In Search of the Breath of Being, or Why We Live in a Space of Imagined Essences

By the Author

We live among things, people, and events, and usually do not stop to consider how the familiar picture of the world takes shape. Yet perception does not receive ready-made images. Even vision begins by processing separate features - lines, contours, and colors - which the brain connects into recognizable objects. Without this capacity, the world would appear to us as a much more scattered flow of sensations. There are even disorders in which a person sees an object but cannot recognize it.

Yet recognizing an object is not the same as understanding what it means to us. We hold not only images of things, but also relationships, memories, expectations, ideas of ourselves and others. From these, the familiar world takes shape, the world in which we can orient ourselves and act. I call such stable forms of significance imagined essences. Imagined not because they are false or invented, but because they are assembled and held in our experience. From this comes an important distinction between what exists and the stable essence we see in it. The distinction is expressed by the formula: **the existent exists, and essence is imagined.**

But where does the possibility of distinguishing anything come from in the first place? Why are there different states in the world, why do they change, and how do they retain stability? The further inquiry begins with these questions. From the world that already exists, we move toward its simplest condition - distinguishability - and then trace how differences are held and gathered into stable forms.

Here another important thought arises: stability does not mean immobility. Even where everything seems frozen, physical processes, movements, and interactions continue within it. The world does not stop merely because individual things preserve their familiar appearance. Form can therefore be understood not as something motionless, but as a process that succeeds in preserving stability. **Form is a stabilized process.** From here our inquiry gradually moves toward more complex levels of organization - life, consciousness, and the human world of meanings.

This essay is an attempt to see the connections among them. It is not a ready-made theory of how the universe is organized, but a philosophical map that may allow us to follow this path and perhaps look a little differently at the world of which we ourselves are part.

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Being is not.
Being takes place
as the emergence of presence from concealment.

— Martin Heidegger

1. An Exercise in Meaningology

In our strange and remarkable time, it is becoming increasingly clear that the accumulation of knowledge alone is no longer enough for humanity. We can amass vast bodies of data, teach machines to detect patterns, accelerate the analysis of texts, images, behavior, and social processes - and still come no closer to the central question: what does all of this mean for human life? Not only how does it work, but what human meaning takes shape from it?

Against this background, the need for a particular mode of thought becomes ever more pressing, one that might be called **noemic**. The word derives from the Greek *noēma*: that which is thought, understood content. **Noemics** is an attempt to discover and bring into view connections between different levels of reality: between nature and scientific knowledge, consciousness and culture, language and technology. Such a way of seeing belongs wholly to neither philosophy nor science nor literature, though it draws on the language of all three. Its task is not to prove everything to completion, but to hold the connections where seemingly separate domains begin to speak about the same thing. In this sense, the present work may be regarded as an exercise in the noemic way of seeing. Or, more simply, as **an exercise in meaningology**.

The noemic approach asks not only what exists and not only how it works. It asks how something becomes distinguishable, held, and significant. How possibility becomes manifestation, how manifestation enters into presence, how presence becomes an event, how an event leaves a trace, how a trace enters into living or conscious apprehension, and how, out of that apprehension, an essence is then assembled. What follows, therefore, may be read not only as an abstract

ontological scheme, but also as an example of noemic analysis in action. It will move from the earliest condition of givenness toward form, time, trace, consciousness, and the space of imagined essences.

2. On Mapping Thought

The work proposed here may be compared to drawing a metro map. Such a map is not a photograph of the tunnels. It does not reproduce the actual curvature of the tracks, the depth of the stations, or the engineering complexity of the city. Its strength lies elsewhere. It shows lines, nodes, and transitions, allowing movement to become conscious traversal. In the same way, this work does not seek to replace reality with a ready-made theory. It attempts to construct an ontological map that might help us travel from the ultimate conditions of the world toward the human being, toward consciousness, and, ultimately, toward the human mode of existence itself.

3. What Does Not Precede Existence

From birth, every human being finds themselves in a world of things and concepts whose meanings are patiently explained by the adults around them. We are taught to name objects, distinguish people, understand rules, and navigate an already established space of meanings. In time, we begin to feel that the world consists of ready-made essences revealed to us through things, words, and stable ideas about life.

And yet modern philosophical thought has repeatedly called this certainty into question. **Essence does not precede existence**, and a human being does not enter the world with a ready-made inner content. We become ourselves gradually, through memory, language, relationships, actions, and the ideas we come to accept or reject.

In trying to make sense of these philosophical questions, and above all the questions of existence, an important formula emerges: **the existent exists, and essence is imagined.** Essence does not lie inside a thing like a ready-made core waiting simply to be discovered. It is assembled through perception, image, repetition, name, symbol, language, and culture.

A further question then arises. Does this apply only to human beings? Or is no essence ever given in advance, but instead arises later, through our dealings with things, people, and the world? Perhaps what surrounds us is not a world of ready-made essences, ourselves included, but of essences that become stable for us through experience, memory, and meaning. And perhaps this is not only a source of our errors, but also one of our advantages. It is precisely in this way that we are able to assemble a world, meaning, and ourselves.

4. From the World as Given to Ultimate Conditions

The argument here does not begin from an abstract beginning of the world. It begins from the fact that the world is already given. We are already within it. We encounter forms, changes, stabilities, memory, and perception. From this a question arises: what are the minimal conditions of this givenness? What must be possible at all for anything whatsoever to appear **as something**?

An important clarification is needed here. Givenness does not mean merely that the world is given to human beings in experience. That would be too narrow. Givenness refers to something more primordial: the world already takes place before we ask about it. We do not stand before the world as external observers to whom something is subsequently presented. We find ourselves within a world that preceded our understanding, our language, our explanations, and our will. The point of departure is not **"the world for us,"** but **"we in the world."** Understanding itself becomes possible only because a person is already involved in a world that they did not begin.

This question matters to the present work for another reason as well. At their furthest reaches, both contemporary science and philosophical thought increasingly lead us toward the idea that matter as we ordinarily understand it need not be the first point of inquiry. If we are speaking of the beginning of the manifest world, then what we must seek is not the first thing, but the conditions that make the appearance of anything possible at all. In other words, we are speaking of something prior to matter in the sense familiar to us.

5. Distinguishability and the Limit of Causal Inquiry

If we proceed in precisely this way - seeking not the first thing but the condition under which anything can appear as something - thought first encounters the possibility of distinction. We are not speaking of ready-made differences between things, but of the possibility that one may be irreducible to another. If nothing differs from anything else, then we can speak neither of appearance, nor of change, nor of stability, nor of the world as given. This ultimate possibility of difference may be called **distinguishability**.

Any possibility, so long as it remains only a condition, exists in a less demanding mode than its realization. In potentiality, it need not preserve an outline, confirm itself, or reproduce its own form. It can retain an indeterminate fullness without selecting one contour from among many. Realization, however, always narrows the field of the possible and requires the chosen determinacy to be sustained. The manifest does not simply appear. It must continue to be held; otherwise it loses its contours once again and returns to the less demanding state of mere possibility.

At the human level, a similar pattern can be seen in the idea of justice. So long as the possibility of justice exists as a vague expectation, it requires no institution. But once it becomes a law, a rule, an obligation, it must be sustained. It requires language, agreement, enforcement, repetition, sanctions, trust. A norm does not exist by itself. It constantly tends toward dissolution unless it is held.

Returning to distinguishability as the ultimate condition of the manifest world, we can say that the same principle operates here. Distinguishability by itself does not yet constitute manifestation. It only opens the possibility of difference. For the world to begin to manifest, this possibility must be held. Otherwise difference slips back into indistinguishability, like a flash that never had time to become light.

And here it is easy to succumb to temptation and answer too quickly the question of the cause of manifestation and of Being itself. Why is there Being at all, rather than complete indistinguishability? Why does possibility emerge from concealment? These questions bring us to

the very boundary of human understanding. Philosophical thought can, of course, go very far, almost to the horizon beyond which ordinary explanations lose their footing. But our capacity to know still has a limit. We should not pretend that this limit has already been crossed. The concern here, therefore, is not the cause of Being as such, but what happens **on this side of the horizon**, once difference has already become manifest.

6. Between Gap and Interval

If distinguishability may be called a condition on the far side of manifestation, the next question concerns a condition already within the manifest. Distinguishability opens the possibility of difference, but does not yet constitute a manifest world. For difference not to disappear at once, there must arise within manifestation a minimal **between**, in which one is no longer reducible to another. This "between" is the **gap**.

But the gap belongs to another order of conditions of manifestation. It is needed not for the possibility of difference itself, but to keep that difference from collapsing. Within it, difference first acquires the possibility of not dissolving back into indistinguishability.

Like every condition, the gap tends back toward potentiality. If it does not acquire stability, it may disappear again, and difference may recede into indistinguishability. A manifest world therefore requires more than an instantaneous "between." The "between" must be held.

The held form of the gap becomes the **interval**. We might say that an interval is a gap that has acquired extension. Within it, one thing is not merely different from another; it is **held apart** from it.

Together with the interval, the first dimensionality arises. At this stage, dimensionality means only the simplest mode of extension in which difference is already sustained as separation.

And only when the interval acquires this primary dimensionality does transition first become possible. A **transition** is not a separate space between states, but the change of state itself through the traversal of an interval. If a state changes, it no longer coincides with what it was before, yet it does not yet coincide with what it is becoming. Between these determinations there arises an interval of change. It cannot be skipped. It must be traversed.

In ordinary physical reality this is easiest to see in matter: no change occurs without motion, displacement, oscillation, exchange, or a reconfiguration of relations. Even when it seems to us that only a quality has changed, some alteration of configuration stands behind it. Transition may be understood as a change in the current configuration in which the earlier state gives way to the next. At the same time, the very possibility of distinguishing states and passing between them is preserved. Distinguishability becomes distinctness in the first difference. The gap and the interval allow this difference to remain, acquire extension, and become a condition for further transitions.

At this limit, the interval can already be thought of as a first form - not a material object, but a stable way of holding distinctness and the possibility of transition. The further growth of the network complicates this principle of formation, but does not create it anew.

7. The Network as a Space of States

From here, the picture begins to grow more complex. For the gap to be realized stably as a condition of irreducibility, a single interval is not enough. The space of states begins to multiply, branch, and expand. Intervals cease to be isolated. From them emerges a **network of distinctness** - a space of states in which differences that have already been held begin to assemble into more complex configurations. Within this network, **nodes** arise - local concentrations of connectivity. But the nodes themselves do not remain motionless: they too can shift, reorganize, and alter the configuration of the network as a whole. The world therefore grows not through the simple accumulation of lines, but as an increasingly complex interweaving of intervals, transitions, and mobile nodes.

At every moment, a particular configuration of the network is actual. Its transitions occur among many possible distinct states, and as the connections change, the space of these possibilities changes as well. Movement in such a network can therefore be thought of as the passage of an actual configuration through a network of possible distinct configurations. A local return to a nearby state does not cancel the changes accumulated by the wider network.

Yet distinctness is not enough simply to arise once. For it to persist, the network must keep unfolding, opening new paths and expanding the space of possible configurations. It is here that a more complex spatiality begins to emerge.

Within the ontological scheme proposed here, what we later experience as volume and as movement in three dimensions may be understood as a late effect of an immense number of interconnected intervals, transitions, and nodes. In other words, three-dimensionality is not treated here as the primordial form of space, but as the result of the growth and densification of an initially one-dimensional network. For this reason, the movement familiar to us in space should not be conceived as displacement within a pre-given volume, but as traversal through a multitude of connected nodes and transitions, including their diagonal combinations.

8. Contemplating the Architecture of Waiting

If we continue with the metaphor of the metro map, our thought must now make a transition. Or, more precisely, it must pause for a moment and enter into contemplation of transition itself.

Until now, we have called transition a change of state through the traversal of an interval. What matters now is to see how, within such a transition of state, **waiting** is born. If one state passes into another through an interval, the transition can no longer have zero duration. It is compelled to undergo the duration of its own passage. This undergoing of duration is **waiting**.

This is not human waiting in the psychological sense, but a more ancient pause inherent in transition itself. Thus, with the first transition, the first **temporality** appears. And here things become especially interesting.

Imagine a Gothic nave in which rows of pointed arches stand one behind another, forming a long enfilade. Between each pair of arches there remains a wedge-shaped empty field. Medieval craftsmen called it an *entrevolte*, from *entre voûtes*, “between the vaults.”

The entrevolte is not itself an arch and does not support the structure. It arises between the load-bearing stones as a necessary space, not intentionally designed by the architect, yet inevitably produced by the rhythm and form of the arches. It may be filled with stained glass, ornament, or relief, or left almost empty, allowing light and sound to pass through its contours. Even when empty, it does not disappear. It makes visible the order of the arches, their rhythm, and the necessary interval produced by their relation to one another.

Following this beautiful architectural metaphor, we may call **time the entrevolte of space**. Time does not arise as a thing among things, nor does it flow over the world as some external current. It appears within transition itself, as the necessary duration of its passage. Space holds distinctness, but it is transition that makes this distinctness traversable. Where transition cannot be instantaneous, a pause of passage arises. In this sense, **time is an architecture of waiting**, arising wherever there is extension, distinctness, and the necessity of transition.

9. On Holding Form

Returning to the network of distinctness, we may notice that it does not remain uniform. Within it, regions arise in which movement is sustained more stably than elsewhere. As the network expands, one tendency preserves the possibility of holding differences, while an opposing tendency continually draws them back toward the limit of indistinguishability. At the meeting point of these opposing processes, some transitions begin to preserve a repeatable pattern, and a local coherence of trajectories takes shape within the network. Such a regime of gathered and continuing movement may be called **form**. In other words, **form is a stabilized process**. In its earliest sense, such a form becomes the first mode of materiality: a stable concentration of process, a field, a configuration, or an elementary object.

The stability of form may appear as repeatability: what is reproduced need not be the earlier state itself, but a particular pattern of relations and transitions. When repeated transitions acquire a coherent temporal order, a rhythm of form arises. Rhythm does not require an exact return to the past: a form may remain recognizable while changing at the same time.

As form is held, the character of time changes as well. Repeatable rhythms appear within the network of transitions, yet the configuration itself never returns to itself completely. It shifts, accumulates differences, and preserves traces of the states through which it has passed. Thus, from the primary temporality of transition there emerges the **arrow of time**: the directionality of accumulated change within the network of distinctness itself.

10. The Hierarchy of Time

Following the arrow of time, we encounter increasingly complex regimes of transition. The more complex a system becomes, the more apparent it is that it possesses its own **temporal threshold**: a change must have time to become distinguishable for that particular system. In a broad sense, such a system-specific temporal threshold may be understood as an element of **hierarchical time**. For this threshold, it will be useful to introduce a name: **autochron**, from the Greek *autos*, “self” or “one's own,” and *chronos*, “time.” An autochron denotes the **minimum duration of a system's distinguishable transition**.

If every system possesses a threshold of its own, then different levels of organization also possess different temporal scales. The time of an elementary physical process, a living cell, a nervous system, and human consciousness cannot be reduced to one and the same internal rhythm. At every level, transition becomes distinguishable in its own way.

In biological systems, this principle becomes particularly vivid. Imagine a seed that has fallen into the soil. In order to begin growing, it must distinguish down from up. This function is performed by **statoliths** - tiny internal "weights" through which the plant senses gravity. As they shift, they trigger an internal chain of signals by which the root grows downward and the future shoot upward. This process is called **gravitropism**. Between the seed's entry into its environment and the first sustained growth lies an interval proper to the system itself. That interval consists of many nested processes, each with its own autochron. A transition becomes distinguishable when the internal reorganization has had time to assemble itself into a new regime.

The autochron can therefore be understood as the minimum duration within which a system has time to distinguish one of its own states from another and pass into a new regime. This interval differs from system to system: one for an elementary physical process, another for a living cell, a third for a nervous system, and a still more complex one for human consciousness. But in every case, the point is the same: the transition must become distinguishable for the system itself, and therefore must possess a duration of its own.

11. On the Living and the Significant

For us, as living beings, an especially important moment arrives when form no longer merely sustains a stable pattern of process, but begins to maintain its own form independently. We call this tense and intensive mode of holding **life**. A living form remains alive only so long as it sustains itself through the continuous work of a multitude of internal processes.

It is worth noting that living form is not only more complex than earlier levels of organization, but also far more vulnerable. Risk arises for it both in the external environment and within its own internal organization. And the more complex a living form becomes, the more urgent is its need to distinguish between what helps it persist and what leads toward disintegration. Thus arises the **holding of the significant**. A living being begins to build its behavior on distinguishing what is favorable from what is dangerous, what is its own from what is alien.

Here we encounter a pattern already familiar to us, but at a more intensive level. Distinctness must be held so that it does not disappear into indistinguishability. Form must be held so that it does not dissolve back into flux. And the living must hold what is significant in order to sustain its own form more reliably.

To put it very simply: a spider has no philosophical concepts, yet it already possesses established distinctions of significance. One kind of signal leads it toward prey; another causes it to hide. A vibration of the web will usually indicate possible prey, while a shadow of a certain size may signal danger. This is not yet language or culture. But it is already something more than simple physiological reactivity.

12. The Conscious Assembly of Meaning

As living form becomes more complex, the ways in which it holds what is significant change as well. The living distinguishes what is happening with increasing precision, learns, reconfigures its orientations, and relates new influences to experience already acquired. In a changing network of distinctness, stability alone is not enough: continuing one's form requires adaptation. Even early living systems can change their behavior, while more complex organization expands the possibilities for such retuning within a single life.

In this increasing complexity of living retention, we gradually approach consciousness. The earlier principle of holding acquires new possibilities. What is significant is preserved in experience, related to other significances, and affects the further behavior of living form. At earlier levels, such distinction directs action and helps adaptation to the environment; at more complex levels, it joins memory, learning, and the changing of one's own orientations. In human beings, the significant becomes available to reflection, receives a name, and enters the complex order of symbols and language. Human consciousness develops earlier forms of holding, joining them into a many-connected organization of experience.

This work appears in the coherence of perception, memory, and action. In a constantly changing world, the living holds what is significant, relates what is happening to earlier experience, and changes its own behavior. What has been held does not disappear together with the event that caused it. It leaves a trace, changes the perception of new circumstances, makes some actions more available and others less probable. In this way, the significant returns to living form itself and participates in its further becoming.

13. In the Space of Imagined Essences

The holding of what is significant begins long before the appearance of human language. A living being already preserves stable distinctions between the favorable and the dangerous, its own and the alien, possibility and threat. Such pre-symbolic stabilizations of the significant may be regarded as early forms of imagined essence. “Imagined” here indicates a mode of existence: the significant is assembled, preserved in experience, and returned to further perception and action. In human beings this process acquires a new complexity. Perception, images, memory, expectation, symbol, and language bind experiences into recognizable figures, names, roles, and supports of meaning.

We can now return to the original formula: **the existent exists, and essence is imagined.** To exist here means to enter living apprehension and open itself in experience as something. The existent is that which exists precisely in this sense. Essence arises where what exists is no longer merely apprehended, but also held, fixed, and gathered into a stable form of the significant.

This is why the human world can be called a space of imagined essences. We live among stable assemblages of the significant that help us orient ourselves, remember, transmit experience, and continue our own history. Many of them are held collectively: sustained by the attention, recognition, and actions of many people, and then becoming part of the experience of new generations.

14. Normative Forms

As the holding of imagined essences increasingly relies on symbol, language, and cultural memory, it is no longer only images of things, other people, or oneself that become fixed. Forms of shared life begin to be held as well: love, fidelity, duty, prohibition, responsibility, guilt, law.

These are no longer merely essences that help us recognize the world. They are **normative forms** - stable points of orientation for shared life. They determine not only what we see and name, but also how we relate to one another, where the boundary of the permissible lies, what calls for fidelity, what gives rise to guilt, and what requires protection.

Such forms are not given by nature in a ready-made state, yet neither can they be reduced to empty convention. They are real, but their mode of reality is different: they are sustained not by matter, but by significance, recognition, attention, and the shared effort by which they are held.

15. Beyond the Moth's Wing

We have traveled from distinguishability to the becoming of form, from form to life, and from the living holding of the significant to the human world of meanings. But sometimes this entire path can be seen in the smallest, almost imperceptible movement.

For us as human beings, what matters first of all is our own life. We live, fear, act, grow tired, hope, make mistakes, care, cause harm, hold close what we love, and lose it. But noemics does not allow the significance of the living to close in upon the human being alone.

And although it is natural for us to seek the center of that significance in ourselves, the scale of the living can be seen in the smallest example available to contemplation.

We are accustomed to measuring an event by its size. The explosion of a star seems great to us because it is dazzling, immense, destructive. The movement of a moth's wing seems almost like nothing: a slight tremor in the air, a barely perceptible movement of living tissue, a moment that disappears before we have time to grant it significance.

But noemically, this smallness is deceptive. Behind the beating of a moth's wing lies an event of another order. It matters not because it produces a greater force, but because **it happens differently**. Here the difference becomes visible between the involuntary movement of matter and the **self-initiated movement of the living**.

A nonliving body moves without self-initiation. A stone falls because gravity carries it. A star explodes because the internal stability of its physical state has been exhausted. A black hole curves spacetime not because it responds to the world, but because of its mass and geometry. In the nonliving, grandeur may be immense, but it remains the **grandeur of necessity**.

The living introduces another mode of transition into the world. It does not step outside physics, violate causality, or suspend the laws of matter. But within those laws, **self-initiation** appears. Not will in the human sense. Not conscious choice. Not intention. Rather, the capacity of a living form to sustain itself, separate itself from its environment, store the possibility of action, and release it into the world from within its own state.

A cell that maintains its membrane is no longer simply dissolved into its environment. It creates a boundary between inside and outside. A bacterium that changes its direction of movement is no longer merely a speck of dust driven by a current. It distinguishes favorable from harmful, approach from withdrawal, possibility from threat. A moth moving its wing is not yet performing an action in the human sense, but its movement can no longer be reduced to the falling of a stone or the explosion of a star. It passes through living form, stored energy, and the inner holding of distinction.

One might say that the living coils the spring of the world within itself. It gathers energy, sustains a boundary, senses its environment, and at a certain moment releases what has been stored, not as a simple mechanical discharge, but as an action of its own. This is not yet thought or will. But it is already movement arising from within the living mode.

For this reason, the movement of a moth's wing can be compared with the explosion of a supernova. The supernova is incomparably greater as an event of force. It can burn through and restructure immense regions of the cosmos, scatter the matter of future worlds, alter the fate of stellar clouds and planets. But it cannot do what the moth does. It cannot initiate movement from within a living state. It cannot evade, reach toward light, withdraw from danger, err in its direction, and then change its movement again.

In this sense, the beat of a moth's wing may be an event of a higher noemic order than the explosion of a supernova. Not in energy, not in the scale of destruction, not in physical power, but because within it matter no longer merely changes state. It sustains itself as living, distinguishes the world, and returns that distinction to the world as movement.

But even this is not enough. The movement of a moth's wing is not a simple displacement of a small particle of matter through the air. The wing, air, light, nerve centers, muscles, chemical energy, direction, threat, attraction, and the entire subtle architecture of the living body all enter a new configuration for a moment. The beat of the wing becomes a small node of a vast reorganization. The network of distinctness does not merely continue by inertia or simply expand under external causes. It changes its form from within the living mode.

The network also changes in nonliving nature. A star explodes, matter disperses, fields change their tension, and particles interact. But this remains involuntary reorganization. The network changes because forces, masses, energies, pressures, decays, and collisions combine in that way.

Something different appears in the living. The network of distinctness seems to have learned not only to expand and grow, but also to change its configuration from within a held form. The beat of a moth's wing is therefore not a small episode against the background of the great universe, but a sign that a mode has arisen in the universe in which the network of transitions itself begins to reorganize voluntarily.

The human being introduces an even more dangerous and responsible level into this reorganization. A person acts not only through the body, but also through image, word, memory, concept, fear, hope, culture, and technology. A person changes the network of distinctness not only through the movement of a hand, but also through thought, decision, formula, command, refusal, care, destruction, and promise.

We cannot fully imagine the scale of this influence. Every human action enters a network of consequences that cannot be completely calculated. Even a thought that has not yet become an action already reorganizes the inner map of what is possible. It changes the probability of a future word, gesture, choice, violence, or mercy.

This does not imply pride of the living over the nonliving. Quite the opposite: this is where responsibility begins. We can no longer say: it was only a gesture, only a word, only a thought. In a world where the significant returns to matter through living action, even the small becomes a participant in a vast network of consequences.

> *Beyond the moth's wing lies not a cause for human pride, but a measure of human responsibility.*

16. The Breath of Being

To bring this inquiry to a close, we may say that it has been built around three concepts: Being, the existent, and essence. Of these three, however, only Being remains that which can never be wholly encompassed by either experience or concept. Being is not one more object among objects. Nor does it become an essence that can finally and completely be held. Being is more like a horizon from beyond which the manifest comes forth toward us, while the horizon itself is not exhausted by the manifest world alone.

Astrophysics offers a metaphor of comparable force in its description of black holes. To an external observer, a body falling toward an event horizon seems to approach the boundary ever more slowly, never finally crossing it. Yet in the body's own proper time, the crossing does occur. Perhaps thought, as it approaches the question of Being, can likewise go farther than observation can follow. Perhaps it already crosses a certain limit, while from within our world we have no reliable way of witnessing that crossing.

And so we are left to explore the vicinity of that limit. On this side of the horizon, we can speak not of Being as such, but of the modes in which it becomes perceptible to us: distinguishability, becoming, form, life, consciousness, and the human holding of the world. Who knows? Perhaps what appears to us as distinguishability is, on the far side of the horizon, merely one mode of a deeper distinctness.

Being is not given to us as an object that we might one day see and turn into completed knowledge. But we can feel its breath. It lives in transitions and in the holding of forms, in the expansion of space and in the living distinction of what is significant. It is present where consciousness assembles a world out of images, memory, and expectation, and where imagined essences allow human beings to preserve not only a picture of the world, but the very mode of their own existence.

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