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Itself Gives: A Review of Dr. Robert Craig Baum's Book *Itself*

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Many of us begin the text from the right. Typically it is the bibliography or the index we peruse to see *where* the writer passes and *who* passes through her. It is a kind of preliminary test of the reader. If it is someone we know and distrust we find the back pages to be like a photo album from the trip he has been on (and offer for us to join them). The unknown *author* is being held to a test. There are certain names that must appear in the back pages of certain dwellings. If these names are absent, the merit of text is, well...

Itself gives a gift. The end pages are filled with "acknowledgements" of Dr. Baum. What is intriguing, if not impressive, about these *acknowledgements* is not so much the array of thinkers that Dr. Baum calls his mentors and peers, a formidable list, but the care that is apparent is acknowledgement *itself*. One has the sense, in beginning *Itself* from the back, that we are dealing not merely with a brilliant and thorough thinker, but with a very human sage. In his authenticity, RCB unconceals an authentic care for Dasein, not a flamboyant display of inauthentic posturing (that is all too typical), but a pathway to understand the intentionality with which Dr. Baum approaches *Itself*, giving.

To "*live a creative life with courage,*" if there is anything that we can truly call freedom – this is it- and this is the very thing that *Itself* gives. We experience in *Itself* a sense of freedom (emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical) that is rare in writing, let alone in *philosophical* writing. Robert Craig Baum has achieved a freedom, and gives *Itself* as a gift of freedom in the sensitive dwelling, speculating, and dreaming. Perhaps this is the greatest gift

that *Itself* gives; a transcending from the Heideggerian *dwelling* to the Baumian *dreaming*.

We do not take this *dream* to be that of the sleeper or the fantastical. Rather we receive this dream with a vividness that cannot be accomplished in dwelling alone. Whereas *dwelling* remains active, *dreaming* is more of a receiving, a sensitive participation in reaping Being in the world. Baum, in this way, brings us to a new place, a nonviolent *destruktion* that is woven-through with the sensitivity of a *care* only known of the father. Is it possible that this Baumian *dreaming* is the "*fourth dimensional meditation*" that Baum dwells before.

Dr. Baum treats certain critics of Heidegger with ease and insight. Analogically revealing the similarities between clumsy conclusions regarding the work of Malevich or Pollack, and the dwelling of Heidegger, must leave the dismissive reader as feeling awkwardly crude.

Baum begins with an examination of the limits of thinking within the boundaries of the modern and the necessity of the awakening of *Ereignis* in the modern. Knowing the limits of the knowable (not unlike Zizek's VR limits) is expressed as a gift *itself*, rather than a problem. The gift, if I may call it that, *Itself* gives. In "*Tracings*" Baum heedfully outlines what he sees as dangers in following Heidegger's path too closely, or too loosely. He finds a distance that allows his own voice, and the voice of the reader in return, to come forth, and to speak *with* Heidegger on this path. Baum walks with us on this path, and allows for the hermetic opening of *Dasein* to manifest without fact, instruction, or guidance. He, as Heidegger, is a guide who *points towards* (or *points out*) rather than *presenting*. Baum has learned from Heidegger that this is the only way the reader can come to *letting go* the unknown as the known.

In *The Principle of Reason (Ground)*, Heidegger describes a grounding, or a backing, that is the necessary, yet unrealized or unknowable, foundation for *knowing*. In *Itself*, Baum explores this ground and takes on the current groundings through Lacan and Žižek. What we are left with something that is a brave turning away from. In Baum's words:

"This is standard Lacanian/Zizekian thinking, but with *ereignis*, we get to have something—even if this something is forgotten or encountered in a flash. Something undeniable happens; and perhaps this is about as good as it gets. Otherwise the problem of being is reduced to the quantification of realized desires. Big Other is always unobtainable; the little other is available, a substitute. This is all based on desire and need; as we stated in the opening moments of this book, *ereignis* doesn't care if we get what we desire or need—our goal is to get over ourselves."

Again we find Baum hinting at something that sounds like the dream. His momentary flashings are not unlike lucid dreaming, only this is a *desire* for a lucid *waking*. The Fourth Dimensionality of seeking may be an *unstructuring* that is only possible in an overcoming of metaphysics, but rather as a letting go (or for-getting) or metaphysics. Baum's dreaming gives-up this space for dwelling; A dwelling in the reality of the dream. His text does not teach, direct, or guide, but rather gives *Itself* as a dwelling space.
