



If AI is a proposition featuring the unity of thought and extension in our time, it is a claim on substance. Is there any way around it? VR says [Jaron Lanier](#). He discusses VR as digital technology developed for immersive and interactive purposes. We don't need VR-goggles and gloves to be part of this.

Our VIDEO-meetings—during the corona shutdown—are both immersive and interactive (even if they bring us into what Lanier calls 'the valley of the uncanny'). Lanier underscores the potential of existential awareness as we endure. Growing sustainable containers for this experience is a sensorial task.



Substance is discussed in the **first 39%** of *Ethica*. Spinoza defines it thus: “*By substance, I mean that which is in itself, and is conceived through it-self: in other words, that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception.*” A compound of a **term**, its **reference** and **mediation** in **one**.

His concern with **pleasure**—however—is throughout the **book (97%)**. In **counterpoint** to **pain**, and in **opposition** to **lust**. His **ethical project** builds on the **metaphysical** foundation of **substance**. And what brings us from this foundation to the **precepts** for a **good life**, is **necessity vs. contingency**.

Spinoza’s stroke of **genius** may lie in the way **contingency** turns to **necessity** when **constituted** at the **metaphysical** level of **substance**. Consider that you have initiated an **operation A** and you encounter an **obstacle B**. You then determine a **way A’** to get around **B**; you record an **effect B’** of that choice.

That would seem to fall squarely into the **definition** of **contingency**: the **joinery** of something **found** with something **negotiated**. **Now** take the **whole** of the **4 steps** above into consideration, and **form** an **idea** of it (in your **thought**). **Then** compare that idea to how **whole operation** actually turned out (**extension**).

Thought and extension are **one in substance**, claims Spinoza. **Necessarily** so. We have moved from **contingency** to **necessity**. It does **not** happen by itself—**automatically**—but requires that we **put in** some **work**. A **shorthand** of Spinoza’s **ethics**, if we in our definition of **contingency** include the **unknown (X)**.

The **found**, the **negotiated** and the **unknown** when turned **through** the **clock-work** of Spinoza’s ‘**telescope**’, **contingency** will **yield necessity**. In our **master-class** in **design** at KHiO—in the school year **2019/20**—we have **explored** this **assumption** as a regular **litmus-test** in our **stages** of **learning together**.

This relates to a **research-culture** in design, featuring a **via negativa** in the sense that **what is explored** is regularly **external** to **design**. It is similar to **anthropology**, in this sense, which is based on **fieldwork**. The **joinery** of **negotiated findings** is well established. But if the **unknown** is part of the **equation**?

It is on this **backdrop** that I, at the present occasion, **re/turn** to **Saul Kripke’s** **lecture-series** at Princeton, published in **Naming & Necessity (1980/1970)**, where he argues that **names**—as opposed to **descriptive notions**—are **rigid designators** of the **object** across the **different worlds** in which it exists.

It is therefore conceivably in the **unknown aspect** that the **things** in our world are **named**: which is of **consequence** if we consider **makes & brands**: for instance, **Tesla** which is now a car in which the **genius** of **Nikola Tesla (1856-1943)** is now **encased**. That could be seen as a **turn** from **pleasure** to **lust**.

Can one do such a thing?—see me do it! It’s a **lingo** in our days. We live in an era where the work of **metaphysics** might be left to **AI**. I know that **Jaron Lanier** would agree. A kind of **metaphysical hijacking** (*détournement*) that will continue—**unless we do our job**—for no other reason that it can be done.