an indefinite reality. It is that indefiniteness that often necessitates the act of eclecticism. Are not all philosophies and scientific theories eclectic?

My goal in this chapter is to examine certain aspects of the realm of inter-state relations. I will thus examine certain contents of this realm; its relational dimension; and the roles that interest, language, and attitude play in its construction.

The realm of inter-state relations

In the pre-modern world the realm of the inter-state was distinctly limited. It was marked by occasional visits by emissaries and public officials, periodic wars, the occasional building of alliances as the need arose, travelling merchants, and myths and legends about distant and imaginary societies. Spatial (in)proximity was the key determinant of the extent of these barely existing relations. Being close meant more. In the age of relations however relations are no longer simple and far in-between, they are indefinite, their scope expansive, their conduct multifaceted, their forms regulated and unregulated. Such relations include discoursing, informing, challenging, using force, regulating, exchanging information, assisting, warning, punishing, oppressing, preventing, state of indifference, protecting, gathering information, threatening, sending and receiving, agreeing and disagreeing, coordinating, cooperating, misleading, exploiting, confronting, hiding, learning and teaching, ignoring, dismissing, encouraging, buying and selling, stealing, giving and taking, changing, intervening, retaliating, warning, sanctioning, inviting, honoring, disrespecting, blocking, competing, discussing, taking advantage, protecting, recognizing, controlling, criticizing, sowing confusion, instructing, and so-on. For each relation to materialize there are manifold relations involved. The realm of the inter-state is rich, growing, and dense. It is thus inadequate to describe this realm in the following manner: "Inter-national politics is the realm of recurrence and repetition; it is the field in which political action is most regularly necessitous."¹⁹⁸ This realm is the realm of repetition and the new, necessity and leisure, nihilism and order.

The development of new relations does not entail the abandonment of the old ways. Agreements such as treaties, written for their durability and externality unlike verbal agreements which are rare and temporary, largely continue to constitute the foundation of inter-state

relations. Yet even these supposedly transcendental instruments do not remain the same as social existence transforms. They are modified, revisited, changed, discarded, ignored, rewritten, withdrawn, and replaced. In the ancient times agreements tended to be limited to certain issues such as allegiance, alliance, aid during war, the sharing of information, deportees, fugitives, territories, and so-on. In the modern world there are agreements of all sorts. Below are excerpts from two agreements belonging to two different historical periods:

a) From a treaty between Suppiluliumas and Aziras: “[If...] before you, Aziras, somebody speaks [evil words concerning] the Sun, be it a [notable] or be it an [ordinary] subject of yours, (if) you, [Azir]as, will not seize [him] and will not hand him over to the king of the Hatti land, thereby you will transgress the oath.”¹⁹⁹

b) From the seventh principle of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development: “States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth’s ecosystem. In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.”²⁰⁰ And from the twenty-seventh principle: “States and people shall cooperate in good faith and in a spirit of partnership in the fulfilment of the principles embodied in this Declaration and in the further development of international law in the field of sustainable development.”²⁰¹

Issues, problems, concerns, and ways of conduct are understandably different in each historical example. However, the essential logic of an agreement as a means of establishing relations that are meant to transcend the present, and the very idea of breaking off agreements are

present in both. In principle, agreements, which are recorded and agreed upon, often for a defined duration, and which exist as the same and as an externalized cemented set of relations, contain and indicate mistrust and unfaithfulness. Furthermore, as instruments of furthering, establishing, and regulating relations, agreements are not permanent settlements of differences, of unrelatedness, and of otherings between states, they are meant to reduce and resolve these and ultimately bring states closer.

Agreements neither cover all the understandings between states nor do they solely function as what prevents the use of force. Their significance to the constitution of the modern-day inter-state, though, is incontestable. Even wars often end in and by agreements, hence the significance of the written.

The prevalence of agreements and the over reliance of the state on them, however, could eventually either bring about the end of the institution of diplomacy or reduce its scope considerably. Diplomacy has always played a vital role in the conduct of the external relations of polities. An ancient Egyptian text, *The Teaching for King Merikare*, for instance, gives the following advice to the succeeding king:

Let your images be sent to distant foreign lands,
(Even ones) which will not acknowledge them,
For he who lacks knowledge of the affairs of the enemy will suffer.²⁰²

Diplomacy is a method, a physical presence, an expertise, a representation, a service, a form of gathering information and reaching an agreement. It is not secondary to force and war; it is simply a different form of an inter-state relationship. But there are challenges that the institution of diplomacy faces today. For instance, the sheer reliance over long term agreements reduces the use of diplomacy. Second, the scope of inter-state relations is such that it includes relations that are not traditionally covered by diplomatic missions. Third, advancements in the ways of

communications lessen the need for both diplomats and embassies to serve and fulfill such needs. Fourth, government officials and governmental institutions converse and exchange information with their foreign counterparts on a regular basis. Fifth, the politician, the soldier, the artist, and the businessman have all become diplomats today. Faced with such challenges, in order to survive, diplomacy will have to transform and redefine itself, its logic and mission. The conditions of the world today are such that complexity not simplicity is the norm, distance is no longer distant, foreign is no longer foreign, and relations are no longer purely political. These conditions require specialized individuals to conduct the affairs of states, whose scope is no longer limited to the political, the economic, or the diplomatic. Morgenthau once argued that “diplomacy can make peace more secure than it is today, and the world state can make peace more secure than it would be if nations were to abide by the rules of diplomacy.”²⁰³ The exponential expansion of relations in the realm of the inter-state have limited diplomacy to traditional diplomatic relations and have opened up space for instruments other than the diplomatic. Reduced to certain technical procedures, such as issuing visas, diplomacy is no longer the determinant of the inter-state; it is the agreements, which can be reached over phone calls nowadays, that are the dominant form of the conduct and construction of the inter-state.

The emergent in the contemporary inter-state is not limited to the prevalence of agreements and the retreat of the diplomatic. One of the most significant developments has been the *socialization* of this realm. I have already pointed out to the politicization of the world and its relations, but when the inter-state is concerned the opposite is equally true, meaning its gradual socialization. The inter-state is overflowed by the social. It incorporates and borrows relations that are conventionally perceived to be everyday social relations. Although this development can be traced to the development of modern democracies, where the involvement of people in the

political has consequently transformed and enriched the content of the relations of the political, with technologies this process has only intensified. The political and the inter-state in particular resemble the everyday; they contain relations and responses that constitute the everyday. The more a politician acts and thinks like the people, resembles the people, and represents the values of their constituents, the more the support for the politician. What is happening here is the disappearance of the boundaries that traditionally separated the political and the social. As the political invades the social, the social counters such invasion by socializing the political.

Relational dimensions of inter-state relations

The realm of inter-state is a realm of calculation and consultation. Of indefinite possibilities only certain relations become a reality. A reality is what has become actual out of many possibilities. If only it was possible to track these actualizing realities, the newly developing relations, the newly introduced relations; we would be recording the present history of relations, a new form of history: the history of relations. The relations of/in the inter-state can vary, resemble, replace, collapse, or disappear. Geographical proximities, historical connections, extant-relations, and so-on, all play roles in how and in what way states relate to one another. The scope and intensity of the Canada-USA relations, for instance, are not equal to the Canada-Seychelles relations. Histories, geographies, religious and ideological affiliations are important to the scope of inter-state, so are the sovereignties and their freedoms of choosing with whom to have what relations, and relations such as enmity, cooperation, and competition. Enmity between states, for instance, does not mean the end of all relations. With the emergence of enmity new and different relations are developed, hostile relations for instance. This rationally constructed realm is not free from inadequacies and shortcomings, inequalities and injustices however. The

use of reason in decision making does not entail justice, morality, and equality. It is informed by interest and other conditions. It is capital conscious. It is infested with pathologies and absurdities. It is not pure reason or rationality as every form of thinking and decision making is always rational.

Furthermore, there are three broad aspects to this realm of the inter-state that need to be considered when examining its relations. First, there exist indefinite relations at the disposal of states particularly considering how social they have become. Having such a boundless disposal does not indicate that all inter-state relations are intended and planned. There are instances where states are forced into relations despite their will to do otherwise. There are instances where states tend to develop relations with all states as conditions necessitate while holding back manifold other relations that are at their disposal, only to be activated when necessary. The following is a press release from the Canadian Foreign Affairs: “In direct response to the actions of the Maduro regime, Canada has imposed targeted sanctions against 70 regime officials and, in collaboration with five other countries in the Americas, referred the situation in Venezuela to the International Criminal Court. Canada has also taken steps to downgrade diplomatic relations and restrict engagement with Venezuela.”²⁰⁴

Further, the everyday relations of the inter-state vary. For instance, certain relationships of states are described as special, friendly, antagonistic, close, etc. These categorizations serve as points of difference, differing a relationship from another. Despite the fluidity of these categorizations, as conditions determine their extents, they nonetheless define the overall scope of relations. Special relationships for instance can be very special.

Secondly, there are limits to the extent and scope of its relations. This limitation stems from conditions such as spatial proximities, governments in power, ideological affiliations,

historical connections, domestic dynamics. State A, for instance, may have trade relations with state B, but may not have regular political relations and open lines of communications. Although this aspect of the inter-state may indicate the absolute presence of determination in sovereign states, such determination however is not open-ended and without constraints and limitations, for there can be instances where pressure from other states determines the nature of the determination of a state in manifesting relations.

Lastly, the inter-state is not a universal reality. Not all states have inter-state relations with all other states. But the absence of inter-state relations however does not mean that there are no relations at all between them.

Interest

The organic relationship of the modern nation state and capitalism makes it necessary to speak of the notion of 'interest', which plays a constitutive role in inter-state and all forms of politics. Interest, to be clear, is not unique to the modern nation state as it is embedded in the very essence of sovereignty; an essence whose will is to survive for a long duration by any means. Nor does its prevalence mean that all inter-state relations are formulated based on interest, the national interest, a form of interest that is strictly oriented towards serving and enriching the nation. Interested relations coexist with relations that are regulated by mutual interests and with situations where states lack any sort of interest. But what is 'interest'? According to Bull, "To say that x is in someone's interest is merely to say that it serves as a means to some end that he is pursuing", he thus concludes that: "the conception of interest is an empty or vacuous guide, both as to what a person does do and as to what he should do. To provide such a guide we need to know what ends he does or should pursue, and the conception of

interest in itself tells us nothing about either.”²⁰⁵ There may be a degree of ambiguity to the implications of interest if it is understood as a principle of the political. Yet interest can also represent concrete relations. To say that this land is mine or ours means that the I and we are present in relations that are related to that land. The ownership of the land becomes interest; the relation of interest attaches itself to the relation of ownership. Interest as a logic is not hidden, not secret; politicians and diplomats proudly declare it as their *modus operandi* in their engagements. In this respect, national interest is different than self-interest, as self-interest is rarely spoken of, it is often hidden hypocritically.

“To be interested” in something generally implies finding in something what is desirable and fulfilling. The something is something that one lacks or is something that adds further to what one already has. The ramifications of the interest of the political however go behind desire and addition. It, on the one hand, refers to things, tangible or intangible, that a state has a claim to, and, on the other refers to a principle, a logic, that guides and constitutes the inter-state realm. A state acts in an interested way to achieve or protect its interests. What a state is interested in is not limited to the showing of interest in something, as that something, which has already been decided by the state, is what a state has or wants. Interest then does not only refer to a tangible or intangible asset it also represents invasive and ambitious desires.

In Islamic jurisprudence the concept of *masalih*, public interest or public good, is used as a source of extracting rulings in the absence of direct references in the Qur’an and the Hadith. In other words, *masalih*,²⁰⁶ which means what benefits, in opposition to *mafsada* that which damages and destroys, is the totality of what benefits the people as long as they do not contradict the textual rulings found in the Qur’an and the Hadith. Notions of benefits and damages are of course relative values, but what they reveal is that the content of interest is predetermined as it in

itself has to be in the interest of what is valued by a society. What a state 'does' should be in the interest of the people. In modern times, with the rise of capitalism and liberalism national interest achieved an explicit expression in material interests. The capitalist, the liberal, and the nationalist pursue interests. Interest is what a state 'has' or 'wants'. Some have claimed²⁰⁷ that the paradigm of national interest is a product of the modern nation state and credit Cardinal de Richelieu for promulgating the notion of *raison d'état*. In my view, we cannot think of any state, ancient or modern, free from the logic of interest. The modern form of national interest however is expressed more openly, practiced more frequently, and structured institutionally.

Furthermore, if national interest as a policy instrument is essentially concerned with protecting what a state has or getting what a state wills to acquire, its prevalence then also has something to do with the ways in which states exist. They have independent territories, they experience a continuous expansion of the margins of their sovereignties, and they are often forced to achieve what they are willing to achieve through negotiations and agreements. These facts and forms of conducts necessitate and encourage the use of national interest as a way of acquisition and expansion. National interest is a dominant regulator of the inter-state and a dominant policy instrument because conditions necessitate it. In this context, national interest is not simply a principle or a representation of the material, but also a technique and a way of going about the conduct of international relations by means of negotiations and agreements. Such strategy necessarily reduces the use of brute force in the acquisition of what sovereignty wills. These two strategies, national interest and the use of force, can at times be othered and challenged by a condition where a state is not interested in pursuing them, which could be for many reasons or for no reasons at all. National interest, the absence of any interest, and the use of force all coexisting to constitute the inter-state.

Before ending this section I should highlight a few further broad considerations in relation to the notion of national interest. First, the adaptation of the logic of interest as a national policy simplifies the conduct of relations between states, as relations are no longer personal. Persons sitting on negotiation tables are conscious of the interests of their state and the interests they represent and the interests they must pursue; they have existing knowledge of the best possible outcome and have a broad understanding of the interests of other parties. Second, the pursuit of national interest can materialize only when it is in the interest of the involved parties to reach an agreement or a settlement on a given issue, which is to say: the pursuit of national interest in itself is informed by interest, the timing and the place of which are essentially determined by the conditions that favor an agreement. Not every issue is agreed upon or negotiated according to national interest alone as there can be other factors involved, such as morality and legal obligations. Third, rarely can a state completely achieve all their interests at a negotiating table. The best possible outcome is generally the operating principle of the pursuit of national interest. Fourth, the pursuit of national interest implies the existence of an interest to pursue. A state needs to have power and capability to have an interest in order to pursue interest. The lack of such capability and power is crucial to the dynamics present in negotiations and agreements. And it is at this juncture where inequalities and injustices arise. Fifth, national interest is a form of national egoism. The 'we' and the interests of the 'we' come before the other and their interests. Sixth, in certain situations national interest may be sacrificed for certain principles, other interests, or moral considerations. Therefore, we cannot claim that every agreement, negotiation, or conduct is based purely on national interest. There are always exceptions even in our age of extreme egoisms. Seventh, in the age of relations national interest is not as simple as it used to be. What is in one's interest may also be in the interest of the other.

Similarly, what may be an interest in a given issue may be damaging to another relation or issue. As such, the content of national interest can always be reconfigured to adjust to changing conditions. What is considered an interest today may be against interest tomorrow. Eighth, the content of interest in national interest can be material, territorial, ideological, idealistic, and so-on. What interest represents changes when the will, the conditions, and the historical change.

Attitudes

In their encounters with others, states, like selves, have attitudes. They respond, they offend, they voice an opinion, they declare a position, they take sides, they act tough, they are loud yet also silent, they threaten, they seek help, they offer assistance, and so-on. In many ways, states rather than disappearing into the world have adapted to the transforming force of the world by way of transforming themselves. They did not fade away into oblivion. They remained relevant by actively participating in the making of the world, by holding the keys to the destruction of the world, by politicizing the world while socializing themselves, and developing attitudes to resemble who they represent. Below are some such attitudes, which should help us contextualize the transformation of the state.

Cooperation: The excessive culture of cooperation in the inter-state is primarily the product of the post-World War II era. This culture is neither a direct consequence of the liberal philosophy, which in essence lacks such a collectivistic attitude despite its wish of a collective harmonious existence, a wish which is also encountered in Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam. Nor is such culture an organic product of modernity. Alliances, which are limited forms of cooperation, are an ancient practice. Cooperation, in its excessive form though, that coming togetherness in the

face of a challenge, in solving problems, in tackling pressing issues, that hope to reduce conflicts, that realization that no single state is capable of solving a global concern unilaterally, that emerging culture which is made possible by technologies and machineries, is in the final analysis a consequence of the conditions and the emergence of the world. The culture of cooperation has thus a multitude of origins and functions. It is neither a purely moralistic development nor is it a pure product of cynical national interests. States seek cooperation when they face a challenge, when national interest dictates it, when they are powerless, and when conditions are fertile for such activity. It is born out of necessity only to become a norm. Its most concrete expressions are international organizations, which foster and encourage cooperative attitudes, without which their very existence is pointless. Below are excerpts from speeches given in the United Nations General Assembly's 73rd Session. The Secretary General of the UN: "And we need to show the added value of international cooperation by delivering peace, defending human rights and driving economic and social progress for women and men everywhere."²⁰⁸ The President of the Republic of Malawi: "Malawi remains committed to promoting and protecting human rights. We remain committed to participating in international cooperation to resolve challenges that face human societies."²⁰⁹ The Prime Minister of New Zealand: "That's why, as a global community, not since the inception of the United Nations has there been a greater example of the importance of collective action and multilateralism, than climate change. It should be a rallying cry to all of us."²¹⁰ Such pronouncements of cooperation and good intentions. Such hypocrisy and deceitfulness.

The culture of cooperation is far from representing an age of solidarity among the peoples of the world. Cooperation coexists with conflict, competition, oppression, silence. The

harmonious coexistence of contradictions. States compete and cooperate simultaneously. They seek their interests unilaterally while they cooperate multilaterally.

Lastly, cooperation often occurs on an *ad hoc* basis. It is therefore never total cooperation as states only cooperate on certain issues that necessitate their cooperation.

Indifference: Indifference is at once an indication of the loss of the ethical, of the moral, in the inter-state, to be indifferent to the misery of another, suffering, oppression, and extermination. It is a consequence of the logics of sovereignty, logics such as independence and the principle of non-interference. To be indifferent is to disassociate, to remain distant, and to be careless. To be indifferent is to not differ. General Dellaire, the commander of the UN Force in Rwanda in the 1990s, states: “Still, at its heart, the Rwandan story is the story of the failure of humanity to heed a call for help from an endangered people. The international community, of which the UN is only a symbol, failed to move beyond self-interest for the sake of Rwanda. While most nations agreed that something should be done, they all had an excuse why they should not be the ones to do it.”²¹¹ Indifference as this experience affirms is an intentional act, a calculative decision of the political. To be indifferent is to remain silent.

The roots of the indifferent attitude of the modern political can also be traced to the liberal tradition, a tradition that espouses individualism and rights, both of which quite explicitly resemble the principles of independence and non-interference of sovereignty. Having rights and confining responsibility to one’s self often lead to indifference.

Indifference does not mean that the political has no sense of care. The political cares for itself. Yet the realm of the inter-state is such that indifference rather than care comes to define

the reality of this realm. For instance, a diplomat's personal sense of care essentially has very limited bearing.

Openness and closedness: The inter-state, like other political realms, consists of two spaces, two dimensions, one that is seen and the other that is unseen. There are also shades that exist between these two such as what is thought to be seen yet remains unseen. What is revealed to the people is what was wanted to be revealed, scripted, and catered. What goes on behind closed doors between states often remains behind doors. Faces put on display after meetings, languages used, words uttered, agreements and conclusions shared, are what is intended and calculated. Politics is never fully open, never fully put on stage. Its truth is half seen and known and half unseen and unknown. It is in instances such as these that the state reveals its exclusive grip over power as it decides what to reveal and what not to reveal, and more importantly to what extent a truth should be revealed. There is power in half-truths, in the unknowns. In the inter-state too, states navigate between openness and closedness. Negotiating states, for instance, do not reveal their cards all too often. If they are open and direct that is because they have the power to do so.

Further, these two spaces and the space between them facilitate deception, hypocrisy, and lies to flourish. What a state does or intends is never truly revealed in totality, which gives a new meaning to sovereignty: holding on to things, keeping things. The state is at once accountable and open, and incapable of opening itself up. It is at these paradoxical junctures where silence, lies, and hypocrisies become useful instruments, which do not necessarily imply insincerity; quite the contrary, they reveal an important dimension of the political. To survive, the political must misdirect, deceive, and keep certain things to itself.

Projecting strength: Strong, powerful, and proud, essentially personal attributes, is how the political projects its demeanour and desires to be perceived. According to Hobbes²¹² a strong body politic was necessary to overcome anarchy and injustice. It is therefore vital that the political stands strong in the face of adversity and enmity, in times of calm and prosperity. It must project power to subdue the inherent fear of the other of its people. This attitude has a double orientation: to its subjects the political on the one hand projects safety and stability against external forces, and on the other it instills fear in its own subjects to maintain order. The fear of the other is essentially replaced by the fear of the political. People are kept in a constant state of fear both in the absence and presence of the state. The prince, Machiavelli tells us, “should contrive that his actions should display grandeur, courage, seriousness and strength, and his decisions about the private disputes of his subjects should be irrevocable.”²¹³ The second orientation is towards other sovereignties, where a state projects strength and resoluteness in its desire to keep what it has. What this condition reveals is that a state does not necessarily replace anarchy, as anarchy and uncertainty remain the constituents of the world, of the pre or the post political.

Language

Language is one of the most prevalent constituents of the political and that of the inter-state. It is such that it is best understood through itself, and it is needed in expressions and definitions. It is such a closed totality that it limits thought's thinking about it as thought's expression is possible with what language has availed to thought. Therefore, what Ranciere says in the following sentences only tells us certain aspects of language: “Language does not reflect things; it expresses their relations. But this expression is itself conceived as another resemblance.

If the function of language is not to represent ideas, situations objects, or characters according to the norms of resemblance, it is because it already presents, on its very body, the physiognomy of what it says. It does not resemble things as a copy because it bears their resemblance as a memory. It is not an instrument of communication because it is already the mirror of a community. Language is made of materialities that are materializations of its own spirit, the spirit that must become a world.”²¹⁴ Relationally speaking, there is nothing wrong with characterizing language as an “instrument of communication”, as long as we do not perceive language only in such terms. Language can thus be interpreted as representation, instrument, social phenomenon, ontological category, a set of relations, extension and expression of relations and relationalities, and so-on. To that effect, the political, particularly in its contemporary forms, cannot be imagined without language. We encounter language in speeches, constitutions, laws, communications, legislations, rulings, policies, statements, press releases, communiqués, threats, messages, recordings, files, and so-on. In many ways, language is a set of indefinite relations, it is what expresses relations, what represents relations, and it is enabled through relations and enables indefinite relations.

In relation to the inter-state the linguistic serves as a means through which the relations of this realm are expressed and interpreted. Without this linguistic assistance our access to this realm is limited. The linguistic therefore is a window into the political. But unlike everyday language, which can be incomplete and unstructured, the language of the political has its own characteristics, its own personality. It is codified, calculated, precise, technical, negotiated, and agreed upon. There is a sense of freedom to everyday language as sentences are often incomplete, single words express manifold intentions, meanings are scarce. Political language,

however, is given its own life and structure. Words are relational here in a very concrete sense, as they transmit certain messages they also satisfy certain goals and intentions.

The linguistic in the political is also an instrument for expressing what is intended to be open. In its openness it can be very specific and precise particularly the language of treaties and agreements. An article from the Geneva Conventions (1929) for instance reads: “All personal effects and articles in personal use – except arms, horses, military equipment and military papers – shall remain in the possession of prisoners of war, as well as their metal helmets and gas-masks. Sums of money carried by prisoners may only be taken from them on the order of an officer and after the amount has been recorded. A receipt shall be given for them. Sums thus impounded shall be placed to the account of each prisoner. Their identity tokens, badges of rank, decorations and articles of value may not be taken from prisoners.”²¹⁵ Language can also be very limited in its content and scope, only communicating what the political wishes to communicate. Such a use of language exposes the non-spoken, non-written, non-communicated, and non-linguistic realms of the political. Very few can be privy to this silent and un-communicated realm.

Lastly, language has manifold functions in the social, from reducing tensions to initiating and increasing them, from solving ongoing problems and minimizing contentions to replacing the use of force. But to what effect does language reduce tensions in the inter-state? Habermas has argued that through communication and reaching an understanding, individuals are also “taking part in interactions through which they develop, confirm, and renew, their memberships in social groups and their own identities” and that actions and interactions such as these “are at the same time processes of social integration and socialization.”²¹⁶ Language in such an interpretation contributes to social harmony and enriches the social. Language functions as the

instrument of harmony and reducing tensions in the inter-state too. Communication has prevented conflicts. Yet there is another aspect to the political here. It has a good understanding of the other, of the other's conditions insofar even amidst wars, in the face of misery and destruction, and despite all forms of communications, the political continues its destructive activities in a highly calculative manner. The political desires death and destruction here not harmony.

Further, despite an increase in communications and conversations between polities, the world is such that it expands in every realm. Meaning, as avenues of communications may have increased so have the means and ways of destructions. This condition reveals the limits of language, ethics, and understanding. The problem perhaps is ontological. Human existence is such that it cannot sustain or transform itself without problems. Neither the political nor the inter-state is immune to this existential illness, condition. Solving a problem therefore is an indication of the rise of a hundred new problems. To put it differently, the present conditions of the world are such that certain problems are solved by the linguistic, while others require forceful action. How else could the oppressor cease oppressing the oppressed if not by force?

CHAPTER XI - The State of Incompleteness

The goal in the previous three chapters was to map out the world's fields of relations, which are not separate but intertwined, contributing to one another and affecting one another. In this chapter my aim is first to examine the state of incompleteness of what largely constitutes the world, particularly the realms of the relations of states and of the inter-state, and the ways in which the world copes with such a state of incompleteness. Second, I will briefly explore the question of uncertainty and see how it impacts the behaviours of states. Third, building on the analysis of the conditions of incompleteness and uncertainty I will analyse how states and institutions develop futural relations to face the challenges that are presented by such conditions.

The state of incompleteness

If we were to freeze the world, all its processes and relations, and orient our gaze towards it, we would see the world in its brute materiality consisting of the blue spherical earth, the surface of which is populated by living beings of all sorts and inanimate entities of all sorts, of the atmosphere that surrounds such a spherical object, and of the imaginary lines drawn dividing the nation states of the world. Political geography is embedded in the everyday; it is generally known, for instance, where each state is located, what territory belongs to whom, and what parts of the oceans are shared by all nations equally and what are not. In such respects we find a sense of completeness to the world and to what constitutes it: the earth, oceans, mountains, states, cities, villages, and so-on, largely divided and distributed, largely owned and recognized. However, if we were to attend to it more intently and loosen the relations that constitute it, relations that were largely unseen and unobservable during our initial gaze, we would be confronted by an ever present state of incompleteness of the world, of all the things that make up

the world. In it we will encounter a social that never remains the same. We will see children growing, seasons changing, cities rising, cultures expanding, voices travelling, voices disappearing. We will encounter the ever changing boundaries that are drawn and redrawn; neither the drawn nor the redrawn is ever complete. Each completion is succeeded by an incompleteness. Borders, sovereignties, treaties, agreements, institutions, all become null, get modified or rearranged, overtime. Times change, conditions evolve, new situations arise, all contributing to the state of the incompleteness of the world and of what constitutes it. Ibn Khaldun once observed: “The old Persian nations, the Syrians, the Nabataeans, the Tubba’s, the Israelites, and the Copts, all once existed. They all had their own particular institutions in respect of dynastic and territorial arrangements, their own politics, crafts, languages, technical terminologies, as well as their own ways of dealing with their fellow men and handling their cultural institutions. Their (historical) relics testify to that. They were succeeded by the later Persians, the Byzantines, and the Arabs. The old institutions changed and former customs were transformed, either into something very similar, or into something distinct and altogether different.”²¹⁷ Ibn Khaldun is describing the change in cultures and polities, arts and traditions. Change is mobile and fluid, it outlives the social. Change is history. History is change. Such social and historical changes do contribute to the making of the state of incompleteness, but they merely represent a slice of such an existential state.

The state of incompleteness as much as it is a default state of the world is also a condition of many other worldly phenomena. An increase or decrease in human population is one such incomplete phenomenon. There are more human beings in existence now than they were a century ago, or a millennia ago, for instance. According to the estimates of the United Nations the world population will grow to over 9 billion by 2050.²¹⁸ This state of incompleteness of

population, its increase or decrease, impacts the state of the world in manifold ways, such as its effects on the borders of states and other aspects of human existence. Borders today, those lines that stand like walls stretching from the surface of the earth into the emptiness of space are incomplete. They thus continue to shift, change, rebuild, and are redrawn. Oppressed nations like Palestinians, Kashmiris, Tamils, and Kurds, will ultimately build their own walls and draw their own lines. It is only through realizing that boundaries are meaningless and absurd can we extinguish the burden of the state of incompleteness in relation to the geography of the world. The completeness of the world is always shattered by the incomplete. There are always new problems, new desires, new shortcomings, new oppressions, new health challenges, new ecological dangers, new destructive military technologies, new innovations, new machineries, and so-on. At each instance incompleteness prevails over the complete. This state of incompleteness should not be interpreted in purely dialectical or causal terms as it represents far broader conditions, it represents the whole human existence, the movements, the innovations, the accidents, the unintended, and the happenings of all sorts.

The world may be complete in certain ways, but it is incomplete in indefinite ways. Even in relation to the revealed texts such as the Qur'an, the Torah, and the Bible, where the revelation is complete in the eyes of the believer, their interpretations remain incomplete and ongoing; each interpretation is countered and overcome by a new interpretation as conditions and times change and necessitate them. This state of incompleteness can neither be fully interpreted nor should it be understood purely in terms of progress and advancement. Although certain social realities appear to be progressing, and as much as this progress in itself is a reflection and mirror of the condition of incompleteness, the state of incompleteness in its very essence is an existential condition that represents not only social reality but the existence of existence at large. Neither

can this state be equated with the notion of change. Change is an indication of the incomplete, is a characteristic of the incomplete. The incomplete therefore, especially in relation to human existence, is a state that represents the ongoing and what is not complete. The incomplete coexists with the complete and change. A desire to complete something, to fulfill and satisfy something, to reach a resolution, a conclusion is always there. It is all too common for the self and the political to attempt to end something, to move on to the next activity, the next project, the next problem. Yet each completion opens the gates of incompleteness. World maps from different historical periods testify to the presence of this state of incompleteness.

Furthermore, innumerable relational happenings are involved in the relationship between the state of incompleteness and relations as such. I should pursue some of them here. First, the completed, what is perceived as complete, does not encompass all that is involved in what appears to be complete. In such a case, the complete is already incomplete. Constitutions, treaties, for instance, despite the presence of signatures, which are signs of completions, are never truly complete as they constantly require revisions, additions, and expansions. Conditions, situations, and agreements that these instruments appear to complete and settle are never truly settled. They neither cover all the incomplete situations present nor do they leave enough room to maneuver for situations that may arise in the future. This form of incompleteness is also true for the relations of states. In the age of nationalisms and nation states for instance, many oppressed peoples have thus far been unsuccessful in establishing their own states. Hence, as long as nationalism and nation-state define the politics of the world, the geography and the map of the Middle East, which presently appears as complete territorially, will always be incomplete without a Palestinian state, without a Kurdish state, and without states for other minorities in the region.

Second, the complete and the structure that such completeness boxes itself in, can always be breached and destroyed. In *Leviathan* Hobbes argues that in order to prevent civil wars and foreign invasions it is necessary to have “a common power”, which can actualize if people “confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men”.²¹⁹ For him, such political formation “is more than consent, or concord; it is a real unity of them all, in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man”.²²⁰ But this supposed unity of all, which presumably completes a structure within which safety and security are achieved, is not truly complete as the history of the last few centuries has shown. Polities are not complete entities despite the presence of the logic of sovereignty, which espouses a completion of some sort. States that have achieved thus far a degree of completion in their geographies for long durations have primarily succeeded either due to luck, like being an island, or the culture of insistence on unity, as in Egypt and China.

Third, what is complete, as long as it is not an end or non-existence, is a temporary hiatus of the incomplete. The incomplete, therefore, is a default state of human existence, whereas the complete is a transitional state. To end all wars Kant argued that “there must be a league of a particular kind, which can be called a league of peace (*foedus pacificum*)... to make an end of all wars forever. This league does not tend to any dominion over the power of the state but only to the maintenance and security of the freedom of the state itself and of other states in league with it, without there being any need for them to submit to civil laws and their compulsion, as men in a state of nature must submit.”²²¹ Like Hobbes, whose primary concern was to find ways to put an end to civil wars and foreign invasions, Kant was concerned about finding ways to end wars. Both find institutions to be solutions to conflictual human conditions; for Hobbes it is the leviathan and for Kant it is the league of peace. To be fair, their ideas did materialize, at least

partially. But neither institution is complete: the state is overshadowed by the world and international institutions are overshadowed by states. The state of incompleteness remains a true reflection of the state of the world, as neither the nation-state nor international organizations have managed to put an end to wars. The solution – provided that we are interested in one – to miserable human conditions lies perhaps in the notion of incompleteness which has the capacity to complete and to incomplete. War is not an endlessly persistent human condition. It is not a default state of human relations. It began at a certain point in the past and it will be obsolete at a certain point in the future. But as long as the conditions and logics that have initiated the culture of war remain, putting an end to all wars, hence achieving completeness, may not be possible anytime soon.

Fourth, relationally speaking, each complete situation and event is composed of manifold relations, and to maintain such a state of completeness they must emanate certain relations and remain in relation to certain relationalities. A majority of relations are not permanently fixed, they are phenomena that can mutate, develop new relations, be influenced by surrounding relations, and so-on. Such a relational ontology, hence, forces us to reconsider and question the notion of completeness defined as that which fixes and settles a situation on a permanent basis. The complete can remain complete only through its relations to the structures that enforce such completeness upon it. If the circumstances that surround such structures were to change, the complete would give way to incompleteness.

In sum, the world and what constitutes it, particularly the relations that constitute the realm of the inter-state are never truly complete unless they become obsolete and non-existent. A pure complete existent is rarely achieved, and even if it is achieved it is often achieved in its extinction, in its death. In matters of the world, completeness is only a temporary state, a

transitional state. It is the state of incompleteness that which truly reflects and represents the state of the world and of the inter-state. Histories of states, their births and destructions, their mutations, all attest to this perpetual experience of the state of incompleteness.

The key question here is: if the state of incompleteness is almost given and is a default state of the world and what constitutes it then how are we to deal with it? There exist certain resemblances between the behaviour of states and selves insofar they, in relation to certain things, have a desire to maintain the status quo, reach a point of rest, and in relation to others not settle for completeness. A desire for completeness coexists with the recognition of the incompleteness of things. What this awareness, this internalization of the incompleteness, indicates is that both states and individuals have learned to accommodate the challenges that the state of incompleteness offers. Together, the complete and the incomplete tell the story of human existence, they summarize human experience. Certain forms of incompleteness are inevitable (fluctuations in human population or changes in the social for instance), they are embedded in human existence, while other forms are not. Secondly, although in manifold conditions of the world the state of incompleteness appears to be inevitable, it, nevertheless, in the era of over-relating, needs to be attended to as it has only accelerated. This acceleration at once refers to excessiveness in the production of relations and to speed and reduction in the durations in such relations. Third, the state of incompleteness has historically flowed without much resistance from the world, except in certain cases, and it has only intensified and accelerated with the rise of machineries and technologies. Indefinite relations are produced at any given moment to challenge the boundaries of the complete. Such a tsunami of incompleteness is a challenge to all aspects of social existence. These relations may not always be managed but they need to be

attended to. Structures, such as labour, capitalism, liberal democracy, state, law, and all that appear complete, will ultimately be overrun by the flow of incompleteness and become extinct.

Uncertainty

The very existence of states is an expression of certainty, of a desire for certainty. Knowing one's leader, choosing one's leader, consenting to sovereign rule, having defined boundaries and a capital city for the seat of authority, legislating laws that regulate what can and cannot be done, laws that have definitive procedures for certain interactions, for settling disagreements, etc., constructing anthems that contain specific words, their memorizations, having flags of certain colours and designs, national monuments, and so-on, are all in many ways expressions of the desire for certainty. A state that fails to express itself, its very existence, through these mediums of certainties is a failed state, it is not a state in the political sense of the word. That is to say, the political operates on certainties; it detests uncertainties. States know, keep records, watch, punish, set rules, order, and design. They, in relation to the future, that absolute realm of uncertainty, develop short and long term plans for economic, military, and security activities. The uncertain realm is configured by certainties or by what approximates them. A periodically released American National Defense Strategy document, for example, in its 2018 summary writes the following: "The National Defense Strategy acknowledges an increasingly complex global security environment, characterized by overt challenges to the free and open international order and the re-emergence of long-term, strategic competition between nations. These changes require a clear-eyed appraisal of the threats we face, acknowledgement of the changing character of warfare, and a transformation of how the Department conducts business. The central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the *reemergence of long-term,*

strategic competition by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers. It is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model – gaining veto authority over other nations’ economic, diplomatic, and security decisions.”²²² What this excerpt reveals, aside from fear, anxiety, and mistrust which are essential to the political, is an attempt by the political to draw a map, primarily through the medium of the linguistic, of present conditions, threats, and challenges, and of the future, of the certain challenges and ambiguities of the not yet existing future. The political, thus, desires to exist in certainty and flow into a certainty.

The phenomenon of uncertainty also has a constant presence in the economic realm. Stock markets tumble when faced with uncertainty. Economy deteriorates in uncertain environments. A self is engulfed with fear and anxiety, with isolation and abandonment when faced with uncertainty. Economy, which is a primarily future oriented activity and principally concerned, once present needs are satisfied, with predicting the future, of a stock and an industry for example, cannot sustain itself under uncertain conditions, hence the rise of crises, depressions, and recessions. Commenting on the role of uncertainty on human behaviour economist Brenda Spotton-Visano states that “Crises are essentially institutional phenomena occurring when institutions fail in their operations and fail in their role to reduce uncertainty. Institutions – as rules and conventions governing behaviour – impose a structure on social interaction, serving to reduce uncertainty by rendering behaviour predictable.”²²³ Uncertainties, their reduction, predictability, and management are essential to economic logic then. The failure to reduce uncertainties leads to economic crises. She further states that “Uncertainty that escapes calculated predictions over possible future outcomes raises critical questions about how behaviour is motivated when information is incomplete and imperfect. When fundamental

uncertainty reigns, we do not have objective estimates of potential outcomes to inform choice and action.”²²⁴ The linkages that Spotton-Visano establishes between the phenomenon of uncertainty and the notions of “future outcome”, “incomplete and imperfect” information, and “choice and action”, reveal the fragility of the present economic system. To be concerned about the future is not unique to capitalism of course; for example, nomads and villagers used to store meat and dried vegetables for long and cold winters. What guided this nomadic logic was certainty, the inability to harvest in winters, more so than uncertainty. In order to succeed, capitalism needs uncertainty despite its struggle for certainty, as uncertainty is embedded in its very logic, hence its fluidity and resilience. Imagine if all wages were equal, all commodities had the same price tag regardless of supply and demand conditions. Uncertainty then is as much the enemy of the economic as its engine. The uncertain may not be the end of the economic or its originator, but without it the economic would not have been the same.

How can we define the phenomenon of uncertainty from a relational point of view? What forms of relations are operational in the making of an uncertain situation, event, and future? In simple terms, uncertainty is the lack of clarity about relations that exist in a situation. It is a state of ambiguity. This in turn generates states of confusion in us. In its essence then uncertainty is a human phenomenon as it describes the state of our minds and our outwardly oriented relations. Inanimate beings are oblivious to uncertainty; its existence or non-existence is a non-event for them. For certainty seeking species like us, however, uncertainty is the sum of existential conditions and has existential consequences. Not knowing where to go, what to expect, and what to encounter; to be concerned, to be worried. Uncertainty is not nothingness, is not about being concerned about nothing for nothing. In most instances, it is a consequence of the possibility of a happening of something. Manifold relations are involved in the making of uncertainty: unknown

relations, hidden relations, predictable and unpredictable relations, ambiguous relations, the relations of fear, mistrust, control, desire, knowing, and so-on. Furthermore, uncertainty is not an isolated condition; it can co-exist with certainty. We may be amidst an uncertain situation yet we continue performing certain tasks and relate through certain relations. The co-existence of certainty and uncertainty does not necessarily cancel each other out; it is simply a matter of being certain of certain relations and being uncertain of other relations. As pointed out by Spotton-Visano, in the context of the economic, uncertainty is in many ways directly linked to a lack of knowledge. To be certain of what to do next or what comes next, to be certain of the future, which is neither here nor is it totally known enables a state and a self to initiate certain relations, which in many ways subdues future related hesitations, fears, and anxieties.

The knowing of the present or predicting what may constitute it as much as it is a concern for the economic is also a concern for the political. The political, in its contemporary form, must know, must record. Not knowing what is happening at this very moment or what may happen after it or lacking information about someone or something leads to uncertainties. The political desires certainties here and now, and it acts on certainties. In the absence of certainties it acts in certain ways based on calculated and assessed predictions generated by experts. Intelligence services, for instance, are partially established to increase the abilities of polities to see and know the concealed, what is unknown or uncertain, which may threaten their sovereignties. Through such clandestine institutions the state aims to have access to the realm of threats, the activities of other polities or organizations, their movements, investments, plans, strategies, etc. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act, for instance, outlines the duties of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service's (CSIS) responsibilities as the following: "The Service shall collect, by investigation or otherwise, to the extent that it is strictly necessary, and analyse and

retain information and intelligence respecting activities that may on reasonable grounds be suspected of constituting threats to the security of Canada and, in relation thereto, shall report to and advise the Government of Canada.”²²⁵ The primary purpose of the intelligence services is to gather information, information that does not exist publicly, that is inaccessible; it is to unconceal concealed activities and relations that produce uncertainty and ambiguity.

Often times the disruption, destruction, or transformation of regulated routine relations can lead to uncertainty. Changes in governments, in existing relations and conditions, can all disrupt the flow of the established, hence the generation of uncertainties, which in turn produces anxieties, new plans, and announcements of positions.

Overall, what the presence of uncertainty in the political and the economic reveals is that the phenomenon of uncertainty essentially is an existential condition of human existence. As living species we live with it, walk into it, plan according to it, and are engulfed by its constant presence. We experience uncertainty in relation to our well-being, jobs, shelters, relations, everyday interactions, etc. The overwhelming weight of uncertainty so often paralyzes our relations. The future of our very own existence is uncertain. When are we going to die, where, and how? How are we to cope with the presence of such a paralyzing condition? As much as we strive to create certainty out of uncertainty and prevent uncertainty, we have also internalized uncertainty as we simply live with it, and deal with it or accept it as it comes. We can die at any moment. Lose everything any moment. We may be left with no one at any moment. It may rain soon. Uncertainty therefore is not only a dimension of our existence it is also its consequence.

Furthermore, the sheer indefiniteness of the existing or emerging relations in social and political realms, and our inability to access the future physically contribute and produce this phenomenon of uncertainty. What is certain is our death, at least until the sciences discover ways

to stop the degeneration of our cells or invent an elixir of immortality, the certainty of death remains certain. Aside from death, all there is simply exists in uncertainty, as uncertainty. There is a sense of certainty in us about uncertainty. We are certain of certain existences, particularly in relation to the uncertainty of the future, about what it may hold, what it may have. As much as we live towards the future, and bring the future towards ourselves, to the present, so we can shape and design it, we also extend ourselves into the future, not into the distant future though, only the near future, the only form of future, under most circumstances, we can have access to, shape and fill how we desire. In the realm of the inter-state, international law is perhaps the best possible example of such attempts at the mastery of the uncertain future. “Every state has the right to establish the breadth of its territorial sea up to a limit not exceeding 12 nautical miles, measured from baselines determined in accordance with this Convention.”²²⁶ In many ways, each agreement, treaty, and convention is an attempt to regulate the uncertain future, the uncertainties of the future. Articles in treaties and agreements essentially extend into the future, into uncertainty, in order to clear the path of flowing relations, or develop certain definite relations to set grounds for future relations. Although uncertainty is often presumed to be the property of the present moment and most importantly of the future, the past can also be viewed as the realm of uncertainty. We would not have developed disciplines such as history and archeology had the past not been uncertain. The uncertainty of the past, or of what constitutes the past, can not only be the foundation of the present uncertainty but it also remains uncertain. The uncertain past, which so often presents itself to us as a forgotten past and as a past gone, remains uncertain until our studies or memories uncover the relations that constitute it. There is always an uncertainty to the past. Even our subjective memories, which Borges describes as “broken mirrors”,²²⁷ are never truly certain representations of the past.

In relation to the uncertainty of the future of our own present, at a time when so much is invested in securing a certainty in the coming uncertainty, there are many reasons to be pessimistic about it. On the one hand, western hegemony is nearing an end; a hegemony that had a horrifying and barbaric legacy of slavery, colonialism, and so-on. On the other, it is ever more uncertain what awaits us in the certain future which we are flowing towards. There is so much uncertainty as to how the west, that gave us two destructive world wars, will react in the event it loses its superiority over the rest. Can we trust the west? I think not. What is more, although we have the keys to the destruction of the world, we do not yet know how to build a world without the hegemony of a state or a number of states that maintain a balance in the politics of the world. The second source of pessimism is that the present conditions of hyper innovation in machineries and technologies, coupled with both pathologies inherent in the logic of 'might being the right' and concerning characteristics that liberal subjectivity present, offer nothing but uncertainty, worry and concern for the world. Flowing forward into the uncertain, we have nothing to fear but ourselves, our tenacity, creativity, persistence, and imagination, all of which as much as they are the sources of optimism for a better world are also keys to its destruction.

Futural relations

Life and existence are such that they unfold. This way of existence has significant implications on the ways in which both the self and states organize and construct their activities and present timespan. Since the future is not here yet, it is yet to occur, yet to arrive, the present and the past become important foundations for shaping a future that is at once desirable and manageable, certain and accessible. Although the future does not exist yet, it is not here and not right before us yet, where we can reach out and shape it as we wish, it is nonetheless an

existential characteristic of the human condition to reach into the future, to extend itself, its plans, its goals, its desires, its hopes, its ambitions, its wants, towards the future, or as Heidegger describes this condition particularly in relation to the structure of “care” as “*being-ahead-of-itself*”.²²⁸ By orienting towards the future the self however is not necessarily being ahead of itself. The self is merely relating outwardly towards what does not yet exist. They are orientating beyond their own selves that are at once both the present and the past. The accumulation of such forms of extensions is what primarily constitutes the essence of futural relations. But what are ‘futural relations’? What forms of relations lead to the formation of such specific temporal relationism? In their essence futural relations are those orientations that emanate from selves directed towards beyond the present moment. There is thus, a sense of directionality, a sense of transcendence beyond a reality that exists in the confines of the now. This orientation is existential; it is a constitutive component of human existence. Although such an orientation may have intensified with the emergence of capitalism, technologies and machineries, and globalization, its roots extend deep into the evolution of the very constitution of human existence. It is an existential condition, a highly relational condition in its roots that contains manifold forms of relations. For instance, we dream of tomorrows, we care for and have concern over our future activities, fear the incompleteness of the now and the uncertainties of the future, and so-on. Secondly, this existentially futural orientation has epistemological foundations. It is related to our unshakable conviction that the future does exist and will exist, and that tomorrow will be today regardless of whether we live to see it or not. From the standpoint of episteme, we may not be certain of our own future as we are aware that we may die at any given moment, however we are sure that the world, the earth, humanity at large, will continue to exist into an unforeseeable future. Thirdly, since we know that the future will arrive, that it will exist in some

form, that it will be present at some point, and to prevent uncertainties and incompleteness, and minimize the chaos and the unknown, we orient ourselves towards the future in such a way that we attempt to construct the future before it exists. In such an instance of transcendence, the future exists in the present before it actualizes concretely at some point in the future. Our relations with the future are thus complex as on the one hand we know that the future is going to exist, thus we use the present moment to literally and metaphorically organize and order the future; and on the other, we are aware that the future does not exist yet, that it may be pregnant with relations that we cannot foresee, that it is never completely in our hands. The future is blurry and envelops the present like a morning fog; it is also constructed, ordered, and organized. Yet these relations we have towards the future only constitute our relations with the future, not the future itself. The future does not know itself. It is an unknown, an abyss, an inaccessible. Fourthly, this futural orientation on our part reveals an important aspect of human existence: even though the future is inaccessible to us, we are capable of, at least mentally, reaching beyond the physically impenetrable walls of the now. Not only do we bring the future to ourselves we also extend ourselves into the future, into the abyss. The future is here, and we are in the future, that is the sum of our relations with the future. To have such an existential relation with the future does not in any way mean that everyone is able to organize their futures however they wish. They do not. There are those whose futures are stolen. Think of the lives lost in slavery, of the extermination of the indigenous peoples in the Americas, of the people who lost their lives in wars, of the women and children who were suffocated to death in Halabja. These long gone souls did not have a future beyond the moment of their deaths, as it was stolen from them, taken from them. Their future did not exist for them from that moment on, they were not in it. Even if they

had made it into it, it was not in the way they wanted. They disappeared into a non-existent future, yet forever remembered by an existing future.

How is a future, something that does not exist, determined? How do we shape it in a way that a non-existing phenomenon actually exists? As a category, a future is something that is both real and unreal, imaginary and unimaginary, existent and non-existent, hallucinatory and unhallucinatory. If we were to examine our very own subjective attitudes and orientations, or examine the policies and plans of a given state, we would encounter indefinite ways and strategies through which selves and states determine the content of their futures. For instance: one of the most common techniques of determination is the chronological organization of the future. Doings, activities, and events are planned, put in order of occurrence, which should occur first and what should follow. This should happen in the morning and that at noon. A trip to a country is scheduled for this month of the year, and so-on. Our daily lives are largely constructed chronologically, spontaneity has little room; tomorrow, the future, occurs before it actually occurs. However, this ordering attitude is more deterministic in states than in the everyday of selves. For states, unless a major catastrophe strikes, the order of the day, of future events are determined and decided beforehand. Relations that would happen to constitute the future thus are pre-arranged and pre-constructed before the future itself and before the occurrence of its events. As the future is ordered beforehand, the relations of its pre-planned events are also predetermined. Additionally, since the future is often imagined as a blurry scenery its certain aspects are left blank. The future is therefore largely empty. There can be manifold reasons for such emptiness; one being that our orientation towards the future is generally event based: like meeting this person, going to work, eating at a restaurant, going to get tested for COVID-19, etc. Non-eventful and mundane activities tend to remain undetermined. Furthermore, certain aspects

of the future or what would fill the future are left open to be determined by the conditions of the future. As such, the overall structure of future events and relations may broadly be determined but their exact coordinates, mechanics, and the logistics are mainly left to be determined by the relations that the conditions of such a particular future determine. Lastly, and this is more of a general characteristic of human existence, when states and selves orient themselves towards the future and attempt to construct its events and relations they also determine the derelations of such future reality. Meaning, when a future event is planned and its relations are determined, it is simultaneously decided what cannot be done, what relations cannot occur, and from what relationalities the self and states must derelate and unrelate during the unfolding of such future reality.

Relating towards the future is a constant human condition. Tomorrow is always in the present. States, for instance, by virtue of being collective entities, deal at all levels with indefinite forms of futural relations that are formed and determined by the processes of negotiations, consultations, decision makings, implementations, institutionalizations, and so-on. The mundane mechanical futural relations, those ongoing futural orientations that remain intact until it is decided otherwise, constitute the bulk of the future oriented relations of states. These relations are what primarily constitute a state's extension into the future. Manifold relations of the present are built upon them. Values and norms of inter-state relations, treaties and agreements, and procedures of diplomatic and other inter-state activities are generally of a mechanical nature. They gradually mutate and extend into the future. Beside these mundane futural relations, there exist relations in the form of announcements and plans related to future activities and events, the sort of relations that we find in agreements and treaties for instance. These legal instruments are oriented towards future activities, and their purpose is to regulate future happenings and the

manner in which they should actualize. An article from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) states the following, for example: “1. Except as otherwise provided in this Agreement, no Party may increase any existing customs duty, or adopt any customs duty, on an originating good. 2. Except as otherwise provided in this Agreement, each Party shall progressively eliminate its customs duties on originating goods in accordance with its Schedule to Annex 302.2. 3. On the request of any Party, the Parties shall consult to consider accelerating the elimination of customs duties set out in their Schedules. An agreement between two or more Parties to accelerate the elimination of a customs duty on a good shall supersede any duty rate or staging category determined pursuant to their Schedules for such good when approved by each such Party in accordance with its applicable legal procedures.”²²⁹ These legal instruments, which often serve to settle the present and regulate the future, can be very specific and definitive. In such cases, not only is the future present in the present, the present is also present in the future. This happening in itself is the overcoming of time, and is proof that human beings, particularly in the collective sense, have transcended time, their own time.

Furthermore, these futural relations of states actualize in manifold forms. They can be in the form of preventions, for instance, of certain activities or events happening in the future. Certain states prevent certain others from acquiring nuclear weapons; certain states prevent certain peoples to establish their own independent states. In such cases, states fear the future, their own futures, hence the dedication of enormous energies and means into shaping a future they desire. In such acts, states are no longer democratic and liberal; they are inherently totalitarian as they attempt to control the future, both their own and of others. The extent of the strategies dedicated to the controlling of the future are essentially dependent on the relative position and power of a given state. The United States, for example, by virtue of having global

interests and being the foremost power of today, obsessively constructs futures as it is fearful of the future of others. The following excerpt from Zbigniew Brzezinski reflects America's self-assigned entitlement to a future that it desires and its views and fears of the world: "The time has come for the United States to formulate and prosecute an integrated, comprehensive, and long-term geostrategy for all of Eurasia. This need arises out of the interaction between two fundamental realities: America is now the only global superpower, and Eurasia is the globe's central arena. Hence, what happens to the distribution of power on the Eurasian continent will be of decisive importance to America's global primacy and to America's historical legacy."²³⁰ So much egoism and pathology is present in these words. To prevent, maintain, determine, control, and watch. These words represent a fixation and a heavy burden that are assigned to the self by the self; to control the present and all that happens in it, and to shape a future that is in line with America's desire regardless of the desires and aspirations of others. In the end though, states may attempt to shape the future and prevent an uncertain future, it is the relations that arise out of the past and present or out of the future that determine the present of the future.

To conclude, the future is a destiny but also a reality, a reality that has yet to actualize. It is uncertain yet also full of indefinite relations, events, and activities, and as it becomes present it is radically different than what states and selves had anticipated and imagined. In many ways, there is a degree of realism to the relations of states towards the future as they are quite calculative in their treatment of the how of the future. They attempt to construct a future that is within the limits of their abilities and means. They are also flexible in relation to the future. Rather than repeating the relations of the past obsessively they adapt to the relations and realities that the future presents as it becomes present. States, regardless of how they strategize for or imagine a future, recognize that the future as an unknown and uncertain reality is not present yet,

and is not a replica of the present. What Brzezinski had dreamed of did not become a reality; there are two new rising stars in Eurasia: China and Russia. Nietzsche's Zarathustra tells us the following: "*I teach you the Overhuman. The human is something that shall be overcome. What have you done to overcome it? All beings so far have created something beyond themselves: and you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and even go back to the beasts rather than overcome the human? What is the ape for the human being? A laughing-stock or a painful cause for shame. And the human shall be just that for the Overhuman: a laughing-stock or a painful cause for shame. You have made your way from worm to human, and much in you is still worm. Once you were apes, and even now the human being is still more ape than any ape is.*"²³¹ The main concern is not so much about human beings overcoming themselves, as human existence is always in the process of overcoming itself, rather: are we capable of not overcoming? History is the narration of overcomings. It is about the birth and the rise of new religions, new systems, new fashions, and new empires. It is about the prophets and philosophers that seek a better world, better conditions, better humanity, and better and stronger human beings. Let us not overcome ourselves anymore, for a brief duration at least. Let us see what we have become; let us re-evaluate what we have achieved, what pathologies and absurdities we have developed and inherited this far. Have we not had enough overcomings? To hell with overcomings! Who are we to tell future generations who to be and how to be?

CHAPTER XII - Attending to the World and its Relations

So far I have examined the concept of the world, which I preliminarily described as a characteristic of human existence and the totality of this existence's very existence and production. I have argued that this world has been achieved in certain ways and that it has manifold layers of relations and constitutive realms, such as the relations of states and inter-state relations. I have suggested that the reality of the world and what constitutes it is such that it is incomplete and its future is uncertain. The world's journey continues. Its realms, layers, and relations never cease to change, mutate, begin, and end. Lastly, I have briefly explained why moving forward with the world, amidst all our positivities and achievements, we cannot be trusted yet. We stand at a crossroads between a violent yet somehow organic development towards the world of the past and a promising possibility that at long last we may finally be collectively capable of structuring a world of our very own design. There remain many compelling reasons as to why we should maintain a cynical attitude towards our potentialities and creativities, and the future that has yet to arrive.

In this chapter, the first section will briefly reflect on the concept of attending, particularly in relation to the danger of normalizing certain practices and attitudes, and to the issue of decision making. The second section will examine the notions of care and life and the relations that constitute them. Lastly, the third section will inquire into the conditions of having relations, of being relational, and the consequences of being as such.

Attending to the world's relations

The incompleteness of the present and the uncertainty of the future demand constant attentiveness to the world and the relations that constitute it, especially at a time when over-

relating is excessive. Remaining silent, or being indifferent, or apolitical, or delegating politics to the political, or simply subjectively caring for everything and taking care of everything not only increases the uncertainty of the future it is also the missing of an opportunity of actively shaping the world. The political, the economic, the world, and the liberal subjectivity that are engulfing the self of today, demand rigorous attention and vigilance. To be wary, cynical, pessimistic, and attentive; to participate, be hopeful, optimistic, imaginative, and attentive. What do we really mean by attentiveness though? More importantly why should attentiveness be our primary response in our concern for the world? To begin with, *attending* does not, in this context, necessarily indicate a collective action in the forms of resistance, rebellion, or revolution, all of which may be necessary if conditions arise. But ‘to attend’ is primarily an attitude, an existential one, one that encompasses both oppositional and critical attentiveness such as suspiciousness and disagreement, and simple everyday activities such as knowing. From a strategic point of view, attentiveness is therefore an existential response to the ways in which the political is conducted in the form of representation, as in elections, and, secondly, it counters the essential attitude of modern subjects who are attuned to themselves and orient their attentions primarily to themselves and to what they consider as theirs.

In terms of its relations, attending, first, involves being present. Such presence may be in the form of physical presence as in the forms of participations, activities, and discussions, and it may also be in the form of mental presence as being aware and in the know of the relations that are being emanated and produced in the world, especially those that concern the world. To attend then, means to be present, where the self is spread and extended into and towards the world. It means not being absent and indifferent. To be absent from the world and indifferent from the relations of the world, particularly the relations that concern the world, is contrary to the spirit of

the age of relations. If, and this is just a presumptive prediction, the world were to expand by the existing norms and mechanisms of modern subjectivity, it is safe to presume that the future self would be a self-dependent self, who is capable, knowledgeable, self-sufficient, and independent. Second, attending primarily stems from the attitude of being concerned with the world and its relations. To be concerned is not to be indifferent, is not to make a distinction between close and distant, between a relative and a stranger, between mine and not mine; it is a concern as such. Undoubtedly, a heavy and constant burden. 'One should care for rocks' says the indigenous wisdom of North America. Kingships and national associations made sense at a time when they were the primary forms of human gatherings and assemblages. But in the times of the world, gathering is limited, life is rarely congregated. Life is mobile now, it is spreading and expanding. Notions such as 'there', 'far', 'them', are losing their significance (or are attaining new meanings that are unrelated to their distant etymologies). We are part of the world now, contributing to it, knowing it, traveling it, and desiring it. Third, the phenomenon of attending should also attend to the hidden, the secretive, and the deceitful. The culture of over-relating encompasses both the relations that are out there in the open, accessible to all, and the relations that are hidden.

There is certainly an increasing sense of curiosity about the world and its affairs nowadays, an encouraging informed concern for the environment, climate, and life forms. One reads or listens to the news, inquires about election results, about wars, trade and environmental agreements, and conversations of 'world leaders'. Some participate in the political process, some join resistance movements, some become members of aid organizations. Yet such curious and concerned acts and attitudes, as commendable as some of them may be, are primarily acts of certain interested or concerned selves. We thus cannot classify them as prevalent forms of attentiveness to the world, as the ontological attitudes of all, yet. The self remains primarily

concerned about the self. While capitalism collapses ourselves into ourselves as it confines us to ourselves and to the rightful space it has designated for us; attentiveness demands of each self to be involved in the world, attend to its demands and challenges, be part of it, know it, learn it, see it, and enjoy it. In contrast to the self's primarily self-centered subjectivity, the political has grown more attentive. Security apparatuses, surveillance mechanisms, censuses, information storage, international gatherings, formations of alliances and partnerships, and so-on, are mere means that serve such an attentive attitude, albeit a hierarchical, exclusive, and hegemonic one.

There exist many attitudes towards the world. One such attitude is the condition of numbness, a state of banalizing and normalizing that we so often have towards the problems of the everyday, towards the experiences of others, towards the political, its actions and conducts. We treat wars, for instance, as a normal human condition, as 'this is how it is'. And we call this realism. Wars are normal; therefore, it is pointless to wage war against war. Machiavelli's advice to the prince: "A ruler, then, should have no other objective and no other concern, nor occupy himself with anything else except war and its methods and practices, for this pertains only to those who rule."²³² Machiavelli again: "A ruler should therefore always be concerned with military matters, and peacetime he should be even more taken up with them than in war."²³³ For someone like Machiavelli who experienced the medieval chaos of the Italian city states, which were either occupied by foreign forces or were in a constant state of anarchy, war was not just a reality of life but also something to be perfected in order to end wars and anarchy. Waging war thus was no longer an everyday condition of the political, but it was a necessity; the prince must wage war. War in such circumstances was an indispensable mean to achieve an end regardless of whether the aim was to achieve some good or some advantage. Additionally, waging a just war or an ethical war, which was/is so often epitomized by Christians and Muslims in their quest to

convert the world, does not mean any less killing, destruction, and violence. War is simply war; it is violent, destructive, and at times necessary; it involves theft, misery, and death. In short, in war what is abnormal is normalized. Aside from such a banal view of war, proximity (spatiality) also contributes to such a perception of war. Most of us remain numb to the economic crisis of other nations for instance, we watch their wars from a distance, and we remain indifferent to their suffering and destruction. Such an indifferent attitude partly stems from our inability to do much as citizens, as people, and as subjects of different sovereignties (inability as the source for justifying silence and indifference), and partly from the condition of what is distant is distant in every regard (life and its relations succumbing to the force of physics). In sum, there is the attitude of normalizing things in the world, and there is the condition of numbness and indifference towards the world. They both become a concern in relation to the suffering of the other. Indifference, guilt, care, and distance, all present in a single attitude. No one has been criticized for being unhappy while the distant other is happy, or for not participating in the joy of the stranger. The stranger is not invited to the festival of good times; but their care is demanded in times of destruction. Hypocrisy is everywhere.

There is also the issue of the recurrence of events. Constancy and recurrence generate indifference, familiarity, and banality. A quick glance at the history of the political should reveal that it is a history of war and peace. Each period of peace is followed by a period of war and vice versa. It is no longer a time which determines things but how time itself exists (a time of war, a time of peace) is what determines all there is, including life and death. Yet let us not infer from such a historical reality that war is a norm(al) part of the social and the political, and that it will sooner or later recur, like death. I have already argued that the absence of relations between states is the default and natural state; neither war nor peace are the originary states that define the

relations of states. The inter-state, on the other hand, by virtue of already existing, exists either under the conditions of war or peace. Lastly, I should point out that such a normalizing approach goes beyond our attitudes towards war in relation to the politics of the world. The entirety of the political is perceived as normal. For instance: we find it normal and even natural that there should be a state, that each state ultimately pursues its interests, that scarcity leads to conflict, that people should sacrifice their beings for their land and state, that an egalitarian society will be peaceful and harmonious, that might matters, and so-on.

Furthermore, in relation to the relations involved in such a normalizing attitude there is, first, a degree of rationalization involved in convictions such as ‘this is how it is, this is how it has always been’. It is this form of rationalization that ultimately plays a major role in the legitimization of destructive relations and confrontations. Second, such an attitude often leads to and results in forgetfulness, which is often the case in the everyday as we seldom remember normal and familiar events. By normalizing the suffering of a peoples, we, as a consequence, undermine the enormity of a situation, of an event. Third, caring for the world and humanity and being concerned about them may be noble acts but they are also painful, burdensome, and exhaustive. Caring for the world, for the sufferings and the pains that it emanates and produces, means to be in constant agonizing pain. Normalizing and seeing things as banal and all too familiar, or being numb to them reduces and erases such pain. People die. People starve. People suffer. States go extinct. It is just the way of the world. The less one knows the less one is in pain. Neither the love of the Christians, nor the peace of the Muslims, and nor the care for the workers of socialists have been able to eradicate this normalizing attitude of indifference. However, since we have discovered and invented the other, we have also developed an attitude of what the other experiences and concerns the other, which is to say: there is hope going

forward. We have the means to be more attentive; to attend, a never-ending process of paying attention to the world, being a part of the world, and caring for the world.

There are many ways for selves to attend to the world. The most consequential is the attending of the decision-making processes, decisions that are made and being made, decisions that concern the world and what constitutes it. Decisions are everyday phenomena: one chooses coffee over tea; a state enters war; one decides to let go of life. 'Deciding' involves the relations of determination, hesitation, choosing, calculation, discussion, rationalization, etc. For a decision to be made, often times there needs to be an environment where manifold options are available out of which a course of action is decided. This environment is congested with either/or, this/that, today/tomorrow, this self/that self, this ideology/that ideology, to care/ not to care, tea/coffee, war/peace, foods offered in a buffet. In the absence of such an environment of possibilities and multiplicities the act of decision making becomes a meaningless notion. It is for such reason that most of the political or the self related activities are of a repetitive nature, as the courses and procedures of such activities are pre-determined and pre-decided. There is re-relation, repetition of the similar and of the initial form of relation to such activities, until such time where conditions necessitate the emergence of a new decision. In 1945, through the UN Charter, it was decided that: "The Security Council shall consist of fifteen Members of the United Nations. The Republic of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America shall be permanent members of the Security Council."²³⁴ A decision was made by the political on the politics and the fate of the world in 1945 and what was decided remains intact until today. The endurance of decisions, of certain decisions.

About American politics, de Tocqueville observed the following: “In America the people appoint both those who make the laws and those who execute them; the people form the jury which punishes breaches of the law. The institutions are democratic not only in principle but also in all their developments; thus the people *directly* nominate their representatives and generally choose them *annually* so as to hold them more completely dependent. So direction really comes from the people, and though the form of government is representative, it is clear that the opinions, prejudices, interests, and even passions of the people can find no lasting obstacles preventing them from being manifest in the daily conduct of society.”²³⁵ For de Tocqueville’s time, processes and structures of the American politics were certainly progressive, in a way ahead of their time in certain regards. It is more difficult however to make such clear cut statements about the political relationships of today. Neither the state nor the people’s power is the same. The people are still able to vote for a certain party, which is far more inclusive than it was during de Tocqueville’s time, yet the state has its own life and personality now, its own decisions, processes, mechanisms, interests, opinions, and passions, which it alone decides.

As relations expand and increase, begin and end, shrink and mutate so do situations that demand decisions. In political affairs, perhaps with the exception of some elections, it is the state that ultimately makes decisions for itself and its people. The political therefore is what and who decides. Such a monopoly over decision making is sensible, even understandable, in matters of everyday political procedures, regulations and relations, as it is near impossible for a self to be burdened with all forms of decisions in the world today. It is equally nonsensical and inconceivable that in the age of machineries and technologies the political class has a monopoly over key decisions that have existential consequences for the people and the world. It is absurd that people have no voice in decisions concerning wars for instance, for something so

destructive, so historical. It is time perhaps that the relations between the people and the political are questioned, re-evaluated, and reconfigured, particularly in relation to decision making and its processes. It is neither sustainable nor logical anymore for the political to solely decide on the affairs of the world and the making of the world. Poulantzas once reasoned that “*Transformation of the State apparatus tending towards the withering away of the state* can rest only on increased intervention of the popular masses in the State: certainly through their trade-union and political forms of representation, but also through their own initiatives within the State itself.”²³⁶

Although it is difficult to agree with Poulantzas on the ways and means of the participation of the people in the political, as it is for the people to *decide* what and how to imagine such participation, his call for active participation by the people in politics is nonetheless an important point. The people are no longer sheep, nor can they be portrayed as sheep, nor can they be shepherded any longer. Together they can make decisions, and it should be they who should decide on the destiny of the world, particularly at a time when humanity is in a position to shape the world. Rousseau’s statements therefore that “the legislative power belongs to the people” and that the government is “the legitimate exercise of the executive power”²³⁷ are not particularly adequate principles for the world in the making. The people not the political should be the architect of the world, which is infinitely relational and complex and requires complex processes and mechanisms.

Care, life

We should attend to the world, as enormous and burdening as this task may be, because the world is ontologically incomplete and its foundations, particularly its political foundations, are fragile as they are primarily built on ancient relationships, such as the burdening of the

political to manage the world and its affairs. If the world has not collapsed upon itself and thus disintegrated into oblivion yet it is in large part due to the sheer force of the political expressed through force. Therefore, it is not the wisdom of the political but the force of arms that has managed to keep the world as the world. The question however is how could and why should the world, in its entirety be left to the political? The burden must be shared perhaps with the political by means of attending. Attending is also care, is to care, and is to cultivate a culture of care. But what is 'care', and how can it be developed into a form of attentiveness.

The concept of care here primarily entails what it means in its everyday English use: to be concerned about something or someone, to be mindful of someone or something, for something or someone to positively be present in one's mind and heart, to extend oneself into them, to attach importance and value to them, and to act and behave with great care. Carefulness is already extensively exercised in our daily lives, and it is coalesced with manifold other relations. In most languages, particularly in the Middle Eastern languages, despite the existence of the word "care", "care" is not verbalized as explicitly as it is in the English language. "Care" is a designated certain word(s), but it is also implied in manifold acts and words, which in fact shows how prevalent and dispersed the culture of care is. We take care of ourselves, our health, our families, things we own, things we attach meanings to. But this form of care of the immediate, of what is close to us and a part of us, is perhaps due to the evolutionary reasons deeply rooted in the traditional self-centered form of existence; it is in a way a highly spatial form of care. It limits the scope and the intensity of the care for others, distant others, and for the world at large. In our everyday care is limited as it is essentially oriented towards the self and what concerns the self. Yet this self-centered form of care should not immediately be interpreted as negative and egoistic, although it can be at times, simply because such care is rooted in our

existential conditions and in the fact that our outward extensions are/were limited by spatial confines, even though the phenomenon of care in itself is a trans-spatial reality. However, if our conditions were to change, and they are changing, if spatial confines were to be transcended, the scope of care should further expand outwardly, beyond the self. At face value, this self-centered interpretation of care may contradict the Christian love for Christians, the Muslim's love for the *Ummah*, the humanist's love for all humans, or even the nationalist's care for their nation, as these forms of care transcend the self. These forms of care however remain within the confines of the self as a given Muslim is loved and cared for because of the self's Islam, therefore the self itself, is found in the other Muslim. This is also true for the Christian, the humanist, and the nationalist. The love and the care for the other is the care and love of the self, as the other is the self, resembles the self.

Care, distinct from compassion, in its everyday form may primarily be limited to the self and to what concerns the self, but selves possess other relations that are oriented towards the world and what constitutes it, and they are not as restrictive and exclusive as care is. For instance, our relations with the natural world that surrounds us can be quite extensive. We enjoy the sublimity of nature in most of its forms and shades. We commodify the natural and the inanimate. Such a commodifying relation²³⁸ as archeological as it may be is also partially informed by the ontology of human existence of the Abrahamic religions – that the human is created in God's image, and that the human is God's representative on earth – as well as, in a far more determinate way, by the modern capitalistic mode of life. The inanimate means something because we attach value to it, a monetary value for instance. Otherwise it is something simply there, lifeless and indifferent, only to be noticed occasionally. This existing relation towards the world, which originates in ancient times, further inspired by Abraham's God, but unleashed by

capitalistic relations, finds its most complete expression in Locke: “God, who hath given the World to Men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of Life, and convenience. The Earth, and all that is therein, is given to Men for the Support and Comfort of their being. And though all the Fruits it naturally produces, and Beasts it feeds, belong to Mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of Nature; and no body has originally a private Dominion, exclusive of the rest of Mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state: yet being given for the use of Men, there must of necessity be a means *to appropriate* them some way or other before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular Man. The Fruit, or Venison, which nourishes the wild *Indian*, who knows no Inclosure, and is still a Tenant in common, must be his, and so his, *i.e.* a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his Life.”²³⁹

Relations that we immediately encounter in this excerpt, aside from racism, are: the use of nature, having a domineering attitude towards it, the sense of entitlement towards it, the ownership of it, and so-on. At their very essence, these relations are neither the invention of capitalism nor of Locke. They are and have been essential to the development of the human experience in certain parts of the world. What is new in their modern expression, however, is the mutation and the expansion of their scopes and contents. They extend, unlike care, beyond the immediate and the spatially close and thus relate to multiple existents.

This modern attitude towards the natural world that surrounds us is certainly not the only relation we have but it is the most dominant one, particularly the relation of ownership, which is ever so prevalent more so than the relations of use, commodifying, etc. In the Abrahamic religious form of relations towards the natural world, the self is often passive, it is merely representing God on earth. In the end what is there is God’s creation, God is present in them. But

in modernity with the rise of the liberal, secular, and capitalist subjectivity the relationship between the human species and the world that surrounds them has become multifaceted, including relations such as protection, commodification, domination,²⁴⁰ enjoyment, parceling, concern, destruction, and so-on. But these relations have produced a paradox, an existential paradox. On the one hand, using, commodifying, transforming, exchanging, researching, conserving, processing, etc. the entities that constitute the world have enhanced human existence and experience, and benefited human life in ways we cannot enumerate, and on the other, these relations have been violently destructive, consuming the earth's resources, and affecting the environment and ecology. There is no harmony in such a relationship, as it lacks the culture of care, an attentive care. Whatever institutionalized care there is it is simply in itself commodified. Care is profit here. The attentive form of care of course does not mean that we cease utilizing the earth's resources in order to further our comfort and enhance our capabilities. Quite conversely, the primary aim of the notion of care is to care for life, in all its forms, perhaps the most fragile existent in existence. Care for the world, though, is also care for life, for self. In the end, the world is the home of life, the only home, to which we all belong, to which we all have an existential claim to.

If we were to compare the moderns to the ancients in their attitudes towards the world and the earth that constitutes it, it can be said that the relations of the ancients were limited and inconsequential, which essentially was a consequence of limited knowledge about the world. The ancients had neither technologies nor machineries to have any significant impact on the world in terms of destruction, appropriation, studying, etc. Their world was literally small, but with infinite horizons expressed through religions and mythologies. As such, the ancients did not really need to care for caring or not caring about the natural world. Their care for it, even if they

had any, had very limited consequences. For the moderns though, care as an existential, social, and psychological mode is their salvation, is a necessity. The culture of care, the principle of care, then, must be embedded in everyday culture, in daily interactions and attitudes, simply because as we are creating a world, we are simultaneously destroying it.

Of the phenomena that the relation of care can be oriented towards, life in all its forms deserves significant attention. There already exist in the world manifold degrees of care for life. The highest form, needless to say, is the self's care for their own life. This self-care often manifests itself in the forms of survival, self-love, reproduction, struggle for recognition, simply living, and so-on. As it is the case in everything that exists, there are exceptions to this highest form of care; for instance, one may sacrifice oneself for a cause, religious or ideological, or commit suicide which is common to human existence. A self's care for life is not limited to their own life of course. A self cares for those who are close to them in terms of relations; to care for one's family or friends for instance. A self may also care for distant others, with different relations and layers constituting such care. Similarly, the political also cares for life, as it is one of its foundational logics and functions to care and protect life that is subjected to its rule. The political's care for life though is not necessarily personal, as it rarely involves the relations of various feelings; this form of care is institutionalized and it primarily stems from a sense of duty and obligation instilled in the political. It is an unspoken promise that the political fulfills as long as its subjects remain loyal and obedient. Beside the protection and preservation of life, the political also cares for its poor, it provides them with shelter, monthly stipends, and so-on. Interestingly, as the socialization of the political expands and intensifies, the political becomes further inventive in its care solutions. For instance, article ten of the Geneva Conventions states: "1. All the wounded, sick and ship wrecked, to whichever Party they belong, shall be respected

and protected. 2. In all circumstances they shall be treated humanely and shall receive, to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay, the medical care and attention required by their condition. There shall be no distinction among them founded on any grounds other than medical ones.”²⁴¹ Such articles aim to institutionalize the protection of the vulnerable in wars. This form of care is one of the highest expressions of contradiction and hypocrisy. Care amidst war, destruction, suffering, death, and anguish.

There are further implications to the notion of care for life. First, we must make a distinction between mere living, being alive, and having a good and fulfilling life. This distinction is not new of course, and it fundamentally stems from an existential concern for human existence and the ways in which it exists. Numerous philosophers, such as Aristotle,²⁴² Nietzsche,²⁴³ Agamben,²⁴⁴ and others, each in their own way and in relation to what primarily concerned them, and various religions and ideologies, have all concerned themselves with this distinction in the conditions of human existence. What this historical concern reveals is that human existence is not ideal, equal, just, fair, and fulfilling. Hegel for instance, following Plato, goes as far as to describe ‘good’ as “*realized freedom, the absolute and ultimate end of the world*”²⁴⁵ (italics are his). This concern about the conditions of life, a concern that is universal in its orientation as it concerns humanity, should persist as long as differences in living standards and conditions persist, as long as there is no fully realized justice, harmony, and equality. The condition of mere living simply refers to living a life primarily described in terms of struggle and survival, which is and has been the reality of most human beings, if not all. The content of struggle here should be perceived in the broadest possible way, beyond economic and material struggles. Health can be a struggle; losing someone is a struggle, not being married or the inability to have children is a struggle for some, loneliness is a struggle, loss of faith is a

struggle, absence of spirituality is a struggle, overworking is a struggle, and so-on. So many struggles one experiences in life. Against the backdrop of this naked and brute reality of existence, we often desire a good life, and are conscious of it as there is always someone who has a better life. The other determines a self's consciousness of their everyday reality. Inequality, struggle, pain, loneliness, misery, injustice, destructions, absurdities, all are at the heart of human existence. Life even in the most economically advanced societies remains a struggle, in one form or another. So much struggle, effort, and time are dedicated to work, for example. Life therefore in its essence is a struggle, a struggle to maintain it, a struggle to live and continue it. A good life, on the other hand, is living beyond the limitations of merely living life, it is to be human not just living like any living being. A good life does not necessarily mean a happy life, as happiness is a relative and temporal concept, it is a condition that comes and goes like ocean waves. A good life is to live beyond the constraints of mere life, is a reinterpretation and re-articulation of life, a very human endeavour. For most it remains a goal in life, it is a destiny towards which we sail.

In general, life, in relation to other cosmic phenomena, is a fragile being. It can only flourish at the intersection and the coming together of manifold cosmic relationalities and relations. For it to exist there needs to be ideal natural conditions. And even when it exists it is easily damaged, broken, ended, destroyed, changed, and so-on. Its unfortunate reality is that it is dependent on far too many phenomena for its survival. Through manifold processes such as production, evolution, reproduction, mutation, manifold relations, generation, consumption, protection, absorption, and so-on, it is able to sustain its existence. Far too many pre-conditions, after-conditions, happenings and gatherings are involved in the realization of life. Although life, despite its fragility, has found a way to emerge and sustain itself amidst the ocean of the

inanimate, it is in need of help, our help, in order to flourish and enrich further. For so long, we as living beings have lived according to the capabilities and potentialities of life, its strategies for survival, its ways to sustain itself, its fight for existence, which were only for a brief temporary existence, to be reproduced before its extinction. Life's journey has been a constant state of struggle in all its stages and phases. To help life: to create conditions where life is no longer solely dependent on its own strength and means and ways of existence. To care for it we should perhaps begin by caring for our own lives, individually and collectively. Life is weak, life is fragile, and life is insignificant amidst the ocean of the inanimate, in relation to the inanimate. What is a human life? In vulgar terms, it is a product of a few minutes of sexual intercourse, of love, pleasure, pain, and most importantly the force of life to reproduce itself. What is a human life? In a few brief instances we depart from it, we become extinct, we are no longer alive. Life is short. Life is a sweet journey, a friendship between the self and life. The body is aging and sickening. The body is hungry, thirsty. Life requires so much maintenance and sustenance, so much attention. In this context, the medical sciences is ontology, is existential to human existence. The point of helping life is not necessarily to prolong its existence, which is an admirable goal in itself; it is simply to assist life as it struggles for its existence by itself and for itself. Our relations with life have a passive character. We always accept what life gives us; we play by its rules of survival and struggle. It is time perhaps that this arrangement is renegotiated.

The curse and the gift of relations

As selves attend to the world and its relations in a positively multifaceted way, care for it, and as they remember that they are a part of it, and the world is theirs, and as much they contribute to its making and expansion the world also produces and invents them, I should by

way of conclusion to this text revisit the phenomenon of relations and draw attention to its further two characteristics in relation to our relations with relations as such. The first is that relations, in general, are a gift to us. Through them and as a consequence of them we are born, through them we grow and maintain our lives, and through them we expand and enrich our lives. With the exception of certain biological and physical relations, relations that sustain life, most human relations are susceptible to changes, mutations, repetitions, and cessations. This in itself is a gift as it allows the self to become rather than simply be. We are born with so many/much of them; to so many of them we are born into; so many of them we produce and emanate; and so many are oriented towards us. They are gifts, good and bad. We are born to relate. In this case relations are natural, they are a part of our DNA, we learn languages, we eat, we desire; such relations are pure, are who we are, yet even they can change, mutate, and cease. We also learn to relate; those continuous relations that constitute the everyday, those repetitive and recurring relations. Repetition solidifies habitual relations; they become a part of the self. But as the repetition of a relation multiplies, when many relate in a similar way, they are harder to end and change. Still, let us not deduce from this that changing the relation of a self is any easier than changing a relation repeated by many. Then there are those relations that are reinforced by other relations, that coalesce with other relations, that accompany other relations. Despite their layers and levels, states and forms, distances and engagements, relations can nevertheless end, change, mutate, weaken, strengthen, expand, shrink, be forgotten, learned, taught, disposed, recycled, mimicked, repeated endlessly, and so-on.

Furthermore, as our relations continuously expand and increase, and as we over-relate there lies the danger of relations superseding our capacities, relations overwhelming our capabilities. How can such incapacitation be prevented? A few historical techniques such as

force, ideas, laws, revolutions, rebellions, and education have successfully been utilized to change or manage certain relations. The gradual disappearance of certain practices (relations) has also played a key role in regulating relations. As did the sovereign's decisions. In the Laws of Ur-Nammu for instance it is stated: "Then did Ur-Nammu, the mighty warrior, king of Ur, king of Sumer and Akkad, by the might of Nanna, lord of the city (of Ur), and in accordance with the true word of Utu, establish equity in the land (and) he banished malediction, violence and strife. *By granting immunity in Akkad to the maritime trade from the seafarers' overseer, to the herdsmen from the 'Oxen-taker', the 'sheep-taker', and the 'donkey-taker', he set Sumer and Akkad free.*"²⁴⁶ History has diligently recorded the changes brought by such charismatic individuals (e.g. leaders, prophets, generals), where the world was simple and limited enough to be transformed by ambition and leadership. The world in its current stage however is an unceasingly transforming immense. Its existence is such that as it contains the changes imbedded in it, it also carries within itself attitudes of opposition or indifference towards such changes. Although a majority of the changes in recurring relations occur organically, for instance major advancements in one industry or research field often generate change in other social realms, there are also agents of change such as movements, parties, and groups who force change onto societies. Gramsci for instance talks of "war of position" and "war of maneuver",²⁴⁷ where the aim is to bring about change either by overthrowing the dominant class or by reforming the system from within. Obama's slogan for his 2008 presidential election campaign was "Change We Can Believe In". The desire for change is everywhere. That desire for difference, for the new, for leaving a mark. But the world is colossal now, only the world can change the world. All other attempts can only disturb certain aspects of the world.

These changes, desires for change, and techniques for achieving changes ultimately prove one of the main arguments of this text, that relations are a fragile phenomena despite their seemingly continuous existence through repetition. Even in the absence of external relations, such as force, laws and regulations, etc., ending or changing a relation is possible through sheer conviction. There is a thin line between the existence and non-existence of a relation. One can cease to believe, end one's life, and live in isolation. What makes the change or the end of certain relations difficult is not those relations themselves but the presence of other relations that surround such relations. One may easily break the law, but it is punishment, morals, etc., that prevent the emanation or production of certain relations. Therefore, the existentiality of most human relations is simply an illusion.

At times, a self experiences moments of meaninglessness, absurdity, and emptiness. In such instances certain relations lose their significance and meaningfulness. So much time is dedicated to achieving something. Then there is the instance of 'was it worth it?' These instances are best read as mere manifestations of derelationism. Through them relations are reconfigured and ended. It is in moments such as these that we come face to face with the absurdity of certain relations that we have. In such emptiness we often determine the course of certain relations. The emptiness becomes full again; a mimicry of the cycle of void and existence, an instance of relating to our very own relations.

The gift of relations is also our curse. Relations free us but they also destroy us. They help us transcend ourselves, but they also deny us a permanent fixed essence. They enable us to reach out to what lies beyond ourselves but in the beyond where we remain dwelling and find our identities. They enrich us but they also confine us to a relational existence. Through them we are and become who we are, but it is also through them that what was to become never becomes.

Someone is good, someone is evil, and someone evil has become good. This gift and curse of relations is simultaneously present. They can neither be a pure gift nor can they be a pure curse. As we attend to the relations of the world and what constitutes it, and as we care for the world and for life, as we attempt to save politics from the political class, as we begin making decisions over the issues that concern the world, we must attend and be aware of, on the one hand, the dangers that the overcoming of relations can pose, and on the other, of the challenges that the giftful and curseful aspects of relations present.

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