1. Phorontology

Published by

Braune, Sean.
Language Parasites: Of Phorontology.

➢ For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76529
Phorontology is the ontological study of an intermediary category of sites. The biological doctrine of phoresis is the practice of parasitic migration upon a larger organism. A phoront is a specific category of symbionts that travel upon larger organisms and engage in phoresis or migration. The sloth moths Bradipodicola hahneli and Cryptoses choloepli are two types of phoronts that live in the fur of sloths and use them for travel. A phoront lives upon a larger creature and, like a vagrant or menacing hitchhiker, does not pay for gas.

In the contemporary world, issues of phoresis are omnipresent, ‘pataphysically traceable to the Aristotelian tradition of phronesis. Such wordplay reveals an underlying relationship between parasitic correlationism and practical wisdom. Phronesis is an epistemological mode that judges the world according to its own internal laws. When translated into Latin as prudentialia – the term from which jurisprudence derives – an indecipherable knot is produced between the legal and the biological. Emerging from philosophy as practical wisdom, phronesis evokes a particular Weltanschauung that apprehends the world as arguably parasitic. Contemporary phronesis should be related to phoresis because it is only through understanding parasitic migration that a radical theorization of subjects, objects, and transjects can occur. Phorontology situates and sites these various entities as components of a larger being called a xenoject, which is a subjective entity thrown very far afield from “normative” Deleuzo-Foucauldian folds or Lacano-Freudian knots.

Phronesis, in phorontology, when combined with phoresis, situates an underlying structural model of the world in which every traditional human subject becomes nothing but a glo-
rified phoront riding on the back of a larger creature. In “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” Nietzsche writes: “Here one may certainly admire man as a mighty genius of construction, who succeeds in piling up an infinitely complicated dome of concepts upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water.” When conceived of as a phoront (or as being composed of phoronts), the draconian human subject is relegated to a thing that is cast adrift in the Heraclitean river — never fixed, never stable — where, caught in the fluctuations of water, any sense of being becomes strange and alien. The subject is dead and the xenoject and the transject emerge. These new jects are thrown from Zarathustra’s mountain and walk — protean and parasitic — down to the marketplace or the shopping mall. And where are these new jects headed? To dinner of course!

Sites and Constructions

Sites are spaces. A site is non-coded and exists apart from correlational reality, remaining anterior to apprehensions of language, meaning, or system. A site is a space upon which things are built and a building is then a place that, whether constructed or deconstructed, has a particular shape, appearance, or representation.

Nothing is built, in phorontology, ab nihilo in that traditional construction projects require a superstitious ritual that sanctifies the ground. A cornerstone is the term for a sanctified object that designates the land as safe for construction. In Europe, until the early twentieth century, cornerstones were locations of sacrifice: cats, dogs, and even women were ritually slaughtered in the service of cornerstones in order to purify the land and permit a reliable construction. To this day, the ritual holds true — albeit in a less barbarous manner — when a coin or a time capsule is placed in the ground prior to the construction of

a tall office tower. Humans appear to require the sanctification of construction projects.

A good textual example of the tradition of the cornerstone can be found in the iconic Romanian text “Monastirea Argeșului”—an anonymous oral ballad handed down from generation to generation. The poem features Meșterul Manole (or “Master Manole”), a master architect charged with building Prince Negru Voda’s new monastery. In order to sanctify the building project, Manole and his men build the walls around the living body of his wife, Ana (who is pregnant with their child). The sacrifice of Ana and her baby permits the construction of the monastery. The poem is obviously misogynistic and epitomizes the tradition of the cornerstone in that, in patriarchal culture, every foundation requires some form of oblation or sacrifice. A previous construction anticipates future constructions in an unfolding seriality of architectural and architextual emergence. Nothing can be constructed ab nihilo because every construction requires an originary parasite that can site the future building as a site that is not of the site. The hidden parasite is foundational when ontology becomes phorontology.

A place, once built, presents as an image or appearance that has a specific emergence in temporality. As a place, this image instates subsequent events, occasions, experiences, and situations. A situation is a meeting place or gathering of subjects, objects, abjects, projects, dejects, and rejects. A situation is an event constituted by a variety of parasites that remain hidden within the instated specificity of gridlines. These parasites self-organize in an overall system that develops according to rules of emergence. What I call “the site” is meant to describe an ontological space of fractal emergence so that, in other words, the site permits the concrescence of a seriality of construction sites. The site enables systems of meaning, sense, and substance to emerge alongside the fantasmatic and the imaginary.

Phorontology approaches these strange entities via an alternative or anterior pathway that can be located at a Res-in-situ—at a situated or sited Thing. There are no “coherent” subjects or objects that can be found in a phorontological per-
spective because both standardized categories (as “subject” or “object”) are only existent when sited or situated. Abjests and rejects, objects and dejects all similarly manifest within situations. A site, being initially un-coded, becomes re-coded as a Res-in-situ when a thing is positioned in relation to a corresponding intersection point of codes and meaning-productions. The thing is sited here in and as a place where situations and occasions can and do occur. However, the sited thing — whether subject, object, project, deject, reject, or abject — is consistently focalized as a para-site in relation to a larger process of sites and situating-spaces.

Ontological and metaphysical inquiry should not focus on either the subject or the object or any hermeneutic that privileges an entity or thing that has been “thrown”; instead, ontology and metaphysics should proceed by way of a phorontology, which I conceive as a program that studies the ontological status of sites and parasites. In Microcosmos (1986), Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan claim that “[t]he reality and recurrence of symbiosis in evolution suggests that we are still in an invasive, ‘parasitic’ stage and we must slow down, share, and reunite ourselves with other beings if we are to achieve evolutionary longevity.”

The Copernican Revolution (found in both Copernicus for astronomy and Kant for philosophy) situates a revolution of consciousness — a spitting in the face of acceptable opinion. A pinion, the same one that resides within machines, eventually develops into an I-pinion of proliferating cycles, differences, and repetitions (alongside their different-repetitions and repetitive-differences). The I-pinion turns, revolves, evolves, and involves the whole corpus of the machine in the minutiae of its independent parts. The part is apart and a part from the whole, but the whole is a part and apart of the part. This perhaps frustrating phrasing presents one of the most important contributions of fractal geometry to anthropocentric knowledge-systems in that

---

there remains — in natural shapes and objects — an ontological resistance to the firm differentiation between an apparent macrocosmos and an apparent microcosmos.

This book re-imagines the parasite of Michel Serres from the perspective of the site itself, which is the site that the parasite occupies. The term “parasite” derives, etymologically, from *parasitus* (Latin) and *parasitos* (Greek), meaning “a person who eats at the table of another.” It can mean “feeding beside,” from *para* (beside) and *sitos* (wheat, flour, bread, or food). The scientific definition of a parasite as an animal or plant that lives on or inside others emerges in 1646, but the original definition denotes the sycophantic or Machiavellian implication of a “hanger-on” (from 1539 onwards). Arguably, the 1539 definition is the dominant (but not exclusive) meaning used by Serres; however, in *Language Parasites*, I argue that a parasite is something else as well: the parasite is also a *para-site*. In other words, there is a site that can be found beside the original — a site that contains the meaning of the original as simulation or fractal. This *para* can be considered the epiphenomenon of the phenomenon, and, as such, manifests as the unconsidered supplement that is negated by anthropocentric and epistemological systems of segmentation.

A way of grounding or siting a phorontological theory is to consider real parasite-bodies and ask: *what is the Being of a para-site or the parasites?* The question that extends from this initial query is: *what are the constructions or segmentations that allow and are allowed by such a notion of Being?* For example, the male sheep crab *Loxorhynchus grandis* is commonly infected by a parasitic barnacle called *Heterosaccus californicus* and the crab becomes female: its abdomen widens and the parasitic infection creates a womb in the crab. The male sheep crab’s entire ontology changes, but its ontology is never strictly “in-itself” because the transformation requires the inclusion or assistance of a parasitic other that is also a *parasitic self*. The Other, in the instance of phorontology, is often on the inside and acts as a

---

belonging-self that constructs a metamorphic-inside or the very possibility of an inside. The logic of the parasite is not theoretical, abstract, or obscure, but real: the parasite induces and produces real processes of metamorphosis. Following this line of reasoning, the most frightening aspect of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) is not that Gregor Samsa awakens as a large bug, but rather, that the parasite responsible for Samsa's transformation is never found. The genus of the originary parasite is never identified or taxonomically clarified in Kafka's text. In this sense, Kafka's writing can be considered an evocation or clinical diagnosis of a particular kind of originary parasite: *the parasite of the modern and contemporary subjective condition.*

The white butterfly wasp *Cotesia glomerata* infects the cabbage butterfly *Pieris brassicae*. The process begins when the cabbage butterfly, as a caterpillar, protects the wasp larvae below its body after the parasites have burrowed out of the caterpillar’s abdomen in order to spin their cocoon. *Language Parasites* primarily focuses on male writers and thinkers — the reason for this may be immediately apparent because, historically speaking, “man” and men have occupied parasitic positions in both patriarchy and colonialism. As well, like any parasitic process, epistemology and philosophy develop from a variety of parasitic traditions. My subtitle, *Of Phorontology*, echoes Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967), but it is its own entity while at the same time feeding off of Derrida's original. Philosophy is parasitical. The purpose of this work is to suggest a new system that I term “phorontology,” which is a system or program that can be used to engage or interrogate the para-sites that extend beside and beyond their originary sites. I consider phorontology to be “the study of sites, para-sites, and parasitic being.”

However, the sites that I engage with cannot be approached at their origin; therefore, they are entered through their para-sites. As I mentioned earlier, *sitos* in Greek originally means “food.” Fittingly, food is not simply connotative of food itself, but also of the normative ideologies that surround consumption and commensality. The parasite de-consumes through its consumption. The notion of the *sitos* is concerned with food, eat-
ing, mastication, digestion, belching, and shitting — the whole of the human anatomy is at work in the concept of sitos — and the whole of human society is at work also, with its cycles of negentropy and entropy or reversal and redemption. Humans enjoy eating in groups that ritualize the consumption of food — we fetishize chewing, eating, and feeding. The restaurant and the grocery store are economic assemblages that will never go out of business because Homo sapiens are social by virtue of the ritualization, temporalization, and spatialization of the intake of food. We know where we are because we eat within specific locales. Serres is quite right when he points out our parasitical social order, but the subtlety found in the para-site can be considered in the emphasis placed on the sitos. It is difficult to contend that civilization would have “caught on” if it were not for the social rituals that surround eating and the related structures of etiquette.

The sitos of phorontology connotes not only food, but also mastication and digestion — it is fully anatomical and fully automatic — we eat, we socialize as we chew, and we digest without thinking too much about it. The parasitic flatworm Ribeiroia ondatrae infects the American bullfrog Lithobates catesbeianus and inspires the growth of extra legs so that the bullfrog is easy prey for herons. The herons that eat the bullfrog are also consuming the flatworm’s eggs, which are then released through the heron’s feces. The most interesting aspects of human society are the parts that we do not think about. The parts of society are, in this sense, anatomical and automatic. They are anatomic (in parts), automatic in how they function, and atomic (as a whole). The parts of society work in relation — in diffracted and diffracting networks. Phorontology analyzes that which is not considered; or, put differently, phorontology is “food” for the mind that simultaneously eats the mind. Phorontology consumes philosophy, authors, and readers because the parasite(s) wait over phorontology’s shoulder. The parasite is, conceptually speaking, the realist manifestation of an unconsidered shadow or supplement. The parasite is a swerve or an N — it is unknown. It is
simultaneously that which gnaws at the base of consciousness and also consciousness itself.

Is the site ever the subject? Perhaps, but the site can just as easily be voided or avoided. This “void” is formed and informed by the relation of the para-site to the para-site or by the chain of para-sites that live or manifest beside the para-site, thereby creating a chain of fractal sites ad infinitum. The amphipod Hyalella azteca is invaded by Pseudocorynosoma constrictum (a parasitic worm that can only grow in the digestive tracks of birds) and the worm reprograms the amphipod’s brain so that it will swim up to the water’s surface and be eaten by birds. Pattern recognition and the metamorphoses of patterns: patterns are repetitively re-cognized to reinstate the same. Ideologies do sometimes change, but perhaps the patterns do not. This situation describes why the revolution will not arrive.

Occasionally, the ideology of science changes, but this change becomes incorporated into a pattern of sameness or repetition. The awareness of the parasite permits a Copernican shift in the ontology of the subject because the subject transforms — according to the program of the parasite — initially to the postmodern and then later to the posthuman. To understand this transformation, we have to understand the localities and diffracting beings of the site and the para-site. This development is not the result of a type of reaction formation, but rather of the parasite of constraint that influences, infects, and feeds side-by-side with the hôte.

The concept of the “parasite of constraint” will be returned to throughout Language Parasites. The parasite of constraint is both a guest and a host and it is living inside you and with you (dear reader, dear scholar, dear thinker). Sometimes, it speaks for you. Sometimes, it listens. At other times, it influences, decides, and formulates as its thoughts and impressions are inextricable from your own. It thinks and it speaks; or, I speak and I think. This chiasmus formulates the relation between the site and the para-site because language is produced from an other site — from an “elsewhere.” The parasite of constraint is, in this sense, language. The parasite of constraint writes and speaks.
It teaches us through the discipline of epistemology and the institutional systems of academia and media. Maybe there is a spiraling tapeworm wrapped tightly around the “insides” of knowledge and discourse.

But isn’t this assertion similar to saying that “every message is ideological?” In some ways, certainly; however, the behavior patterns of the parasite of constraint suggest that the logic of the ideological points not to an internal logic or to an internal illogic, but rather, to an interior illness. An ideological message is typically tainted in some way and this “off-kilter” quality that is omnipresent in the ideological leaves us susceptible to parasitic infection. The parasite of constraint is not necessarily air-borne because it infects through the realms of the visual, the auditory, and the spoken. This parasite is born inside all of us as extra ribs. The tangibility of the object called the “brain” is already parasitical: it is a bumpy, curly, and unknown mass that “exists” inside our skull. The parasite of constraint is intrinsic to language and culture and can be focalized in the subjective site as a Res-in-situ.

Even if we have historically moved into (and out of) the postmodern, then we still stand at the corpus’s feet, hypnotized by what I call postmortemism. The corpus is dead and has become a corpse after the parasite has hollowed out its insides. We have historically moved beyond the posthuman and begun its dissection. The spark of “newness” or “nowness” has long since been evacuated by the sense of cold flesh on the cold steel of the autopsy table. Torpor and rigidity have set in and the sentience of the parasites is all that is left. I would go further: we are living in an era of metasentient parasites.

I will eat French theory and its leftovers. I will become a parasite of thought. Why? Because every thought is already a parasite. Philosophy is filled with Hegel-parasites, Derrida-parasites, Cixous-parasites, Serres-parasites, Harman-parasites, Kristeva-parasites, Laruelle-parasites, de Beauvoir-parasites, and countless other parasites. There is no escape from the parasites of thought. At the very least, every “is” and every declarative sentence in Language Parasites is a material parasite; or, in
other words, this book is the result of a *continental philosophical infection*.

What is called “the subject” is subject of various constraints. If society is situated as a site, then the subject becomes a para-site. Linguistic and logical feedback can be found everywhere. This feedback can be found in even the most banal communication. Linguistic feedback is supplemental to normative communication and hints at a kind of semantic void that watches over the subject’s shoulder. This loop is chaotic and fractal and repeats itself forever — as a stammering in echoes, without solution.

Phorontology considers the fundamental arbitrariness of sites. Phorontology offers a new approach to theories of Being because before Being can be addressed, there must be a site that situates being as Being or existence as an existence that exists. Prior to the deconstruction of a philosophical edifice or artifice, there must have been a site for the original philosophy-formation — a construction site for philosophy. Why was an artifice built here and not there? Or, why was a philosophy built in this way and not a different way? These questions are phorontological. Why consider Being at all when the related considerations of parasite places and spaces or parasite temporalities have yet to be addressed? Phorontology considers the fractal origins of philosophy. Fractals are bumpy, fuzzy, and folded geometrical formations and parasites love hiding in folds and furrows. How can we investigate existence without first considering the site(s) that yield(s) existence?

Have we moved beyond the historical? If we have, then perhaps we have entered into a phase that could be called *hyper-history*. We should remember Giambattista Vico’s conception of history in the *Scienza Nuova* (1744): his concept of *storia ideale eterna* or *ideal eternal history* is summarized in his concept of the *ricorso*. The *ricorso* considers an eternal model of history that recurs through three essential ages: the ages of Gods, Heroes, and Man. This early structural model of history is parasitic because of its intrinsic recursivity: Vico’s “epochs” recur as historical fractals that likewise fold into the fractality of the subject and the other subjects of history. The picture here becomes one
of feedback upon feedback upon feedback. Recursive history is a hyperhistory of pure forward momentum — an accelerationist nightmare. We are moving too fast, but it should be noted that, from a phorontological perspective, history (like consciousness) is metafractal.

Of course, by using the term “hyperhistory” I am building on Baudrillard’s use of the term “hyperreal.” The hyperreal denotes the simulation of the real as a site that grounds the real, but without origin. The hyperreal sites an epistemic shift in the real, but any shift in the real must accompany a contingent shift in the historical. “Hyperhistory” designates a notion of world history that is no longer cumulative, but constellated. What I call “hyperhistory” coincides with the accelerated sense of time that corresponds to the emergence of contemporary industry, technology, and specifically the rise of the Internet. The Internet permits everyone with a cable connection to create her or his own personal history everyday. For this reason, there is no longer one history, but rather, multiple histories. Certainly, one way of thinking about the hyperhistorical is to invoke the Deleuzoguattarian concept of the rhizome because hyperhistory has no origin, linearity, or definable boundary. Another way to think of hyperhistory is to consider the recent interest in the concept of accelerationism made popular in the Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams manifesto written in 2013.

However, beyond other possible conceptual allegiances, hyperhistory is phorontological. Why? Because even though the site is arbitrary, fractal, and indefinite, it remains a site. Despite the multiplication of possibilities and the relativization of subjectivities, histories will of necessity be “killed off” to permit the full autocratic reign of hyperhistory. However, it should be mentioned that the hyperhistorical is impossible if the contemporary representation of the subject were not metafractal. The

---

ontology of the subject is self-similar to the “ontology” of the historical. For this reason, the metafractality of the subject extends into the metafractality of history.

The Latin proverb rings true here: Nomen est numen or “to name is to know.” We have a lot of concepts in philosophy and theory: concepts such as the “absolute,” the “transcendent,” “noumena,” “phenomena,” “ego,” “id,” “unconscious,” “line of flight,” “heteroglossia,” “rhizome,” “sinthome,” “objet petit a,” “différance,” etc. I consider each of these concepts to be both discoveries and inventions. The unconscious has become real whether we agree with the concept or not. The quantum world has become real even though we have no hope of ever “seeing” it. The rhizome is real when we look at or think about interlocking structures of visceral or virtual complexity. Sometimes reality exists and sometimes “reality” does not exist. It certainly depends. Nomen est numen. To name means to nominate or carve out a place in history and epistemology and this humanist or posthumanist mode of nomination permits the creation of what I call a de-scission.6 In other words, every concept is cut—sometimes forcefully and sometimes elegantly—out of the cloth of necessity and contingency. If the subject is experiencing a parasitic infection—an infection that lurks at the depths of its language and ontology—then we need new concepts that can begin to fend off the invasion.

Hyperhistory is also spectaclysmic. In the rapid speed of our accelerated history, traditional notions of history have been replaced by the infinite histories that are propagated by modern technologies. History is now too big to read or to know and there is too much of it. History is now hyperhistorical: it does not have linearity or “plot progression” and its cast of characters is far larger than anything that can ever be conceived. There is no longer any possibility of “historical narrative.” History, prior to its own death, has imposed sites onto the landscape. “Hist-

---

historical sites” they are called or “heritage homes”: consider the scene in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* (1985) when Jack Gladney and Murray Jay Siskind visit the “Most Photographed Barn in America”—the barn is only notable because it is marketed as “the most photographed barn.” The site is therefore a pure construction. Siskind recognizes that there is nothing intrinsic about this particular barn that makes it notable beyond its symbolic and cultural cache.

The sites keep changing. The horsehair worm *Paragordius varius* and the house cricket *Acheta domesticus* are locked in a relationship of parasite and host: the horsehair worm uses the cricket as a host, eventually inducing the cricket to commit suicide by diving into a body of water and drowning so that the mature horsehair worm (sometimes measuring a foot long) can swim to its future. Like the horsehair worm, every major intellectual tradition in human history situates itself in relation to a specific site: relativism, phenomenology, existentialism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, scientism, sociology, anthropology, psychology, structuralism, constructivism, positivism, nihilism, metaphysics, Marxism, fascism, ’Pataphysics, situationism, surrealism, Dadaism, impressionism, etc., each exist as the discursive productions of an antagonism against an immanent construction. Each discourse emerges here as a response — as a para-site to a site.

Every site and every situation is dialogistic in that they allow for responses, but these responses do not exist as infinities, but as finite continua. These continua inaugurate counter-sites or para-sites that are responsive, but these para-sites can themselves become sites when an ideologically “new” discourse implants inside them and grows like an embryogenetic building. *Why this one site and not another?* Notions such as “discourse,” “hegemony,” “ideology,” and “mythology” each require a site to ground them. *Grund*. What allows one site to develop a dominant thought-episteme instead of another? These are phorontological questions. Phorontology, now as a *named* discourse, analyzes that which makes our skin crawl. Phorontology is not an ism, but a *Grundrisse*. Phorontology studies that which
grows from the breaks and ruptures in the ground of things. We must begin to ask ourselves what sites we occupy. If we do not, then the current phase of hyperhistory will create a presentation or representation of “reality” that is so persuasive that we will find ourselves living under a more frightening despotic regime than ever before (I include in this statement all the current and troubling trends towards the so-called “alt-right” or neo-fascist political parties or movements that have been emerging around the world from roughly 2014 to the present). Check your watch and note the time.

Consider the rising popularity of Marine Le Pen’s National Front in France, Norbert Hofer’s Freedom Party in Austria, Geert Wilders’s Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, Jimmie Akesson’s Sweden Democrats, Andrej Babíš in the Czech Republic, Beppe Grillo’s Five Star Movement in Italy, and Frauke Petry’s Alternative for Germany party. The popularity of these parties is rising after the Brexit vote in June of 2016 (in which Britain exited the European Union) and the unprecedented and rather surreal presidential win of Donald Trump in the United States.