INDEX

5   Editor’s Preface

10  Zen Pessimism: On E. M. Cioran and Non-Being
    Brad Baumgartner

28  Marvelous Harmony: On Christina the Astonishing
    Nicola Masciandaro

44  The Cyclops and Ocular Origination: A Study in Three Phases.
    Part I: The Eye-Axis
    Constanza Bizraelli

68  Moral or Mortal Cosmos?
    On Subjective Existence in Kant and Bataille
    James F. Depew

94  Readings of Nietzsche in Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy by Lev Shestov
    Marina Jijina-Ogden

112 About the Contributors
Editor’s Preface

Non-Conductive Presences and The Channelling of Abstraction

Cyclops Journal is based on an initiative that seeks to generate an extension of philosophy into the provinces of its own margins, into what is anticipatively regarded as unthinkable but is yet to be present in thought, in spite of its apparent incommensurability with the nature of the act of thinking. The channelization of abstract thinking into pre-established arrangements of directions- like pipe systems bearers of a structural truth informed by rationality- allows a certain fluidity and continuity in our understanding and assimilation of events. However, there is always a residuum: the “inassimilable”, composed by elements that are deprived of the lubricant of logic directionality, which would allow them to relate with other logically commensurable elements. These other elements are therefore impossible to conduct through the channels of discursive understanding. The residues of conductive abstraction remain an undecipherable dense knot of potential channels, as a virtual labyrinth contracted in its non-possibility but turned concrete in its undeniable presence- the numinous presence of the unthinkable. The unthinkable *is*\(^1\), inscribed in the geometric reduction that characterizes the infrastructures of the thinkable and exceeding it.

This unsorted mass of the unthinkable stands as a formal labyrinth, logic only in its general idea. Yet, it is a non-accessible labyrinth; its channels stand as the phantasmatic residue of the failed attempts to channelize and, despite their apparent volatile phantasmagoria, they conceal a heavy mass of residual matter. Both

\[^1\] It remains, it continues being.
heavy and subtle, residual volumes of inassimilable matter are informed by fragmented quanta of the forces of abstraction.

Inassimilable elements are turned by the channelizing intellect and by directional reason into channels that do not conduct: because they lack continuity; because they lack relational direction; yet they are. They bear an incorruptible unity of presence, which manifests fragmentarily in regions where the opacity of directional reason diminishes.

Even as it is a non-conductive presence, “labyrinth” is heavier than its conductive twin. Embodying non-conductivity, it can only be grasped in a pure and abstract present, which it inundates with liquids that do not conduct. The presence of the unthinkable to the mind conceals the possibility of its own translation into discursive models, into the spirit of a fluid system based on discursive logic. However, by concealing it, it does not negate it. Discontinuity in reason does not annihilate the unity of presence of what appeared as unthinkable to the forces of abstraction; on the contrary, it highlights this unity by revealing the insufficiency of reason.

The presence of the unthinkable in the forms of those non-conductive elements, which are nonetheless still susceptible of being grasped by the forces of abstraction, enables the growth of certain awareness of the necessity to actualize the channelization of the forces of abstraction. On the one hand, the nucleus of the force of abstraction resides in a craving for direction. On the other hand, it is rooted in the need for a scale: namely, a relational system of pure directions, where it can execute the concrete inscription of its channels. However, the problem of residuality in abstraction resides in the modality of being of the lubricants that allow the conduction of the forces of abstraction through the channels of the understanding. What is unthinkable is as it is because it resists conductive continuities that are based on certain measurements—specifically those of conventional logic and directional reason. However, this might not be the case if other conductive models are
applied, such as those of emotion, mystical thinking, musical thinking, pure energy, archeyposophy or “polymorphous reason” (borrowing this last term from Klossowski). After all, the unthinkable is still present, as an apparition or as a pure emergence, even if it still stands as a one-dimensional non-accessible labyrinth to the contemporary mind.

**Heterological Channelling**

In *The Use Value of D.A.F de Sade*, Bataille (1985) introduced the terms “heterogeneous” and “heterology” to describe elements that are impossible to assimilate, based on a model structured upon the binary assimilation/excretion. Moving into the categories of thought and abstraction, heterogeneous elements constitute objects that do not serve any purpose; they are directionless and are the outcome of unproductive expenditure. They do not produce posterity and, in this sense, they lack continuity. According to Bataille, what is sacred and what is excremental share heterogeneity. Heterology, on the other hand, stands as an abstract science - a theoretical route or a diversion of the act of thinking into the residues of traditional channelization, into the inassimilable, the unthinkable. In the light of what has been said previously, heterological action might only be possible by means of an exercise of extension of the forces of abstraction and an actualization of the modalities and lubricants of their channelization.

Heterology, in its categorical use, recognizes the heavy presence of the unthinkable and offers a theoretical recognition of this presence.

Cyclops Journal is interested in departing from heterology as a medium to approach the possibility of extending contemporary thought into sacred and abstract non-conductive presences.

---

Cultivation of the Ocular Ubiquity

The presence of the unthinkable above all seduces, and sets into play other conductive possibilities generating an abstract orgy between faculties, informed by mutual, plural and yet unimaginable copulas and synaesthesias. Our task would consist of cultivating eyes inside of these processes instead of merely witnessing them from externality. The ocular component of thought, namely the ideas that revolve around a conception of vision as evidence or as the act of casting light on obscured regions is in tune with the idea behind the name of the Journal: “Cyclops”, meaning round eyes. Our action would consist of cultivating the germ of the ocular in the margins of the thinkable and into the regions of the unthinkable. The cultivation of vision (in an abstract sense) in the depths of each process entails the germination of eyes that would internally grow in accordance with each organism, nurtured by different nutrients in each case, permeating the opposition between what can be assimilated and what cannot be assimilated. Heterological channelling here behaves as an arrangement of spinning eyes: eyes set into work; a machinery of ubiquitous vision; a thinking that is everywhere, with the ability to grow inside of every presence and with every presence. The cultivation of ocular ubiquity through heterological channelling enables a polymorphous growth of the same eye in the unfolding of its potential diversity. It welcomes a parasitical and virulent cosmogenesis of vision through the actualization of the forces of abstraction into everything present.

Constanza Bizraelli
London, 2016
ZEN PESSIMISM: ON E.M CIORAN AND NON-BEING

Brad Baumgartner
Shock to the System

Unlike systematic philosophers, many of whom spend large swaths of time grappling with the fastidious organization of their ideas, pessimist philosopher E. M. Cioran gained a reputation for dismantling the so-called systematic utility of philosophy in favor of a fragmented, disintegrative one.¹ As Eugene Thacker suggests in an interview entitled “The Sight of a Mangled Corpse,” paying consideration to Cioran necessitates a corollary counter-analysis of philosophy itself. Thus, he indicates that

there is something in Cioran’s work that mitigates against philosophy in the key of philosophy. That is a good definition of “pessimism” to me—the philosophy of the futility of philosophy. Cioran takes up this thread from other thinkers to be sure—Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Lichtenberg, Leopardi, Pascal, the French moralists. His writing itself works against the presuppositions of grand, systematic philosophy, composed as it is of fragments, aphorisms, stray thoughts. It is refreshing to read his work today, especially against the mania for systematicity in philosophy textbooks or the so-called speculative realist treatises. (2013, 386)

Thacker’s analysis continues, pointing out that there is ’subtractive rigour to this kind of pessimism, what Nietzsche called the rigour of the “unfinished thought.” Cioran appeals to the secret voice inside all our heads when we read philosophy, or science, or psychology, or self-help: “Really? You really think we can just figure it all out?”’(Ibid).

¹ Cf. Cioran in All Gall is Divided: “Thought which liberates itself from all prejudice disintegrates, imitating the scattered coherence of the very things it would apprehend. With “fluid” ideas we spread ourselves over reality, we espouse it; we do not explicate it. Thus we pay dearly for the “system” we have not sought’ (2012a, 33).
Since, as Thacker shows, Cioran is heavily invested in unveiling philosophy’s futility\(^2\) in a subtractive mode that, even in its anti-ness still closely resembles philosophy, it may be useful to posit, but in a way that discloses the paradoxical nature of this pessimism, yet another term for what specifically Cioran is doing in his writing. But before we do, let us suggest that one way to theorize Cioranian pessimism, which, at its limit, is really a weird mysticism that negates its own beyond, might be to highlight it within the context of its leitmotif—that of futility—and to point to its essential practicality as a transposal of philosophic utility. To do this, we need to begin with the question of ontology. Ontology, the branch of metaphysics that concerns itself with the nature of existence, asks the question of how something can be said to exist. Rather than speaking about Cioranian pessimism on the basis of some totalizing philosophical system,\(^3\) we might do better to see it as laying out a position for a negative ontology, or, more accurately, a meontology (an ontology of what is not) that can teach readers something central and non-exchangeable about existence as it is commonly viewed or agreed upon.

While many may read Cioran’s philosophical work as gloomy and incomplete, we should note that these are in fact important features in his work: they are the textual remnants of a rigorous—albeit subtractive—process of un-making oneself and the world via a practical mysticism of intense, pessimistic mindfulness which, as we will later suggest, paradoxically results in a sort of Zen-like no-

\(^2\) One will note Cioran’s critique of philosophy in *The Trouble with Being Born*: ‘Philosophy is taught only in the agora, in a garden, or at home. The lecture chair is the grave of philosophy, the death of any living thought, the dais is the mind in morning’ (1976, 188).

\(^3\) Cf. ‘A person who has the misfortune to fall victim to the spell of a philosophical system […] can no longer see the world, or people, or historic events, as they are; he sees everything only through the distorting prism of the system by which he is possessed’ (*Meditations on the Tarot*, 1985, 42-3).
mind. In opposition to identifying with oneself as oneself, his aphorisms and fragments position readers in a marginal space between being and non-being. It is not that Cioranian pessimism changes the condition in which one could be said to exist, for that condition is one of futility, but that it burrows an inhabitable gap between existing and non-existing, and pointing us to it, a liminal mode that claims no throne to a transcendent reality, might enable one to think in a way that is more clearly and immanently pessimal.

Field Notes from Nowhere

For a pessimist, fragmentary writing often serves as ongoing marginalia on the book of systematicity. Cioran’s philosophical position, as it views systematic philosophy as a kind of futility warehouse, is composed of fragmentary thoughts that break up not only the language of systematicity but also sever the positivistic conditions for a mode of existing that directs itself and/or validates the “subject” to which it refers on this side of being. ‘As long as you live on this side of the terrible,’ writes Cioran, ‘you will find words to express it; once you know it from the inside, you will no longer find a single one’ (1976, 53). Yet what would knowing something “from inside” the other side of being, which is really to say, unknowing something, look like?

Focusing on themes such as nothingness, despair, suffering, and personal crisis, Cioran’s work presents a series of meontological dictums that allow readers to come into mindful awareness of their complicity with the horrors of existence. Let us take, for instance, an aphorism in which Cioran presents this paradox by way of a philosopher who hopes to gain a kind of satisfaction from his ontological forays. Cioran writes, “Being never

---

4 Cioran’s early work, for instance, survives within the tradition of the ‘nihilism of the great sophists’ (Petreu, 2005, 234), and, infused with sophistical idiosyncrasies concerned with the nature of non-being and the language of negation, holds a close relation to the work of Gorgias.
disappoints,” declares a philosopher. Then what does? Certainly not nonbeing, by definition incapable of disappointing. This advantage, so irritating to our philosopher, must have led him to promulgate so flagrant a countertruth’ (2012b, 113). According to this inventive formulation, any perceived positive conditions for existence are actually ontological misgivings that survive under an ideological rubric of optimistic validation: being does not disappoint. The kōan-like thrust of this aphorism, however, is most powerful in what it does not show. On the other side of the ontological veil of this positivistic philosopher lies “so flagrant a countertruth” that it precedes his statement entirely. In fact, it precedes even the conditions to proffer an ontology. For only in non-being is one capable of never being disappointed, if not simply because there is no is there—no circumstance nor possibility to exist at all. This notion is perhaps the closest Cioran will come to a “first philosophy” in the Cartesian sense of the term of knowing something in full sureness after casting all into doubt.

Utilizing a negative and equally skeptical logic that subtracts its way from a whole in order to proffer an imperative for non-being, Cioran posits a non-philosophical tenet that primacies non-being as the only truth to be desired: ‘I have never taken myself for a being. A non-citizen, a marginal type, a nothing who exists only by the excess, by the superabundance of his nothingness’ (1976, 176). Given that meontology typically utilizes discourse about both being and non-being, Cioran’s marginal status as a chameleon-like figure that moves back and forth between being and non-being simultaneously relays to readers what does not happen, that is to say, negatively indexes what happens nowhere.

Pessimism’s connection to mystical discourses of non-being is well-noted in one of Cioran’s pessimist predecessors, Arthur Schopenhauer, who held a personal and philosophic affinity for Eastern mysticism and was strongly influenced by Hindu and Buddhist religious thought. Though, as Peter Abelson points out, ‘compared to his worldview, which is very severe, Buddhism seems
almost cheerful’ (1993, 255), Schopenhauer agreed that Buddhism’s First Noble Truth, dukkha—a Pali word commonly translated as “suffering”—was the basis of human existence. In *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), Schopenhauer analyzes several principles of esoteric origin. His description of the ethics of willessness, for instance, is worth quoting at length:

If [the] veil of Maya, the *principium individuationis*, if lifted from the eyes of a man to such an extent that he no longer makes the egotistical distinction between himself and the person of others, but takes as much interest in the sufferings of other individuals as his own, and thus is not only benevolent and charitable in the highest degree, but even ready to sacrifice his own individuality whenever several others can be saved thereby, then it follows automatically that such a man, recognizing in all beings, his own true and innermost self, must also regard the endless sufferings of all that lives as his own, and thus take upon himself the pain of the whole world. No suffering is any longer strange or foreign to him. All the miseries of others, which he sees and is so seldom able to alleviate, all the miseries of which he has indirect knowledge, and even those he recognizes merely as possible, affect his mind just as do his own [...] Wherever he looks, he sees suffering humanity and the suffering animal world, and a world that passes away. (1969, 378-9)

The purpose of highlighting this quotation is not to subsume Cioran under the rubric of personal liberation that Schopenhauer outlines, but rather to address the fact that Cioran disconnectedly fits into this paradigm just like the fragmented verses he pens fit into his implicit critique of systematic philosophy. In other words, Cioran is and is not this liberated person, does and does not these things. His own contradictory individuation is evocative of what might fragmentarily occur in the ontological gaps and affective crevices of such an individual’s life.5

5 ‘Once we appeal to our most intimate selves,’ Cioran writes, ‘we become unconscious of our own gaps... “Self-knowledge”? A contradiction in terms’ (1976, 35).
What, then, ought the pessimist to do about the problem of communal suffering, the double suffering, no less, that stems both from the horror of one’s individuation and, for those who lack self-knowledge, from the inability to recognize such horror? The obvious answer is that the pessimist will do nothing: ‘What to do? Where to go? Do nothing and go nowhere, easy enough’ (Cioran, 1976, 13). But what does this mean? How might this negative praxis turn back to the theory of knowledge? If we are to take Cioran’s vision of existence, a universe with no way out, seriously, then we must deign to understand the complexity of the ethical paradox this negative vision brings to light. First, we must learn to dwell in the horror of being ourselves. If to exist is truly the ultimate condemnation, if our own births sever us from the abyssic canal of non-being, then we must find a way to exist not. If we follow this through, “being negatively” (2012, 23), as Clarice Lispector’s G. H. once called it, becomes the way to live rightly, which is also to say justly. This is the hidden mystical life of the marginal figure, the inter-dimensional chameleon that passes between being and non-being because they know by un-knowing, because they owe themselves nothing other than to know that they know not. In this sense, we might wish, first, to implore a kind of “pessimist activism,” one compelled by an inverted and introverted courage—not hope—to be emptied out, to stay and break bread with one’s nothingness. This would be an assortment of individuals who know they are doomed but have learned to dwell in their own horror so that, one day, they might be able to unlearn it, in order to, as Nicola Masciandaro puts it, ‘think through cosmic pessimism, as opposed to dwelling in it’ (2014, 188).

Keeping Schopenhauer’s description of the *principium individuationis* and its corollary renunciation in mind, one can see that Cioran hovers somewhere in the middle of the two as a

---

6 Cf. ‘No one needs pessimism, though I like to imagine the idea of a pessimist activism’ (Thacker, 2012, 66).
marginal figure. On the one hand, in Cioran’s fragmentary work readers find the laborious musings of a man so deeply tied to and cognizant of humanity’s suffering that it brings him to a place of innermost, even automatic, recognition of pain and suffering. In this case, Cioran, who, we could argue, has adopted an identity politics of non-identification and has to a degree successfully renounced himself as a self and the world as world, has somewhat parted with the *principium individuationis*. Cioran sees personal and communal suffering everywhere he looks and, as is indicated by the overarching theme of suffering found in his work, he does, as Schopenhauer puts it, “take upon himself the pain of the whole world.” On the other hand, however, he stops short of becoming the kind of bodhisattva figure Schopenhauer describes above that attempts to lead others out of the veil of Maya, or the illusory causes of humanity’s suffering, and into liberation. Cioran is a failed mystic and an even better pessimist in the sense that he would not hold this attainment true or available for anybody, which is in part analogous to and bolsters his critique of the “failed mystic” in *Tears and Saints*, i.e. ‘a critique of [the mystic’s] will to power which reaps nothing but empty and cruel suffering’ (Zarifopol-Johnston, 1995, Introduction xiii). He sacrifices his individuality, but not for anyone, and in that way he exemplifies the latter half of Schopenhauer’s description which focuses on the hardship of the individual who cannot fend off her desires via a “final resignation” in order to free themselves from the “the allurements of hope” and the false pleasures of the world (1969, 379). On the one who is lured back into such egoism, Schopenhauer continues, ‘At times, in the hard experience of our own sufferings or in the vividly recognized sufferings of others, knowledge of the vanity and bitterness of life comes close to us who are still enveloped in the veil of Maya’ (Ibid).

Cioran is sure to resist the allurements of hope. Yet, in quite another way, he remains courageous in sense that his work does indeed uncover what lies underneath Maya’s veil. Through an intense mode of unknowing, a kind of practical mysticism of
pessimistic awareness, he points out the elaborate and illusive fallacies through which human beings live out their lives. In this way, then, Cioran hovers in between the two concepts of willlessness and egoism, which, in his typical contradictory fashion, is not surprising. And yet, there is another, a third, view that can be taken, that is aligned at the point at which authorship and reader reception comes into play. For just because Cioran does not intend his work to be a catalyst to any kind of change whatsoever, that does not necessarily mean that a reader might not find any. In fact, the change that happens is not even one that is related to the product of changing the plight of the world, but rather a change in the process of observing the world.

Towards a Zen Pessimism

Another way to show how Cioran deals with the subject of non-being is to view inexistence as a particular state of mind. To do so, we can analyze passages in his work which specifically relate to Buddhism, a religion which prioritizes the concept of nothingness or, more accurately, emptiness (*sunyata*), as deeply significant on the path to realization. In the remaining space, an in-depth study of Buddhism’s wellspring of beliefs and traditions cannot be undertaken, but we can begin to trace out Cioran’s curious treatment of Buddhism. Given that he appears at once critical and laudatory of Buddhist doctrine, this living contradiction may bring us closer to understanding how merging Eastern mysticism with philosophical pessimism presents challenges to philosophical authority, but also utilizes the limits of philosophical thinking in order to possibly think *through* such limits. For example, Cioran writes,

---

7 As we will see, this state of mind is a state of no-mind, a self-realized nothingness as opposed to mere apathy or passive nihilism.
“Meditate but one hour upon the self’s nonexistence and you will feel yourself to be another man,” said a priest of the Japanese Kusha sect to a Western visitor.

Without having frequented the Buddhist monasteries, how many times have I not lingered over the world’s unreality, and hence my own? I have not become another man for that, no, but there certainly has remained with me the feeling that my identity is entirely illusory, and that by losing it I have lost nothing, except something, except everything. (1976, 19)

Drawing on Buddhist custom, Cioran discloses a sort of pessimist appreciation for living in a state of non-attachment. To lose living under the false illusions of one’s identity is to gain everything by returning to one’s original state, what Zen masters call Original Mind. In unorthodox fashion, Cioran’s curious treatment of Buddhism constitutes a strange portmanteau discourse, or inverted spiritual practice, something we might call a Zen pessimism.

Zen, a form of Mahayana Buddhism which began in sixth-century China and later spread throughout the West in a modern context by D. T. Suzuki, especially primacies this relation. Insofar as Cioran is doing a kind of non-philosophy, that is, subtracting from Western systematic thought rather than adding to it, this mode bears a resemblance to Buddhist philosophy, ‘which takes up philosophy,’ writes William Barrett, ‘only as a device to save the philosopher from his conceptual prison; its philosophy is, as it were, a non-philosophy, a philosophy to undo philosophy’ (1965, xvi). Zen, then, is not a philosophy. And neither is it ‘mysticism as the West understands mysticism’ (1965, xvii). Zen writings or sayings aim not to philosophize and are conveyed through strange mystical utterances, negations which give way to nonsensical affirmations. For those who come into the Zen state of mind, these nonsensical affirmations have pointed to the deeper reality of

---

8 The usage of this term throughout the essay can be thought of as a philosophy of undoing and is not to be confused with the non-standard philosophy of François Laruelle.
existence. ‘In the end all language is pointing: we use language to point beyond language, beyond concepts to the concrete,’ writes Barrett (1965, xv). In contrast, Cioran points backwardly beyond language, reverse engineering it into an existential mantra for ego death: ‘Sarvam anityam: All is transitory (Buddha). A formula one should repeat at every hour of the day, at the—admirable—risk of dying of it’ (2012b, 19).

If the failed mystic of Tears and Saints, is, for Cioran, the figure of futility par excellence, then this Zen pessimism, an epigrammatic auto-subtractivism in which futility points to itself via being oneself, becomes essentially recuperative. This pessimist recuperation is paradoxical, given that Cioran goes to great lengths to emphasize absolute futility, but it is by this futility that readers may be able to recuperate nothingness. There is something in futility worth thinking about more fully, and that something, being nothing, recuperates—à la futility qua futility. So the question arises: why have these texts not yet been sucked into the black hole of their own making? It is because they first require readers to pass through the event horizon in order to actualize their nothingness.

In other words, Zen pessimism recuperates failure not in order to redeem the world, but rather to point out more and more of its infinite failures. Cioran writes,

“All is suffering”—modernized, the Buddhist expression runs: “All is nightmare.”

Thereby, nirvana, whose mission now is to end a much more widespread torment, is no longer a recourse reserved to the few but becomes as universal as nightmare itself. (Cioran, 1976, 14)

Whereas Zen Buddhist satori, the nirvanic experience of inner peace, emphasizes the awakened mind as its source, Cioran paradoxically insists (via an oneiric logic of suffering) that only by nightmare comes one’s true awakening. To see the world as nightmare, to hear it playing as the nocturne of pessimism, is not to
know the modern world philosophically, but rather to know it *practically*.

At present, let us emphasize that Cioran does not specifically advocate Zen Buddhist practice, but rather uses Buddhist doctrine to problematize his readers’ relationship to his non-philosophy’s underlying tenets. Suzuki states, for example, that ‘contradiction, negation, or paradoxical statement is the inevitable result of the Zen way of looking at life’ (1965, 120). Zen is a “living fact,” an intuitive means of apprehending truth, and not something to be penned down. On the one hand, Suzuki’s notion of paradox is homologous to Cioran’s aphoristic language of paradox. On the other hand, one finds in Cioran a poetic inversion of Zen, that is, a non-philosophy, but one profusely committed to writing. Consequently, it exacerbates Zen’s limit-conditions to the point of failure. That is to say, his appropriation of Buddhist thought is itself a failure. But failure is ‘always essential,’ writes Cioran, because it ‘reveals us to ourselves, permits us to see ourselves as God sees us’ (1976, 17). For a Zen pessimist, the world does not change, only their perception of it does. It follows that this shift in perception enables one to attain a level of pessimistic lucidity, a state which neither withdraws from, nor adds to, the world’s troubles. ‘One can be proud of what one has done,’ writes Cioran, ‘but one should be much prouder of what one has not done. Such pride has yet to be invented’ (2012b, 81).

Appeals to non-action raise an important question regarding Cioran’s work and its relationship to ethics. In Buddhism, one cannot extricate the epistemological from the ethical, for the ethical is the a priori moment. Buddha stepped onto the path the moment he recognized that others suffer and that their suffering is the suffering of self. Earlier we pointed out that, for Cioran, only in non-being is one capable of not being disappointed. This notion echoes

---

9 As Cioran sees it, ‘In this “great dormitory,” as one Taoist text calls the universe, nightmare is the sole method of lucidity’ (2012a, 19).
the very crux of Buddhism’s commitment to compassion. It is precisely in that moment of realization of non-existence that one recognizes the absolute commitment to others. Here Cioran presents readers with an ethical conundrum. He fails to allot an ethical imperative for compassion and thus fails to assess the ethical implications of this thought. Hence, his invocation of Buddhism is indeed a failure, at least an ethical failure. But being that Cioran’s appeal to non-action serves as a practical vehicle to auto-negation, returning the practitioner to their rightful inexistence, then his work does provide a fascinating pivot point for the critical reception of his work to cross back into the realm of ethics.

The Way of Worst

If there is a lesson of unlearning to be gleaned from Cioran, it is to erase the “fiction of being” that people, dishonestly perpetuating an insidious complicity with their own births, constantly entrust to themselves. Being’s fiction is that it masquerades as non-fiction, that it is the only “reality” that “exists.” One must first awaken to the nightmare in order for the nightmare to provide one’s awakening. The awakening might be sudden, as in the Rinzai account of satori, or it may come over the duration of time, mirroring the Soto school. Or perhaps one ought ‘to go still further than Buddha, to raise oneself above nirvana, to learn to do without it…, to be stopped by nothing, not even by the notion of deliverance, regarding it as a mere way-station, an embarrassment,

---

10 In Dialogues with Scientists and Sages (1986), Renée Weber remarks that ultimate reality in Buddhism is a state that, similar to Kant’s ‘noumenon,’ is ‘beyond human language and thought.’ ‘It is from this level of wholeness,’ she continues, ‘that true compassion derives. Compassion—the central ethical value of Buddhism—is therefore no mere emotion but rather a force that lies embedded in reality itself’ (129).
an eclipse...’ (1976, 207). Such an awakening is therefore a kind of sleeping, a nirvanic reversal of nirvana wherein the pessimist refuses self and world, but also refuses what is beyond self and world. No matter how it comes, his work plants the nightmarish seed of readerly awakening necessary to properly decipher the fictive nature of being. This way of reading, which is a type of pessimist sleuthing or true detection, sets the stage to dismantle the very stage upon which this fiction takes place, reversing the hermeneutic circle into a self-eating or Ouroboric one.

Ultimately, Cioran often avoids going into the realm of ethics. His is an ethics of no one. But this ethics of no one conceals an ethics of the Other. It models the kind of horror-dwelling it takes to create the conditions of possibility in which other individuals, perhaps his readers, can enter into the realm of ethics. For, to dwell in horror necessarily means coming to realize, as if out of nowhere, that being oneself is the root cause of horror in the world. Hence, the critical reception of his work can point to an ethical encounter, even though he may have found one futile. Put yet another way, the lack of ethics in Cioran can be negatively indexed as a pessimal ethical move on his part, which lays the ground (pessum “downward, to the ground,” from PIE ped-yos) for a form of pessimo-mystical social anarchism, a world of no ones who commune by their nothingness.

His readers thus find themselves complicit in an adroit Cioranian paradox: that this practice of auto-negation, selflessness

---

11 Cf. Cioran: ‘If we could sleep twenty-four hours a day, we would soon return to the primordial slime, the beatitude of that perfect torpor before Genesis—the dream of every consciousness sick of itself’ (1976, 212).
12 On the coinage and use of this new term in relation to the study of pessimism, see the recent release entitled True Detection (2014). Schism Books.
13 A Nietzschean move of this sort would thus view utter futility as essentially productive, i.e. in a world with absolutely no hope, there is nothing that can harm anyone any longer.
via pessimism, might bear out in a relinquishment of suffering. The question returns: why read the old curmudgeon Cioran? The courage of the pessimist is to intuitively recognize that there is no hope and to know that the only kind of world to be desired is one inhabited by those who exist by the abundance of their nothingness. Zen pessimism speculatively opens itself to a readership that can dwell in that space on and as its own, a readership, that is to say, of no-mind. In no-mind one is said to know without knowing, act without acting, and do without doing.\(^{15}\) Put simply, for the Zen pessimist to do nothing means to do without doing, by intensely observing without identifying with oneself as the observer and recognizing, in that moment, the presence of infinite others factically suffering with you and because of you. These are readers who, in the commons of nowhere, move in a state of pessimist mushin (No-Mind), and who, in the ultimate form of compassion for one another, ask nothing of each other.\(^{16}\) To practice asking nothing of anyone is also to suffer through the horror of oneself, the “living fact” of worst.

Zen pessimism shows the way to self-erasure by showing us nothing; it’s only maxim, no maxim. To illustrate this point, we can take, for example, a short essay entitled “The Odyssey of Rancor,” when Cioran writes that

\[O\]ur kingdom is that of the “I,” and through the “I” there is no salvation. To exist is to condescend to sensation, hence to self-

\(^{15}\) Cf. the Wu Xin Lun (On No Mind): ‘It is as if one were to see to the end of the day, and still see not, because in the end there was no mind to see. It is as if hearing all day to the end of day, still one hears not, because in the end there was no mind to hear. It is as if one feels all day to the end of the day, and yet feels not, because in the end there was no mind to feel. It is as if one knows all to the end of the day, and still knows not, because in the end there was no mind to know. For no mind is indeed true mind. True mind is indeed no mind’ (Quoted in Saso, 1992, 4-5).

\(^{16}\) This paradox, arising ex nihilo in the mind of the Zen pessimist, points to itself as a double entendre: to ask nothing of anyone, that is, but their nothingness.
affirmation [...] The more we try to wrest ourselves from our ego, the deeper we sink into it. Try as we will to explode it, just when we suppose we have succeeded, there it is, apparently more self-assured than ever; whatever we do to destroy it merely augments its strength and solidarity, as such is its vigor and its perversity that it flourishes still more in affliction than in joy [...] No man stirs without allying himself to the multiple, to appearances, to the “I”. To act is to forfeit the absolute. (1998, 62-3)

The logic of non-action found in this passage is axiomatic: there is no one to be; there never was anything to do; there is no way in because there is no way out. In other words, pessimist non-action resurrects the potential for ontological insurrection: to accept the inexistent call to be no one, what Zen refers to as the selfless self, is simply to return one to the full awareness of their nothingness. Pessimism of this sort claims no mastery over anything; it is non-mastered through its nirvanic reversal of nirvana, the renunciation of enlightenment: "‘Children admit no limits to anything’ they always want to see beyond, to see what there is afterward. But there is no afterward. Nirvana is a limit, the limit. It is liberation, supreme impasse....’ (1976, 175). This pessimistic kōan, a playful but concentrated gesture of language, gives pause: to desire a way out is a limit. Cioran does not offer an escape. Rather, he offers us nothing.

Cioran’s writings supply readers with the negative of writing, the dissemination of the extimacy of his soul. In On the Heights of Despair, Cioran writes, ‘My soul is chaos, how can it be at all? There is everything in me: search and you will find out...in me anything is possible, for I am he who at the supreme moment, in front of absolute nothingness, will laugh’ (1992, 86). This is the mantra of the pessimist, the one who, despite the ineffable magnitude of suffering in the world, stays put, to see it and feel it with an intensity that others do not yet possess, so that they might one day laugh, to suffer absolutely but not to balk, for in this laughter there is absolutely nothing over which to suffer. Speaking impossibly, from there, which is really nowhere, everything is
possible, impossibly speaking, even nothing. Stay put and let Zen pessimism fail you into inexistence. Worst is not a way out. It is the Way.

References

MARVELOUS HARMONY: ON CHRISTINA THE ASTONISHING

Nicola Masciandaro

The ears of mortals are filled with this sound, but they are unable to hear it.

Cicero, *Somnium Scipionis*

In Adam’s voice before he fell there was the sound of every harmony and the sweetness of the whole art in music.

Hildegard of Bingen

There we hear without any sound.

Meister Eckhart
As if echoing in the space between the unhearable sound which fills the body and the incorporeal hearing that takes place without sound, Christina Mirabilis (1150-1224) was known to produce astonishing harmonies in the following manner:

[...] et cum ipsis aliquando [sedendo] loqueretur de Christo, subito et inopinate rapiebatur a spiritu, corpusque ejus velut trochus ludentum puerorum in vertiginem rotabatur, ita quod ex nimia vehementia vertiginis nulla in corpore ejus membrorum forma discerni posset. Cumque diutius sic rotata fuisset, acsi vehementia deficeret, membris omnibus quiescebat; sonabatque proinde inter guttur et pectus ejus, quaedam harmonia mirabilis, quam nemo mortalium vel intelligere posset, vel aliquibus artificiis imitari. Solam flexibilitatem musicae et tonos ille ejus cantu habebat; verba vero melodiae, ut ita dicam, si tamen verba dici possunt, incomprehensibilitrer concrepabant. Nulla interim de ore ejus vel naso vox vel anhelitus spiritalis exibat, sed inter solum pectus et guttur harmonia vocis angelicae resonabat.

Sometimes while she was sitting with them [nuns of St. Catherine’s near Saint-Trond], she would speak of Christ and suddenly and unexpectedly she would be ravished in the spirit and her body would roll and whirl around like a hoop. She whirled around with such extreme violence that the individual limbs of her body could not be distinguished. When she had whirled around for a long time in this manner, it seemed as if she became weakened by the violence of her rolling and all her limbs grew quiet. Then a wondrous harmony sounded between her throat and her breast which no mortal man could understand nor could it be imitated by an artificial instrument. Her song had not only the pliancy and tones of music but also the words—if thus I might call them—sounded together incomprehensibly. The voice or spiritual breath, however, did not come out of her mouth or nose, but a harmony of the angelic voice resounded only from between the breast and the throat. (Thomas De Cantimpré, 1999. III, 35)
It is beautiful that Christina does this—that is, beautiful more in light of the fact that she does it than due to the nature of what she does, however enchanting it sounds. Or better, this harmonic whirling, whereby the saint’s body spins into being a superlative toy of its own divine game, opens a third domain of shimmering depth where what and that become indistinguishable, where what she is doing is that she is and that she is doing it is what she is. To make this sound less loopy (and more), recall the correlative nature of deixis—‘the category within which language refers to its own taking place’ (Agamben, 1991, 25)—and its grounding of mystical discourse: ‘Where should I write? That is the question the organization of every mystic text strives to answer: the truth value of the discourse does not depend on the truth value of its propositions, but on the fact of its being in the very place at which the Speaker speaks.’ (De Certeau, 2000, 199) The ground of musical hearing is likewise deictically turned, as Guerino Mazzola explains in The Topos of Music: ‘The special class of shifter or deictic signs is very important in music . . . Their significance transcends the lexical reality and penetrates the unsayable existence of the system’s user . . . In music deixis, such as emotional signification, is the standard situation.’ (2002, 188 My emphasis) As the twin auto-deictic dimensions of music and mysticism coincide in the principle of speaking-through-muteness or signifying-by-unsaying—consider the human gesture of pointing to something astonishing while covering one’s mouth—so does Christina’s ecstatic spinning in place produce a literally mouthless yet still verbal harmony.\(^1\)

1 The m-resonance across these terms is etymologically significant: `the word [mythos] evidences the ambivalent nature of a primal word. The corresponding verb for mythos is mytheomai, meaning, “to discourse, talk, speak”; its root, mu-, means “to sound”. But another verb of the same root, myein—ambivalent because of the substitution of a short “u”—means “to close”, specifically to close the eyes, the mouth, and wounds. From this root we have Sanskrit mākas (with long vowel), meaning “mute, silent”, and Latin mutus with the same meaning. It recurs in Greek in the words mystes, “the consecrated”, and mysterion, “mysterium”,
I begin, then, with a first response—a response that would
itself be first. Something important is simply in evidence, in motion
with the spontaneous fact of Christina’s moving, as if with equal
suddenness I have caught myself looking at her for longer than she
was even there—an order of reaction to anticipate by echo the
timeless telos of mystical union when the soul realizes, as its says in
*The Mirror of Simple Souls*, ‘where she was before she was.’ (Porete,
1993, 218) From this ground-zero impression it follows, in the aura
of our not possessing real knowledge of the nature of her action,
that something is here actually disclosed—if we can keep to the
simplicity of it—about the beautiful essence of doing, about the
intrinsic worth of action itself. This commentary begins, then, from
the position that the saint’s resonant spiraling is a *standard of
action*, a paradigm of doing, just as her behavior itself is literally
paradigmatic, characterized by ‘the suspension of reference and
normal use’ and is ‘beside itself’ (*para-deiknymi*). (Agamben, 2009,
24). Christina astonishes because she acts ecstatically beside herself
and is beside herself with action. And it is precisely this that makes
her, the person, *not* paradigmatic, not exemplary of her class, but
something unaccountably more special, a saint (from *sacer*, set
apart). The saint is not a person who shows what to do, but
someone who demonstrates what action should be. And it is this
that makes her a most true person, or something that sounds
through itself (*per-sonare*).

and later during the Christian era, gave the characteristic stamp to the concept of
mysticism: speechless contemplation with closed eyes, that is, eyes turned
inward’ (Gebser, 1985, 65). Apophatic language likewise evokes via the unsaid:
‘apophatic language . . . displaces the grammatical object, affirms a moment of
immediacy, and affirms a moment of ontological pre-construction—as in the
paradoxical refrain that in mystical union the soul reverts “to where it was before
it was”. The meaning event is transreferential. Rather than pointing to an object,
apophatic language attempts to evoke in the reader an event that is—in its
movement beyond structures of self and other, subject and object—structurally
analogous to the event of mystical union’ (Sells, 1996, 10).
Wishing to become a stethoscope or speculative ear placed upon Christina’s breast, something that can hear the hidden voice of her heart, this commentary will perform a hermeneutics of auscultation proper to the interface between mystical vision and the body as instrument of impossible sound. Our task is to see, in the mirror of this whirling harmony, what Christina hears. More specifically, rather than treating the saint’s behavior as an occult phenomenon, religious miracle, or hagiographic story, I will try to draw from its movement a vision of intelligent action, according to the following definitional criteria:

1) Action is 

specular. It is the inherently delightful mirroring forth of the hidden nature and reality of the agent whose being is thus amplified. ‘For in all action what is principally intended by the agent, whether he acts by natural necessity or voluntarily, is the disclosure or manifestation of his own image. Whence it happens that every agent, insofar as he is such, takes delight. For, because everything that is desires its own being and in acting the being of an agent is in a certain way amplified, delight necessarily follows.’

Such is the activity of the whole universe, which is nothing but the self-intensifying specular instrument whereby Reality or God, ‘Who was originally unconscious, now becomes oblivious of oblivion itself and gets the real and final answer to His original First Word, “Who am I?”, as “I am God”.’ (Meher Baba, 1973, 139)

2) Action is intelligent when it is true to the universal task of life, which is to free itself from itself, absolutely: ‘All action except that which is intelligently designed to attain God-realisation, creates a binding for consciousness. It is not only an expression of

---

2 “Nam in omni actione principaliter intenditur ab agente, sive necessitate nature sive voluntarie agat, propriam similitudinem explicare. Unde fit quod omne agens, in quantum huiusmodi, delectatur; quia, cum omne quod est appetat suum esse, ac in agendo agentis esse quodammodo amplietur, sequitur de necessitate delectatio, quia delectatio rei desiderate semper annexa est.” (Alighieri, 1965, I.13.2–3)
accumulated ignorance, but a further addition to that accumulated ignorance . . . All life is an effort to attain freedom from self-created entanglement. It is a desperate struggle to undo what has been done under ignorance.’ (Meher Baba, 1967, I.112-3.)

3) Intelligent action is *musical*, in the sense of being a movement perfected in the play of a beneficial release of the formless into form. ‘To penetrate into the essence of all being and significance and to release the fragrance of that inner attainment for the guidance and benefit of others, by expressing, in the world of forms, truth, love, purity and beauty—this is the sole game which has intrinsic and absolute worth. All other happenings, incidents and attainments in themselves can have no lasting importance.’ (Meher Baba, 1967, II.110)

In sum, intelligent action is the musical revelation of Truth. For as Cioran observes in *Tears and Saints*, ‘Only music gives definite answers.’ (1995, 80)

To effect this, my commentary will compose itself by considering the three aspects of its principal idea (specularity, intelligence, musicality) in correlation to the stages of Christina’s movement (speaking, spinning, sounding), understanding that all aspects are perforce also present in each stage and that the whole event, like the anagogic sense of scripture which gives a “foretaste of paradise”, is mystically fourth—a participation in what stands beyond the triune count of time. The hidden, unrepresented medium of Christina’s movement is her own mystical listening, our listening to which—hearing her hearing—will both explain her astonishing behavior and articulate the nature of true action. The appropriateness of this method of understanding Christina’s movement is underscored by its legibility in terms of the universal procession of love through gross, subtle, and mental spheres in the respective forms of lust, longing, and resignation. First, she follows her pleasure beyond its inherent insufficiency into vehement

---

3 See Meher Baba, 1967, III. 175-80.
passion and ecstasy. Second, she spins toward union with what flesh cannot possess. Third, she is quieted in surrender to the will that speaks through her. This, in turn, is the pattern action must follow, that it will follow, when one listens to it.

Speaking

*et cum ipsis aliquando [sedendo] loqueretur de Christo, subito*  
*et inopinate rapiebatur a spiritu* [Sometimes while she was sitting with them, she would speak of Christ and suddenly and unexpectedly she would be ravished in the spirit]

To speak of Christ is to reflect upon the human mirror of God, upon the perfection that speculates *you* infinitely beyond itself, to recognize the God-Man as one’s mirror. It is to voice a universal cognizance of life as ordered towards its immanent beyond, in continuity with action as primary recognition. As Meher Baba says, ‘man’s cognizance is **life** in man, and man’s life is made cognizant through the **actions** of man.’ (1973, 93 original emphasis) So Clare of Assisi tells one to gaze within this mirror continually, *iugiter*—a word whose compound root (*aiu-guei*) literally and nearly ouroborically (*life/age/eternity-life*) signifies long/eternal life and whose semantic association with flowing water conveys the principle of that which is always streaming beyond itself. She writes, ‘Look upon [*intuere*] this mirror [*speculum*] every day, O queen and spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually [*iugiter*] study [*speculare*] your face in it.’ (*Francis and Clare: The Complete Works, 1982, 204*) This looking is more than meditation upon perfection’s attributes, for these—indicated by Clare as poverty, humility, and love—are only the “parameters of this mirror” and not “that Mirror” itself [*ipsum speculum*]. (*Francis and Clare, 1982, 204-205.*).

To reflect upon Christ means, generically, to see from/towards the recognition of life that the continuity of action itself is, to address the living work of action, the life one is really doing in the midst of all activity. To re-cognize Christ is to speculate the speculum, to study the mirror that becomes manifest in the
midst of self-reflection vis-à-vis God, i.e. the unbounded Reality that one has clearly not realized. Reality is negatively specular, an open secret hidden in plain light like the dark ground or silvering of the mirror, which in Turkish is perfectly named *sir* (secret). It is the still, true, and unseen speculum wherein life appears to itself, what Ruusbroec calls ‘the sparkling stone [of] Christ . . . a spotless mirror in which all things have their life.’ (1985, 60)

The framework of such speculation of the God-Man as universal mirror is more graspable (and less) if we bracket off the anthropic incarnational model and consider instead the idea of the Christ or Avatar as the universal yet individuated live appearance of God vis-à-vis all forms, the species of all species or spice of the spice of life. As Meher Baba says, ‘This Divinity pervades the Illusion in effect and presents Itself in innumerable varieties of forms—gross, subtle and mental.’

Accordingly, he often described himself and the function of God-realized individuals in specular terms: ‘He who knows everything displaces nothing. To each one I appear to be what he thinks I am.’ (1957, 3)

‘The mirror is changeless,

---

4 ‘It is very difficult to grasp the entire meaning of the word “Avatar”. For mankind it is easy and simple to declare that the Avatar is God and that it means that God becomes man . . . It would be more appropriate to say that the Avatar is God and that God becomes man for all mankind and simultaneously God also becomes a sparrow for all sparrows in Creation, an ant for all ants in Creation, a pig for all pigs in creation, a particle of dust for all dusts in Creation, a particle of air for all airs in Creation, etc., for each and everything that is in Creation. When the five *Sadgurus* effect the presentation of the Divinity of God into Illusion, this Divinity pervades the Illusion in effect and presents Itself in innumerable varieties of forms—gross, subtle and mental. Consequently in *Avataric* periods God mingles with mankind as man and with the world of ants as an ant, etc. But the man of the world cannot perceive this and hence simply says that God has become man and remains satisfied with this understanding in his own world of mankind’ (Meher Baba, 1973, 268-269).

5 ‘What you see in the mirror is your exact likeness—it is not the likeness of the mirror! . . . however I appear to you, it is only your own reflected image. I am always still and unchangeable — like the wall or the mirror’ (Meher Baba, quoted in *Lord Meher*, 316).
immovable and always steady. I, too, am like a mirror. The change you observe is in you—not in me. I am always so constant and still that it cannot be imagined.’\(^6\) Christ is the appearance of the universal mirror, the face through which Reality looks back into you, photographing in a kind of impossible flash the invisible fact that you are no more of the world than it: ‘They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world’ (John, 17:16). The bare phenomenal truth of these words is explained by Michel Henry: ‘Just like Christ, as a man I am not of the world in the radical phenomenological sense that the appearing out of which my phenomenological flesh is made, and which constitutes my true essence, is not the appearing of the world. This is not due to the effect of some supposed credo, philosophical or theological; it is rather because the world has no flesh, because in the “outside-itself” of the world no flesh and no living are possible.’ (2003, 101) Or as Eckhart (2009, 131) says, ‘I once thought—it was not long

---

\(^6\) Meher Baba, quoted in *Lord Meher*, 1062. ‘The God you are in search of is not up in the sky. He is here — on this plane! I am That. I am in you, so search for me within yourself. I am not in any mosque, temple or church. You may claim that this is impossible—totally impossible. All right, then tell me do your eyes see yourself? They see the world, but they do not see you. For that you have to use a mirror. Similarly, through the mirror of love, you have to see yourself. And the person who has the mirror is the Perfect Master and no one else. Only a Perfect Master has the mirror of love’ (Meher Baba, quoted in *Lord Meher*, 006). ‘I remain the same Eternal One and am in all; therefore you all are God, and yet you feel so helpless. Why is this? Because there is a sort of veil that veils you from God. You yourself are the veil, and it is not possible for you to lift it — this veil which is yourself. Your eyes, which are quite small, can see a vast panorama and all the objects contained in it, but they cannot see themselves. To see themselves, a mirror is required. So, when the Mirror of my Grace descends, your own True Self is revealed in an instant’ (*Lord Meher*, 4092). ‘Being the total manifestation of God in human form, He is like a gauge against which man can measure what he is and what he may become. He trues the standard of human values by interpreting them in terms of divinely human life. He is interested in everything but not concerned about anything’ (Meher Baba, 1967, III.14-5).
ago—that I am a man is something other men share with me . . . but that I am, that belongs to no man but myself, not to a man, not to an angel, not even to God except insofar as I am one with Him.’ The fact of one’s life simply is superessential and divine, beyond assertion and denial. So Meher Baba says, ‘Philosophers, atheists and others may affirm or refute the existence of God, but as long as they do not deny their very existence, they continue to testify their belief in God; for I tell you with divine authority that God is Existence, eternal and infinite. He is everything. For man, there is only one aim in life, and that is to realize his unity with God.’ (Lord Meher, 4055) One may distract oneself with correlational praise or complaint about the situation, or lose oneself to a panoply of purposes, but there is no real argument with Reality—that which freely exists on the order of divine whim and with which there can be no substantial relation other than individual eternal union. Reality is itself that which wills it, the groundless ground of everything that cannot not will it, from whose hearing grows the mystic desire ‘to be everything [tout].’ (Bataille, 1988, xxxii) As Julian of Norwich hears God tell her: ‘I am ground of thy beseeching.’ (1993, 154)

Christina whirls in the place where her ears have touched the ground, in a body that hears the hidden word whose secret grows into the very spiral of one’s ears: ‘Now there was a word spoken to me in private [verbum absconditum], and my ears by stealth as it were received the veins of its whisper [venas susurri]’ (Job, 4:12). A hearing through which one begins to touch—a touching through which one begins to hear . . . the mirror of the Real. Commenting on this whisper, John of the Cross explains the object of such mystical auscultation as the “whistling of love-stirring breezes” [el silbo de los aires amorosos]. He writes, ‘just as two things are felt in the breeze (the touch and the whistling or sound), so in this communication . . . two things are experienced: knowledge and a feeling of delight . . . The delight of hearing is much

7 Spiritual Canticle 14/15.12, in John of the Cross, 1991, 530.
greater than that of feeling because the sound in the sense of hearing is more spiritual.’ (Ibid) Likewise, we may conceive of the saint’s spinning as a kind of spiral organ dance, the corporeal repercussion of spiritually becoming ear, just as the *semazen* or whirling dervish follows from the contemplative practice of *sema*, which simply means “listening”.

Mystical auscultation is a matter of becoming all ears for the Reality that must be, that is, right *there*—it being that through which anything is perceived at all. So for Bonaventure, the divine being, in its radically immanent and inconceivable simplicity, is the *first* thing one always sees and so continually overlooks: ‘How remarkable, then, is the blindness of the intellect which does not take note of that which it sees first, and without which it can know nothing. . . . Accustomed as it is to the darkness of things and to the phantasms of sensible objects, when the mind looks at the light of the highest being, it seems to see nothing. And it does not understand that this darkness itself is the highest illumination of our mind.’ (2002, 115) To sense this first image is to listen *through* overlooking, so that mystical auscultation, to add a twist to the classic Vedantic analogy, sounds like listening to how the snake—i.e. the rope (ultimate reality) which one cannot without illumination not perceive as a snake (manifold universe)—sounds like a rope.

Christina’s spiritual rapture, the spiraling of this “little Christ”, is a flying falling from and into the mirror that her speech, in the secret of its hearing, reflects. How does hearing mystically mediate between her speaking and spinning? What initiates her sudden rapture? How does this spontaneous transition touch the nature of true action? The answer to these questions lies in the inherent negative infinity of the will, whose weird hyper-lonesome nature—answerable only by the infinite—is to mutate and accelerate itself by means of its own privation. This is why mystical tradition generally orders affect above intellect, heart over head (and practice before theory), as that which alone can speculatively
show the way or lead the mind beyond itself.\(^8\) What makes it impossible for Christina to remain speaking is simply the hidden negativity or occluded insufficiency of the pleasure of speculation. More literally: to speak of Christ means to see anew that speaking of Christ is not enough—not to mention the inevitable intuition that to realize that Truth one must at last silence oneself. As Eckhart says of salvation or eternal birth, ‘What does it avail me that this birth is always happening, if it does not happen in me? That it should happen in me is what matters.’ (2009, 29) The grace of Christina’s rapture is something that arrives desperately from the darkness of reflection, when reflection, due to the very truth of its own delight, becomes insufficient—an insufficiency that is not predicated upon lack but an unassimilable surplus, namely, the fact that what one is speculating is also looking at you. ‘The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.’ (Eckhart, 2009, 298) Such is the beautifully black mirror-pupil of bewilderment that sends one into spin, as per the Sufi understanding of *hayra* (bewilderment) in

\(^8\) ‘[T]he Psalmist says, *Taste and see.* “Taste” refers to the *affectus* of love; “See” refers to the intellect’s cogitation and mediation. Therefore one ought first to surge up in the movement of love *before* intellectually pondering . . . For this is the general rule in mystical theology: one ought to have practice before theory, that is, one ought to be well practiced in the heart before one has knowledge of the things said about it’ (Hugh Of Balma, 1997, 71). ‘No one is disposed in any way to the divine contemplations which lead to ecstasies [*excessus*] of the mind without being, like Daniel, *a person of desires* [*vir desideriorum*]’ (St. Bonaventure, 2002, translation modified). ‘It is futile to try to glean knowledge of true values by exercise of the mind alone. Mind cannot tell you which things are worth having, it can only tell you how to achieve the ends accepted from non-intellectual sources. In most persons the mind accepts ends from the promptings of wants, but this means denial of the life of the spirit. Only when the mind accepts its ends and values from the deepest promptings of the heart does it contribute to the life of the spirit. Thus mind has to work in co-operation with the heart; factual knowledge has to be subordinated to intuitive perceptions; and heart has to be allowed full freedom in determining the ends of life without any interference from the mind. The mind has a place in practical life, but its role begins after the heart has had its say’ (Meher Baba, 1967, I.140).
connection with ḥīra (whirlpool)—the perplexity of a swirling reality inseparable from one’s own being. Ecstasy is never a matter of escape, but of the feeling of complicity with something that is too real. So bewilderment—to be rigorously distinguished from intellectual confusion—is, as Ibn Arabi explains, the dead-end exit which leads all the way to the Absolute: ‘rational speculation leads to bewilderment [hayra] and theophany leads to bewilderment. There is nothing but a bewildered one. There is nothing exercising properties but bewilderment. There is nothing but Allah.’ (2005, 64)

What separates mystic from philosopher on this point is that

9 “‘The [Universal] Order is perplexity, and perplexity is agitation and movement, and movement is life’ [al-‘amr ḥīra wa-l-ḥīra qalaq wa haraka wa-l-ḥaraka ḥayāt]. I read the Arabic word َحيرة here as ḥīra not hayra following Ibn ‘Arabī’s intention to identify “perplexity” and “whirlpool”. “perplexity” can be read as ḥīra not hayra, Arabic dictionaries tell us, and “whirlpool” (ḥīra) is one of the favourite images of universal life and order in Ibn ‘Arabī’s texts. The ḥā’ir “perplexed” human being finds himself in constant movement. He cannot gain a foothold at any point, he is not established anywhere. This is why Ibn ‘Arabī says that he is “perplexed in the multiplication of the One”: this “multiplication” is not just epistemological, it is ontological as well, and the perplexed human being is moving in the whirlpool of life and cosmic Order and at the same time realises that he is at that movement.’ (Smirnov, 22-23).

Chittick explicates the concept: ‘To find God is to fall into bewilderment (hayra), not the bewilderment of being lost and unable to find one’s way, but the bewilderment of finding and knowing God and of not-finding and not-knowing Him at the same time. Every existent thing other than God dwells in a never-never land of affirmation and negation, finding and losing, knowing and not-knowing. The difference between the Finders and the rest of us is that they are fully aware of their own ambiguous situation. They know the significance of the saying of the first caliph Abū Bakr: “Incapacity to attain comprehension is itself comprehension.”’ (1989, 3-4) So for Heidegger, bewilderment characterizes the intellectual experience of truth: ‘That experience [‘the fundamental experience of Being and Time’] consists in an ever-increasing but perhaps also – in a few places – self-clarifying bewilderment in the face of this one event: In the history of Western thought, from its inception, the Being of beings has indeed been thought, but the truth of Being as Being remains unthought; not only is such truth denied as a possible experience for thinking, but Western though, as metaphysics,
the former realizes in the action of her own being what the latter at best *thinks* to do, namely, ‘project unreason into things themselves, and discover in our grasp of facticity the veritable … *intuition* of the absolute.’ (Meillassoux, 2008, 82)

The positive insufficiency out of which Christina’s ecstasy spirals in bewilderment is structurally identical—if I listen rightly to her hearing—to that which is felt in all limited forms of love, of which lust is the most familiar: ‘The unambiguous stamp of insufficiency which lust invariably bears is in itself a sign that it is an incomplete and inadequate expression of something deeper, which is vast and unlimited . . . In this manner the irrepressible voice of the infinity of God’s love indirectly asserts the imperative claims of its unexpressed but unimpaired reality.’ (Meher Baba, 1967, III. 177) Christina’s ecstasy flows alive from an unreasonable but no less scientific courage to venture the voidal ground of her own will and exit the circle of foreseeable pleasure. So the vector of true action is corrective of the self-repetitive will to gratification, precisely by virtue of being the real order of pleasure seeking, one that listens to delight’s essential specularity and touches the profounder promise of its own failing. Likewise for speculation, which is also a delightful act. True speculation is that which ecstatically exit-enters through the factical hole of its own insufficiency. For to do so is the very tune of loving intelligence.

_to be continued_

**References**


expressly though unwittingly conceals the occurrence of this refusal.’(Heidegger, 1987, III. 189-90)


The Cyclops and Ocular Origination: A Study in Three Phases
Part I: The Eye-Axis

Constanza Bizraelli

The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the color of a beryl [bright gold/yellow]: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel. When they went, they went upon their four sides: and they turned not when they went. As for their rings [rims], they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four. And when the living creatures went, the wheels went by them: and when the living creatures were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up. Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.

Ezekiel 1:15ff (Spoke 4, Cycle 2)

De todas las muertes/ escoge la tuya propia
Que será la más breve y ocurrirá en todas partes.

Mario Montalbetti
Introduction

The English word “Cyclop” etymologically derives from the union of two Greek terms: “Κύκλωψ and ὤψops. The former designates the notion of a wheel, circle or just the figure of roundness, while the latter means eye. The simplest translation of the term would be: “Round eye”. However, it is possible to find in the etymological construction of the word (if we combine it with an analysis that focuses on the archetypes in play) the turn towards a conception of wheel structured via one of its archetypal antecedents; Rota¹, an ancient term rooted in the Hermetic and Cabbalistic traditions. The notion of Rota, approached from a geometric angle only, can be decomposed into two fundamental symbolisms; on the one hand the symbolism of cosmic motion, that turns concrete on the cyclic patterns that structure the natural and metaphysical worlds of various belief systems and mysticism (Hermeticism and early Judaism, to name a few), and on the other

¹ “Rota” or “Taro” is an ancient Kabbalistic formula that has been extensively interpreted as the expression of the natural absolute, a variant to the Tetragrammaton, with the additional components of dynamism and motion. It is also associated with the Indian archetype of the Mandala. According to Guillaume Postel (Absconditorum Clavis, 1899), the symbolism of ROTA is intimately connected with the idea of Man becoming God, it is therefore the neutralization of the binary HOMO-DEUS by means of the archetype of rotation: HOMO-ROTA-DEUS: ‘[A]nd again, it must be taken in the DEUS-HOMO-ROTA context. As such, the Cosmos itself is a rotating sphere consisting of spheres within spheres, or, metaphorically, a wheel.’ (ROTA/RATO : Key to Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World) On a different level of the interpretation, Mouni Sadhu points out when analysing the Tarot archetype of the wheel: ‘On the plane of nature we have to do with the pitiless Wheel of fortune, otherwise called “the World’s Mill”. This Wheel grinds everything, assimilates everything, and prepares everything. It raises one thing, and lowers another, as a true ROTA, leaving nothing immovable, except its AXLE which bears the name of: the possibility of existence of illusion, which is MATTER.’ (1970, 192-193).
hand the symbolism of wholeness, as Jung pointed out when analysing the round-shaped archetype of the Mandala\(^2\) in terms of the psychological coagulation of the totality of the self\(^3\) and as what symbolically stems from ‘the contemplation into the absolute state [of consciousness]’(1968, 357). For the purpose of this study, we will be inclined to think the Greek root: “Κύκλα” in a direction that is more oriented to the idea of cycle, rather than to the formal aspect of the figure of roundness. A few examples of the presence of this linguistic root in other ancient Greek words might be, for instance: Κυκλιοδιδασκαλος: that stands for a music teacher of circular choruses, or dithyrambic poet, or Κύκλας that stands for “circular, moving in a circle, or recurrent”. Again, if we focus on the idea of roundness in terms of movement rather than form, and in terms of temporality rather than spatiality, a new conclusion might be formed. If we pay attention to the fact that this idea, within the scheme of the mythological archetype of the Cyclop, becomes entwined with vision (vision in terms of action), we could infer that here the sensorial faculty of vision is rendered as a circular exploratory gesture, which coming out of itself, but at the same time carrying its primitive self throughout the action and the modifications of the agent that this action implies, describes a curved trajectory.

\(^2\) ‘The Sanskrit word mandala means, “circle” in the ordinary sense of the word... The “squaring of the circle” is one of the many archetypal motifs, which form the basic patterns of our dreams and fantasies. But it is distinguished by the fact that it is one of the most important of them from the functional point of view. Indeed, it could even be called the archetype of wholeness. Because of this significance, the “quaternity of the One” is the schema for all images of God, as depicted in the visions of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Enoch, and as the representation of Horus with his four sons also shows.’ (Jung, 1968, 388)  
\(^3\) ‘Although the centre is represented by an innermost point, it is surrounded by a periphery containing everything that belongs to the self- the paired opposites that make up the total personality.’(Jung, 1968, 257)
Vision is an originating faculty; it sprouts and grows at some point and develops along the development of its agent. The ocular entails a germ; it is grounded on the primeval state of being-germ. The germ-eye sprouts and comes out of itself in order to see. The Cyclop, cycle-eye, or wheel-eye, according to our reading, would etymologically and archetyposophically describe nothing more than this, the journey or trajectory of vision. If vision is what germinates, within the scheme of the Cyclop it does it following a circular pattern. Cyclop here would be framed within the practice of an act that is tacitly implied in the constitution of the eye and that would point towards a fundamental condition of vision in its being vision. It would hint towards the presence of another verb, which apart from executing vision would predicate a parallel action, the cyclic action; the action of turning or spinning.

Let's consider the figure of the eye as that of the sun, which spins and gives light simultaneously. According to a kyklop reading, if the eye (in an abstract sense) is what sees, it is also what turns and what spins. The action of turning is not a secondary action predicated upon the basis of seeing, but it is (it belongs) with seeing, since the very beginning. In a similar reading, Arthur Bernard Cook, in his book about Zeus, compares the eye of the Cyclops with ‘the shining orb of the sun’. Following the line of this interpretation, an analysis of the Cyclop in these

---

4 It is originating in the sense that it originates, that it has origin.
5 The use of this term will be explained on the following section of this paper.
6 From kyklop: cyclop
7 According to Cook the archetype of the sun as a revolving wheel finds its perfect correspondence with the notion of eye and particularly with the archetype of the Cyclop, bearer of a single round eye: ‘Who or what was the national light-god before the advent of the Greek Apollon? I am disposed to think that he was, or became... the monstrous form known to the Greeks as the Kyklops. (1964, I, 302). ‘A Greek of the classical period at least might speak of the sun as a revolving wheel and yet credit tales of the kyklopes and the cheirogástores, though logically the former should have forced him to identify the disk with the eye of a giant and
terms might show how the action of seeing travels outside of its origin, departing from the threshold founded at its emergence, at its germ-phase, in order to inevitably return to this point. Thus, the awakening of vision would be both an initiation in the practice of spinning and an embodiment of the orb, of the cycle that informs the symbolic constitution of the eye. The Cycle-becoming of vision might be framed at this point as an inherent condition of possibility for the journey of vision. We will denominate this journey or trajectory as the *cyclesis* of vision.

The term *cyclesis* is structured upon the union of the Greek “*kyklos*” which as we’ve said previously, stands for circular or cyclic, and the suffix “*sis*” which is related to action. It can be either simple or transformative action. Therefore “*cyclesis*” could be read as “the cyclic action” or as “the action of becoming cyclic”. It is important to consider that the nuptials of the ideas of rotation and vision might indicate that an abstract teleology of vision (if there was such thing) is rooted on the faculty’s ability to witness and experience its own source/origin at some point; an operation, which would be impossible without the generation of a scission between the eye and its origin, and therefore, the production of an ultimate duality in the seer.

The wheel-eye that comes out of its origin, abandons the intimacy of its emergence in order to exile itself, describing a curved trajectory by means of this exile, which will lead it to the same place where it emerged, to its point of origination. Only this way, would the eye ever be capable to see, witness and ultimately *know* its own origin. Only this way is the eye able to execute its singular action upon the source of this same action. Also, as we apply the metaphor of exile to the case of the eye’s journey, a second archetype will be automatically generated, which is the figure of the *inevitable return*. This will appear as a consequence of

the latter should have called up the image of a monster’s circling hands.’(1964, I, 316)
the formal aspect of the ocular trajectory, which when framed within the symbolic scheme of the Cyclop, presents itself as a cycle. Finally, the trajectory of the eye, will as well show how in the very witnessing of the source, at the end of its kyclip journey, the point of origination would necessarily have to be re-discovered as an otherness; as a former intimate twin that the distance of the journey has contracted into a distant, inassimilable and incisively cruel double.

The figure of circularity speaks cruelty as it stretches towards the outside of the ocular origin, towards what the eye opposes to its own origin. Because cruelty is the base figure of the actions perpetuated upon a strangeness towards what was supposed to be, of all relations possible, the most intimate. The intimacy of the ocular origin is never experienced through vision at the moment of the emergence of the faculty. The eye emerges unaware of its constituent directionality and requires a second substance to enable the intimacy with itself and to provide the evidence of itself for itself. Doubling itself, it cultivates the grounds of copula. The eye needs a second nature to make possible the apprehension of itself, a mirroring nature.

The stretching of circularity (cyclesis) towards the outsidity of an originating substance, reaches a point of aloofness at which the germ becomes a stranger to its own origin. Only at this crucial point, is mystical illumination (universal love), or individual love possible, for it is the point at which the maximum stretching from the origin takes place, and where an exact geometric opposition

---

8 Within the scheme of this analysis, the notion of copula is grounded as the outcome of the undoing of the initial duplicity (in this case: eye/outside) by means of the geometric figure of opposition. However this is an undoing that is rooted in a place (topos), and which correspondent event should not be equated with a pre-original state.

9 Again, considering that we are thinking within the geometric scheme of roundness.
enables the mobilization of the sexual drives of copula, sublimated in this case in the abstract solvent that constitutes the figure of love. The figure of love as that of cruelty, is a product of the circular ousidity (expansion of oneself + remoteness from one’s core) of the germ that has become other, and in this sense it is an outcome of the perversion of the initial intimacy of the origin liquefied in itself before its cyclesis (before its becoming cycle). Love indicates a movement of attraction towards the source and an anticipated merging with the origin, while cruelty stems from the repulsion to the source and a drive towards the suspension of cyclesis. The amorous depth of the origin is present at birth or emergence, however unreachable at this stage to the nascent seer, and then mediated by ousidity in the figure of death and its warm anticipation, love.

Now, leaving the figures of cruelty, love and ousidity aside for further discussion later, and coming back to the binary exile-return, it is relevant to point out that the inevitable return given by the symbolic frame of the Cyclop, might usually (when taken into the realm of myth) stand upon the narrative and existential categories of “fate” or “destiny”. This is a consequence of the circular structure of the trajectory of the earlier exile, which allows no diversions from the original route of the exploratory gesture of vision and thus, necessarily returns to the same place where it started. This study will open a speculative path along this abstract trajectory of vision, along its phases of origin/emergence, alienation/ exile/duplicity, into the extended plane of the curved becoming of its exile, and finally into the return and witnessing of the origin.

**Methodology: Archetyposophy**

Throughout this study, the ideas of rotation and vision briefly introduced in the previous paragraphs will be further exposed and explored departing from the symbolic construction of
the mythic one-eyed creature Cyclop, which will be used as a platform for speculative archetyposophical analysis, where the archetype in play will be employed both as a horizon of speculation and a limit.

In Archetyposophy, the *mythologem*\(^{10}\) or archetype\(^{11}\) is used as a filter through which the theoretical operator extracts vivid and actual content in a relational and synthetic manner. The archetype plays the role of a *synthesizer of contents* between the operator and the external matters of thought. Here, the symbolic structure of a mythologem is framed as a filter prior to the thinking of any existent or imaginary category of content, working almost as an eye. The mythologem plays the role of a second eye transposed to the original eye, bearing a particular light that serves to illuminate certain obscured areas of thought. This way it unveils new content, rooted both in the contemporary realities that surround the archetyposophical analysis-gaze, and in the depths of the symbolic infrastructures of mythology.

Archetypes are, as Karoly Kerenyi points out, ground principles, patterns or types within the depths of the plane of origination.\(^{12}\) They constitute the primeval ground necessary for the emergence and contraction of any substance, or arrangement of substances into their further worldly dispositions. Throughout the development of this study, we will be inclined to think these primordial patterns as if they were something similar to accents.

\(^{10}\) Term used by Karoly Kerenyi to denominate the monads of mythology, or archetypes. See Jung and Kerenyi, 2002, *Introduction*.

\(^{11}\) Eliade, who also uses the term, writes: ‘I was using the term with reference to Plato and Saint Agustine. I give it the sense of exemplary model, revealed in myth and re-actualized through ritual.’ (Eliade [1978] quoted in Spineto, [2008, 368]) On the same subject, Eliade writes: ‘Man could escape from anything, except for the archetypal intuitions created at the very moment in which he has become aware of his position in the cosmos.’ (Eliade [1990] quoted in Spineto, N [2008, 369])

\(^{12}\) Kerenyi writes: ‘Mythology gives a ground, provides a foundation.’ (2002, 8).
The ancient Greek term “ἀρχέτυπος” stands as the union of the terms: “ἀρχή” (origin, principle, foundation) and “τύπος” (pattern or type). These ground principles, discursively allocated within narrative coagulations of sense; such as: myths, legends, parables and folk tales (to name a few examples), provide grounds to a vast variety of belief systems and mythologies. They probably constitute, as we have mentioned before, an infrastructure, which correspondent reach extends through time and historical events to the sensitive and mineral depth of the internal cohesion that informs contemporary culture\textsuperscript{13}.

Archetyposophy is the speculative movement of thought at the very limits of the archetype and within the symbolic entrails of its own plasma. It works as a platform for synthesis and as fountain of analogies, relations and sophic shortcuts before, after or in-reason. It is a reflection about the ground, carried out with the same ground-material that informs it. Archetyposophy, as a speculative initiative, departs from an in-groundness of thought, where abstraction is not alienation from the concrete components of thinking, but a rooting in the depths of the foundations of this concreteness.

Let’s consider the event of knowledge as a process so immediate as vision; let’s consider the event of knowledge in terms of the execution of a particular gaze. In Archetyposophy, the processes of thinking and knowing work in a similar fashion to the activity of seeing, in a plane that treasures the nuptials between irreducible intuition and logical structure.

**The Eye-Axis**

The eye alone, separated from the idea of the cycle-eye (Cyclop), or the ocular in its origin, could be described in its early

\textsuperscript{13} Eliade writes: ‘The conscious repetition of given paradigmatic gestures reveals an original ontology’ (1985, 5)
development as that which constellates a simultaneity of processes around itself; moving processes, streams, accents, elements, textures and forces, which are drawn to its nascent germ or ocular ἀρχή, in a similar fashion to a whirlwind or eddy.

At this early stage, the germ\textsuperscript{14} of the eye allocated at the threshold of its own emergence, endures its first transmutation into what could be designated as “place”. The *topos*\textsuperscript{15} of the newborn eye is an outcome of its own craving for continuity. For the germ, which rests at the new place of its emergence, the figure of the axis is what informs and maintains it unspent\textsuperscript{16} in its singularity, opening up the senses of stability, perspective and consequently location. Motion’s condition of possibility is a primeval fixity that enables repetition, because repetition is only possible if its object remains the same.

The ocular, at the threshold of its origin craves for dynamism and continuity, as a wheel that having indulged in the first millimetres of the practice of turning, feels inclined to continue turning. The passive eye does not ask to see. In its origin, or in the becoming solid of its internal cohesion, it only receives-witnesses the novelty of the outside as a fluid sum of events. However, at this primitive stage, this witnessing is not mediated by anything, instead it is the bare face of the eye’s singularity, informed by the primal accent of its formation, that which is exposed to the turbulence of an immense *something-somewhere* outside. In this early exposure, there is no possible assimilation of the outsider whole by the eye, or of any of its parts. There is not such thing as a possible contraction of the external substance into parts yet. There is only the sense of a

\textsuperscript{14} The term “germ” is as well used by Kerenyi to address the idea of origin: ‘At the point where the abyss-like ἀρχή of the germ opens, the world itself breaks in. The world itself speaks in the images of origination that stream out of it.’ (2002, 12)

\textsuperscript{15} From the ancient Greek τόπος: place

\textsuperscript{16} This is necessary for the germ of the eye to remain unspent in its being eye, instead of becoming ontologically disembodied by the dynamic morphological fluidity of the plane of origination.
bare witnessing, a face that is mono-directed to a centrifugal whole, incapable of turning back, of undoing its constitution. Face equals irremediable identity, irremediable vector, impossible undoing the constitution of self, of face, of directionality. Face is the coagulated impossibility of being other, or of being everything once one has a face, an eye. A face bears the solidity of cohesion, and therefore directionality and accent. A face is a monad insofar as it constitutes a solid unity. In relation to this, Karoly Kerenyi writes: ‘A monad means an inability to see otherwise, a possession in Frobenius sense.’ (2002, 27)

Perhaps this is why omnipresence sacrifices faces and heads, its condition of possibility is beheading, sacrificing this way the mono-directionality of faces and of eyes. Following this, we could as well think the figure of the omnipresent saint or mystic as the operator of a second cyclesis, namely the embodiment of the archetype of the sunflower; featuring a gaze that was capable of turning from its own constitution in order to become other gazes, other axles, other perspectives. Faces, in general, are incapable of turning back from their being-that-singular-face that looks that way or the other. Coming back to the eye, it is clear that what informs the singularity of the ocular origin is precisely the solidity of its constitution and internal cohesion; this is what ultimately enables it to see one way or another. The origin of the eye is the singularity of a specific perspective. We would like to denominate the early stage of bare-witnessing we were describing in the previous paragraphs as the eye-axis. Perhaps a Cyclops folktale from Lesbos might illuminate our point about the self and the face:

---

17 The figure of the sunflower might depict in an archetypal way and sticking to the scheme of roundness, the possibility of the ubiquity of topoi. It would present a vacant topoi, that still framed within the scheme of “a place” or “object”, but deprived of its inner content, would cruise the outside through a multiplicity of faces (and the subsequent copulas between places and each of the unities that constitute the plurality of faces given by this cyclic ubiquity).
Once there was a good man whose fortune was in the sun. He went out on the hill, and saw three thieves who had killed a goat. They told him to cook it. Well, as they say, “a thief among thieves, and a liar among liars”; so he nodded without speaking, and did as he was bid. They asked him his name, and he said “APARÓS” - “Mr Self”. When he had cooked the goat, he beat the three thieves soundly with the spit, and they ran off howling. People asked them who did it? “Self!” said they, and got laughed at for their pains.” An Albanian version, recorded at Piana de Greci near Palermo, recognizes two kyklopes and gives each of them two pairs of eyes. (Cook, 1925, II. 2, 999)

As in the case of many other Cyclop folktales, the story here involves an action of aggression carried out against the beasts. Usually, this ends with the blinding of the cyclop’s one eye. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of this is the story of Polyphemus in “The Odyssey”. However, in the case of this specific tale things might have gotten a bit more exposed with the association of the hero with the self. As a possible interpretation we might suggest that the figure of the self opposes the dynamism of vision, framed as a multiple movement turned concrete in the plural figure of three cyclops. Self, which is one, opposes the three thieves by initially following their cyclesis (or trajectory), and then betraying it. When the wounded cyclops are asked about who did this to them, they reply “self”. On this peculiar turn in the story there is an incorporation of this initial man, “the-self” into the depths of the thieves’ symbolic constitution. Because they say this, as if “self” was a name, but they are understood in a different way, namely self as that inner condition rooted in their essence. According to this reading, it wouldn’t be difficult to think the tale in terms of the figure of a chauffeur being carried in his chariot by three beasts. The man, whose fortune is in the sun, needs no more the potential diversions of the voluptuousness of earthly vision, or the voluptuousness of the contingency of wandering, so the beasts that bear these potential diversions are blinded. However, it is
important to note that the blinding of the beasts does not entail the annihilation of the beasts. The self appropriates the plurality and diversity of its earthly accomplices, but rejects the single-perspectival limits of this earthly cyclopean vision. Interestingly, a different interpretation might suggest that the blinding of the beasts hints towards the sacrifice of the mono-directionality of vision coagulated in the figure of one-eyedness. This sacrifice would move in favour of a total vision that was not fixed on a specific perspective or axis, but that on the other hand constituted a vision that was able to turn, that was able to move from its singular *topos*, like a sunflower, like the sun.

**Outsidity and Exile**

Now, coming back to our discussion of the germ-eye, which put under the scheme of a phase within a process, we denominated the *eye-axis*, it is important to mention that this phase grows possible by means of the first exposure of the eye to the outside, where the initial awareness of its unknown exuberance takes place. The figure of the eye-axis is the first attempt of mediation between the eye and the outside, the first bridge that would dress the early bare-witnessing described in the first sections of this paper. However, the fundamental point here consists on how this outside stands in relation to the ocular origin. We will try to approach and explore this in the following paragraphs.

As it has been said before, we will be inclined to think the binary eye-outside, by means of an archetype of exile. This might help to understand how the figure of the outside came to being, or more precisely: came to place. This figure of exile would set the foundations for the initial duplicity eye-outside. The term “outsidity”, briefly mentioned before, will stand as the key to the formal aspect of this event, and will as well constitute the basis of our previous use of the term “centrifugal”. “Centrifuge”, in its literal
meaning, defines a force that escapes from a centre. This, in our case will reference the *outsidity* of the eye in its axis phase. The concept of *outsidity* is primordially informed by the formula: expansion of oneself plus remoteness from one’s core. This idea is necessarily framed within the inner constitution of an agency, which for the case of this analysis will be grounded in the development of the notion of *the eye*. Now, we would like to pose that in the eye’s threshold of emergence there is already a duplicity eye-outside. The outside is not something that stems from the ocular origin as a formal consequence, but it is a presence that accompanies it and that is tacitly ascribed to its condition of possibility. Every ocular origin is simultaneously an eye plus an outside. The figure of exile proposed would only be real for the eye; it would constitute a logical gesture that would ground the origination of vision in that singular eye.

In order to become verb and to embody action\(^{18}\), the germ of the eye requires an exterior realm where it can execute its functions. Bare-witnessing this other realm is an experience of awareness but not necessarily one of recognition. In this primeval witnessing, a bare face confronts the turbulence of an undetermined outsider whole. If there is any sense of apprehension coming from the eye (in relation to the outside otherness), there must be a certain awareness of this otherness, as we pointed out previously, and especially since it has been already said that this act of witnessing is not mediated. Then it could be inferred that something in this outside must belong in the eye or vice versa. If something in the turbulent whole that constitutes the outside belonged in the eye or existed in it as well, then this would entail that both eye and outside need to share a common ancestor. And since there is no possible ancestor to the eye-axis, since it is the

\[^{18}\text{The eye-origin becomes verb in the act of seeing by executing the essence of vision discursively through action.}\]
origin and the germ of the ocular, it would be helpful to think the outside as something that has been exiled from the eye, since the eye is what ultimately holds the category of origin in the arrangement of things we are sketching. The figure of exile would consequently stand as a formal condition of possibility; it would be logically concealed in the posing of the binary eye-outside as the original germ of the eye. This idea could be expressed through the following metaphor:

If “eye” is being, then “outside” is being outside of being; it is being exiled of being for the sake of being, serving the only purpose of letting being be, by letting it become verb; actually act, happen, move, bridge.

The eye-axis constitutes the phase where the eye finds its first nuclear topos, and also the event by which it embraces perspective; this is the outcome of an anticipatory embodiment of the outside by means of the figure of exile. According to this scheme the outside would be framed as something that is not entirely foreign; as something that can be subject to speculation, and ultimately knowledge. This allows the eye to go beyond bare-witnessing into actual immersion, and enables in it the possibility of assimilating the foreign extension (outside), which is not so foreign anymore (which never was). In order to know, apprehend and assimilate this outside and not only merely witness it, the germ of the eye needs to generate a bridge; it needs to come out of itself. The figure of exile sets the favourable conditions for this to take place.

The Synthetic-Eye

In the Theogony, Hesiod speaks of three cyclops, ‘Gaia first bore equal to herself starry Ouranos … but then bedded by Ouranos she produced deep-eddyng Okeanos … She further bore the Kyklopes with exceeding forceful hearts, Brontes, Steropes and
Arges mighty of spirit ... they were like gods in all respects except the single eye that lay in the middle of their foreheads. They are named Kyklops for this feature, because one circular eye lay in the forehead of each’ (Theogony, 135-145). Thinking archetyposofically, perhaps we could say that Ouranos and Gaia take the copula of the natural archetypes of earth and sky into an interesting scheme of symbolism in the context of our analysis of vision. Accordingly, it is relevant to note that the faculty of vision, when transposed into the realm of the natural creaturely world, is to be found in creatures that dwell in exteriors and in general in areas reached and nurtured by the sun’s light, while creatures that dwell in the telluric entrails of the earth or in the depths of the sea are generally blind or with considerable limitations with regard to their vision. The light of the sun enables the delineated recognition and recuperation of the outside into forms, figures and shapes and is possibly the threshold that stands in between a monadic-fragmented modality of being and a continuous non-delineated one. The sun’s threshold is the formal antecedent of the eye-threshold.

Could the archetypal copula of sky and earth, be aligned with the copula of vision and blindness in the context of the symbolic scheme of the Cyclop? We will be inclined to think these ideas in terms of a peculiar kind of synthesis, which would take place in the figure of the Cyclop and its one-eyedness.

The Eye-Threshold

The ocular threshold stands as a liminal scission; it is the formal event upon which the eye engenders its own duplication; namely the primordial duality eye-outside. But how is this possible? It has been previously said that one of the major conditions of possibility of the nativity of the eye is its initial determination as an axis, the axis of a tumultuous and turbulent other, the outside. Following this line we added that the eye-axis also behaves as a threshold that sets the conditions of possibility for an a priori
duplicitv. The *Eye* and the *outside* are both engendered at this primordial event, mediated by the formal figure of *exile*, formulated in the previous paragraphs. In order to become axis, and thus produce a *topos* that enables the openness to the world, the eye needs to generate an anticipatory embodiment of the outside. Again, this is achieved by means of the figure of exile. And since at this early stage of origination, it is not possible to think about this process in terms of parts and divisibility, the outside needs not only to be something that has been exiled from the eye, but also to be a formal embodiment of the eye in its totality; it needs to be a double of the eye that has been exported into extension, or that has been sacrificed passing from being to place. An unreal anticipated embodiment of this extension, executed by the original eye, creates the possibility of intersection with it. The outside is produced as a necessary phantasm, as a shadow that grows along the development of the eye-origin, and enables it to ultimately cruise its own whirlwind.

**Expenditure, origin and originals**

In the context of a more Bataillean reading, and according to Nick Land, ‘The eye is not an origin, but an expenditure.’(1992, 30) We might argue that being an origin is precisely being expenditure.\(^\text{19}\) These two ideas do not exclude each other, but are contained in each other insofar as origin is the threshold of emergence, and emergence is the threshold of expenditure.

According to Bataille’s use of the term, total expenditure can be read in terms of sacrificial consumption; namely, a total annihilation of the creature or object at stake in and for the present

---

\(^{19}\) Although there is a first moment in the origination of a substance (origin) where it needs to remain unspent in order to secure its constitution as *that particular substance*, the horizon of potentiality of a substance, once it crosses the threshold of origination, is marked by the transience of the origin; once it is, it *is* to be spent.
instant. Bataillean expenditure is a purposeless act that serves no future or goal, and disintegrates in pure and gross nowness.

It is necessary to serve the word expenditure for these unproductive forms, to the exclusion of all the modes of consumption, which serve production as a norm. The accent is placed on loss, which must be as great as possible if the activity is to assure its true meaning. (Bataille, 1998, 70)

The use of the term *expenditure*, abstracted from its economic connotations, is here framed within the realm of simple and pure energy. Unproductive expenditure serves no purpose; it doesn’t serve the continuity of things as things, but puts its emphasis on total loss. Now, it is important to make the following distinction before proceeding with the analysis; an origin is not the same as an original. The former is a germ, which encapsulates posterity and conceals a promise of development. The germ, in the event of origination, breaks through the plane that contains and nurtures its singularity. It can easily afford breaking apart with its nutritive environment because it carries in itself a *self-sufficiency* that enables it to venture beyond, into the *outside*.

The self-sufficiency of the origin is constituted by the solidity of its internal cohesion. It could also be said that the origin bears an intrinsic sense of exteriority embedded in its constitution, which ultimately informs both *outsidity* and *cyclesis*. Originals, on the other hand, are not necessarily meant to originate or grow outside of the plane of origination. Perhaps they could be compared to accents in a fountain of water; accents that are inherent to the stream, that dwell in the stream at a cero degree of elevation from it. If origins sprout from a ground, originals are *in-ground* creatures, creatures that dwell in in-groundness; they in are in essence one-dimensional beings.20

---

20 Our use of the term “one-dimensional” will be referencing Montalbetti’s *theory of boxes*, which will be explained in the following sections of this paper, not to be
Now, coming back to our earlier point on expenditure, if we take the phrase: “Only at the highest of expansion can anything begin to contract”, and then we bring the notion of expenditure in, we will note that Bataillean expenditure in this case, works as both, expansion and contraction. It is both in one lethal and intimate gesture. On the one hand it is the expansion of a given origin into the posterity of its development, and on the other hand, it is a journey towards the final contraction of this development into nothingness, by means of its total consumption. The initial *cyclesis* of the eye, its original trajectory, is both the unfolding of all the internal potentialities inherent to the eye (those which prescribe its nascent internal cohesion that later becomes externalized through the figure of outsidity) and the expenditure of all of these potentialities, once they become actual during the cyclesis or trajectory of the eye. This would ultimately reveal the true essence of cyclesis as a circular burning. We could, in support of the argument by Nick Land, and in support of our earlier point on the Cyclop’s eye resembling the sun, consider the eye-origin and in general, every origin or germ as related to the archetype of the sun:

The radiation of the sun is distinguished by its unilateral character: it loses itself without reckoning, without counterpart. (Land, 1992, 33)

Eye-origins are structured upon their own finiteness, and are accented in the directionality of their death sentence. All of this is murmured in an anticipated tragic sequel, since the first encounter with the *outside*, or even since the exile, where a substance acquires the cohesion of the eye and therefore stands at the threshold of its irremediable fall, the fall of vision.

Myth and the Mono-Dimensional Abyss

Throughout this study we will be inclined to think mythology as both a web and a fluid of archetypes, as both a collection of delineated quasi-discrete elements and a non-differentiated fluidity. The notion of “element” or “monad” in myth, borrowing Kerenyi’s terminology, could be aligned with our earlier understanding of the concept of “original”. The formal creatures that would dwell in the plane of myth would not exactly be discrete (self-sufficient) entity-oriented germs (as it is in the case of origins) but open accidents that would often merge with one another. Kerenyi writes:

... Mythology is the movement of this material: it is something solid and yet mobile, substantial and yet not static, capable of transformation. (2002, 11)

Mythology is a flat infrastructure that conceals the possibility of the bare confrontation with the evidence of pure sense. It is a depth which abyssal truth is rooted within a mono-dimensional intimacy. This is precisely the depth of the primordial ground and the depth of in-groundness. Mythology is a mono-dimensional abyss insofar as it entails a depth that allows no ulterior depth. Its fathomless quality resides in not being a quantitative, but a qualitative formal profundity.

Ground principles, mythologems or archetypes, have the same formal depth as vectors. They are not envelopes of content but embodiments of directionality. As Mario Montalbetti would say: they are one-dimensional boxes. They do not promise anything internally or externally, they are what they promise, concealing no ulterior content displaced in any direction. They can also be designated as accents or originals as they are creatures of origination. They are accents insofar as they are pure indicators, pure directionalities. The qualitative depth of myth is based on the openness of its accidents (accents). They relate to each other in a
continuous and fluid dynamic. The phases of copula in between them, namely their merging with one another, produces a certain blur that enables a wide range of possibilities of formation. This would be easily allocated within the scheme of fecundity. Precisely this blur might stand as the phantasmatic mask of the generative event, that turbid absence of focus: the sense of an intimate and non-nuclear accent-oriented formlessness.

1-D

Perhaps Mario Montalbetti’s theory of boxes (2012) would show through the realm of linguistics, some of the implications of considering ground principles as constituent elements of a monodimensional realm. His theory explains in depth the notions of signifying, signification and sense through the use of geometric speculation and functions of usefulness. He describes three types of boxes: three-dimensional, two-dimensional and one-dimensional boxes. 3D (three-dimensional) boxes are essentially objects that are meant to contain another object; they bear the promise of content. There is also the concrete object; ‘el objeto a secas’, which doesn’t need to coincide with the object of the promise; it is what the box really contains. The object of the promise is concealed logically. A box of aspirins, “the box of Schrödinger”, the box of Wittgenstein in “Philosophical Investigations”, are examples of 3D boxes. On the other hand, 2D (two-dimensional) boxes are those in which the object of the promise is outside of the box. Photographs, or words; for instance, the word “apple”, that is promising a real apple, are examples of 2D boxes. However words can also be 3D boxes, for instance, a word that is promising a meaning. The essential characteristic of 2D boxes, according to this theory, is that they represent, and therefore, displace the object of the promise.

21 Montalbetti, 2012. ‘The tangible object’ or ‘the concrete object’: ‘the real object’-opposed to the ideal object of the promise.
Toda representación desplaza el objeto de la promesa. (Ibid)\textsuperscript{22}

Finally, a 1D (one-dimensional) box does not represent anything. It is not in the place of anything, it cannot contain anything either. It doesn’t promise anything outside or inside, because geometrically it doesn’t distinguish between inside and outside. As Montalbetti shows:

\begin{quote}
La ilusión de que una línea distingue lados solo es posible si asumimos que la línea yace sobre un espacio 2D. (Ibid)\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

A 1D box is in this sense pure directionality. Arrows and vectors are 1D boxes. Sense is a 1D box. In a 1D box, the object of the promise and the box coincide. Montalbetti writes:

\begin{quote}
El sentido es uni-dimensional/ uni-direccional. (Ibid)\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

According to Montalbetti’s analysis, the word “correct” is informed by the sum of the prefix “co” and an abbreviation of the word “rectitude” resulting in “rect”. Sense is never “correct” because its rectitude is not established on the basis of its concordance with another rectitude. (2012) In this sense, sense is mono-dimensional and mono-directional. It constitutes its own plane.

One-dimensional boxes, in their formal and pre-ontological self-predicative truth, are archaic in the sense that they are basic realities or foundations. Their archaic quality does not reference any chronological order, or historical sequence. Sequences do not apply to what is archaic because what is primordial, the substance of origination, encompasses substances and events before the exportation of these into discursive sequences. One-dimensional

\textsuperscript{22} ‘Every representation displaces the object of the promise’.
\textsuperscript{23} ‘The illusion that a line possesses sides is only possible if we assume that the line is lying on a 2D space.’
\textsuperscript{24} ‘Sense is one-dimensional/ one-directional.’
boxes and mythologems are embedded in the plane of origination; their degree of in-groundness is cero. They are ground matter. They are accented in-ground matter. According to this analysis accent would be, in the plane of origination, the primitive antecedent of form, divisibility and objectivity.

A few Considerations about Function and Cyclesis

Finally we would like to add that function is as well a figure of cyclesis, like the wheel-eye. Function bends the accentuality of the original, curling it around itself. It limits its initial liberty and its subsequent openness to the frame of a cyclic figure and through a curved trajectory around itself. This is the way in which originals are exported into origins. The solidity of cohesion that informs the origin, its self-sufficiency, is an affirmation of self, and an affirmation of self is a copy, a repetition, a mirror, or also, a will to continuity. Wheels are the geometric wombs of repetition, doomed to keep turning and actualizing their cycles. Once an accent is curled around itself through cyclesis, then it is able to originate. We now use the notion of “function” in the same way as we used the notion of “verb”. Cyclesis is intimately related to verb, origins are intimately connected to verbs, insofar as their nucleus is informed by a specific action. An action is only described as such to the extent that it is repeated. What sees is what sees constantly, so then, an eye originates as an outcome of the constancy of the action of seeing, as an outcome of the wheel-act. In the mythic figure of the Cyclop, the wheel-act of vision finds its own failure; “Cyclop” is informed by both vision and blindness. In order to proceed with a closer inspection of these ideas, it will be necessary to enter into the second section of this study, which will be denominated as The Eye-Snake.
References


MORAL OR MORTAL COSMOS?
ON SUBJECTIVE EXISTENCE IN KANT AND BATAILLE

James F. Depew

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily reflection is occupied with them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. Neither of them need I seek and merely suspect as if shrouded in obscurity or rapture beyond my own horizon; I see them before me and connect them immediately with my existence.

Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason

The heavens are in no way refuge for me. There is no refuge on earth or in heaven.

Georges Bataille, Celestial Bodies
§I

i. Kant’s Existential Crisis

The problem of how the subject posits itself, and makes itself into an object of experience, is something of a moment of crisis in transcendental philosophy. As transcendental subjects, we must also be an ‘object of outer sense for ourselves, for otherwise we would not be able to perceive our place in the world and would not intuit ourselves in relation to other things’ (Kant, 2005, 18: 619). The problem arises when we think of space, the form of outer sense, as an aspect of the subject itself, since in this case it is unclear how the subject can also exist in that space. As Kant writes: ‘The “I think” expresses the act of determining my existence. Existence is already given thereby, but the mode in which I am to determine this existence, that is, how I am to posit in me the manifold belonging to it, is not thereby given’ (1998, B158a; cf. B67f.). Kant’s “Copernican revolution” entails that cognition of oneself is only possible if what is outer is represented prior to the perception of objects. A problem arises when this representation of general objectivity is thought to occur within the subject, within its inner sense which, having the form of time, only presents a flux of representations. The subject

---

1 Over the course of this study it will become evident that the problem of temporality as it conditions inner experience is one of the main points of difficulty for Kant’s theory of position insofar as it conflicts with the spatial conditions of outer experience. Kant’s critical refutation of idealism, however, is based on the premise that inner experience is possible only under the presupposition of outer experience. Kant notes that “I am” is consciousness of existence as determined in time, but that “[a]ll time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception. This persistent thing, however, cannot be something in me, since my own existence in time can first be determined only through this persistent thing. Thus the perception of this persistent thing is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere
must somehow represent itself, which requires perceiving itself as having the permanence of an object, but only experiences itself in time, as a flux of representations. As Garth Green suggests:

Self-affection and self-cognition require the integration of the sphere of outer sense (and its noematic correlate of oneself qua determined object) and the sphere of inner sense (and its noetic correlate of oneself qua determining subject). Only a unified sphere of intuition can grant the unity of a single subject, across the determining-determined distinction. (2010, 317, emphasis added)

For transcendental philosophy, the consciousness of oneself with respect to both outer and inner experience must somehow be available a priori if experience is to be sufficiently grounded.

ii. The Problem of Absolute Position

In his pre-critical work, Kant argues that the real possibility of all things depends on absolute position. In The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God, representation of a thing outside me’ (1998, B275). In the preface to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant rewords this as follows: ‘But this permanent [thing] cannot be an intuition in me. For all the determining grounds of my existence can be encountered in me are representations, and as such they themselves need something permanent distinct from them, in relation to which their change, and thus my existence in the time in which they change, can be determined’ (1998, B xli). Furthermore, ‘[t]he representation of something persisting in existence is not the same as a persisting representation; for that can be quite variable and changeable, as all our representations are, even the representation of matter, while still being related to something permanent, which must therefore be a thing distinct from all my representations and external, the existence of which is necessarily included in the determination of my own existence, which with it constitutes only a single experience, which could not take place even as inner if it were not simultaneously (in part) outer’ (1998, B xli). The problem that is of concern here, then, is how the “I am” whose existence corresponds to the determination of the “I think” can persist outside of its mere representation in inner experience.
Kant argues that ‘the difference between a real thing and a merely possible thing never lies in the connection of that thing with all the predicates which can be thought in it’ (2003, 2:76). He maintains that for any subject, ‘nothing more is posited in an existent thing than is posited in a merely possible thing (for then one is speaking of the predicates of that thing). But more is posited through an existent thing than is posited through a merely possible thing, for positing through an existent thing involves the absolute positing of the thing itself as well’ (Kant, 2003, 2:75). What has to be shown of all possibility in general is that it presupposes something real. In other words, Kant asks why a concept should be accepted as datum, arguing that even the impossibility of its contradiction posits only its logical possibility and not its real possibility. Real possibility involves what Kant calls “absolute positing,” which presupposes actual existence. Kant proceeds with a negative argument:  

2 Kant’s effort to explain what is necessary for the possibility of thought proceeds by way of negation. Kant writes: ‘That of which the opposite is impossible in itself is absolutely necessary. This is a certainly correct nominal definition. But if I ask: upon what does the absolute impossibility of the non-being of a thing depend? then what I am looking for is the real definition; this alone can serve our purpose...the necessity in the predicates of merely possible concepts may be called logical necessity. But the necessity, for which I am seeking the ultimate foundation, namely, the necessity of existence, is absolute real necessity. What I find to start with is this: that which I am supposed to regard as absolutely nothing and impossible must eliminate everything which can be thought. For if there were still something left to be thought, then it would not be completely unthinkable or absolutely impossible’ (2003, 2:82). Ultimately, then, all possibility ‘presupposes something actual in and through which all that can be thought is given. Accordingly, there is a certain reality, the cancellation of which would itself cancel all internal possibility whatever. But that, the cancellation of which eradicates all possibility, is absolutely necessary. Therefore, something exists absolutely necessarily’ (2003, 2:83). What this means is that, for the pre-critical Kant, something exists necessarily only insofar as its negation would amount to the real negation of all (and not just experiential) possibility. Of course, this changes with Kant’s critical turn.
‘possibility disappears not only when an internal contradiction, as the logical element of impossibility, is present, but also when there exists no material element, no datum, to be thought. For then nothing is given which can be thought’ (2003, 2:78). So while it is true that when something is possible the concepts that are compared in judgement do not contradict each other, this is merely the formal condition of possibility. There is also the material condition to consider. As Eckhart Förster explains:

In all comparison, what is to be compared – the material – must be given beforehand. Where there is nothing to be compared, there can be no comparison and hence no possibility. For Kant, this means that nothing can be conceived as possible unless what is real in every possible notion exists...[A]ll these realities (omnitudo haec realitas), which in a sense are the material for all possible notions, can exist necessarily only if they are united in a single infinite being. For if the realities were distributed among several existing things, any of them would have its existence limited by privations that belong to the thoroughgoing determination of any finite thing. (2002, 78)

Yet in the critical work, the project of real comparison (or comparison of realities) ends in aporia: Kant tells us that infinite being is merely the object of a transcendental idea that can only regulate the possibility of unification, without ever being able to constitute a real unity (1998, A682/B710). Now considering the subject as a thinking nature or soul (“I myself”), he shows that its reality cannot be experienced except in terms of some limitation or privation – its determination is always directed by the thought of the reality that it limits: the concept of the “highest reality” (omnitudo realitas). Thought is thus led by reason to form the idea of an object that, although transcendent, is regarded, if only in theory, as being thoroughly determinable. This is because in the collective determination of all things, the subject might find its place, thus coming to know the way in which its relative limits make it what it is. Kant points out that this determinability,
however, is only formally possible and to confuse such possibility for real conditions of complete determination would be to substitute something intuitible and real for something that can only be conceived – what Kant calls “subreption.” The subject only has access to a distributed determination, since its experience of objects is never equivalent to the whole of reality because of the limitation of its possible experience to certain formal conditions. In this way, material conditions are radically separated from formal conditions by the finitude of experience, and relative limitation cuts the subject off from objective unity.

If all the thinking subject can know are things relative to its finite mode of knowing, then this rules out knowledge of things independently of the senses, that is, as “things in themselves.” However, Kant attempts to avoid a relativist view of the subject by arguing that universal epistemic conditions apply to finite rational beings. There is a sense that subjectivity is thought of as absolute position, inasmuch as knowledge achieves objectivity by being grounded in the conditions of every subject. A problem arises, however, since Kant conceives the subject in its inner relation to itself as conditioned by temporal succession (self-activity). Given Kant’s claims to universal epistemic conditions, outer relation is considered simultaneous, so that ‘the succession that always exists in the perceptions, as apprehensions, will not be ascribed to the objects’ (Kant, 1998, A214/B261).

For the relation of simultaneity to obtain, the subject must find itself in coexistence or “community” with objects, and this seems to be rendered impossible since the subject’s experience of itself is always successive, due to the temporality of inner sense. As Kant notes in the Third Analogy of the first Critique: ‘Space makes community possible. Now since the thinking being with all its faculties, whose effects belong merely to inner sense, is not a relation of space, the commercium of soul with the body is therefore not comprehensible.’ (1998, A211/B258, n. e) In a letter to Marcus Herz, Kant (1967, 151) expresses this problem as a distinction
between the way in which, epistemically, ‘the soul as object of inner sense cannot perceive its place within the body,’ while, ontologically, ‘[the soul] is in the place in which the person is’ (Kant, 2005, 18:619). Thus, ontologically, the soul should have a position in outer sense, in “the place” where the subject plays out its personhood (the significance of the role of the person will be explored below). But since positing representations into inner sense and making them conscious means positing them in time (in the form of inner sense), as well as having a temporally conditioned consciousness of this activity of positing, it is hard to see how outer sense plays any role in the representation of the “the place” of the soul. So, not only does the subject encounter a duality in its determination, but also in its affection: the self is affected formally in the act of apprehension of representations in inner sense, which, occurring in time, is successive and changing, and the self is affected materially by an outer sense that furnishes the contents of representations, from a space (as the form of outer sense) whose simultaneity is thought to subtend the changes of inner sense. As Manfred Baum rightly points out, what this amounts to is that ‘the body, being an object in space, must be something to which our sensations are referred and cannot be the referring subject’ (1989, 284, emphasis added).

In Kant’s critical phase, he addresses the possibility that the fullness of space, or the community of objects, might be constructed in a thorough amplification by concepts in the understanding, beginning with the subject’s body as object and opening to the interaction with other bodies that affect the subject over time. The simultaneity of bodies allows space itself to become an object of experience under the presupposition of the interaction of bodies in a reciprocal temporal sequence of bodies in inner sense, and in this way ‘matter everywhere mak[es] the perception of our position possible’ (Kant, 1998, A213/B260). However, this could not constitute a real subjective unity, but only a concept of matter that lets us think bodies in distributed aggregation, not as collective
unity. The conception of the place of subjectivity, through simultaneity, can offer no \textit{systematic} substantiality to the self since matter can only provide the basis for outer sense. Thought, insofar as it occurs under the form of time in inner sense, can only expand itself in an indefinite sequence, at best ‘striving toward retrieving the originally infinite perfection of pure intuition’ (Kerszberg, 1997, 37), a simultaneity that could only be space itself, as \textit{empty} form where no subject is to be found.

From this perspective, the finitude of the subject might lead it, in the effort to know itself as real, to transgress the limits of its material conditions (its body) towards a fully determined field of bodies, a spatial totality that \textit{must} include it, as a unified form. However, this striving is bound to fail, since one cannot presuppose the \textit{existence} of all reality (\textit{omnitudo realitas}), but only its \textit{idea}. The material conditions of this transgression are absent insofar as the subject has only an idea of the whole. Further, ‘there is only one concept that has the capacity of rejoining without loss the forms of human sensibility: this is the concept of \textit{ens realissimum}, or universal concept of a reality in general’ (Ibid.). Yet, as explained above, for an object of sense to be thoroughly determined, it must be compared with all data that can be given in the field of appearances, which is inevitably ‘considered as single and all embracing’ (Kant, 1998, A582), for there is only ‘one single experience in which all perceptions are represented as in thoroughgoing and orderly connection’ (Kant, 1998, A110). So, in order to know “I myself,” the subject must somehow achieve this singular experience, but for the critical Kant transgression can at best be regression toward an original condition, a space that is merely \textit{formally} infinite, since it is considered impossible that the \textit{material} of “reality in general” to be given to the subject as \textit{collective unity}. The \textit{omnitudo realitas} as \textit{ens realissumum} can be nothing short of real totality and its divine nature—\textit{God}. Here the thorny problem of the soul’s relation to the body is taken to a cosmic level, to the level of totality, both insofar as the human subject cannot
transgress without *real* limits and that way directs itself towards “cosmic apperception,” and insofar as the subject is certainly not itself God.

## iii. The Ethereal Coherence of Experience

In his post-critical *Opus Postumum*, Kant’s solution to the problem of the *commercium* of body and soul, understood as the problem of the unity of the subject, is that space must somehow be *represented as originally full* if its community is to include the subject without contradiction, exhibiting *a priori* the existence that corresponds to “I think.” In this work, Kant takes a radical step: he argues that the world (as the complete domain of objects, and in this sense, the cosmos) must be present to consciousness before there can be any distinction between inner and outer sense, as the ground of “I myself.” He writes: ‘To mere inner and outer perception as such there already belong moving forces—of matter outside me as well as their composition inside me’ (1995, 22:18, Op.13-15). Moreover, in the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant rethinks his earlier view of the regulative ideal of the systematic unity of material reality in terms of the *purposiveness* of nature, the principle that ‘[n]ature, for the sake of judgment, specifies its universal laws to empirical ones, according to the form of a logical system’ (Kant, 1987, 20:215f). In the *Opus*, Kant argues that for experience to achieve systematic unity that is realized subjectivity, there must be a principle for combining all moving forces of matter into a single, all-embracing whole. Whereas the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* had shown that matter in general is always constituted by the two fundamental forces of *attraction* and *repulsion*, Kant now attempts to provide an *a priori* principle in accordance with which these two fundamental forces are thought to underlie all particular varieties of matter. In other words, the possibility of experience is now thought to presuppose a *collective* unity of the forces from which the distributive unity of experience is
derived. Note that the direction of the derivation of experience has been inverted in Kant’s post-critical work—now from collective to distributive. Kant’s major theoretical move in the *Opus* is to prove that ‘[t]he principle which serves as the basis for the combination of all moving forces of matter into a whole of all possible experience is the assumption of a material which is uniformly distributed throughout cosmic space, and which penetrates all bodies internally’ (Kant, 1995, 21:540, Op.24-27). The question arises as to how full space can be thought as a unity of opposing forces, if it is to ground the varieties of matter in a uniform, *all-penetrating* material.

Kant argues that if matter is what fills space, it must do so by resisting all other matter that attempts to enter the same space. This can only be made possible by the moving force of repulsion. To fill space to a determinate degree, however, a second force is required that opposes the first and limits its expansion: an attractive force. ‘Neither force can in principle suffice on its own: without attraction, matter would by its repulsive force disperse itself to infinity, leaving space empty; without repulsion, matter would by its attractive force coalesce into a single point, again leaving space empty. Therefore, it is only by the interaction of both fundamental forces that matter of a determinate quantity is possible’ ( Förster, 2002, 63). However, in order to avoid circularity in the construction of his concept of matter, attraction must

---

3 In a letter to Beck dated September 8, 1792, Kant identifies “a circle that I cannot get out of” in his attempt to understand the differences in density and mass in different types of matter. In the *Metaphysical Foundations*, Kant argued that the attractive force that makes possible the filling of space also makes possible the contact between different types of matter. Such an attractive force must therefore be prior to contact itself, ‘an immediate action through empty space of one matter upon another’ (Kant, 2004, 4:512, Prop. 7), which at this point Kant identifies with Newtonian attraction, or gravitation. However, as Förster explains, this identification introduces a problem into Kant’s theory: ‘gravitational attraction is always proportional to the mass or, for a given volume, the density of matter....So the intensity of the attractive force must causally
ultimately be the effect of repulsion – the effect of a resistance to the expansion of the cosmos that pushes bodies together. Repulsion is retained as an essential force of matter, but now of a matter that is originally expansive (originarie expansiva): ‘the ether, but not as an object of experience; rather, merely as the idea of an expansive matter’ (Kant, 1995, 21:378f., Op. 12). Moreover, a ‘universal attraction’ must be thought of resulting from a resistance that ‘the matter of the ether exerts upon itself,’ limiting itself to ‘one universal cosmic body’ (ibid.). Kant’s “ether proof” in the Opus is intended to demonstrate the necessity of “an all-pervading ether,” and in this sense resembles his efforts to establish the necessity of God in his pre-critical work. However, unlike the absolute necessity required for a proof of God (the impossibility of non-existence), Kant only wants to establish the necessity of the ether for the possibility of unified experience. Kant writes:

If it can be proved that the unity of the whole of possible experience rests upon the existence of such a material...then its actuality is also proved, not, indeed, through experience, but a priori, merely from the conditions of possibility, for the sake of the possibility of experience...Now the concept of the whole of outer experience...presupposes all possible moving forces of matter as combined in a collective unity; to wit, in full space (for empty space...is not an object of experience). (1995, 22:550-551, Op. 86-87)

depend on density, and density must in turn be the effect of attraction’ (Fürster, 2002, 35). Or, as Kant describes the circularity: ‘the power to attract depends on the density, this density on the power to attract’ (Kant, 2005, 11:361f). In the Opus postumum Kant argues for an originally expansive matter in which no attraction is to be found, except that which it exerts on itself: an all-penetrating ether. In order to counter its original repulsive expansion, and for there to be existence in the first place, attraction is required; not the penetrative force of attraction that is gravitation, but only attraction in contact, or cohesion. As Förster puts it: ‘Since cohesion is a contact force, its measure does not depend on the quantity of a given matter. This is the first step in avoiding the circle. The second step consists in showing that cohesion itself – indeed all internally moving forces of matter – depends on the living force of an ether’ (Fürster, 2002, 45).
While in the *Metaphysical Foundations* Kant thinks of the existence of an all-pervasive ether as a merely empirical hypothesis, in the *Opus* he is convinced that it could be demonstrated as the condition of the possibility of perception and thus the material of subjective experience. This shift resulted from the recognition that any perception of an outer object is also the effect of a moving force of matter on the subject, and that space must be filled with something to serve as a medium for the transmission of moving forces between the objects of perception and the subject’s body, allowing it to perceive *all* bodies in space as determinately related to one another. In other words, Kant would use the ether to ground the systematicity in our cognition of the physical world sought in the third Critique’s principle of purposiveness. Kant suggests that by commencing with the idea of a whole of moving forces that constitute the basis of experience, one represents to oneself *a priori* full space as the ‘only one object of possible outer experience’ (Kant, 1995, 22:554fn., Op. 89fn.). What this means is that, objectively, there is only one experience, and ‘all so-called experiences are always only parts of one experience,’ in virtue of a universally distributed, unbounded material which ‘connects all ... bodies in one system and sets them into a community of reciprocity’ (Ibid). In other words, because experience requires the *ethereal coherence* of a “universally distributed world-material” in order to be systematic, all experience is already cosmic experience.

**iv. Moral Effort and the Cosmotheological Proposition**

If the subject is to become an empirical object for itself and resolve Kant’s existential crises, there must be more than a common basis of moving forces. For there to be experience of any particular object *in* space, the object’s moving forces must affect the subject in order to be known as such. It is important that Kant had included
organisms in the *a priori* division of bodies and that humans are examples of organically moving forces. He writes: ‘Because man is conscious of himself as a self-moving machine [organism] ... he can, and is entitled to, introduce a priori organic-moving forces of bodies into the classification of bodies in general’ (1995, 21:212-213, Op. 65-66). With this, the problem of position seems to be resolved. As Förster points out:

> Only because we ourselves exercise moving forces do we apprehend the appearances of moving forces upon us. But – and this is the crucial part of Kant’s argument – only in the process of such apprehension can we, and do we, appear to ourselves as empirical beings. Empirical self-consciousness emerges at the point of intersection (interaction) between the moving forces of matter as they affect me, and my own motions thereon. That is to say, on the one hand, only because I am corporeal – a system of organically moving forces – can I be affected by moving forces of matter; on the other hand, only insofar as I can represent myself as affected do I appear to myself as sensuous and corporeal, that is, as an object of outer sense. (2002, 106)

So, an organism is thought to affect itself with moving forces insofar as it is a self-moving machine, and thus *appears to itself* within the field of bodies and forces. Organic embodiment ensures that inasmuch as humans insert themselves into the space of moving forces that allows them to experience objects, they will experience themselves as situated in that space. With this, humans might come to know themselves as subjected to those limits, at once determining inner and outer intuitions (transcendentally empirical), provided by the organic resistance that constitutes a unified field of forces.

However, a new problem arises insofar as ‘[o]rganism is the form of a body regarded as a machine – i.e. as an instrument of motion for a certain purpose’ (Kant, 1995, 21:185, Op.), that is, insofar as the human body is determined by its purposive organization. The question of why the subject is *driven* by a self-
movement that allows it to appear to itself is inevitable. As Kant tells us, an organic body cannot derive its organization merely from movement; the movement must be directed. Kant writes: ‘There is no spontaneity in the organization of matter but only receptivity from an immaterial principle of the formation of matter into bodies, which indicates the universe, and contains a thoroughgoing relation of means to ends. An understanding ... [is] the principle of the system’ (1995, 22:78, Op. 186). And for an organism to come to know itself through its own organization, this principle must be internal.

It is only the spontaneity of thought that moves the subject from within, and as Kant has told us throughout the Critiques, this spontaneity emerges in relation to the categorical imperative, that is, in relation to duty. Empirical self-consciousness, he had argued early in the Opus, can emerge only in the context of a single, all embracing whole of moving forces, in the determination of which I posit myself as persisting in externality. But, and this is the new and important thought considered at the end of the Opus, ‘I do not only posit myself as an object. I also constitute myself as a person,' that is,

---

4 It would seem that Kant is unsatisfied with the manner in which existence is persistent for the organism, since a merely organic drive towards purpose is not sufficiently free to be associated with the human spirit that can will actions solely on the basis of their rightness. This is connected to the problem of personal immortality, which for Kant amounts to the free ground of cosmic persistence. This is a complex problem, especially insofar as there appears to be a rather significant change in Kant’s thoughts on the subject from his pre-critical, through critical, and into his post-critical phases. In summary, it might be argued that Kant moves from the pre-critical presupposition of immortality, to a critical postulation of immortality as the practical necessity of the will’s endless progress towards complete conformity with moral law, to the post-critical “discovery” of the real basis of such conformity. However, since in the last instance this post-critical basis is composed of merely moral forces, Kant’s argument is ultimately grounded in practical reason, and claims that moral considerations alone suffice to justify the idea of personal immortality as a postulate (for more on Kant postulation of immortality see Suprenant, Chris. (2008) “Kant’s Postulate of the Immortality of the Soul,” International Philosophical Quarterly. Vol. 48, No. 1,
as a being whose actions can be imputed to me. This, Kant claims, also presupposes a collective unity of forces, albeit not of matter, but forces of moral-practical reason’ (Förster, 2002, 138, emphasis added). Such a collective unity of moral forces, Kant tells us, can only be God, who is the ideal coherence of those forces directed towards the good. Ethereal coherence gives way to an immaterial principle in order that spiritual coherence hold together the repulsive forces inherent in personal existence. So it is the question “Is there a God?” that compels us to determine ourselves, and the space that separates being in the world from the highest being sets us in an ideal relation to the unity of experience. The subject is affected by its own tendency towards the good, but this tendency seems to lead again to a disconnection from material conditions, since the position of the subject ultimately results from a moral effort to think what Kant calls ‘the cosmotheological proposition’ (1995, 21:21, Op. 68): there is a god. The moral effort of the person is only thought to be real effort inasmuch as God is thought of as a personal principle of reason—an intelligent cause that enables the subject to act with consciousness of purpose and directs the subject toward itself according to a proposed practical unity of strictly moral forces. Such a collective unity cannot constitute a really delimited domain of affection in which the subject finds itself qua subject, but remains merely the prerogative of the Kantian moral

---

5 Although Kant never says as much, it is as though personality is a selection of attractive forces. The thought here would be that the person is a self-limiting whole, limited by the united attraction of those parts directed toward the good. And rather than being disconnected from God, this limiting is in fact what connects it with God. It is as though only a moral unity could avoid the dispersive tendency of repulsion. In other words, if there is only one experience, it is moral experience.
imperative.

§II

i. Bataille’s Community of Force

Could there be a real relation to the unity of experience, one that does not leave materiality and the body behind, as was apparently the fate of the Kantian subject. As something of an experiment, this paper turns to Georges Bataille for an alternative resolution to the Kantian existential crisis, who throughout his work appeals to a cosmic community of material forces, but emphasizes a selection of forces implied by an embodied effort inherent in mortality as absolute position. While Bataille’s work is far less systematic than Kant’s, there are striking parallels in their engagements with subjectivity, materiality, force, community, and cosmos.

Bataille had from very early on in his writings directed his attention to what he called “heterogeneous existence,” which is tied to a vision of matter that Allan Stoekl describes as ‘so repulsive that it resisted not only the idealism of Christians, Hegelians, and surrealists, but even the conceptual edifice building of traditional materialists’ (Stoekl in Bataille, 1985, xi). As Bataille defines it, *heterogeneous* indicates ‘elements that are impossible to assimilate’ and in this way ‘a fundamental impact on social assimilation, likewise has an impact on scientific assimilation’ (Bataille, 1985, 140-141). It is therefore necessary, according to Bataille, to posit the limits of social and scientific tendencies and ‘to constitute a knowledge of the *nonexplainable difference*, which supposes the immediate access of the intellect to a body of material prior to any intellectual reduction’ (Bataille, 1985, 141). Arguably, this knowledge appears in self-affection insofar as ‘the object of any affective reaction is necessarily heterogeneous’ (Bataille, 1985, 142). Inasmuch as ‘in a disconcerting way, the subject [has] the
capacity to displace the exciting value of one element onto an analogous or neighboring one,’ the subject arises as a site of heterogeneity where ‘[t]here is sometimes attraction, sometimes repulsion, and in certain circumstances, any object of repulsion can become an object of attraction and vice versa’ (Bataille, 1985, 141-142). The ‘inner experience’ of the subject is rooted in this ‘body of material’ where its existence can connect to multiple determinations, to limitless modifications of itself and its object as ‘the subject contests himself, hunts himself’ (Bataille, 2001, 94-95).

This line of thinking takes on a new dimension in Bataille’s work with the College de Sociologie, where he addresses the composition of community through an extension of the relation of the forces of attraction and repulsion. What is important in this context is that, as Stoekl points out, Bataille begins to think of entities as collections of other entities:

there is no simply isolable *ipse* that would represent unitary being. What cells are to a human being, a human being is to that larger organism, the community. Being is not simple identity, but rather rupture or disequilibrium, the sudden change of levels: being is violent *difference*, precariousness and heterogeneity in relation to a given stable group (Stoekl in Bataille, 1988, xxi).

Like Kant, Bataille thinks that the relation between attraction and repulsion makes community possible, and consciousness of this relation positions subjectivity. In his essay titled *Attraction and Repulsion*, Bataille writes: ‘It is not enough that individuals are attracted to each other. It is also necessary that they be conscious of some attraction or other’ (in Hollier 1988, 105). But this tendency is almost the inverse of the moral effort of the Kantian person. Bataille does state that the consciousness of attraction results from a ‘fundamental repulsion,’ but rather than God indicating the *focus* of moral tendencies, the *focus* for Bataille is what is ‘untouchable and unspeakable; from the outset it partakes of the nature of corpses, menstrual blood, or pariahs’ (Bataille in Hollier, 1988, 122), the
pulsating rhythm of the ‘transformation of...the object of repulsion into the object of attraction’ (Ibid). This pulsation invests an ‘unquestionable affective concentration’ (Ibid) into the repulsive, through which base materiality comes to possess a force of attraction, which brings about collection.

Significantly, this base materiality associated with an oscillation of forces is reminiscent of the Kantian ether. This oscillation ‘would consist not in a movement concentrating individuals who are distant from each other but in the intervention of a new element at the moment in which the individuals come close, something analogous to the production of an electric current\(^6\) uniting, in a more or less stable manner, individuals who came into contact’ (Bataille in Hollier, 1988, 109). However, he says that while this wavering stability is brought about by moments of intense affection, it must be insisted upon that this affection ‘is devoid of personal significance’ (Bataille in Hollier, 1988, 110) – it is not a concentration of individual bodies but a concentration of affection that collects a field of bodies. This is because Bataille thinks that community, rather than arising from a compulsion to duty inherent in Kant’s vision of personhood, must be ‘held together by being put in touch with joy – by a contact – whose aggregative value depends on life’s being satisfying and exuberant’ (Ibid). Crucially, this holding together through joy emerges in the face of death, ‘to the extent that the very dark, repulsive nucleus, around which all turbulence revolves, has created the principle of life out of the category death’ (Bataille in Hollier, 1988, 111). Joy in the face of death is the self-affection that assures a certain unity, since mortality makes the very life of the living think itself in its disappearance. Ultimately, for Bataille, the subject posits itself only in this disappearance.

\(^6\) The notion of an ether has long been associated with fire and electricity, from ancient thought well into modern science. See Whittaker, Sir Edmund. (1951) *A History of the Theories of Aether and Electricity*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons.
ii. The Expending Cosmos and the Subject Outside Itself

In another early essay entitled *Celestial Bodies*, Bataille discusses moving forces from a cosmological perspective, clarifying the notion of joyful turbulence. In it Bataille refers to Arthur Eddington, an astronomer often associated with the theory of the *expanding universe*. Of course, this notion of the universe as expansive was already present in Kant’s cosmology, resulting from a fundamental cosmic repulsion. But what is interesting is the way in which Bataille thinks through this expansion. His reading ‘transforms it into an interpretation of the world that would rather deserve the name of expending universe’ (Hollier, 1990, 134). This is a *transgressive* movement that drives the universe, ‘hurling it into space like a whirling explosion’ (Bataille, 1986, 75), and the ‘underlying nature of the world from which we come is that of an explosive rotation of matter’ (Bataille, 1986, 76).

While he says that ‘[t]hese considerations about ourselves have been made possible as knowledge developed,’ they are ‘wholly contrary to those representations which have established man and his earthly base as the seemingly immutable seat of human life,’ a domain ‘constituted as not subject to the reality of the universe, as entirely autonomous, to the point of perfect immobility set within the mad spin of it all’ (Ibid). With this in mind, Bataille proposes a “Copernican revolution” of his own. He writes:

> even if human existence is really in the process of now discovering the universe that sustains it, this existence must acknowledge the universe as a spectacle external to itself. How, indeed, can it claim to identify with the rapture of the heavens, acknowledging itself as spectacle viewing itself, when the fact of looking presupposes that the viewing subject has somehow escaped from the rapturous

---

movement of the universe? All that we recognize as truth is necessarily linked to the error represented by the “stationary earth” (Ibid)

Of course, Bataille is pointing to the error of the stationary subject, associated with Kant’s “Copernican revolution.” The question that arises from this reversal of the Kantian reversal is how human existence can subject itself to the rapturous movement that is ultimately the “movement of the whole,” from the perspective of a body that is itself moving?

Bataille suggests that the thought of autonomous human existence is directly correlated with misconceptions of the movement of the cosmos. The mistake is to think of human existence as constituted by accumulation and concentration, a movement of attraction around a fixed nucleus. It is a mistake that ‘gradually effaces the image of a [material] reality free of inherent meaning or demand, replacing it with a personification ... of the immutable idea of the Good’ (Bataille, 1986, 78, emphasis added). The cycle of human energy, in its directedness toward a power associated with total coherence, disconnects itself from the real coherence of the cosmos. ‘There is,’ Bataille writes,

but one way out; it is in vain that we deny our nature, and since we do seek power, we can only assent to the force we must be [and] one must go ... to the full limit of power. Existence in avidity attains, when fully developed, a point of disequilibrium at which it suddenly and lavishly expends; it sustains an explosive loss of the surplus of force it has so painfully accumulated” (Ibid).

In this violent expenditure of self, in an encounter with the repulsive as such, one must, Bataille writes, ‘perceive that he breathes in the power of death’ (Ibid.), awakening to a movement that sustains itself beyond a loss of the subject, ‘where thought keeps going even after its subject has been spent’ (Hollier, 1990, 139). The movement of forces takes bodies into the space of mortality in which the whole of embodied life is affected, not merely the subject.
Bataille discovers, in the movement of the cosmos, the possibility of a subject position that is the inverse of that discovered by Kant. As Denis Hollier writes:

Expenditure here is not so much an object to be thought of, as it is the mode of thought when there is no subject left to think it. Thinking expenditure, for a subject, means first of all thinking of a scene from which he has been evacuated. It means to push self-sacrifice at least to the point of the loss of ego, entering a space where the ego, having become expendable, is endowed with the glory of not being there. (Ibid)

iii. Mortal Effort and Cosmo-atheology

For Bataille, mortality is the absolute limitation of living motion.\(^8\) Perhaps we must admit, after the death of God\(^9\) and against Kant, that ‘membership in this world is tied to the positing of the body as thing insofar as it is mortal’ (Bataille, 1989, 46, emphasis added). For Bataille, as for Kant, it is the positing of the object from without that generally defines a world, and this means that the subject comes to know itself in the world ‘from the outside as another’ (Bataille, 1989, 31). Interestingly, Bataille argues that at this original moment of exteriorization, insofar as the world shares

---

\(^8\) Throughout his work Bataille appears committed to a picture of life as organic. It is worth noting that mortality here refers to the mortality of the organism, and in this sense shares some of Kant’s understanding of the directedness of the organism. The organism shares in ‘the most luxurious form of life,’ since it is an ‘abyss where enormous quantities of energy are swallowed up, and destroyed’ (Bataille, 1991, 85). One wonders what life in the face of death might look like, were “living motion” not already limited to the organism’s space of mortality.

\(^9\) The death of God became something of a principle for Bataille, suggesting that the God that guarantees the identity of the responsible self has disappeared. For the most part, this ideal was taken from Nietzsche, who wrote: ‘Whither is God?...I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers....God is dead. God remains dead.’ And: ‘The greatest recent event—that “God is dead,” that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable—is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe.’ (1974, 279)
the same externality that is essential to the subject coming to know itself, the world and every thing in it is posited on the same plane as the subject. What this suggests is that the sense of continuity that was associated with the subject *qua* subject is negated by the positing of a distinct objective world. Yet, precisely for this reason, that continuity ‘derives new significance from the contrast it has formed to the world of things’ (Bataille, 1989, 35). It is here that there emerges ‘the fascination of the sacred,’ but not in relation to a cosmotheological ideal that draws the subject towards objective unity, but rather in relation to a world that is ideal insofar as it is no-thing. This un-real world ‘establishes reality, which it is not, as its contrary’ (Bataille, 1989, 37).

The positing of an ideal world is profoundly linked to the definition of body as being opposed to the soul, for only starting from the negative representation of a sacred and “spiritual” world does the body find itself on the side of things. ‘[I]t is the glory of the human body to be the substratum of a spirit’ (Bataille, 1989, 40). However, insofar as the body becomes a thing only after the subject finds that in the positing of itself as object it has also posited a non-objective domain, the body ‘is never a thing except virtually, so much that if death reduces it to the condition of a thing, the spirit is more present than ever: the body that has betrayed it reveals it more clearly than when it served it’ (Ibid.). Death’s absence reveals the very essence of the soul, and its appearance (in the violent swirl of the cosmos) is the supreme affirmation of life. Life’s disappearance in death reveals the invisible unity of life that is not a thing, but is nevertheless real. Death is that which resists the expansion of life, but in this same moment transforms that expanse

---

10 Whereas for Kant, the affirmation of the highest good through personal will ensures the subject’s position in a moral and intelligible world/cosmos, for Bataille it is the affirmation of life through the mortal body that disposes the subject towards a world/cosmos that retains a persistent nothingness within itself, the encounter with which produces a transgressive affectivity that resists intelligibility.
into expense. The world of things (what Bataille calls "the real order") preserves its value in duration, and in this sense death has no place in it. But ‘[t]he real order does not so much reject the negation of life that is death as it rejects the affirmation of intimate life, whose measureless violence is a danger to the stability of things, and affirmation that is fully realized in death’ (Bataille, 1989, 46-47). The unity of the self, which was lost to the Kantian subject precisely because it was regarded as thing becoming object, is restored in the dissolution of the real order, and this always takes place through real death.

For Bataille, the subject stands in relation to itself as the quasi-locus of a pure affectivity (joy) without object that emerges in the face of death. The subject stands outside itself in an ecstatic moment that interrupts the endurance of an expanding world of things, a moment that is real but non-objective; it faces itself as nothing. The subject finds itself insofar as it loses itself at that point of oscillation between forces, where it becomes other than itself rather than a person, where an explosion of power makes it impossible to select a directedness since it is given over to the effusive life of the cosmos. For Kant, the temporality of the subject puts its self-identity into question and calls for an objective permanence that preserves the soul ‘through all its alterations, even the human being’s death’ (Kant, 1998, A351), whereas for Bataille, death is a violence that exposes the soul as sacred nothing. Moral effort subordinates the world of things to the divine. By prescribing universal obligatory relations between forces it reduces their community to an order of things that resists the violent expenditure of the cosmos: ‘a community of those who have no community’ (Bataille, 1987, 5:483). In the place of Kantian cosmotheology that ultimately dissolves the intimacy of the subject in the moral person, Bataille offers a cosmo-atheology\textsuperscript{11} that seeks the place of God in

\textsuperscript{11} Bataille was working on a project called \textit{La Somme athéologique} that was never finished, though it is as close as Bataille came to a “system.” Bataille himself
sacred immanence, in a a cosmos that makes itself present only in its absence, in the ‘insurmountable vertigo of all things that leaves nothing as it is’ (Bataille, 2011, 208). Mortal effort is directedness beyond a stable subject that reveals its reality – an absolute position outside itself where everything dies, even God.

References


Hollier, Denis. Ed. (1988) The College of Sociology. Minneapolis: University of

defined atheology as ‘the science of the death or the destruction of God (the science of the things being destroyed inasmuch as it is a thing)’ (2001, 166).

Stuart Kendall in his edited volume of Bataille’s works entitled The Unfinished System of Non-knowledge, outlines a few key points: ‘Atheology...is a science of immediacy...is a search for the death of objectivity...is a search for immanence...implies a general economy of forces...the incarnation of revolt...by practicing joy before death’ (Bataille 2001, xxxviii-xxxix). Bataille writes: ‘Is not God the most basic presupposition of thought? I don’t doubt this, but this fatal presupposition is itself given in the inexorable movement of thought, it is no less given than it is, ultimately, the fact of its absence. Atheology expresses the fact that human thinking is above all placed before God and then before his absence’ (1987, 13:367).
Minnesota Press.
The great Cyclops eye of Socrates – that eye that had never glowed with the sweet madness of artistic inspiration - turned upon tragedy. *

Nietzsche

All a priori judgments are lost, the philosophy of Kant and Count Tolstoy is ended, and there begins the realm of the Ding an sich. Would you like to follow Dostoevsky and Nietzsche there? †

Shestov

---

* Nietzsche, F., *The Birth of Tragedy*, 2003, p. 67
Written in 1899-1903 when Shestov was still living in Russia, *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy* (1903) is one of the earliest works of the Russian philosopher.\(^1\) Possibly, for the first time in Russian literature the two great thinkers of the 19\(^{th}\) century Dostoevsky (1821-1881) and Nietzsche (1844-1900) were brought into a comparative discussion, subjected to a critical analysis, and evaluated at a single philosophical level.

It is well known that Shestov’s discovery of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche in the 1890s had a stratospheric influence on his thinking.\(^2\) As Bernard Martin pointed out in the introduction (1969) to *Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche*, it was from Nietzsche that Shestov drew the inspiration for his own lifelong polemic against the power of universal moral rules and the superiority of reason (VII). For Shestov the focus of philosophy moved away from logical continuity of argument and aimed to bring man ‘out on the shoreless sea of imagination, the fantastic tides where everything is equally possible and impossible’ (1923, 38). He developed a philosophical perspective that rests on the absurd, or “the ugly reality” as he defined it (1969, 148-149). Specifically, from Dostoevsky Shestov adopted the underground man as the spokesman for his critical thought. In his advance towards a notion of tragic philosophy, Shestov relied on the experiences of the two precursors, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche.

---

\(^1\) The article *Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* was first published in *The Art World*

\(^2\) According to Mme. Baranova Shestov first read Nietzsche in the year 1896 (1983, 24). Lovtzy, G. L. remembers that *Beyond Good and Evil* (1909-1913) was the first of Nietzsche’s work Shestov read, followed shortly by *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). Many years later Shestov told his disciple Benjamin Fondane that the reading *On the Genealogy of Morals* had a stratospheric influence on his imagination and disturbed him to the state of insomnia, (Finkenthal, 30).
Since the 1840s Dostoevsky's writing was appreciated in French intellectual circles where he became known for his insights into murder, hallucination and madness. Shestov emphasised that Dostoevsky's psychological realism challenged the notions of Western ideals. From Shestov's point of view Dostoevsky's most significant work is *Notes from the Underground* (Zapiski is Podpolja, 1864). Precisely in this book Shestov found the key to his interpretation of the rest of Dostoevsky's writing. For the first time in this novel, according to Shestov, Dostoevsky established the method of “psychology”\(^3\) in his writing, which he was the first in Russia to discover (1969, 170, 174). The “psychology,” presented in the underground man,\(^4\) wrote Shestov, was ‘the first gift that Europe gratefully accepted from Russia’ (Ibid. 147). That authentic subliminal quality of Dostoevsky's writing is precisely what attracted Nietzsche:

> Dostoevsky is the only psychologist from whom I was able to learn anything. I rank my acquaintance with him among the most splendid achievements of my life. (quoted in Shestov, 1969, 146)

According to Shestov, Nietzsche came after Dostoevsky to complete his predecessor’s telling (Ibid. 317). Despite no apparent stylistic resemblance between the two authors’ works, Shestov suggested that traces of the experiences of Dostoevsky's characters are found in Nietzsche’s thought (Ibid. 239).

He claimed that like Dostoevsky Nietzsche ‘had come from penal servitude - from the underworld into the tragic reality, from which there is no return to the world of commonplace’ (Ibid. 317). The German philosopher abandoned the ideals of his youth, waiting

---

\(^3\) Shestov defined “psychology” as a self-liberation of everything that is “foreign” to one's nature, such as theoretical knowledge and manifestations of idealism (Ibid. 266).

\(^4\) “The underground man” is the narrator and main character in *Notes from the Underground* by Dostoevsky.
for the opportunity to liberate his thought in order to be able ‘to speak boldly in his own way’ (Ibid. 274). Shestov structured his analysis of Nietzsche’s work by dividing his philosophical thought into the earlier and later phases. In his view, the most significant changes took place during the second phase of Nietzsche’s literary life.

Shestov asserted, that up until the age of thirty Nietzsche ‘sat in a corner, contemplating the ideas of others’ (Ibid. 250). In the early 1870s Nietzsche studied Greek literature and culture; his writing was mainly influenced by the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer⁵ (1788 - 1860) and the music of Richard Wagner (1813-1883) (Ibid. 239 - 240). In his first book The Birth of Tragedy (1872)⁶ Nietzsche argued that in the tragic myth ‘you may hope for everything and forget all that is most painful,’ while in its chords of delight ‘the terrible image of the world charmingly fades away’ (2003, 116). Accordingly, for young Nietzsche the tragic artist is fearless toward that which is terrible and questionable (Shestov, 1969, 311-312). For him, ‘tragedy itself is a proof of the fact that the Greeks were not pessimists’ (The Wagner-Nietzsche Correspondence 1921, 167).

However, in Nietzsche’s account, pessimism was not necessarily a sign of decline and decay, it could also be a sign of strength and “over-abundance” (2003, 3). Nietzsche wrote that ‘the tragedy of the ancients was diverted from its course by the dialectical impulse towards knowledge and scientific optimism’ (Ibid. 82). Specifically, in Nietzsche’s account, Socratic rationalism and optimism were responsible for the decline of Greek tragedy.⁷

---

⁵ According to Shestov, Schopenhauer wrote books with a pessimistic tendency, but with an optimistic faith (1969, 311).
⁶ Nietzsche dedicated the book to Wagner. In Nietzsche’s own words, this book is ‘badly written, ponderous, painful, its imagery wild and confused, emotional, here and there sweetish to the point of femininity...’ (quoted in Danto, 2005, 46).
⁷ In the climax of The Birth of Tragedy (§ 11- §15) Nietzsche produced his account of how Socratic ideas of making progress through reason destroyed tragedy.
Hence, in the figure of Socrates Nietzsche saw ‘an optimistic zest for knowledge;’ in his view, Socrates originated the idea that the universe is intelligible, and that by means of the rational acquisition of knowledge men might be freed from the fear of death (2003, 74). Tragedy would be no longer required for its function is dismissed by rational knowledge (Danto, 41). Thus, Nietzsche stated that in the face of practical pessimism ‘Socrates is the archetype of the theoretical optimist who, in his faith in the explicability of the nature of things, attributes the power of a panacea to knowledge and science’ (2003, 75). Besides, he noted, there is an endless struggle between the theoretical and the tragic philosophies (Ibid).

Shestov asserted, that Nietzsche rejected the Greek philosopher’s opposition to instincts as a form of decadence, viewing Socrates’ philosophy as preaching of a struggle with oneself or “the improvement theory,” in Nietzsche’s own words (1969, 258). Shestov observed that while Nietzsche viewed Socrates’ teaching as an attempt to overcome his instincts, his own efforts to “save himself” became a form of a new expression of decadence (Ibid. 258). Thus, Shestov concluded, in his stance against decadence Nietzsche fell into the same trap, for his own thought was not too far from Socrates’ (Ibid). ‘None of us,’ wrote Shestov, ‘despite all outward evidence, would sign a moral condemnation of ourselves’ (Ibid. 259). Consequently, in his opinion, Nietzsche’s idea of decadence is contradictory because the struggle against decadence is already decadent by its nature.

Unlike Socrates, who spoke mainly “words of theory,” Nietzsche began to speak out with the intention to reveal to the reader the “agonizing secret” of his life experience, in the way Dostoevsky did in his Grand Inquisitor8 (Ibid. 264). Shestov argued

---

8 *The Grand Inquisitor* is a parable in Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) told by Ivan Karamazov. In his next book, *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* (1905) Shestov wrote: ‘In Dostoevsky’s *Grand Inquisitor* lurks a dreadful idea. Who can be sure, he says – metaphorically, of course – that when the crucified Christ uttered His cry: “Lord, why hast thou forsaken me?” He did not call to mind
that Nietzsche took a weapon from positivism with which to fight idealism. However, he was never a positivist, and “the majority’s happiness” did not attract him (Ibid. 273, 281). For positivism sees happiness to be the meaning of life, and its faith consists of utilitarian morals, relying on hope and justification (Ibid. 274). Specifically, ‘under the cover of positivism,’ Shestov inferred, ‘Nietzsche pursued entirely different goals’ (Ibid. 274). For example, Nietzsche used theory and logical thinking to justify the grounds for his rejection of moral judgments. As Shestov suggested, positivism mainly appeals to those aspects of life, which don’t contain irreconcilable contradictions; it succeeds inasmuch as it leaves fundamentally unsolvable problems aside (Ibid. 275). Shestov argued that man is born a positivist and first has to go through a theological and metaphysical stage in order to obtain the experience of the limitation of knowledge, but when all efforts in the positive direction prove fruitless, it becomes obvious that it is impossible to rid life of “suffering” completely (Ibid. 285). Only then, for Shestov, one is able to abolish the limitations of positivist truth and begin to question, without giving any further thought as to whether or not such questioning would be permitted by contemporary methodology and epistemology (Ibid).

Shestov observed that in his youth Nietzsche was a proud man, who thought of himself as worthy of a destiny marked by achievements of “serious and important deeds,” but after falling ill it occurred to him that it might not be possible⁹ (Ibid. 243). A bitter realisation that he was “an insignificant,” “pitiful” person resulted in his “shamefully and disgustingly unhappy” state (Ibid. 244, 245). As a consequence, Shestov empathised, “this highly perceptive

⁹ On June 14, 1879 due to bad health Nietzsche resigned his professorial chair at the University of Basle and was granted a pension of 3000 francs per year for 6 years. From 1879 he spent much of his time in Italy and Switzerland.
philosopher” became ‘confused and flustered, like a child who has lost its way in a forest’ (1969, 249). Disillusioned, Nietzsche considered Schopenhauer and Wagner ‘the main instigators of his terrible misfortunes’ (Ibid. 243). Had Nietzsche’s life proceeded without such complications, Shestov anticipated, he would perhaps have kept his feelings of love and his devotion for his teachers until old age (Ibid. 247).

Highlighting the fundamental difference between the philosophy based on theory and the philosophy derived from practice, Shestov described Nietzsche’s approach to Socrates’ teaching as theoretical. Conversely, he wrote, Nietzsche in his works told us of his life, ‘that poor life which undermined everything that is lofty and great, and which for its own preservation subjected everything to doubt that mankind reveres’ (Ibid. 263). Shestov observed that when Nietzsche became a sick and suffering man, he started speaking from his experience of ‘a sick and suffering man, about subjects that are important to him’\(^\text{10}\) (Ibid. 265). Shestov praised Nietzsche: despite all theoretical calculations he chose to use his own experience as the source of his philosophy.

Thereby, the time when the German philosopher faced the most difficult period of his life, which was followed by significant changes to his philosophical vision, began with Human, All-Too Human (1878) (Ibid. 246). Nietzsche sent the draft of his new book to Richard Wagner, his teacher and a friend of his youth; the breach that had already been growing between the two men became final and Wagner abandoned Nietzsche\(^\text{11}\) (Ibid. 240). For the first time in

\(^{10}\) From the age of thirty-four to forty-four Nietzsche suffered painful and loathsome attacks of an incurable disease (Shestov, 1969, 303-304).

\(^{11}\) Nietzsche described his break up with Wagner in Ecce Homo (1908): ‘When the book was finally finished and in my hands – a profound surprise for one so seriously ill – I also sent two copies, among others, to Bayreuth. By a miraculously meaningful coincidence, I received at the very same time a beautiful copy of the text of Parsifal, with Wagner’s inscription for me “for his dear friend, Friedrich
his life, Shestov suggested, Nietzsche learnt what it meant to be completely alone (Ibid. 268). For Nietzsche it was no longer possible to live as before, wrote Shestov, even though he knew that the new path could promise nothing but ‘danger, agonizing doubt, and perpetual loneliness’ (Ibid. 249). From the point of view of a rational judgement or “human wisdom,” in Shestov’s own words, Nietzsche was “crushed,” “ruined,” with no chance left for salvation. He described Nietzsche overpowered by despair and grief, for him “the whole world collided” in one moment (Ibid. 316, 249).

But for Shestov truth belonged to reality rather than to the popular wisdom. Precisely then, he wrote, all metaphysical and moral ideals ceased to exist completely for the German philosopher, and his “greatly slandered ego” grew to ‘unprecedented, colossal proportions and bottled out the entire world in front of him’ (Ibid. 269). If before the illness Nietzsche “preached goodness,” “invoked truth” and “sang hymns to beauty,” by contrast on this new path he encountered “much struggle,” “wavering” and “doubt” (Ibid. 272). However, for Nietzsche ‘a sick man indeed has no right to be a pessimist’ (Ibid. 249, 256). Thus, Shestov continued, the break up with Wagner was only the beginning of a major transformation process in the philosopher’s work, and years would pass before he decided to reveal his “underground” ideas openly (Ibid. 275).

Thereupon, with the acknowledgment of Nietzsche’s own human needs came his “psychology,” i.e. his self-liberation of all that is foreign to his nature, such as theoretical knowledge and manifestations of idealism (Ibid. 266). Having withdrawn from theoretical arguments of systematic philosophy, Nietzsche began to

Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Church Councilor”– This crossing of the two books – I felt as if I heard an ominous sound – as if two swords had crossed. – At any rate, both of us felt that way; for both of us remained silent’ (1989, 288).

12 According to Shestov (1969, 168) Notes from the Underground presented an exploration of the subjective reality of the horrors of the existence of “the humblest man.” The “psychology” of the underground man became a turning point in the literary writing at the end of the 19th century (Ibid. 147).
see the world “with his own eyes.”¹³ ‘The shore has disappeared from my sight, the waves of the infinite have engulfed me,’ as it is described by Zarathustra (Nietzsche quoted in Shestov, 1969, 281).

Shestov observed that Nietzsche’s life task took him beyond the limits of systems and spheres, ‘into which he had been driven by the traditions of science and morality’ (Ibid. 282). In this new reality, expanded beyond the boundaries of theory, there was nothing but ugliness. Hence, Nietzsche proclaimed untruth and false judgments to be the fundamental conditions of life that implied a perilous resistance against customary value-feelings (Ibid. 283). Although, one thing was certain, ‘there is reality here – a new, unheard of, unwitnessed reality that has never before been displayed’ (Ibid. 198). Shestov argued that Nietzsche’s newly discovered “psychology,” his viewing of the world based on his personal experience, had led him to a new knowledge. Shestov wrote:

If a lie is so essential to life, then it is no less essential that people think that this lie is not a lie, but the truth. (Ibid. 284)

For Nietzsche, error was now among the conditions of life (2008, 117). His discovery that in the absence of truth everything is false brought him to the recognition that the erroneousness of the world he lived in was perhaps the most certain thing available to his sight (Nietzsche, 1930, 40). Thus, Nietzsche arrived at the conclusion that the new truth may contain something far better than the charm of the most ostentatious lie (Ibid. 173). Crucially, he came to realise that only philosophy that takes risks is capable of taking a stand beyond good and evil:

To recognize untruth as a condition of life: that is certainly to impugn the traditional ideas of value in a dangerous manner, and a

¹³ I.e. free of pre-conceived ideas, universal truths and dogma.
philosophy which ventures to do so, has thereby alone placed itself beyond good and evil. (Nietzsche, 1930, 4)

Thus, Nietzsche’s thinking in the second phase of his writing career detested the boundaries of morality and prevailed ‘voluntarily among ice and high mountains – seeking out everything strange and questionable in existence’ (1989, 218). Shestov pointed out that Kantian theory of the a priori had lead to absurdity and underlined the necessity of each person to realise that ‘apart from himself there is no one else in the entire universe’ (1969, 280). According to the Russian philosopher, Nietzsche began his “regeneration of convictions” when he started viewing reality as an absurd ‘kingdom of whim, uncertainty, and an infinite number of completely new and untried possibilities’ (Ibid. 298). In such reality, where suffering is the essence, ‘the tragic man affirms even the harshest suffering’ (Nietzsche, 1989, 209).

The period between 1886 and 1888, in Shestov's view, was the turning point in Nietzsche’s life and literary career, when ‘something unprecedentedly hideous and terrible had begun to stir in his soul’ (1969, 241, 242). Nietzsche began his “underground

---

14 In 1873 Dostoevsky wrote in his Diary of a Writer: ‘It would be very difficult for me to tell the story of the regeneration of my convictions’ (quoted in Shestov, 1982, 143). Shestov adopted this phrase from Dostoevsky's vocabulary; it became one of the key concepts in his analysis of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche’s writing. Shestov used what is now a less common meaning of the word “regeneration” (pererozhdeniye), i.e. ‘a fundamental change in one’s beliefs’. According to The Ozhegov Dictionary of the Russian Language (1984, 450) the use of the word in this meaning was popular in the 1800s-1850s. However, today the corresponding word in the English language is mainly used in the meaning of ‘the action or process of regenerating or being regenerated, rebirth, renewal or revival.’

15 Arthur Danto pointed out in Nietzsche as Philosopher (2005) that the rupture with Wagner was a complicated episode in the biographies of both men, and the psychology available to date is too fragmented.
work” during a long period of darkness, while he wrote *Dawn* 16 (1881), where he described himself as an underground man:

> In this book we can see the underground man at work - digging, mining and undermining. You can see him – always provided that you have eyes for such deep work - making his way slowly, cautiously, gently but surely, without showing signs of the weariness that usually accompanies a long privation of light and air. It might even be said that he is content with his work in the dark. It even begins to seem as if some faith is leading him on, as if he finds solace in his work. Perhaps he needs a long period of darkness, he needs an unintelligible, hidden, enigmatic something for he knows what awaits him: his own morning, his own redemption, his own rosy dawn. (Nietzsche quoted in Shestov, 1969, 271).

Later Nietzsche confirmed that with this book he started his “campaign against morality” (1989, 290).

Shestov observed that in comparison to Nietzsche’s ideas of the earlier period now in the laws of nature Nietzsche could only find “a guarantee of unhappiness,” but in the horrors of life - a guarantee of a future (1969, 310). Accordingly, in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) Nietzsche suggested that one must examine their own assumptions and prejudices; to subject oneself to one’s own tests, the ‘tests are made only before ourselves and before no other judge’ (1930, 47). Subsequently, a “revaluation of all values” became ‘the formula for an act of supreme self-examination on the part of humanity’ (Nietzsche, 1989, 326). Nietzsche developed this line of argument in his next book, *On The Genealogy of Morals* (1887), where he made one of his most celebrated statements, when “nothing is true, everything is permitted”17 (1969, 282).

16 Sometimes the title is also translated as *Daybreak*.

17 *Nietzsche, F., On The Genealogy of Morals* (1989, 150). According to Walter Kaufmann who wrote the commentaries to this book, it is questionable whether this statement is directly related to Dostoevsky’s idea expressed by Ivan Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* (if mankind lost the belief in God and
Shestov suggested that in his mature writings Nietzsche attempted to break away from the authority of modern theories, while his thought did not seek stability or balance, which corresponded to Dostoevsky’s “world view by contradictions” (Ibid. 282, 293). From the age of forty-four until his death Nietzsche “preached” not only against the unhappy and the sick, but also against their defenders, “the good and the just” (Ibid. 304). Nietzsche admitted that his sickness gave him the right to change all his habits completely:

The man who suffers severely looks forth with terrible calmness from his state of suffering upon outside things: all those little lying enchantments, by which things are usually surrounded when seen through the eye of a healthy person, have vanished from the sufferer; his own life even lies there before him, stripped of all bloom and colour. (2013, 66)

The tragic and painful experience, Shestov inferred, provoked Nietzsche to seek a new, “free” vision. In Shestov’s view Zarathustra represented the struggle of hope against hopelessness. Paradoxically, in the end, Zarathustra ‘gained courage to rebaptize what we regard as evil in us and call it goodness’ (Ibid. 312). Thus, in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-1885) Nietzsche established “the philosophy of tragedy” (Shestov, 1969, 293).

However, Shestov argued that Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov purposed the idea of ‘beyond good and evil’ 35 years before immortality, “everything would be permitted”), as the novel was not translated into French until 1888.

18 A pattern of inner contradictions prevailed in the characters of Dostoevsky’s novels. For instance, the character of Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment (1866) is full of contradictions: Raskolnikov the murderer is mentally unbalanced; his characteristic mood swings rapidly change from momentary bravado to animal fear, from spontaneous generosity to cold heartlessness (Terras, 1998, 54).

19 Raskolnikov is the main character in Crime and Punishment, 1866.
Nietzsche wrote *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) (Ibid. 213). In Dostoevsky’s novel Raskolnikov killed a human being and found a way to salvation when he converted to Sonia Marmeladova’s evangelical faith. According to Shestov, Dostoevsky propagated to love not only the people who you see as happy, but also those who are unhappy, ugly and disgusting (Ibid. 317). The writer depicted the dreadful truth he had discovered as the result of the years he spent at the Siberian penal colony with horror and shame, through the voices of the heroes in his novels (Ibid. 315). Nietzsche, to a greater extent, Shestov proposed, had reason to dedicate his thought to tracking down the “psychology” of preachers and morality. Like Dostoevsky, Nietzsche despised “the good and the just,” but for him the tears of sympathy and compassion were no more than tears of pity and failure, and ‘the stupidity of “the good” was unfathomably shrewd’ (Ibid. 304, 307). For Nietzsche this rebellion was a new and great “declaration of rights,” for the sake of which he undertook all his “underground work” (Ibid. 315).

Shestov argued that while Nietzsche often spoke of aristocracy in his writing, it had little to do with him personally. According to Shestov, having substituted the word “aristocrat” with the phrase “the underground man,” Nietzsche himself became an underground man – the “ugliest man,” “the man into whose mouth the serpent crawled,” as Shestov referred to him (Ibid. 317; 1982, 180). In his view, Nietzsche only joined the aristocrats, i.e. ‘the happy ones, the lucky ones, the victors,’ for external reasons (Ibid. 313). For “aristocratism,” he wrote, like the “good” are means for beautifying life and Nietzsche had a little concern for it (1969, 138).

---

20 In the spring of 1847 Dostoevsky had begun to attend the Friday meetings at the house of M. V. Butashevich - Petrashevsky (1821-1866) to discuss social problems from the socialist viewpoint of Charles Fourier. On April the 22, 1849 Dostoevsky was arrested and jailed. Dostoevsky was due to be executed soon after by the firing squad, but his execution was pardoned in exchange for 8 years (later shortened to 4) of prison labour camp in Western Siberia (1850-1854). He remained in exile till April 1857.
Instead, Nietzsche understood that the evil was as necessary as the good, that both are necessary conditions of human existence, and ‘that the sun must shine equally on the good and the wicked’ (Ibid. 133). The reason Nietzsche joined the aristocrats was to gain strength to endure poverty,\(^{21}\) because poverty is less noticeable behind aristocratic manners.

The underground people, like Nietzsche, rebel against universal truths, harmony and regularity, which scientific investigation and ethical theory seek so avidly. The thought of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche found refuge in the eternal darkness and chaos of the underground, where the life of every underground man was valued as much as the whole world (Ibid. 322). Shestov claimed that in their mature work Dostoevsky and Nietzsche spoke in the name of the underground people – the poor, the indignant, the outraged and the convicted (Ibid. 313, 317). However, with Zarathustra Nietzsche not only raised the question of the underground man, but also provided an answer to it (Ibid. 312). Therefore, Shestov suggested, Nietzsche sometimes exceeded his Russian colleague (Ibid. 301).

For Shestov, the merit of Nietzsche’s philosophy is that it deals with the questions and meaning of human tragedy – in all its volume\(^{22}\); while Ivan Karamazov revolted against “the devilish good and evil,” Zarathustra exclaimed: ‘We already know what is good and just, we possess it also; woe unto those who still seek here’ (Ibid. 306 - 307). “The men of tragedy,” Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, abandoned humanism for the cruelty of real life to ‘side with mankind’s most horrible enemy’\(^{23}\) and, according to Shestov,

\(\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\) Shestov explained that under “poverty” he understood Nietzsche’s egoism, ‘the egoism of a poor man, a beggar, indignant and outraged over the fact that even his sacrifices are disdained’ (1969, 313).

\(\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\) Shestov, L., manuscript MS 2101-1, draft for Philosophy and Preaching, Lazaunne, Dec. 1898, 75.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{23}}\) In On the Genealogy of Morals (1887) Nietzsche wrote: ‘Being evil is being “not moral” (immoral), practicing immorality, resisting tradition, however reasonable
‘whatever harm the “evil” may do, the harm done by “the good” is the most harmful harm!’ (Ibid. 307). Even if the whole world perished, the underground man would not renounce his rights or exchange them for the ideals of pity cultivated by morality (Ibid. 315). In Shestov’s opinion never before Dostoevsky and Nietzsche the psychology of the “good” was revealed with such ruthlessness (Ibid. 317).

Shestov’s critical analysis of Nietzsche’s work aimed to unveil the inner world of the philosopher. His method of reading Nietzsche’s writing focused on the investigation and exposure of the author’s inner conflict. Similarly to his reading of Dostoevsky, upon establishing a breaking point in the philosopher’s life, Shestov attempted to “deconstruct” his text, seeking to reveal a hidden meaning in the author’s writing, a personal confession.24 What Shestov considered especially valuable in Nietzsche’s philosophy was his personal, passionate approach to truth as opposed to the abstract and theoretical attitude of traditional logic and epistemology (Martin, 1969, XXII).

For Shestov a true philosophy is the one based on reality, on life, it is the philosophy of penal servitude and the philosophy of tragedy (1969, 201). Shestov argued that the philosophy of tragedy is hostile to all that is commonplace, it demands respect for “great misfortune” and “great ugliness”; precisely when the commonplace ends the philosophy of tragedy begins (Ibid. 320). According to Shestov the ideals and hopes of the positivists and materialists and

or stupid tradition may be. Harming the neighbor, however, has been felt to be preeminently harmful in all the moral laws of different ages, until now the word “evil” is associated primarily with the deliberate harming of the neighbor’ (1989, 169).

24 For a philosophy writer like Shestov the link with literature was highly important. As Michel Aucouturier noticed: ‘Shestov sees in a work of literature a personal confession of the author (...). For true philosophy in his eyes can grow only out of an existential revelation’ (2002, 79).
their dreams “of chicken for Sunday roast and the universal happiness” are nothing else but childish fantasies in the eyes of the people of tragedy (Ibid. 318). In contrast to systematic philosophy Shestov’s tragic philosophy stemmed from the acknowledgement of the fundamental chaos of life. Therefore he viewed tragedy as “the mysterious unknown,” and believed that no social changes could banish tragedy from life (Ibid. 310, 318).

For Shestov a person begins to think “philosophically” when no path of action is any longer left for him. Later, after leaving Russia for good, during his years in exile, Shestov developed his discourse on the philosophy of tragedy into a more radical direction. Thus, in Speculation and Revelation (1964), published posthumously, Shestov wrote:

When reason grows weak, when truth dies, when the light goes out – only then do the words of Revelation become accessible to man. And, conversely, as long as we have light, reason and truth, we drive Revelation away from ourselves. (1964, 63-64)

Significantly, as Czeslaw Milosz (1981) pointed out, Shestov was neither a preacher, nor a moralist, nor a theologian; on the contrary, he aimed to present a dilemma in all its acuteness (109). The influence of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche is most evident in Shestov’s earlier articles and essays, for example in The Good in The Teaching of Tolstoy and Nietzsche: Philosophy and Preaching (1900) and Apotheosis of Groundlessness (1905), where his philosophical mood is close to the existential philosophical tendency. As Boris Groys wrote, ‘Shestov made an essential contribution to creating an intellectual atmosphere in France that later made possible the rise of French existentialism’ (2012, 34).

In his mature writings, where Shestov’s philosophy took on its most radical form, the notions of tragedy and the mysterious unknown (neizvedannoye) opened up a path to what Shestov called a “biblical revelation.” On one of the final pages of Dostoevsky and
Nietzsche: *The Philosophy of Tragedy* Shestov asked: ‘Must one really be afraid of the unknown?’ (316). He took on the challenge to answer this question in his future philosophical writing, such as *Apotheosis of Groundlessness* (1905), *Penultimate Words* (1916), *Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky* (1935), *Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy* (1936), *Athens and Jerusalem* (1938), *Speculation and Revelation* (1964), *Sola Fide* (1966) and other works.

**References**


*The Nietzsche-Wagner Correspondence* (1921) ed. by Elisabeth Forster-Nietzsche, trans. by Caroline V. Kerr, New York: Boni and Liveright.

Notes

* Translations of the quotations from the manuscripts in *The Lev Shestov Archive*, from Russian into English are all mine.
About the Contributors

**Brad Baumgartner** recently completed his Ph.D. in Literature and Criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Mors Mystica* (Schism, 2015) and *Interdisciplinary Humanities*. Current projects include *Weird Mysticism*, a monograph, *Audens Solitudo*, a collection of fragments and aphorisms, and *Celeste*, an experimental novella.

**Nicola Masciandaro** (PhD, Medieval Studies, Yale University, 2002) is Professor of English at Brooklyn College (CUNY) and a specialist in medieval literature. His works include: *The Voice of the Hammer: The Meaning of Work in Middle English Literature* (Notre Dame, 2007); *Leper Creativity: Cyclonopedia Symposium*, co-edited with Ed Keller and Eugene Thacker (punctum, 2012); *Dark Nights of the Universe*, co-authored with Daniel Colucciello Barber, Alexander Galloway, and Eugene Thacker (NAME, 2013); *And They Were Two In One And One In Two*, co-edited with Eugene Thacker (Schism, 2014); *Sufficient Unto the Day: Sermones Contra Solicitudinem* (Schism, 2014); and *Floating Tomb: Black Metal Theory*, co-authored with Edia Connole (Mimesis, 2015).

**Con stanza Bizraelli** (Originally Constanza Nuñez-Melgar) is a theorist and a music composer and producer. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of Cyclops journal and a PhD candidate at the department of music of the University of Edinburgh. Her research interests include contemporary experimental theory, theory of religion, contemporary music and sound theories and philosophy of mythology. Current projects include: *The Ruin and the Sonic Sacred: Towards an Heterology of Noise-Music, The Cyclops and Ocular Origination* and *Accentology*. 
James F. Depew teaches in the Department of Politics at Acadia University. His research in comparative political anthropology focuses on questions of ethico-religious subjectivity vis-à-vis anthropotechnical interventions. More specifically, his work examines the history of ethico-religious conduct from the ancient Greeks to modernity, and develops a critique of the techniques of personal appropriation that have grounded the development of contemporary neo-liberal subjectivity. He has published on historical subjectivity and philosophical ethnology in the work of Schelling, natural law from the Greeks to early modernity, and Foucault’s work on conduct, care of the self, and subjective technologies.

Marina Jijina - Ogden is an award-winning artist and philosophy scholar. Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, since 2000 she has been living and working in Great Britain. She is a PhD candidate at The University of Glasgow and a contributing writer to The Oxford Philosopher, a philosophic periodical.