



Spacetime and the Magic of Things: A Benjaminian Précis to Einstein's Relativity

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Abstract

Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, far from the singularity of its dramatic reception as the epitome of scientific wisdom, has in 100 years after its announcement that radically transformed physics since Newton, and greatly advanced the cause of evolutionary thinking in general since Darwin, has also made significant claims on religion and mysticism. Though far from the certainty that it may offer as in strict scientific sense, this kind of openness to what is often shunned by science generously links scientific consciousness to a pristine awareness of what Walter Benjamin, a fellow Jew, would describe as the 'magic of things' which in a way of its own is also 'communicable without residue.'

This paper wishes to argue that relativity offers a kind of divinatory-intuitive grasping of the unexpressed, which approximates Benjamin's concept of 'distorted simile,' allowing for a restrained accommodation of the mystical, albeit, not as a primitive mind would confuse ritual gestures, for instance, with the reality it magically presupposes, but rather as a raw 'objective' material for a more metaphysical translation of the interaction of things as they enmesh with human cognition. This kind of 'thingly' interaction is a necessary precondition for human cognition, so to speak, which, however, cannot fully translate the language of things, as knowledge in general lacks the one absolute condition that can minimize, let alone collapse the ontological gap between thing and language, arguably reserved for the divine.

In the same manner that relativity shows, for instance, how gravity bends light, something to the effect of an epoché or suspension of actuality contorts the referential space that fixes certain epistemic and metaphysical relations. When Einstein argued that the perception of time varies in perspectival spatiotemporal shifts, such as the slowness of time inside a speeding train viewed from the outside, it tells us that time cannot be experienced in its own terms. It may be well to put in this light that time has to be relieved of its actuality for experience of time to become possible. We can find a complimentary function in Benjamin in terms of language relieved of its 'divine actuality' for it to be able to communicate the mental or intelligible entity of reality 'without residue.' This latter aspect of Benjamin's transposition does not say that the gap between thing and language is closed, but rather is distorted in the sense that 'it' (the phenomenological gap) is relieved of its actuality in the same manner that the actual gap in time and space between a stationary onlooker and a driving onlooker perceiving the same light shooting forward at the speed of, for instance, 670 miles per second, 'physically' collapses.

The rest of the paper will build on these forms of suspensions of actuality as presupposing an acknowledgement of the simultaneity of the unexpressed and the expressed. For purposes of the paper, we take the unexpressed to mean the expressed intelligibility of an entity that accommodates human cognition after being relieved of its actuality which, left to its own, is indifferent to perception.

Keywords

communicable without residue, last entity, magic of things, relativity, simultaneity