Geography, death, and finitude

José Luis Romanillos

Geography
College of Life and Environmental Sciences
University of Exeter
Amory Building
Rennes Drive
EX4 4RJ

j.l.romanillos@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract

Despite growing interest in the geographies of death, loss and remembrance, comparatively little geographical research has been devoted to either the historical and cultural practices of death, or to an adequate conceptualization of finitude. Responding to these absences, this paper argues for the importance of the notion of finitude within the history and philosophy of geographical thought. Situating finitude initially in the context of the work of Torsten Hägerstrand and Richard Hartshorne, the notion is argued to be both productive of a geographical ethics, and as epistemologically constitutive of phenomenological apprehensions of 'earth' and 'world'. In order to better grasp the sense and genealogy of finitude, the paper turns to the work of Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault and Georges Bataille. These authors are drawn upon precisely because their writings present powerful conceptual frameworks that demonstrate the intimate relations between spatiality, death and finitude. At the same time, their writings are critically interrogated in the light of perhaps the most important aspect of the conceptual history of finitude: the way in which it has been articulated as a site of anthropocentric distinction. The paper argues for a critical deconstruction of this anthropocentric basis to finitude; a deconstruction that raises a series of profound questions over the ethics, normativities and understandings of responsibility shaping contemporary ethical geographies of the human and non-human. In so doing, the paper demonstrates the geographical importance of the notion of finitude for a variety of arenas of debate that include: phenomenological understandings of spatiality; the biopolitical boundaries drawn between human and animal; and contemporary theorizations of corporeality, materiality and hospitality.

Key Words: *finitude, death, spatiality, anthropocentricism, non-human geographies*

Introduction

Writing in the context of the 1970s global oil crises, and the concrete realization of the accuracy of M K Hubbert's prediction concerning peak oil production, Torsten Hägerstrand provided perhaps the first geographical analysis of finitude. In a paper entitled 'Geography and the study of interaction between nature and society' he voiced concern about the kind of ethical dispositions shaping modern society: 'What seems to be particularly dangerous in the present situation is that the human imagination…does not appear to grasp finitudes intuitively' (1976: 333). For Hägerstrand, a society based upon the principles of production, accumulation and consumption struggles to grasp the finite nature of ecological relations. In so doing the intimate relations that compose different ecologies can be destroyed; their finitude revealed all too indifferently, all too late. Because of the distinctive relational composition of geographical imaginations, spun between nature and society, Hägerstrand proposed that a 'central task for geography' entailed teaching 'the lessons of finitude' (*ibid.* 334). The premise of Hägerstrand's argument is that there is an intimate relation between finitude and a geographical ethics. However, Hägerstrand did not explore with any great precision what 'finitude' signifies, represents or communicates. This paper examines a series of historical and philosophical perspectives on finitude so as to both provide a more complex conceptualization of the term, and to help make the claim that finitude might be an important geographical notion.

Geographers have recently begun to explore spatial and place-based accounts of death, dying and remembrance (Kong, 1999; Wylie, 2009; Rose, 2009; Herman, 2010). As Avril Maddrell and James Sidaway outline in their introduction to *Deathscapes: Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning and Remembrance*, these geographical perspectives on

death are developing alongside extant literatures on geography, religion and the sacred; the politics of mourning and memorialisation; and nonrepresentational geographies of emotion and affect (2010: 2). In many ways, however, there continues to be little serious conceptual engagement with the notion of finitude since Hägerstrand's call. This is problematic because, as this paper argues, one of the consequences of a critical exploration of finitude is the recognition that it plays an important, though often veiled, role within a series of geographical concepts and debates: from understandings of spatiality, corporeality and representation, to the ethics and politics that are made possible – or denied – through the boundaries inscribed between the human and the animal, the organic and the inorganic. A geographical encounter with the notion of finitude therefore extends beyond geo-anthropological accounts of the sacred, or religions perspectives on dying, identity and remembrance, towards historical and contemporary theorisations of the human, understandings of worldhood and spatiality, and, as Hägerstrand intimated, ethical geographies of the non-human.

Another consequence of engaging with the notion of finitude is that it presents an epistemological and representational challenge. It is perhaps a symptom of the influence of Gilles Deleuze upon contemporary socio-spatial theory that death has remained a marginal concern even for nonrepresentational geography (but see Harrison, 2007; Wylie, 2007, 2009; Romanillos, 2008). Finitude, death and absence are not 'presences' phenomenologically at hand that can be simply documented, categorized and represented. Whether we are thinking of ecological destruction, the passing of a loved one, or the ignominious power of States to decide between life and death, thinking death cannot be an objective process. As the work of Georges Bataille demonstrates, this is because death is the limit of thought, and as this limit it contaminates and *affects* the

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very project of knowledge that seeks to address it (see in particular Bataille, 1962: 11-25, 1990). Hägerstrand hints at this epistemological problematic when he proposes that finitude is something intuitively grasped rather than categorically 'known'. However, to what extent can we even propose to 'grasp' finitude? As Martin Heidegger puts it: 'death is in every case mine, in so far as it 'is' at all.' (1962: 284). Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that 'finitude itself *is* nothing; it is neither a ground, nor an essence, nor a substance. But it appears, it presents itself, it exposes itself…' (1991: 28). Clearly, the distinctive phenomenality of finitude raises questions concerning representation and communication. Indeed, between authors such as Heidegger, Hegel and Blanchot, finitude comes to be thought as that which makes language possible: 'language is the life that endures death and maintains itself in it.' (Blanchot, 1995: 336). Similarly, Jacques Derrida notes that finitude structures the possibility – and exigency – for writing, representations and the archive: 'There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression.' (1998: 19). Beyond these ontological claims concerning a co-originarity of language and death, however, there is also the question of how death is written, represented and mediated. For example, to what extent does it require or demand a particular form of writing style or address? As the later work of Derrida on death, friendship and mourning demonstrates, language shatters and fragments under the exigency to communicate precisely that which – in the experience of death and loss – exceeds representational discursive economies (Derrida, 2000, 2003).

These initial reflections on writing and representation raise the broader question of how to 'relate' to death and finitude? In his paper, Hägerstrand seems to claim that the geographical imagination is particularly adept at communicating finitude because of its

'relational' thinking and its capacity to bridge the natural and social worlds. But to what extent is the *non-relationality* of death and finitude adequately situated within the relational grammar of contemporary geographical discourse? For example, does not the history of Western philosophy, as Giorgio Agamben documents, take finitude and consciousness of death – alongside the capacity for the *logos* – to be an instance of the radical separation of the human from the natural; the site of an un-crossable abyss? Indeed, if death is a border or a limit (see Derrida, 1993), it is one that has traditionally been inscribed within the limits of the human. There is then an anthropocentric basis to the notion of finitude that demands to be recognised and deconstructed. As the following section demonstrates, this anthropocentrism insidiously insinuates itself into the very epistemological conditions of geographical representation. By turning to the work of Heidegger, Kant and Foucault, the section below unpacks how the anthropocentric basis of finitude acts as a subterranean conceptual pivot for existential analyses of being-in-the-world. By exploring this 'existential analytic of finitude', the analysis therefore arrives at the following crucial geographical consequence of engaging with finitude in the context of post-Heideggerian spatial theory: that the anthropocentric borders and divisions at work in the notion of finitude also problematically ground and striate phenomenological understandings of 'spatiality' itself.

Existential Analytic of Finitude

In *Perspective on the Nature of Geography*, Richard Hartshorne presents an interesting and utterly bizarre thought experiment aimed at revealing something of the nature of geographical knowledge. 'Let us suppose', he writes,

> that the human race should use its recently discovered powers to destroy itself, and were ultimately succeeded by a race of literate insects who learned to read our books through minimizers. They could accept our physics and chemistry, and the greater part of other natural sciences with little change, but might find it necessary to completely rewrite the physical (not to mention the 'human') branches of geography (1964: 45).

Hartshorne is attempting here to outline what is thematically 'significant' for the discipline of geography. The point he is making is that geographical significance is constituted in 'terms of significance to man [sic]' (ibid. 46), and that geographers necessarily conceive 'of the earth as the world of man' (ibid. 47). At various other points in the text Hartshorne extends this gendered and anthropocentric understanding of geography by describing the world as the dwelling-place or 'home of man', occasionally resorting to a teleological depiction of life that places the human at its summit. These are statements that are likely to be vigorously contested by current critical geographies concerned with both dismantling the gendered history of the discipline, and problematising hierarchical enumerations of life.

And yet by enquiring into how we conceive of geographical knowledge and conceptualize 'earth', 'home', and 'world', Hartshorne is engaged in important

epistemological work precisely because he is underlining the phenomenological anthropocentricism of geographical thought. By framing geographical knowledge in terms of its relation-to-the-human, I want to argue, Hartshorne is presenting a kind of Kantian account of geography that foregrounds the specificity of the human as constitutive for the kinds of knowledges that are rendered possible and conceivable in the first instance. As the paper argues below, the 'specificity' that grounds this possibility for knowledge and world is constituted in post-Kantian thought in terms of the 'radical finitude' of the human subject.

Now, let it be stressed here that by drawing upon Hartshorne's thought experiment in this way I am not arguing for the validity of anthropocentric ways of thought. Rather, I am claiming that to understand anthropocentrism as an epistemological and phenomenological process, as much as a theological or ideological assumption, is to help challenge it more profoundly. What this means then is that anthropocentrism is not a doctrine or perspective to which one simply subscribes or rejects, but is rather bound up in much more complex ways with the very modes of representation through which we think the space of the world. Crucially, as I develop below, 'finitude' plays an important role both in crystallizing the image of thought implicit in anthropocentrism, and in shaping the ways in which it operates as an epistemological and phenomenological process. For these reasons, a deconstruction of the anthropocentric basis of finitude is important conceptual work, particularly in the context of developing understandings of non-human geographies and environmental ethics, precisely because it is so subterranean and bound up with habitual epistemologies and phenomenological languages (Meillassoux, 2008). To use an image from Heidegger's (1959) *Introduction*

to Metaphysics, the figure of anthropocentrism is not a shadow of geographical history that can simply be jumped over.

To help explore Hartshorne's thought experiment in relation to this 'radical finitude' we can turn to Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1997). In his '*Kantbook*' Heidegger provides a detailed reading of *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 2008), exploring the work in the light his analysis of the history of metaphysics and the existential analytic of Dasein developed in *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1962)[1]. Whilst there is not the space to go into much detail concerning this *Kantbook*, two points are worth outlining. Firstly, Heidegger proposes that Kant's explication of the transcendental categories does not reflect a desire to uncover the working of pure reason; it 'has nothing to do with a 'theory of knowledge'' (Heidegger, 1997: 11). The path that Heidegger takes in wresting Kant's *Critique* from being understood as a 'theory of mathematical, natural-scientific knowledge' (ibid. 191), is to read it in terms of an 'analytic of finitude' that is ontologically constitutive of knowledge. The finitude of knowledge is not revealed after the fact; when, for example, Hartshorne's thought experiment concerning the end of the world is realised. To argue for the finitude of knowledge here is not simply to demonstrate the historicity of scientific discourse, or reveal the limits and borders of perception, sensation or reason, but to fore*ground* finitude as the conditioning space for thought as such.

> This finitude of reason…in no way consists only or primarily in the fact that human knowing demonstrates many sorts of deficiencies such as instability,

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[1] The *Kantbook* occupies an important space in Heidegger's philosophy, published between *Being and Time*, 1927, and the 1929/30 winter lectures of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Heidegger, 1995), discussed below.

imprecision, and [the potential for making] errors. Rather, this finitude lies in the essential structure of knowledge itself (Heidegger, 1997: 15).

The second key point that I want to highlight from the *Kantbook* is intimately bound with the first: finitude does not just ground knowledge, it is also, and more primordially, grounds the specificity of the human *for whom* appearances, representations and knowledges become phenomenologically possible as such. Here we see how finitude comes to operate as a crucial site of anthropocentric distinction. It is also why we can read Hartshorne's thought experiment in terms of an anthropocentrism that is epistemological: one is concerned here with representations possible through the fragmentary spacings of the human body, the finite temporalities of its existential trajectories, and the worldhood that is 'proper' to it alone. Turning again to Heidegger's account of the *Critique*, Kant's work on the conditions of possibility for knowledge, and the divisions between *phenomena* and *noumena*, is said to revolve around a hidden confrontation with the specific being of the human (*Dasein*). In short, while Kant seeks to metaphysically 'ground' reason by way of a thinking free from experience, Heidegger in turn grounds this very philosophical capacity 'to ground' in a prior existential and worldly analysis:

> The ground for the source for laying the ground for metaphysics is *human* pure reason, so that it is precisely the *humanness* of reason, i.e. its finitude, which will be essential for the core of this problematic of ground-laying (1997: 15 emphasis added).

Stuart Elden has stressed the importance of the notion of ground for Heidegger's account of Being and the spatiality of Dasein (Elden, 2002, 2005; cf. Malpas, 2007). As he puts it, "Heidegger was always concerned with the fundamental, the foundational, the grounding issues" (Elden, 2005: 823). But as Elden also reminds us, the ground at play in Heidegger's writings – finitude – is not a ground at all, if by ground one understands something substantive, fathomable and calculable. Rather, the ground is also an abyss (*abgrund*), the 'night is also a sun' (Nietzsche, 2003: 331), and to think this abyssal experience is to reckon with "[a]n impossible encounter that makes possible what follows" (Elden, 2005: 824). Importantly for Heidegger, an experience of finitude both makes possible the receptivity and representation of the world, and specifies Dasein from other beings: 'the animal is separated from man by an abyss'. (Heidegger, 1995: 264).

In these passages from the *Kantbook*, Heidegger is positioning 'finitude' as a conditioning and active force that structures both the possibility for reflection on the limits of reason and the historicity of 'ontic' knowledges, and as ontologically generative of the human itself. Alexandre Kojève argues that the legacy of Hegelian thought can be conceived in a similar way. In his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1980), for example, Kojève presents Hegel as an inaugural thinker of finitude. Crucially, and as found in the passages from Heidegger above, finitude and death in Hegel are bound up with the production of a boundary or *limit* between the human and the animal, history and nature. What an enquiry into the analytic history of finitude helps unpack then are some of the conceptual mechanisms and languages at work when divisions between culture and nature articulated. For Kojève, for example, whilst death is deemed to be a discontinuous end point for the animal, Hegel's *Phenomenology of*

Spirit demonstrates how the negativity of death is interpolated into the very constitution of the human subject *qua* world-historical consciousness (cf. Butler, 1999; Nancy, 2002).

> Whatever is confined within the limits of a natural life cannot by its own efforts go beyond its immediate existence; but it is driven beyond it by something else, and this uprooting entails its death. Consciousness, however, is explicitly the Notion of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself. (Hegel, 2004: 51).

In Hegelian terms, the 'work of the negative' is formative for human self-consciousness precisely because consciousness needs to *destroy* and *exceed* its immediate limits and self-presence to be what it is. For Kojève, Hegel's famous account of the 'Master and Slave' presents this dialectical process through a dramatization of the bloody birth of History in which the figure of the Master succeeds in a fight to the death for pure 'prestige' and wins recognition from the vanquished Slave[2]. Inaugurating History, the Master desires and fights for something *outside* of the limits of their natural being (the 'prestige' won is *useless* from the perspective of the preservation of their biological being), and it is this negation of immediate, natural presence that is said to constitute the essence of a 'Historical' rather than merely 'Natural' desire. As the anthropological Hegelianism of Kojève puts it, death is said to 'humanize' the biological entity *homo sapiens* (cf. Kojève, 1980: 3-30, 2007: 209-231).

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[2] Think: ape-sequence, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

What the work of Heidegger and Kojève allows us to recognize then is that thinking about finitude is not to be taken as some morbid reaction, for example, to a set of vitalist life philosophies[3]. Rather it is about reflexively underlining finitude as phenomenologically constitutive of the human capacity to think the world as living, lugubrious, or anything at all. This is also to challenge understandings of finitude that consider it as little more than an exercise in mysticism. For Alain Badiou, for example, this mysticism is said to unfold from the central place given to the Holocaust in the ethical philosophies, or 'anthropologies of finitude' of authors such as Levinas, Blanchot, Derrida or Agamben (Badiou, in Hallward, 2004: 237). For Badiou, whilst death comes to be the central operator of their philosophies, it also withdraws from any philosophical apprehension because it is conceived in terms of a radical impossibility and passivity. It is this contradictory position concerning both the centrality, and *a priori* unknowability, of death that for Badiou is the hallmark of a 'religious' rather than a philosophical discourse (Badiou, 2002: 18-39).

> To unshackle existence down here from its mortal correlation requires that it should be axiomatically wrested from the phenomenological constitution of experience as well as from the Nietzschean naming of being as life. To think existence *without finitude* – that is the liberatory imperative, which extricates existence from the ultimate signifier of its submission, death. (Badiou, 2009: 268 emphasis in original).

For Badiou, more important than any thinking of finitude as phenomenologically-existentially constitutive (or as ethical force, socio-political relation, or epistemological

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[3] For Deleuze, for instance, death is more or less a matter of indifference, while a philosophy that is preoccupied with death a sign of 'reactive forces' (Deleuze, 1986). Deleuze's almost Stoic indifference is perhaps best expressed in interview: 'It's organisms that die, not life.' (Deleuze, 1995: 143)

ground) is the possibility for philosophy to approach the Immortal: "Under what conditions is existence…that of an Immortal?" (ibid.; cf. Badiou, 2002: 10-16). In the context of this imperative, as he puts it in *Logics of Worlds*, "what comes to pass with death is an exterior change in the function of appearing of a given multiple. This change is always imposed upon the dying being, and this imposition is contingent." (Badiou, 2009: 270)[4]. What this means is that death is not to be taken as a "category of being" (ibid. 269). Rather, it is understood as a category of "appearance", as an exterior modification of a given multiple. By making this distinction, Badiou makes the case that a thinking of existence in terms of its "mortal correlation", or what Quentin Meillassoux in *After Finitude* has recently termed the "phenomenological correlate" (2008), is philosophically problematic. The basic claim here is that death must neither contaminate (mathematical) ontology, nor obfuscate the reality, production, and affirmation of singular, eternal truths.

Whilst Badiou's lamentations have the value of underlining the anthropocentric or humanist basis to finitude, they are, however, more revealing of the conceptual logic of Badiou's thought than they are interventions into how finitude is addressed, experienced and existentially constitutive. The attempt to exclude or repress finitude for 'ontological' reasons, is to veil how finitude emerges as a *historical* problematic concerning the conceptualization of life. For example, in Heidegger's terms it "possess the methodological function of revealing the apparent positivity in the problem of life." (1995: 266). This relation between finitude and the historicity of knowledge is deployed

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[4] In *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Deleuze offers a similar account of death as an 'external' (1988: 41) 'decomposition' of the modes and relations (affects) of the body (i.e. a modification of the body as a given multiple). In death, a body's mode of expression and relations are decomposed: 'this occurs when the relation, which is itself an eternal truth, is no longer realized by actual parts. What has been done away with is not the relation, which is eternally true, but rather the parts *between which* it was established and which have now assumed another relation.' (ibid. 32, see also pages 41-2, 62-3, 95).

in Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* where he provides a more empirical account of this 'analytic of finitude' (Foucault, 2000: 315). In his study of the development of the human and life sciences, Foucault explores the modern constitution of 'man' as an entity that emerges historically both as an empirical object of positive knowledge, and as transcendental subject that provides the conditions of possibility for those knowledges (ibid. 322). This division of the human as both object and subject of knowledge is described by Foucault precisely in terms of an analytic of finitude: 'Man's [sic] finitude is heralded…in the positivity of knowledge; we know that man is finite, as we know the anatomy of the brain, the mechanics of production costs…' (ibid. 313). At the same time, Foucault stresses that 'each of these positive forms in which man can learn that he is finite is given to him only against the background of its own finitude' (ibid. 314). Recalling Heidegger's reflections on Kantian conditions, finitude is thought here as 'that upon the basis of which it is possible for positivity to arise' (ibid.; cf. Harvey, 2007).

At this point it is worth stressing that between thinkers as diverse as Heidegger, Kojève and Foucault the word 'finitude' is employed in epistemological and ontological registers almost simultaneously. It is also for the most part posited in what could legitimately be described as a 'metaphysical' language; presented as a vague and imprecise generative 'ground'. However, and departing from the conclusions offered by Badiou, for Derrida, rather than a sign of faulty philosophical logic, this imprecision should be recognised as a legitimate response to finitude, precisely because finitude exceeds and resists conceptual capture. In *Archive Fever*, for instance, Derrida reflects on the difficulty of thinking the archive in relation to the anarchic force of the death drive:

We have no concept, only an impression, a series of impressions associated with a word. To the rigor of the *concept*, I am opposing here the vagueness or the open imprecision, the relative indetermination of such a *notion*. (Derrida, 1998: 29)[5]

Despite its various modalities of indetermination, however, what is specific about finitude is that it has operated as an anthropocentric division. For example, while Foucault extends Heidegger's critique of 'cultural anthropologies' used as a framework for understanding the human subject (see in particular Heidegger, 1993), and despite rejecting the ahistorical transcendentalism of Kant, Foucault nevertheless repeats Heidegger's gesture of taking this analytic of finitude to be an instance of the radical separation of human from animal. Recalling the language of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Foucault claims that the capacities for knowledge and self-reflection are 'imbued with finitude', and, that they would not be possible if 'man…was trapped in the mute, nocturnal, immediate and happy opening of animal life' (Foucault, 2000: 314). As the work of Agamben demonstrates, both Heidegger and Foucault reveal finitude to be a crucially important figure in the reproduction of the 'anthropological machine' – that process in which the animal, animality and non-human are posited as vehicles for distinguishing the human (Agamben, 2004). As the discussion of Heidegger and Foucault has outlined, this is even the case in those discourses that explicitly claim to exceed and deconstruct inherited metaphysical, theological and anthropological conceptions of the human subject.

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[5] It is for these methodological reasons that throughout this paper I prefer to talk about a notion, rather than a concept, of finitude (cf. Bataille, 'The Notion of Expenditure', in *Visions of Excess*, 1985: 116-129).

The consequence for geographers interested in spatial theory in a post-Heideggerian context is that this analytic of finitude – and the anthropocentric borders and limits it inscribes – is intimately bound up with Heideggerian accounts of 'spatiality'. The following section develops these ideas by examining how the notion of finitude plays a crucial, though concealed, role in Heidegger's account of spatiality.

Death-based Spatiality

In *The Critique of Pure Reason* Kant famously postulates a series of *a priori* transcendental conditions necessary for phenomenological apprehension to take place. Space, conceived in this way, is thought as a 'ground' for all intuitions and representations (Kant, 2008: 157-162). As Heidegger elaborates,

> space must already be apparent prior to any taking in of what is at hand… It [space] must be represented as that 'within which' what is at hand can first be encountered: Space is [something] represented which is necessary, and necessary in advance, in finite human knowing (1997: 32).

As outlined above, Heidegger argues that this thinking of space as a transcendental condition of possibility demands to be thought within a more primordial existential ground that takes into account the specific kind of being, worldhood and spatiality of Dasein. As he puts it in *Being and Time*: 'If we attribute spatiality to Dasein, then this 'Being in space', must manifestly be conceived in terms of the kind of Being which that entity possesses' (Heidegger, 1962: 138). In other words, to understand 'spatiality' is to understand the ontological nature of the entity said to have, or experience, spatiality. To

be violently brief to Heidegger's work, in *Being and Time* it is Dasein's *being-towards-death* that is presented as the existential horizon that primordially distinguishes the specific 'Being' of Dasein, and which thereby ecstatically opens the space and time of a world. Not only does an experience of finitude differentiate the kind of Being of Dasein from other entities as beings-in-space, it is also productive of the individuated distinctions between self and Other. Death is conceived in terms of presenting an authentic subjectivity, and of tracing the most proper and territory of the self.

> The non-relational character of death, understood in anticipation, *individualizes* Dasein down to itself. (Heidegger, 1962: 308 emphasis added).

In a chapter entitled 'Death-based subjectivity' Jonathan Strauss provides an account of Heidegger's existential analytic of Dasein that allows it to be seen as a historically 'modern' sense of subjectivity. More specifically, it's modernity, Strauss claims, lies in the way in which the individual becomes constituted in relation to an experience of finitude (1998: 23-73). For Strauss, the historical horizon for this understanding, shared between post-Kantian thinkers such as Heidegger, Hegel and Kojève, can be traced genealogically to the specific form of death produced by the French Revolution: the guillotine. In particular, Strauss reflects on how the political context of the Terror led various 'modern' philosophers to place an unwarranted emphasis on death as a way to think about the self. For Strauss, this has resulted in philosophical accounts of the self that privilege an 'authentic subjectivity' grounded in the appropriate 'moods' of terror and violent anguish before death (cf. Adorno, 1973: 130-165)[6]. The consequence of

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[6] If, as Strauss claims, the privileging in post-Kantian philosophy of the affects of anguish and anxiety before death is historically bound to the Terror, perhaps a similar claim can be made for writings on death in the twentieth century. Specifically, the writings on mourning, repetition, grief, disaster and trauma by Freud (1991), Levinas (2001), Bataille (1991), and Blanchot (1986), often appear as a response to the

these historical reflections, as the anthropological historian Philippe Ariès has also argued, is that the notion of death as a violent, anxiety-provoking and excessive limit cannot claim a transcendent historical status (1977, 1981; cf. Dollimore, 1998; Strauss, 2000). As Ariès claims with reference to pre-modern cultural practices and representations of death:

> The idea of an absolute negativity, a sudden, irrevocable plunge into an abyss without memory, did not exist. Nor did people experience an existential disorientation or anxiety, at least these did not figure in the stereotypical images of death. (Ariès 1981: 22)

Broadly speaking, for Ariès the philosophically 'modern' accounts of death found in authors like Pascal, Schopenhauer or Kierkegaard do not account for the overwhelming ubiquity and familiarity of death in medieval and early modern periods. In particular, they do not account for how death was experienced as a public and fundamentally social phenomena. For example, in France 'until the end of the nineteenth century' Ariès claims that 'the dying person must be the centre of a group of people' (ibid. 18). Similarly, Ariès stresses that in both early modern France and England, 'the cemetery was the public square, in a time when there were no other public places except the street' (ibid. 65)[7]. At the same time, the philosophically 'modern' conceptions of death

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profound impact of the First and Second World Wars, and specifically of the Holocaust. For a series of important geographical examinations of the spatial logic, political rationalities and biopolitics of the Holocaust see: Clarke et al., 1996; Abrahamsson C, 2008; Carter-White, 2009; Giaccaria and Minca, 2010.

[7] Ariès offers an interesting speculation in this context concerning the role of cemeteries in providing the model for the 'public square' as a forum surrounded by a variety of shops (the Plaza Mayor in Spain, the Place des Voges and the Palais-Royal in Paris). At least in Spain, the central town plaza certainly had an important public and festive relation to death, often acting as the site for bullfights from the late 18th century until bullfighting became a professional and independent institution in the 1830s and 1840s (see: Mitchell, 1986; Shubert, 1999).

do not adequately account for the way in which death was often represented as a 'fall into sleep', characteristic of what Ariès describes as 'tame deaths' (Ariès, 1977)[8].

While this historical and cultural anthropology fails, as Derrida argues in *Aporias* (1993: 25-28), to determine or explain away the ontological and existential thinking at work in Heidegger's analytic of finitude, it does have the value of underlining the ways in which Heidegger's analytic operates within a political and historical language of authenticity and individualization. The point I want to develop here is that this 'individualizing' force of finitude is precisely at work in his account of spatiality, world and worldhood. Further, that it is between a death-based subjectivity and a death-based spatiality that the notion of finitude can be seen as a powerful agent in constructing anthropocentric perspectives.

As Agamben agues in *The Open: Man and Animal*, the boundary-drawing and propriety of Heidegger's analysis is most clearly presented in the lecture series *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. In this text, Heidegger proposes to enquire into the concepts of world, finitude and individuation (solitude). As is befitting the 'open imprecision' and 'indetermination' of the notion, finitude itself is not explored with the same conceptual depth and detail as 'world', for example (see Stambaugh, 1992). Nonetheless, Heidegger stresses that in relation to the concepts of world and individuation, finitude is to be taken '*as the unifying and original root of the other two*' (Heidegger, 1995: 170 emphasis in original).

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[8] The work of Ariès opens onto some interesting arenas of possible research concerning the historical and cultural geographies of the practices, representations and spatialities of death. Indeed, there are already some useful works in these areas, from geographical analyses of more 'modern' cemeteries as deathscapes, sites of class distinction, biopolitical governance (see, respectively Kong, 1999; Herman, 2010; Johnson, 2008), to studies on the spaces of memorialisation, trauma, heritage and identity (Gough, 2008; Ashworth, 2008; Madrell & Sidaway, 2010).

In order to account for the specificity of Dasein's worldhood Heidegger contrasts Dasein with animals and non-organic entities, such as stones. Famously, he arrives at the following theses: 'the stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man is world-forming' (Heidegger, 1995: 176). Drawing in part upon contemporary biological science and the ethological work of Jakob von Uexküll, Heidegger explores what he terms the 'animality' of the animal as a way of understanding if it could be said to have, or not have, a 'world'. Heidegger comes to think of the animal in terms of its captivated behaviour within an environment.

> Captivation is the condition of possibility for the fact that…the animal *behaves within an environment but never* [comports itself] *within a world*. (Heidegger, 1995: 239).

For Heidegger, the animal is 'taken' by its environment. Indeed, it is essentially encircled with(in) its environment in such a way that this encirclement constitutes its very 'animality'. However, whilst the animal is instinctively and affectively open to its environment, Heidegger argues that it is deprived of phenomenological access to the world *as* world, and other entities *as* entities. It is because of this absence that it is said to be 'poor in world'. This poverty relates to the animal's apparent inability to grasp the 'world' as such, and as a whole. This notion of the animal as 'poor in world' has been critically explored by human geographers interested in debates about the spatialities of affect and ethological accounts of bodies (Thrift, 2004, 2005; Ash, 2010). The appropriateness of the distinction is also a fundamental question in post-Heideggerian debates (Derrida, 1991: 23-30, 1993, 2002; Agamben, 2004; Calarco, 2008; Esposito,

2008). However, what has been less well explored is how the animal's 'poverty in world' is also grounded upon two other modalities of 'poverty' which, Heidegger claims, are intimately related; namely, an inability to experience a relation to death as such, and to relate this experience through the *logos*.

> Mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do so. But animals cannot speak either. The essential relation between death and language flashes up before us, but remains still unthought. (Heidegger, cited in Agamben, 1991: xi).

Just as animal and Dasein are granted different worlds and spatialities, so Heidegger also radically distinguishes between the kinds of 'death' possible for these beings. While the animal is immanently and constitutively encircled by its 'disinhibiting ring' and can be said to possess an *environment* without thereby 'having world', so for Heidegger the animal can *perish* without thereby 'dying' (see Heidegger, 1962: 290-293; cf. Derrida, 1993: 30-42). As Heidegger summarily puts it: "Because captivation belongs to the essence of the animal, the animal cannot die in the sense in which dying is ascribed to human beings but can only come to an end." (1995: 267). Through this logic of propriety Heidegger arguably puts into question the validity of the ethical principle inaugurated by Bentham concerning the *suffering* of the animal as the condition for ethical response. For if the animal cannot die in the sense in which it is ascribed to human beings, to what extent are other forms-of-life and bodily experience also excluded, and with what consequences? As the following sections unfold, what is at stake here concerns the way in which finitude insinuates itself in the borders and limits of ethics. As the paper also goes on to argue below, the importance of thinking

finitude geographically in this context, and after Hägerstrand's call, is precisely to trouble the logic of these borders.

Finitude as an Ethical Topology

Alongside the anthropocentric distinctions concerning spatiality and finitude discussed above, one can find subtended in Heidegger's text a broader conceptual division inscribed between the organic and the inorganic. As Heidegger argues in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, only organic organisms can be said to end, perish or die. Heidegger summarizes what follows from this position in the following way: ''dead matter' is a meaningless concept' (1995: 236). This statement is incredibly revealing of Heidegger's post-Kantian heritage and the way in which the exceptionalism of human life is rendered sacrosanct precisely insofar as it is distanced from natural, inorganic 'matter', and from scientistic conceptions of causality. In these latter aspects, Heidegger's distribution of finitude corresponds to certain vitalist writings' distribution of 'spirit' or *élan vital* (see Greenhough, 2010). More importantly, however, is that it is also a provocative statement for thinking about the kinds of politics and ethics that various forms of new materialism are seeking to create, and the philosophical histories that are being challenged and reworked in these projects (see for example: Bingham, 2006; Stoekl, 2007; Hinchliffe & Bingham, 2008; Bennett, 2010; Greenhough, 2010). This is because Heidegger's statement raises profound questions concerning the anthropocentric limits of ethical geographies of the non-human, care and responsibility. First amongst these questions is the following: how is one to respond to deaths that are not – philosophically, legally, politically – counted as deaths? How are we to ethically

respond to such phenomena as environmental disaster, catastrophe or extinction? The problem here is that the powerful legacy of Heideggerian thought has shaped the sense of an ethical response in terms of an anthropocentric finitude. For Heidegger, for example, 'Being-towards-death is grounded in care' (1962: 303). Whilst in many ways critical of Heidegger's philosophy, the work of Levinas also underscores the place of finitude in ethics and responsibility: 'I am responsible for the other insofar as he is mortal.' (Levinas, cited in Derrida, 1993: 39). The very notion of an ethical relation appears to be predicated upon an Other who is 'counted' as having the right to be treated responsibly on account of the kind of finitude they are said to possess.

Drawing precisely upon this heritage, Mustafa Dikeç, Nigel Clarke and Clive Barnett have recently proposed that 'human finitude' is conditioning and generative of the ethical spatio-temporalities of hospitality (Dikeç et al, 2009; cf. Popke, 2007). For the authors, the writings of Levinas and Derrida are central to their account of 'human finitude' for the most part conceived as 'corporeal vulnerability'; the shared exposure of bodily limits that appears as the condition of possibility for normative praxis.

> Hospitality turns on a vital receptivity to the needs of an Other, but so too are these needs bound up with the constitutive openness and vulnerability of the living body. (Dikeç et al., 2009: 11).

What this work helps underline, again, is the importance of finitude in shaping ethical geographies. Clearly, these authors are drawing upon accounts of finitude to consider forms of hospitality in specific socio-political contexts. They are aware of the central place of limits, borders and thresholds in both Levinas and Derrida's thinking of ethics,

hospitality and the Other. However, their work raises the interesting question of whether, and how far, notions of normative responsibility and ethical relations as such can be prised apart from a finitude inscribed within the borders of the human subject. Posing this question is to recognise how the intimate relation between anthropocentrism and finitude presents itself as a complex ethico-topological demarcation, with consequences for how ethical relations are conceived and practiced.

Anthropocentrism / Anthropomorphism

What is the Heideggerian response to the explicit charge of anthropocentrism? For instance, does not the conceptual trinity of world, finitude and Dasein, alongside the language of limits and borders elevate the human above other forms of life such as animals said to be 'poor in world', and matter that can not even qualify as 'dead'? As Derrida argues, Heidegger's delimitation of the animal in terms of 'privative poverty…cannot avoid a certain anthropocentric or even humanist ideology.' (Derrida, 1991: 55)[9]. Perhaps the most interesting responses to these charges can be found in Heidegger's reflections on animals and animality. For Heidegger, the distinctions between the deaths and worlds of Dasein and animal are necessary because it is conceptually illegitimate – a 'groundless anthropomorphization' (Heidegger, cited in Agamben, 2004: 59) – to think of the animal within the same existential spatio-temporal horizon as Dasein. Correspondingly, for Heidegger one must guard against observing and thinking the animal from human perspectives (such as experiencing moods concerning death, having 'forms' of language etc.) precisely because it does not address the specific *animality* of the animal. It is not faithful enough, as it were, to the Otherness

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[9] As Derrida points out in *The Ends of Man*: 'We can see then that Dasein, though *not* man [conceived anthropologically, biologically or theologically], is nevertheless *nothing other* than man.' (1984: 127).

of the animal. To the charge of anthropo*centrism*, then, Heidegger responds by showing that at least he his not anthropo*morphic*.

Heidegger's critique of anthropomorphism also provides an interesting perspective on certain biological understandings of the 'spatiality' of the animal. This is particularly the case with his critique of the term 'adaptation' (1995: 263, 276-279). Here, he argues that the Darwinist discourse of adaptation does not adequately describe the specific 'animality' of the animal as a living, essentially open potentiality. For example, he takes issue with how the term 'adaptation' appears to posit a distinct entity – the animal – as it were confronting an environment and subsequently acting to adapt itself: "The organism is not something independent in its own right which then adapts itself." (Heidegger, 1995: 264). This image is problematic for Heidegger both because of its anthropomorphic projection of intentionality upon the animal, and because it veils the essential and constitutive spacing of the animal outside itself (see Agamben, 2004: 57-62). In other words, Heidegger troubles the assumed boundary between the limits of the organism and its 'environment' – albeit within the context of his wider discourse on limits, borders and the contours of organic life and death (Derrida, 1993: 28-31).

In *The Open,* Agamben points out that the intimacy of this environmental encirclement – the way in which one cannot properly think a given animal without immediately positing its specific openness-to and relations-with particular environmental affects and impulses[10] – is structurally analogous to the way in which Heidegger posits Dasein as always already and essentially world-forming (Heidegger, 1995: 285). In pointing out

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[10] Think for example of the mediums of air, water, or even sulphuric acid in the case of *Ferroplasma acidiphilum*, as necessary environments for particular organisms. In his lectures series, Heidegger concentrates for the most part on insects such as bees and tics, leaving primates and what he calls the 'higher animals' to one side (Heidegger, 1995: 240-241).

this connection Agamben questions the apparently categorical separations inscribed by Heidegger between the spatialities of animal and Dasein. At the same time, it also provides a historical and political perspective upon Heidegger's philosophy more broadly. In particular, for Agamben, it is a thought situated in the context of the early twentieth century in which the phenomenon of life is reconfigured spatially as organically grounded and bound to the particular characteristics of its 'environment'. Heidegger's existential spatiality and account of being-in-the-world, Agamben implies, can be thought in terms of this spatialisation of life, one that can no longer posit entities (such as an organism, Dasein, or a State) as authentically thinkable outside their material-spatial extension (see Agamben, 2004: 39-43). Agamben's point is that this radical rethinking of the relations between organism and world is the precise conceptual horizon within which the racist geopolitical discourses of National Socialism developed. This is sketched too briefly by Agamben through referencing the work of Paul Vidal de la Blache 'on the relations between populations and their environment', and the *Lebensraum* of Friedrich Ratzel (ibid. 42). However, the broader conceptual claim here for geographical research interested in the relation between Heidegger's spatial theory and politics is that it is not Heidegger's romantic, idyllic and reactionary depictions of pastoral dwellings that signal his problematic political affiliations (Cloke & Jones, 2002; cf. Wolin, 2001). Rather it is that the very *relational* spatialities that he expresses in his analyses of Dasein/world and animal/environment form the horizon within which Heidegger problematically develops his discourse of the rootedness and authenticity of philosophizing, of historical consciousness and of a politics inseparable from the ground of the nation.

However, as Derrida points out in *Of Spirit*, while the above analysis offers a comforting, rational narrative within which to contain Heidegger's thought, it nonetheless runs the risk of not reading Heidegger carefully enough. Indeed, it is important not to naively posit some historico-conceptual continuum between Heidegger's account of being-in-the-world and early twentieth century discourses of human geography, demography, theories of race, or ethology. This is because Heidegger's existential spatiality is based upon a radical destruction of metaphysics, one that is critically distanced from, among other things, 'all biologism and even all philosophy of life (and thus from all political ideology which might draw its inspiration more or less from them)' (Derrida, 1991: 54). As Derrida intimates, the difficulty of engaging with Heidegger's spatial theory lies in the way his writing escapes disciplinary and political positioning; an evasion that makes any simple dismissal or celebration of his work problematic.

The sections above have presented the Heideggerian understanding of spatiality as intimately bound up with a thinking of finitude. Further, they have underlined the anthropocentric borders and delimitations through which this thinking operates. This has not been to resolve debates concerning how the difference between human and animal is thought, or to question the legitimacy of even thinking and representing this 'difference'. Rather, it has been to unpack some of the conceptual histories woven through Heidegger's account of being-in-the-world, and to open up some fundamental questions for growing research on geographical ethics, both human and non-human. In so doing, it has supplemented extant geographical accounts of Heidegger's spatial theory by underscoring the importance of thinking death and finitude in this context. By way of a conclusion to this section I want to draw attention to two important

consequences of, or trajectories from, Heidegger's account of spatiality – an account that, though I have questioned it, I consider to be a non-eliminable conceptual basis for thinking about world, finitude and spatiality.

Firstly, it seems that both an understanding of spatiality and finitude need to be submitted to a critical deconstruction such that they can by approached outside of a singular authentic ground, and beyond a language of authenticity and individuality. A second and related consequence concerns the geographical imaginaries and spatialities through which we can attend to the non-human, both organic and inorganic. If we briefly recall Hägerstrand's wish for geography to 'teach the lessons of finitude', and if we consider this in the context of Heidegger's writings as a necessary conceptual basis for thinking about spatiality, world and death, then it seems as if Hägerstrand's call to geographically grasp the finitude of ecological relations cannot work itself out unless finitude is extended beyond the anthropocentric boundaries that have been consistently bound up with the concept.

In the final section of the paper, this attempt to think finitude 'geographically' is explored in two ways. Firstly, by drawing on the work of Georges Bataille to think through finitude as a shared corporeal exposure across the surface of the earth – a spacing that critically challenges the propriety and partitioning of Heidegger's 'grounding' of spatiality and finitude in terms of an authentic and anthropocentric individuality. Secondly, by thinking through how this shared corporeal exposure might be written in terms of 'compassion' – a concept developed by Jean-Luc Nancy to think about how finitude is shared and spaced between singularities rather than a property of subjects.

Corporeality and Compassion

> …our frenzy to persist in our present state – that's the unconscionable torture…
> This body of ours, this disguise put on by common jumping molecules, is in
> constant revolt against the abominable farce of having to endure. Our molecules,
> the dears, want to get lost in the universe as fast as they can! It makes them
> miserable to be nothing but 'us', the jerks of infinity. (Céline, 2004: 299).

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault claims that 'finitude' is inscribed and exposed 'by the
spatiality of the body, the yawning of desire, and the time of language' (Foucault, 2000:
315). What does it mean for finitude to be exposed by the spatiality of a body? A way
into this question can be found in the corporeal image Heidegger often deploys to think
about a relation to death 'as such'. For Heidegger, an authentic relation to death is found
in the figure of Dasein *standing resolutely*, and in anxious anticipation, in the face of
death (Heidegger, 1962: 296-311; cf. Adorno, 1973: 136-139). Whilst it would be too
easy to point to a kind of masculinity underwriting this image, Heidegger's corporeal
account of finitude seems to posit a subject that incorporates and conquers the
negativity of death.

Perhaps the most important, though neglected, challenge to this masculine sense of
finitude can be found in the work of Georges Bataille. In his key texts *Inner Experience*
and *On Nietzsche* he argues against the notion of anxiety as an authentic relation to
death. For Bataille, the notion of anxiety or anguish before death, rather than an
originary mood, is itself an effect or product of the desire for self-preservation (1988:

52-3; 1992: 146-147). In other words, 'anxiety' reveals itself to be an existential mood appropriate to an incorporation by the self. Against this security and boundedness, Bataille argues that this does not approach the excessive and 'absolute dismemberment' of death through which the subject is annihilated. As he claims in the essay 'Hegel, Death and Sacrifice' death can in no way be dialectically appropriated by the subject, as is implied at least in part by Heidegger's figure of a being standing authentically, resolutely and intact before death (cf. Comay, 1990). Rather for Bataille death is precisely that which exceeds and wounds the limits of the subject, contaminating and eroding the possibility of a stable relation or experience (Bataille, 1990). Indeed, if there is an 'experience of finitude' in Bataille's writing, then as Patrick ffrench argues, it is one that challenges and exceeds the phenomenological account of experience as a property of the subject: "In its exhaustion experience dissolves the subject 'of' experience." (2007: 115).

For these reasons Bataille's writing is littered with dramatizations of corporeal finitude such as the tortured body of Christ; the work of butchers; the pollulation of insects; anthropological accounts of animal sacrifice; the bullfight; or the passivity of the sleeping figure (cf. Harrison, 2007, 2009). For Bataille, finitude is rendered visible through the body's very vulnerability. But the condition of this vulnerability, which distinguishes it from the surmounted vulnerability of Heidegger's resolute *Dasein*, is that the body is constitutively spaced-outside-itself rather than authentically grounded and rooted. Bataille's writing reveals how the body is always already communicative through an ecstatic opening to the outside; exposed to energies that course through it and which constitutively exceed its limits. As presented in his earlier texts collected in *Visions of Excess* (Bataille, 1985), the body escapes out of itself through spasms of

energy, laughter, tears, urine, screaming, text, semen, blood, dead cells and cancerous growths. These visceral and excessive aspects of the body reveal the finitude of corporeality. Further, as I read Bataille, these excessive aspects of the body describe a spacing-outside-of-self that is the very 'condition' for a body at all. As Jean-Luc Nancy argues in *The Inoperative Community*, Bataille dramatizes an experience of finitude according to a spatial imaginary which, for Nancy, provides a way of conceptualizing a "modern experience of community as neither a work to be produced, nor a lost communion, but rather as space itself, and the spacing of the experience of the outside, of the outside-of-self" (1991: 19).

In perhaps his most self-evidently geographical text, *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy vol. 1 Consumption*, Bataille presents an image of the world in which the familiar separations of nature and culture are set aside for the purpose of revealing the shared finitude animating the surface of the earth; from bodies to plants, and from social institutions to animals. The book is described by Bataille himself in terms of a "Copernican transformation…of ethics" (Bataille, 1989: 25). However, unlike Kant's "Copernican revolution" which re-centralizes the human subject by making objects and their movement conform to (human) knowledge, Bataille attempts to de-centralize and un-ground the human from its autonomy, propriety and idealism. As Nigel Clark has recently put it, Bataille's 'energetic geophysics', in which finite beings on earth are radically exposed to a solar economy, gestures 'towards an expansive sense of the earth and cosmos as the volatile ground of human and other creaturely life' (Clark, 2011: 23). By writing on the violent agitations animating the earth from the perspective of a solar exuberance, Bataille also troubles how the borders between inorganic matter and organic 'life' are articulated.

While Bataille is not immune from Agamben's analysis concerning the 'anthropological machine', and while he does not offer an unproblematic access to thinking beyond anthropocentric borders, his writings do provide a way of exploring how spatiality and finitude might be re-worked into a questioning of the human-centred appropriations of the earth as the 'home of man'. To re-read Hägerstrand's call for geographers to 'teach the lessons of finitude' in the light of Bataille's writings is not solely to reveal the finite limits to resources and ecological relations. For the problem here would concern the extent to which this finitude is fundamentally determined according to its *utility* and value for human projects (see, for example Stoekl, 2007). Rather, it is to embark on a geographical writing of finitude that, as Clark also outlines in *Inhuman Nature*, is to radically un-ground the spatial imaginaries through which the earth, nature and phenomenality are conceptualised (see Clark, 2011: 16-22). Again, what is interesting about the work of authors such as Bataille and Nancy from a geographical point of view here is that the critiques of Heideggerian orthodoxies, by exploring the senses of communication, community, sharing and *Mitsein*, explicitly take place through experimental writings on the senses of spatiality and finitude (see in particular: Nancy, 1992, 2000).

For example, one of Nancy's most important philosophical manoeuvres is to unbind the notion of finitude from the Heideggerian borders and spatiality of *Dasein* (see Nancy, 1991, 1992, 2008). Drawing in part upon Bataille's writings on finitude that stress its role as an ontologically *shared* passage or event of 'communication' through which singularities are constituted, Nancy presents a spatiality of *Mitsein* that affirms how, rather than appearing 'for' a subject to appropriate as its self-enclosed possibility or

experience, finitude can only "*co-appear*" (Nancy, 1991: 28); shared between and through the irreducible plurality of the world.

> Communication consists before all else in this sharing and in this compearance (com-parution) of finitude: that is, on the dislocation and in the interpellation that reveal themselves to be constitutive of being-in-common… (ibid. 29)

In *Being Singular Plural* Nancy develops this sharing of finitude in terms of an experience of compassion. Distancing this notion from conceptions of charity or humanist pity, compassion for Nancy comes to signify the very experience of being in a world of finite singularities; a voice, a heart, a stone, a bumblebee, a biome. Through the very repetitions and monotony of Nancy's pronouncements on the plurality of being-with, analogous perhaps to the intense repetitive insanity of Graham Harman's lists of objects (2009), we are presented with a kind of worldly catechism.

> Com-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness. (Nancy, 2000: xiii)

At the same time, because this writing is explicitly engaged in a critique or *détournement* of Heideggerian philosophy, it is a writing that is conscious of both the demand to, *and the difficulty* of, decentring and displacing this worldhood from the boundaries of *Dasein*. The creative and experimental writing to be found with Nancy is perhaps a response to this difficulty. Again, at this juncture it is worth repeating that, like Bataille, Nancy's writings do not offer an easy or unproblematic response to

concerns over the inheritance of humanist or anthropocentric imaginaries, not least because of its grounding in large parts of Heidegger's philosophy. However, it is another important example of how the relation between finitude and spatiality is the site of experimentations in order to think the spacings and matterings of the world differently. In the context of the broader claims of this paper, it also helps in the task of deconstructing how finitude has historically been problematically mapped, partitioned and distributed.

Conclusion: the writing of finitude

> Adam's first act, which made him master of the animals, was to give them names, that is, he annihilated them in their existence (as existing creatures). (Hegel, cited in Blanchot, 1995: 323).

> The bear could speak if he wanted, but he prefers not to…
> (Lot-Falck, cited in Bataille, 2005: 163)

As noted earlier, a broad stream of continental theorists posit an intimate relation between language and death: from Foucault's assertion concerning the 'kinship between writing and death' (1977: 116), to Derrida's Egyptian grammatology and the crucial role played by the mythology of Thoth in his deconstruction of onto-theology (see Derrida: 1981: 84-94; 1997; Sloterdijk, 2009). For Blanchot, language and literature are explicitly conceived as spaces of death; words *revealing* the finitude of the material

existences, beings and worlds they paradoxically both present and render absent (Blanchot, 1995).

Despite the variety of different articulations and understandings of finitude presented in this paper, a common theme has been its function in constructing or sedimenting anthropocentric perspectives concerning language, knowledge, and the spatiality proper to the human. The implications here are that geographical attempts to write the worlds and spaces of both human and nonhuman beings need to become aware of how a distinctively anthropocentric notion of finitude 'grounds' the epistemological and phenomenological basis of that writing. For this reason, I consider finitude to be an important geographical notion precisely because the beauty of the geographical imagination, as affirmed in Hägerstrand's article on nature and society, is to radically put into question the concepts, histories and assumptions at work in anthropocentric thought; to upset the subterraneous epistemological articulation of the earth as the 'home' of 'man'; and to expose human thought to its limits and 'outside' – what Quentin Meillassoux has recently described as the '*great outdoors*' (2008: 7). In short, a writing of the earth that takes finitude seriously necessarily troubles the borders and limits partitioned through anthropocentric logic. I also consider finitude to be an important geographical notion because – precisely on account of its philosophical history – it can be used to rethink and rework accounts of ethics that are seeking to radically challenge the humanist bases of thought and normative action (cf. Lulka, 2009).

An important contribution to this discussion of ethics beyond the boundaries of the human can be found in Cary Wolfe's 'Flesh and Finitude: thinking animals in

(post)humanist philosophy'. For Wolfe, thinking finitude offers a way into attempts to ethically address the nonhuman in posthumanist philosophies: 'the fundamental ethical bond we have with non-human animals resides in our shared finitude, our vulnerability and mortality as 'fellow creatures'' (2008: 23)[11] The key claim in the context of Western ethics is that this shared finitude goes beyond traditional anthropocentric distinctions concerning the capacities for reason and language, but falls upon a radical passivity for finitude that cannot be said to be a 'capacity', 'attribute' or 'property' of a particular being (cf. Greenhough and Roe, 2010; Roe, 2010). Whilst I agree with the ethos of Wolfe's article and its claim that addressing finitude provides an important way of developing compassion and ethics beyond human limits, I think it is important, as my discussions of Heidegger, Foucault, Bataille and Agamben highlight, to recognise that the conceptual history of finitude is not immune from charges of anthropocentrism.

The difficulty of deconstructing anthropocentric perspectives, as Jane Bennett has recently outlined in *Vibrant Matter*, does not solely lie in the task of eliminating theological-hierarchical categorizations of life, or of bringing down human hubris. Rather, it is that the very posing of the question – speaking about it, naming it, writing it – and the related gesture of approaching the independence of animals, matter and the 'things themselves' are both phenomenologically constituted within a human horizon of sense. As she describes this correlation: 'is it not a human subject who is articulating this theory of vibrant matter?' (Bennett, 2010: ix).

Bennett's answer is to engage in a certain amount of anthropomorphism and animism; to extend our intra-human ethical responsibilities to non-humans by, as it were,

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[11] As Mike Pearson notes in *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*, dogs, jackdaws, orang-utans, geese, chimpanzees and elephants 'are all said to exhibit signs of bereavement' (2005: 146).

forgetting any essential abyss between humans, animals and things. In this way, and in an interesting reversal of Heidegger's position concerning the nonhuman, anthropo*morphism* is said to contribute to an erosion of anthropo*centrism*. As I hope to have demonstrated in this paper, finitude is an important conceptual figure in this debate because of its historical role in determining the boundaries of the human, and the epistemological-phenomenological ways in which entities beyond the human are conceived. Rather than making claims about how the notion of finitude is most 'authentically' thought, approached or represented, the paper has aimed to expose and question some of the conceptual histories and philosophical perspectives bound up with the notion. In so doing, the paper has hopefully demonstrated how the notion insinuates itself across a series of key geographical concepts, languages and debates. Further, it has claimed that a geographical writing of finitude in turn offers a way of destabilising the authentic borders and limits bound up with the notion.

By way of conclusion, I want to briefly outline what I consider to be the ethical promise of finitude. Firstly, finitude demands to be thought in terms of a shared exposure to death that com-passionately approaches every being beyond any representational identification to, or derivation from, an authentic human subjectivity. Here, rather than simply acknowledging the anthropocentric basis of finitude and then proclaiming to get beyond it so as to "unshackle existence" from finitude – as proposed in the work of Badiou – the analytic history of finitude can itself be reworked for the contemporary projects of thinking matter, nature and world differently. As the work of Nancy shows, to rethink finitude as a shared exposure in this way is to also rethink the spatialities of the world. At the same time, a critical deconstruction and un-grounding of the analytic history of the notion of finitude helps further trouble and suspend what Agamben refers

to as the anthropological machine of 'suspension' (2004: 92), with its partitions between human and animal, organic and inorganic. Perhaps we can re-read Hägerstrand's affirmation for a geographical thinking of finitude as an important ethical project precisely in this light: to question how the spaces and borders of finitude are mapped, to consider the ethical consequences of those partitions, and to experiment with how a thinking of finitude might write the world differently.

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