The Life and Work of Ernesto De Martino

Italian Perspectives on Apocalypse and Rebirth in the Modern Study of Religion

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Cover Illustration: Ernesto de Martino in August 1956, during an ethnographic journey in the Southern Italian region of Basilicata. Photograph by Franco Pinna.

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Contents

Acknowledgments

> The communion with others populates our past and reaches, in our memory, only a few faces of the people closest to us. It renews itself continuously in the presence of a need, also physical, to maintain old relationships and weave together new ones: Friendly conversations, the joy of a nice dinner amongst friends in an *osteria* outside of town, the miscellaneous encounters of everyday life, the feelings of a celebration experienced together. [All these] do not just bear witness of ourselves to ourselves and get us used to the humility that comes with a continuous confrontation of our ideas and of our emotions. They also form our self, pulling it back, again and again, from the edge of the abyss that is the *moi haïssable*; pushing it, again and again, back to the green fields of life with growing courage and certainty.
>
> ERNESTO DE MARTINO, *La Fine del Mondo*

It is impossible to write a book without the support of others. This is particularly true of the first book in an author's career. Although my scholarship grew into a strong tree, with the pages you are about to read being the most prominent fruit, it would have never come into being without the seed that was planted fifteen years ago. It was during my time as a student at the University of Lausanne that I was introduced to Ernesto de Martino and the Roman School of History of Religions by Silvia Mancini. She was not only, to borrow a term from the distant Himalayan world, a "lineage holder" of this scholarly tradition, but also a passionate, generous, and demanding mentor. Later, as a graduate student at the University of Virginia, I not only had the opportunity of whetting my intellectual curiosity in sheer endless directions, but my perspective on de Martino was enriched through my exchanges with a series of interlocutors from various disciplinary backgrounds, particularly Allan Megill, Richard Handler, Roy Wagner, George Mentore, Kurtis Schaeffer, David Germano, Larry Bouchard, Peter Ochs, Jalane Schmidt, Timothy Wilson, Bruce Greyson, and Edward Kelly. I would like to express my particular gratefulness to Asher Biemann, whose quiet, pragmatic, and realistic mindset offered an invaluable force of stabilization to the dispositions of both myself and that of

this book's protagonist. Although he told me, during one of our first meetings, that books are generally more accomplished teachers than people, I would still choose our conversations over access to any library in the world.

The Swiss National Science Foundation generously supported an extended stay in Rome, where I not only conducted the principal archival research for this project, but also spent blissful afternoons writing on various benches throughout the Villa Borghese gardens. I would like to thank the many scholars in Italy (and beyond), who have offered their time and energy to engage me and my thinking during this period, particularly Giovanni Casadio, Marcello Massenzio, Ulrich van Loyen, Massimo Marraffa, Sergio Berardini, Adelina Talamonti, Alessandro Testa, Fabrizio Ferrari, Valerio Severino, Pietro Angelini, Emilia Andri, Fabio Dei, Nicola Gasbarro, Natale Spineto, and Michaela Schäuble. I am also indebted to Carlo Ginzburg, who has not only mobilized the full range of his impressive acumen to critically examine my thinking, but has also served as an inspiration for what it means to be an intellectual in a globalized world. Sitting in front of him in his home, surrounded by towering stacks of books, was both one of the most intimidating and exhilarating moments of my journey as an academic so far.

I also want to acknowledge my time at the University of Bern, where I defended the thesis out of which this book was developed. Besides the Dr. Josephine de Karman Foundation, which provided me with the funds to complete my dissertation, I am particularly grateful to Jens Schlieter and Marco Pasi, who have been so enthusiastic about my work that they carefully evaluated a dissertation that reached biblical proportions. Jens has been much more than a *Doktorvater* for me, supporting my career even in the years after I finished my Ph.D. In the spring semester of 2019, when he encouraged me to teach a course on the life and work of de Martino, I had the good fortune to initiate bright and open-minded students into the Italian ways of thinking about religion. I fondly remember the many hours we spent at the Länggass-Tee shop, with me pitching them chapter after chapter, and them, in turn, responding curiously and critically to what they had read.

I would also like to express my thanks to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Khyentse Foundation, and the Lady Davis Foundation, who have provided me with yet another home away from home as a postdoctoral researcher over the past year. I am especially appreciative of Eviatar Shulman, who has helped me grow on professional and personal levels over what has been a challenging period for many of us. There is no doubt that the outbreak of the pandemic, coupled with the stimulating environment of Israel—with its rich histories and persistent contradictions—created a field of energy that reverberated into my manuscript during the final revisions. At Brill Publishers, my thanks go to

Tessa Schild, who has accompanied me and my book through the publication process with a lot of patience and grace. I also thank the anonymous readers, who devoted their time and wisdom to my study.

One of these reviewers critically observed that I often tend to quote secondary scholarship to say things that I could have said myself and that there are moments, in which "de Martino's work seems to drown in a sea of metatheoretical speculation." While there is much truth to this, I decided—perhaps to your chagrin—not to change my style of writing. On the contrary, the mixture of voices in the book reflects the times during which it was written, as well as the spirit of the book itself. Just like de Martino, who once self-reflectively described himself as an "intellectual of transition," this book embodies my own transformations. When I started this study, I was a fledgling student in Switzerland, who would absorb any new information like a sponge; as I finish this book, I hold two Ph.D. degrees and teach my own university courses on three continents. Accordingly, the various voices found in the book reflect my own journey from what Jonathan Z. Smith once called a writer of a "dissertation," marked by an "inability to argue and to accept responsibility for decisions of inclusion and exclusion, [...] a bland nodding to authority," to the writer of a "thesis," characterized by a "combative and assertive" disposition and "painful and argued decisions of choice" (Smith 2012, 39).

Looking back, it becomes apparent that I wrote this biographical study of de Martino precisely because my research has always been entangled in the fabric of my own life's trajectory. As the German idealist philosopher Johann Fichte once put it, the kind of philosophy a man chooses depends upon the kind of man he is. There is no doubt that my departure from Switzerland as a young man has profoundly marked my identity. It is as if the drive to escape the *Kantönligeist*, which stifled my creativity as a teenager, acted as the most productive catalyst over the past decade of my life. In the United States, I learned what it means to be free, Rome has taught me how to enjoy life, and Israel showed me how to find peace in contradiction.

Although I never suffered the bouts of famous Swiss nostalgia for mothers' soups and Alpine folk tunes, my identity is nonetheless rooted in my family. Thematically, for instance, the articulation of an Italian perspective on the apocalypse can also be seen as an expedition into my own family's history. As they left Italy two generations ago to settle across the alps, it was a conscious choice to end one world in order to restart another. In terms of my way of thinking, I was shaped by my parents. From my father, I inherited a deep love for the construction of ideas, the laying out of arguments, the journeying into the world of thoughts. My mother, by contrast, instilled in me a curiosity for living cultures, a capacity for vision, as well as a commitment to practical

resolve and courageous decision based on intuition. There is no doubt that this project, like many others in my life, would have never been completed without her support.

Writing a book on the dialectical nature of de Martino's thought for an Anglophone audience also reflects the future trajectory of my family. I thank Katie, who has been a wonderful mother to our children and a human being with whom I've grown tremendously over the past fifteen years. Finally, although they once asked me to write about things that are relevant to them—specifying that they would read anything about unicorns and LEGO cars—this book evokes a spirit that I hope to instill in my three children: Loyal recovery of an old heritage and a transcendent assertion of one's own place within this larger tradition. Of course, I expect neither myself nor my children to ever achieve such a complete *coincidenta oppositorum*. On the contrary, just like Benedetto Croce, the Italian idealist teacher of de Martino, I see this way of living as an ongoing project of world-building, always incomplete and continuously inviting for new construction. In this spirit, I would amend Fichte's previously invoked adage and state that the kind of philosophy a man chooses depends not upon the kind of man he is, but rather upon the kind of man *he wants to become*.

Let the Earth Shake: From Crisis-Born Hero to Master of Civilizational Crisis

> A short while ago, the atrocious news of the earthquake of Messina had reached Naples and the people stood bewildered in light of a tragedy, which seemed to be of cosmic proportions. As people were learning hour by hour more terrifying particulars, their imagination fabricated even greater terror. The night before I was born, a convoy for collecting clothing for the sufferers from the earthquake from Calabria and Sicily was passing through Via Fonseca. My mother used to tell me that, upon the signals by the men of the convoy, which emerged as high-pitched shouts and invocations, the windows of the high apartment buildings would open up, the balconies would fill up with people, and the women would throw down offerings: Bed sheets, gowns, shirts, underwear, socks, shoes, infant straps, skirts, blouses for women and suits for men. In this downpour of paraphernalia, the shouting of those who were giving and those who were receiving, the crying of the women, and the clamor of the low gateways out of which ever more donors surfaced, the street was transformed into an immense oblative phantasmagoria. It was difficult to distinguish pain from celebration, pity from gratitude, receiving from giving. My mother, excited and moved, was also on the balcony to make her offering. Then, so she used to say, upon seeing a Sicilian refugee in mourning sitting on top of a wagon of this convoy with a baby on her breast, she at once felt her legs buckle. Asking for support from her neighbors, she was carried home. They sat her down in the nearest chair. […] When she regained consciousness, she looked around with her eyes veiled in tears and murmured: "We are ready." The labor had started.[1]

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1 Ernesto De Martino, *Vita di Gennaro Esposito, Napoletano*, ed. Luigi Chiriatti (Calimera: Edizioni Kurumuny, 2004), 10–11. All translations from works cited in Italian, Spanish, French, and German are mine unless otherwise indicated.

In this passage, which forms part of a larger collection of autobiographical reflections, all of which are translated for the first time in this study, Ernesto de Martino (1908–1965) retells the story of what happened the night he was born. What is striking about this account is not only the author's evocative literary style, in which the use of a term like "oblative phantasmagoria" gives the reader an important hint at his identity as an intellectual trained in the study of religion, but also that he intentionally located his birth within the context of a cosmic drama. Entitled *Via Fonseca*, this passage depicts the dramatic scenes taking place in the street in front of de Martino's house after the earthquake of Messina on December 28th, 1908 as the city of Naples was flooded with displaced victims in search of food, clothing, and shelter. The 1908-earthquake shook much of Southern Italy in the early morning hours with a moment magnitude of 7.1. Lasting for a mere thirty seconds, it was a massive event of international dimensions. Leveling entire cities, permanently altering coast lines, and causing the death of close to 100,000 people, it was the most destructive earthquake ever to strike Europe in recorded history and left a lasting mark on the collective psyche of Italians for decades to come.[2]

What makes de Martino's retelling of his birth even more remarkable, is the fact that it is mythopoeic in nature, consisting of a combination of historical realities and the creative re-envisionings by its author. Indeed, while the devastating earthquake of Messina shook the Island of Sicily on December 28th, 1908, Ernesto was born in Naples on December 1st. In the same year, but almost a full month earlier. The earthquake narrative sets the tone for the rest of de Martino's life as the trope of the shaking earth is a repeatedly invoked in his writings. Throughout his career, the Italian thinker linked natural calamities, particularly earthquakes, with socio-political crises and intellectual debates in Italy, Europe, and the Western world as a whole. The idea of the earthquake being an "extraordinary event," which can stimulate an intellectual movement towards "deeper spiritual reflection," stems from Ernst Cassirer, the early twentieth-century neo-Kantian philosopher, whom de Martino greatly appreciated.[3] Just as the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 changed the thinking of Goethe, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Kant, de Martino portrays himself as the spawn of crisis to set the theme for the century-long intellectual, spiritual, and

2 Giorgio Boatti, *La terra trema: Messina 28 dicembre 1908. I trenta secondi che cambiarono l'Italia, non gli italiani* (Milano: Mondadori, 2004).

3 Ernst Cassirer and James Haden, *Kant's life and thought* (1918; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 59. For a discussion of de Martino's relationship to Cassirer, see chapter 6 of part II.

cultural aftershocks that would follow the tremblor of his birth in the early twentieth century.

Today, in light of a series of challenges—such as the corona virus pandemic, climate change, or the refugee emergencies in Europe and North America—debates surrounding the crisis of Western civilization seem as present as never before. However, what common discourse frequently forgets is that none of these ideas are as new as they might seem. On the contrary, the history of the Western world is characterized by a long-standing tradition of crisis-thinking that exerted a deep fascination on de Martino. As scholars since his untimely death in 1965 have argued, de Martino's work was dominated by the idea of the "coexistence of modernity with that of the apocalypse."[4] Roughly one hundred years after the publication of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918) and the ravaging of the "Spanish flu" (1918–19), this first comprehensive study of the life and work of Ernesto de Martino (1908–1965) in English language retells the dramatic story of civilizational crisis in the twentieth through the eyes of scholarship on religion.

While Ernesto de Martino is one of the greatest thinkers on religion that Italy has ever produced, his work has remained largely unknown outside of his native land until today. The reasons for this neglect, particularly in the Anglophone world, are multiple. Not only have Italian thinkers generally received less attention than their French and German counterparts, but de Martino was also a particularly complex individual with a wide range of concerns and orientations. I remember that when I first envisioned writing a book about de Martino in 2010, I climbed through the stacks of the old Alderman library at the University of Virginia, having to collect his individual works from various sections, many of them located on different floors: History of religions, cultural anthropology, folklore, musicology, transcultural psychiatry, or moral philosophy. While his thinking can be theoretically unified in its life-long fascination with the study of religion and its relationship to apocalypse and rebirth, his explorations were broad: From Ancient Greek ritual to Marxist ideology, from the Fascist sacralization of the state to Southern Italy's folkloric practices surrounding spider-bitten women, or from apocalyptic tendencies in modern French literature to the Christian roots of secularism, de Martino had something to say about all of these issues. Finally, another factor contributing to his relative neglect by international scholarship is that his thinking about crisis always involved a political dimension. Here too, his persona was anything but one-dimensional: After registering with the fascist party during his years as a

4 Placido Cherchi, "La Presenza Della Crisi, in « L'Indice » 20, 2 (1989)," *L'Indice* 20, no. 2 (n.d.): 36.

student, he later joined the anti-fascist militia, before becoming a leading force in Italian socialist and communist circles.

In light of this remarkable breadth, it is little surprising that his work has provoked a flood of studies from many different orientations. Particularly in Italy, de Martino has become a cult-like figure with followers from all possible fields of research in recent years. During my years of research in Rome, where I benefited from access to de Martino's archives hosting a treasure-trove of unpublished materials, I found knowledgeable admirers of his thinking not only in the form of historians of religion and anthropologists, but also in socialist politicians, undergraduate students of musicology, experts of Italian philosophy, and pretty much anyone stemming from the *mezzogiorno*, the Southern region of Italy. Although de Martino is still one of the most underestimated scholars of religion of the twentieth century, the few international studies dedicated to his work have emphasized how his true importance can be fruitfully compared to the likes of Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), and Clifford Geertz (1926–2006).[5] What has never been comprehensively addressed, however, is that this uniquely colorful Italian thinker positioned himself in the heart of the international discipline of religious studies. Indeed, de Martino entertained a fertile exchange with the phenomenologist of religion Mircea Eliade with whom he shared an interest in religious experience and its relevance for the political circumstances during the 1930s. He engaged in a close reading of all the major works of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, with whom he agreed that a distancing perspective that moves beyond this experience was necessary for understanding religion. Finally, he also articulated important anticipatory remarks on what would become Clifford Geertz's interpretative anthropology, sharing its emphasis on a self-reflexive encounter with foreign religious cultures.

In all of these appointments with his time's leading scholars of religion, de Martino highlighted how the twentieth-century study of religion was shaped by an underlying fascination with civilizational crisis. The Italian thinker believed that scholars of religion, just like a thermometer for body temperature, were

5 George R. Saunders, "'Critical Ethnocentrism' and the Ethnology of Ernesto De Martino," *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 4 (1993): 875; Giordana Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino: les vies antérieures d'un anthropologue* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2009), 8; Vincent Crapanzano, "Foreword," in *The Land of Remorse: A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism*, by Ernesto De Martino, trans. Dorothy Louise Zinn (London: Free Association Books, 2005), vii; Emilio Giacomo Berrocal, "The Post-Colonialism of Ernesto De Martino: The Principle of Critical Ethnocentrism as a Failed Attempt to Reconstruct Ethnographic Authority," *History and Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2009): 123; Fabrizio M. Ferrari, *Ernesto De Martino on Religion: The Crisis and the Presence* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2012), xii.

particularly sensitive to the feverishly mercurial nature of their world. For example, he argued that the scholarly projects of leading figures of the first half of the century, like Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, were largely driven by the idea of civilizational crisis as a radical rupture from a premodern theological worldview. More generally, commenting on the lack of unified vision in light of the divergent perspectives, de Martino characterized the discipline itself as a field ruptured by crisis. He not only diagnosed that the leading thinkers of the study of religion in the twentieth century incarnated the socio-political tensions surrounding them, but he also believed that this led to the materialization of distinct currents of thought within the discipline. Specifically, in the twentieth century, the crisis-ridden discipline of religious studies was operating on three tectonic plates: The insider-phenomenological approach of Mircea Eliade, the outsider-explanatory approach of Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the cultural-discursive approach of Clifford Geertz.

Beyond situating him within the global discipline of religious studies through the relationship with Eliade, Lévi-Strauss, and Geertz, this study also offers an interpretation of the comprehensive corpus of his published and unpublished writings, introduces his major teachers amongst the Italian intelligentsia, and lays open the complex socio-political context that gave rise to de Martino's thinking. Born in Naples in 1908 and passing away in Rome in 1965, he lived through some of the most turbulent years of recent history: Coming of age after WWI and the time Mussolini took power to create a "third Italy," emerging as a scholar during the Civil War and the Resistance in the final years of WWII, gaining the status of a leading intellectual during the reemergence of the "Southern Question" in the 1950s, before dedicating the end of his life to the investigation of apocalyptic movements in all realms of cultural production during the cold war years, de Martino was always on the forefront of intellectual and political debates that marked the Western world.

Despite his fascination with crisis as a rupture that encompassed civilization, politics, and science, de Martino's fundamental attitude remained steadfastly committed to optimism. His thought reached its most radical expression in the moments when he argued that crisis must be regarded as an opportunity for civilizational renewal or rebirth. The greatest power of de Martino's work might lie in his insistence that intellectuals can only overcome crisis if they are willing to generate a "unity of thought" that overcomes our culture's tendency to think in "separate entities" ("*compartimenti-stagni*").[6] This is even more true for our globalized, digitalized, and rapidly changing world. As the coronavirus

6 Ernesto De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, ed. Stefano De Matteis (1941; repr., Lecce: Argo, 1997), 56.

pandemic has painfully reminded us, we are increasingly confronted with complex crises that are just as biological as they are cultural, just as scientific as they are social, just as virological as they are political. In this light, de Martino's eclectic research interests, his continuous composition of speculative theories in light of empirical phenomena, and his fearless integration of contrasting disciplinary perspectives are more relevant than ever.

In this book, I decode de Martino's philosophy of civilizational crisis and cultural palingenesis by means of seven concepts that marked his scholarship over the course of his career. In the first chapter, I tell the story of the young Ernesto's early years as a student and explain how his scholarly interests in religion, like that of many of his contemporaries, can only be understood in light of "the decline of the West" (*la decadenza dell'occidente*), a concept that stands for the larger crisis of the modern world-view of progress and the rise of cultural pessimism during the interwar years. In chapter 2, I discuss "civil religion" (*religione civile*) by juxtaposing it to Eliade's "politics of nostalgia," arguing that the Italian scholar's thinking was based on a palingenetic conception of time according to which political religion is both the return to something from the past and the invention of something new. In chapter 3, I elaborate on "the crisis of the presence" (*la crisi della presenza*), arguing that de Martino used it not only to explain the origin of magic in non-modern societies, but also to warn of a contemporary crisis, namely the rise of magical thinking during the Second World War. In discussing the theory of "de-historification" (*destorificazione*) in chapter 4, I argue that it allowed the Italian thinker to integrate the positions of the insider-phenomenological approach of Eliade and the outsider-explanatory approach of Lévi-Strauss as religion is both a flight from history and an effective means to transform it. In chapter 5, I introduce the concept of "critical ethnocentrism" (*etnocentrismo critico*), which de Martino developed during his ethnographic explorations of the Italian South in the 1950s, arguing that it is marked by a series of traits that can also be found in Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* and post-colonial anthropology. Centered on the "loyalty to the cultural homeland" (*fedeltà alla patria culturale*), chapter 6 shows that de Martino, despite having much in common with interpretative and self-reflexive anthropology of the likes of Clifford Geertz, virulently opposed any form of cultural relativism, remaining firmly committed to the values of Western civilization. Finally, chapter 7 explores de Martino's final notes redacted before his death in order to explore the "ethos of transcendence" (*ethos del trascendimento*), a principle that forms the foundation for a strong cognitive and moral model of truth, which promises to offer an effective alternative to post-modern thinking.

Thus, if much of recent scholarship on de Martino has started to celebrate him as an early harbinger of the various turns that characterize postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism, this study makes a different argument.[7] De Martino's work was profoundly dialectical in nature. If it is post-modern, then only inasmuch as it remained deeply grounded in modernity. As a consequence, his work should be regarded as an anticipated analysis of and resolute response to the cultural-discursive paradigm that came to dominate the humanities in recent decades. Although many of his political and intellectual choices will sound questionable and smack of a naïve form of modernism—particularly his youthful infatuation with fascism and his steadfast commitment to ethnocentrism—his value lies precisely in his commitment to a dialectical type of science. De Martino's dialectical thinking encourages us to *Let the Earth Shake* because any crisis offers science an opportunity to improve its methods and to increase our knowledge about the world. Unlike contemporary scholars of religion, who have rightly been accused of believing their science to be "incapable of learning from its mistakes or correcting its weaknesses,"[8] de Martino was confident that science is capable of growth and progress.

7 Fabrizio M. Ferrari, *Ernesto De Martino on Religion*.

8 Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Reconstructing 'Religion' from the Bottom Up," *Numen* 63, no. 5–6 (October 14, 2016): 590.

CHAPTER 1

The Decline of the West (1908–1929): The Rupture of Time in Modernity and the Rise of the Prophets of Crisis

1 Student Years under Fascism and the Guidance of a Spiritual Prophet of Crisis

It is no coincidence that de Martino published his first scholarly article as a twenty-one-year-old student at the University of Naples on Oswald Spengler's (1880–1936) *The Decline of the West* (1918), one of the most important books published during WWI.[1] Although scholarship has lamented that "The Decline of the West" (*La decadenza dell'Occidente*) consists of only "two immature pages,"[2] and has hastily denied it the status of "insight, or, even less, formulation of specific hypotheses or theories,"[3] it is of immense value to the historian of ideas. In fact, it is the starting point of what would become the marking trait of de Martino's thinking for the rest of his life, namely a profound fascination with the crisis of his own civilization.

Besides the fact that Ernesto de Martino was born in Naples on December 1st 1908, we do not know much about his childhood and upbringing. Ernesto's father, who gave his own name to his only son, was an engineer for the Italian State Railway, and his mother Gina Jaquinangelo was a teacher. About Ernesto Sr. it is said that he was secularized and patriotic.[4] Introducing his mother, scholars emphasize that she was secular yet open to mediumistic and spiritualistic experiences. De Martino's family was required to move frequently due to the profession of the *pater familias*. As a consequence, the young Ernesto moved in between Florence, Naples, and Turin. After finishing the *liceo*,

1 Ernesto De Martino, "La decadenza dell'Occidente," *Rivista del gruppo universitario fascista napoletano Mussolini* 1 (1929): 28–29. For Spengler's original work, see Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Braunmüller, 1918).

2 Domenico Conte, "Ernesto De Martino e la 'mobilitazione dell'arcaico,'" in *Ernesto De Martino tra fondamento e "insecuritas,"* ed. Giuseppe Cantillo, Domenico Conte, and Anna Donise (Napoli: Liguori, 2014), 96.

3 Giuseppe Galasso, "La funzione storica del magismo. Problemi e orizzonti del primo de Martino," *Rivista storica italiana* 2, no. CIX (1997): 494.

4 Cesare Bermani, "Tra furore e valore: Ernesto de Martino," *Il De Martino—Bollettino dell'Istituto Ernesto De Martino* 5–6 (1996): 35.

where he studied Latin and German, he enrolled at the Polytechnic University (*Politecnico*) to study Engineering in 1927. Having done so in order to please his father, he became quickly dissatisfied with this inherited course of studies. A year later, de Martino left the Piemontese capital to return with his family to Naples where he commenced his studies in philosophy and religion.

The ideas lived out by his parents—between religion and the nation—thematically inform his early intellectual activities, which also move between these two concepts. In fact, de Martino's early explorations of religion were closely related to his political engagement with fascism. Not unlike their generous treatment of other eminent Italian historians of religion—such as Raffaele Pettazzoni (1883–1959) and Giuseppe Tucci (1894–1984)—scholars have been slow to grasp the weight of de Martino's youthful endeavors.[5] In the case of de Martino, commentators have generally reduced his involvement with fascism to a mere outgrowth of the indoctrination in the Italy between the world wars.[6]

There is, of course, some evidence for such a reading. After the March on Rome in late October 1922 and Benito Mussolini's rise to power, the *Duce* quickly made the myth of Italy as new nation and as herald of cultural rebirth into his regime's "political program."[7] To use a term coined by French sociologist Jean-Paul Willaime, Mussolini's fascism became an "*état éducateur*."[8] In practice, this was nowhere more apparent than in his endeavors to portray fascism as a movement of youth and in his efforts to establish a program of political catechism. This led to "a gigantic operation of 'public relations' and 'social pedagogy'"[9] which was first introduced in schools and universities, and then in other realms of culture, until it pervaded most sectors of Italian society.[10]

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5 Michael Stausberg, "Raffaele Pettazzoni and the History of Religions in Fascist Italy (1928–1938)," in *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, ed. Horst Junginger (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 365–86; Gustavo Benavides, "Giuseppe Tucci, Anti-Orientalist," in *Asian Horizons: Giuseppe Tucci's Buddhist, Indian, Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, ed. Angelo Andrea Di Castro and David Templeman (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2015), 3–15.

6 A notable exception is the recently published article by Roberto Alciati, in which the author clearly shows that de Martino's later theories of religion were already adumbrated in his writings on fascism as a civil religion. Roberto Alciati, "La religione civile di Ernesto de Martino," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 85, no. 1 (2019): 285–317.

7 Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 178.

8 Jean-Paul Willaime, "La religion civile à la française et ses métamorphoses," *Social Compass* 40, no. 4 (1993): 574.

9 Carlo Tullio Altan, *Italia: una nazione senza religione civile. Le ragioni di una democrazia incompiuta* (Udine: Istituto editoriale Veneto Friulano, 1995), 55.

10 Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: Mass Organization of Leisure in Fascist Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 16.

De Martino entered the University of Naples in 1928 and immediately joined in the Neapolitan section of the GUF,[11] the Fascist University Groups (*Gruppi Universitari Fascisti*), which served as the central vehicle for political persuasion in university education. Two years later he registered with the National Fascist Party (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*, PNF) and, in 1932, he joined the Blackshirts (*Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*). In her influential book, entitled *Ernesto De Martino: Les vies antérieures d'un anthropologue* (2009), the French anthropologist Giordana Charuty has convincingly shown that the newly established GUF were aimed at making university students into "apostles of the revolution [who] operate the pen just as well as the sword."[12] The fascist groups offered the students many benefits, such as a center to study, a library, and medical services. Charuty notes that all of these were "measures of 'assistance' through which the regime favors the learning process of variant competences necessary for the progression within the new social hierarchies, while simultaneously endeavoring to exercise ideological control on the teachers as well as on the students."[13] This being said, it is imperative to acknowledge that de Martino's fascism was much more than merely convenient opportunism. In fact, I will demonstrate that he regarded fascism as a result of and response to a profound crisis affecting the modern Western world.

As for his early intellectual formation, de Martino was shaped by a trident of teachers: Adolfo Omodeo (1889–1946), Raffaele Pettazzoni (1883–1959), and Vittorio Macchioro (1880–1958). In 1932, he defended his dissertation on Greek ritual practices under the supervision of his most official teacher, Italy's foremost historian of Christianity, Adolfo Omodeo. Two years later, as he proceeded to publish his research in Italy's preeminent journal for scholars of religion, *Studies and Materials in the History of Religions* (*Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni*), he did so upon the invitation of the journal's founder, the towering figure of religious studies in Italy, Raffaele Pettazzoni.

This being said, the theme of his earliest piece of academic scholarship, the "gephyrisms," ritual jeers performed on the bridge of Cephisus in Athens during the procession of the Eleusian mysteries, point to the third and most esoteric of de Martino's teachers. Vittorio Macchioro, indeed, wrote a highly influential book on Greek mystery religion by the name of *Zagreus* (1920/30), which offered an analysis of the paintings in the Villa of the Mysteries (*Villa dei Misteri*) in the Ancient Roman city of Pompei after their discovery in 1909.

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11 Domenico Conte, "Decadenza dell'Occidente e 'fede' nel giovane de Martino," *Archivio di storia della cultura* 23 (2010): 486.

12 Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 92–93.

13 Charuty, 93–94.

The villa in the South of the peninsula is famous for a series of spectacular and well-preserved frescos. Pursuing a career as curator in archeological museums, Macchioro had privileged access to these frescos, which are generally believed to depict the initiation of a young woman into the Greco-Roman mystery cult. Largely due to the neglect by the official Italian academic world—unlike the two renowned professors at the universities of Rome and Naples, de Martino's third guide would never fulfil his dream of gaining access to a university position—Macchioro's massive impact on his student's thought has remained obscured for a long time.[14] Considering that the creative interpreter of Greek religion was lecturing at some of the world's most prestigious institutions and cultivated contacts with such luminaries as Mircea Eliade and Aby Warburg, it is indisputable that he is one of the most underestimated Italian intellectuals of the twentieth century.

De Martino and Macchioro maintained a fertile correspondence that started in the summer of 1930 when de Martino was stationed as a military cadet in Northern Italy. It would last for nearly a decade and provide us with precious insights into a profound and complex relationship. After the initial letters in 1930, the correspondence was interrupted for almost five years during which Macchioro traveled to lecture throughout the world—particularly in Europe, the United States, and India. During this time, the teacher's career was "in full bloom,"[15] while de Martino, finishing his dissertation in 1932 and making his first forays into religious studies journals in 1933 and 1934, matured from student to scholar. When their correspondence resumed, Macchioro still resided in India and prepared for his return to Trieste. De Martino, on the other hand, lived in the Southern Italian city of Bari where he taught history and philosophy at the *Liceo Scientifico A. Scacchi*. Around the same time, de Martino married his *guru's* favorite daughter Anna (1911–72), who after finishing her studies in art history became a teacher at the technical institute of Molfetta, in December 1935. Just as Mussolini and the women of his nation—giving up their gold wedding rings in exchange for rings of steel during the "Day of

14 Riccardo Di Donato, "Preistoria di Ernesto de Martino," in *I greci selvaggi. L'antropologia storica di Ernesto de Martino* (1989; repr., Roma: Manifestolibri, 1999), 17–40; Riccardo Di Donato, "Una preistoria rivisitata," in *I greci selvaggi. L'antropologia storica di Ernesto de Martino* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1999), 139–55.

15 Riccardo Di Donato, "Introduzione: Dioniso in Europa. Esperienza e storia delle religioni," in *Le intrecciate vie: carteggi di Ernesto de Martino con Vittorio Macchioro e Raffaele Pettazzoni*, ed. Riccardo Di Donato and Mario Gandini, Carteggi, 1; Anthropoi, 9 (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2015), 30.

Faith"—entered into a "state of mystic communion,"[16] the wedding between Ernesto and Anna played a unifying role in the relationship between him and his new father-in-law. Vittorio, isolated from his own family, was relying on his new son-in-law for some of his emotional connection with his daughter and wife, who lived with him in an apartment on *Corso Vittorio Emanuele* in Bari. With the birth of Ernesto's first daughter Lia in 1936, the bond between the two men deepened further. At this time, de Martino started to address his mentor no longer as "illustrious professor," but rather as "dear professor," "dear friend," and, finally, "dear Papa." The same is true for Macchioro who extended his paternity from his daughter to his son-in-law, signing every letter as "your father."

What strikes the reader of their correspondence is not its content, but rather the apocalyptic atmosphere, the prophetic hope, and the overall dramatic tone expressed therein. Macchioro's existence was marked by moments of intense crisis, religious experiences of rebirth, and radical metamorphosis. First and foremost amongst them was a "disheartening and aporetic" moment as a volunteer during WWI.[17] According to Triestine scholar's own account, it was during the night of Maundy Thursday (*Giovedì santo*) in 1916 when he was saved by divine hand and encouraged to dedicate the rest of his life to religion. What followed were multiple spiritual conversions, leading him first from Judaism to Catholicism, then to Protestantism, and finally back to Catholicism. In this vein, Macchioro liked to assume the mantle of the spiritual guide or the prophet towards the young Ernesto. In a letter he sent from Calcutta on September 3 1935, we read:

> These are great days, my son. Apocalyptic days: God is revealing himself. If we could chat, I would tell you other things that provide you with a more complete picture of the apocalypse. I feel it like an enormous power: It started with my sickness that destroyed and reconstructed me, and now it continues with the testament and with the marriage. No one can tell what the apocalypse is yet to bring and how the revelation will continue, but I believe that one thing is certain: God is with us.[18]

It is apparent that Macchioro felt a deep spiritual connection to his son-in-law, projecting the atmosphere of apocalypse and rebirth into their relationship.

16 Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 118.

17 Di Donato, "Introduzione," 22.

18 Di Donato, "Preistoria di Ernesto de Martino," 28.

He described their bond, in a letter sent to de Martino in 1939, as a "spiritual symbiosis" and a "progressive fusion of two destinies and two souls."[19] There is little doubt that de Martino felt quite likewise for most of the 1930s. In his first letter, he told his prophetic guide about being "saved by a personal religious experience" in his quest to study Italian myths through the lens of Rudolf Otto's numinous.[20] A few years later, he mentioned a first adolescent "religious crisis" during his years in Florence,[21] before he wrote the following lines in January 1939:[22]

> From now on, I should look at you with other eyes, and this means not the way one looks at the scientist or the artist, but the prophet. You might be suspicious of my enthusiasm. Nonetheless, I am certain, very certain, that the things are this way. My studies, of which you are the guardian angel, confirm it for me every day. Your existence does not solely concern the realm of my ideas, in which case it would not be that big of a deal. It concerns all of my spiritual life, my feelings, my character. I now look at things differently; I judge and feel differently.[23]

2 The Arrow of Progress and the Unification of a Ruptured Modernity in Need of Orientation

While the letter exchange does not leave any trace of Macchioro ever offering his new son the "complete picture of the apocalypse," de Martino himself would go on to dedicate much of his academic research to the revealing of such a vision. Throughout his career, he identified the radical rupture brought about by modernity as the most fundamental factor contributing to the crisis of his civilization. The idea that modernity represents a moment of crisis would remain remarkably stable throughout de Martino's life. Consider, for instance, the following reflections stemming from the end of his life, where he makes a distinction between "traditional civilizations," which "base themselves on the intellectual intuition of a transcendent and sacred eternal truth," on the one hand, and the modern Western world, on the other. Describing it is

19 Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 117.

20 Charuty, 117.

21 Emilia Andri, *Il giovane Ernesto de Martino: storia di un dramma dimenticato* (Massa: Transeuropa, 2014), 27.

22 The letter of de Martino seems to have been lost, but Macchioro cites long passages of it in a letter written in mid-February.

23 Di Donato, "Preistoria di Ernesto de Martino," 34; Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 209.

as "the only existing anti-traditional culture," a "monstrosity," and "a barbarity," de Martino elaborates his time's key attributes:

> With the modern age [...], the patrimony of the eternal, metaphysical, and sacred truths has entered into crisis. Disorder, individual opinions, loss of unity, dispersion in groundless multiplicity [...] agitation, lack of superior principles. [...] Democracy is the separation of the temporal from the spiritual, the social order from the sacred [...], the formation of modern nations, another element of dispersion and of disorder, of division and contradiction in the modern civilization.[24]

Elsewhere, de Martino found the first signs of modernity's crisis in the Renaissance period, which he similarly described as "the source of this loss of unity."[25] More importantly, he argued that the true issue might not simply lie in a loss of unity, but rather in its inability to reestablish cultural coherence: "The Renaissance was the time when the nascent modern civilization very quickly manifested an insufficient power of expansion and incorporation of the relics of the past, a defect that later on remained, at least to some extent, its constant characteristic."[26]

If we look a bit deeper, it becomes apparent that this loss of unity was due to two major transformations that dominated our culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: The secularization of politics and the scientification of reason. On the one hand, it was a time during which the old Christian worldview was gradually abandoned and a new secular vision started to dominate the Western world.[27] Liberalism, as a set of political ideas, arose out of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wars of religion and culminated "in the *Treaty of Westphalia*," which drastically recalibrated the balance between politics and religion in Europe. In the political realm, modernization meant that religion would be "replaced by an autonomous politics," which was "based on purely secular foundations,"[28] conceived in exclusively "human terms, without

24 Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo. Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), 496.

25 De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, 56.

26 De Martino, 56.

27 Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 60.

28 Bernhard Giesen, "Tales of Transcendence: Imagining the Sacred in Politics," in *Religion and Politics Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Bernhard Giesen and Daniel Šuber (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 94.

appeal to divine revelation or cosmological speculation."[29] As de Martino put it in some hand-written notes in the early 1930s: "Westphalia: When the interest in that which you believe in diminishes, one declares 'religious tolerance.' The peace of Westphalia only represents a decline in Christian faith, both catholic and reformed."[30]

Mattias Koenig, more comprehensively, summarizes the most important modernization theories as being marked by their common emphasis on the "rationalization of previously religious world-views," "a differentiation of religion and non-religious institutions," "a pluralization and privatization of religious beliefs," "a general decline of religion," and then rightly elaborates on "the core of the classical paradigm of secularization, namely the thesis of a differentiation between politics and religion."[31] In Germany, this process was accelerated after the establishment of the German Reich in 1871, which brought a further distancing from the traditional Christian worldview by means of an unprecedented urbanization and industrialization. On the other hand, these political, industrial, and economic revolutions had significant scientific consequences as they allowed for the enlightenment of culture. Of particular importance was the unprecedented collection of data. Not only did Western people learn more about their bodies and the material world surrounding them, but they also accrued a massive amount of information about other cultures and other times through historical and philological research.

These transformations in the political realm—where the sacred world of Christianity gave way to a new political vision premised on the autonomy of man—and in the scientific realm—which was marked by an unprecedented accrual of new data about the world in its full cultural and temporal reach—had important consequences for the self-depiction of Western modern humanity. Indeed, although Western culture was empowered by its new sociopolitical and scientific accomplishments, the rupture of the old worldview and confrontation with many others, caused an unprecedented "need for orientation (*Orientierungsbedarf*)."[32]

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29 Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 4.

30 Eugenio Maria Capocasale, "Gli appunti inediti giovanili di Ernesto de Martino per un 'Saggio sulla Religione civile'" (Napoli, Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, Università degli Studi "Federico II" di Napoli, 1997), 55.

31 Mattias Koenig, "Politics and Religion in European Nation-States: Institutional Varieties and Contemporary Transformations," in *Religion and Politics Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Bernhard Giesen and Daniel Šuber (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 292. He mentions Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann, Niklas Luhmann, and Bryan Wilson.

32 Volkhard Krech, *Wissenschaft und Religion: Studien zur Geschichte der Religionsforschung in Deutschland 1871 bis 1933* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 39. Aleida Assmann, similarly, speaks of a "continuous crisis of orientation." Aleida Assmann, "Transformations of

Modernity's preferred tool to reestablish order in its socio-political, scientific, and, ultimately, cultural self-understanding was temporal in nature. For much of modernity, at least since the Enlightenment, the single most valuable tool for making sense in this new world was "progress." Reinhard Koselleck—a wonderfully insightful expositor of modernity—has laid bare that modern man's relationship to time changed dramatically between 1750 and 1850, what he calls the *Sattelzeit* or *Neuzeit*.[33] It was during this period that the Western world experienced the "temporalization of history" ("*Verzeitlichung der Geschichte*").[34] This meant that the term "history" was for the first time thought of as a "linear and irreversible 'arrow of time'"[35] as a totalizing force capable of encompassing all the particular histories, events, and processes.[36]

As experts have demonstrated, in light of the overwhelming rise of alterity through new discoveries, the discipline of religious studies appropriated this new "time regime"[37] because it offered its scholars a "comprehensive paradigm for ordering the new data."[38] With Hanegraaff, we could say that "the concept of 'religion' emerged, during the early modern period, in response to a *crisis of comparison* caused by the increasingly overwhelming evidence for global diversity in human belief and modes of worship."[39] Without much hesitation, students of religion used it to reestablish order in a godless world by locating any new culture, language, or religion that they encountered along a temporal

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the Modern Time Regime," in *Breaking up Time Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future*, ed. Chris Lorenz and Berber Bevernage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 40.

33 Reinhart Koselleck, "Einleitung," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, ed. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Klett, 1972), xv.

34 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 19.

35 Aleida Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?: Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne* (München: Hanser, 2013), 24.

36 Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*.

37 The term "régime d'historicité" has been propagated by François Hartog (*cf.* François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003) and has since been widely used by other thinkers concerned with modernity and its particular conception of time. See, for example, Assmann, *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen?*.

38 James S. Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 149.

39 Hanegraaff, "Reconstructing 'Religion' from the Bottom Up," 598. Emphasis in original. As a thoughtful reviewer noted, it might be better to speak of an exacerbation of the crisis of comparison during the early modern period. Indeed, the problem of cultural and religious encounters not only existed much earlier in "Western" society (the rise of Christianity, the encounter with Islam), but also represents a global phenomenon (Buddhism as a transnational entity in South, Southeast, and East Asia).

axis that was driven by progress and moved inexorably from primitive cultures to the Western world's superior sophistication.[40] This became particularly evident in anthropology, where Auguste Comte's (1798–1857) positivist model of cultural development and Charles Darwin's (1809–1882) biological theory of the evolution of species found their places within the humanistic framework of "evolutionism" developed by Herbert Spencer (1820–1903).

The creation of the concept "religion" coincided with the coining of others, such as "savage," "barbaric," and "civilized." Serving the purpose of giving meaning to a disoriented civilization, these concepts turned the "heavy, tumultuous thickness of history, into an airy, die-straight thread."[41] The evolutionary current of religious studies was offering orientation in response to the overwhelming number of new discoveries in space by lining them on a temporal string. As one scholar noted many years ago: While the sighting of alternate histories "encouraged men to see parallels between primitive and civilized practices," the theory of progress and evolution "drew the sting and the stimulus from the comparison by regarding the former as relics, aliens from another era."[42] Since then, especially in the wake of post-colonialism, an impressive cohort of scholars from diverse disciplines, primarily history, religious studies, and anthropology, has continued to argue that modern thinkers organized special realms (cultures, natures, and people) along a temporal axis that was based on evolution. As Eric Sharpe noted for the term "religion:" "Religion became something which it had never really been before. From being a body of revealed truth, it became a developing organism."[43] Thanks to these types of studies, I can move on without digging deeper into the petrified soil of our past to unearth the skeletons buried by scholars of religion.[44]

In the modern time regime, the political and the scientific transformations were ultimately mapped onto the model of progress. If progress provided the axis, "religion" and "liberalism," as well as "irrationalism" and "reason" were used

40 Matilde Callari Galli and Antonio Colajanni, *Gli argonauti: l'antropologia e la società italiana* (Roma: Armando, 2000), 192–93.

41 Daniel Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge, and Ideology*, trans. William Sayers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 153.

42 J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 240.

43 Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 48.

44 Gustavo Benavides, "Modernity," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 186–204; Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*; Louis Dumont, *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

to indicate specific positions along the axis. Indeed, religion and irrationalism were henceforth seen as a "tradition," an inferior form of culture, relegated to some early strata of civilizational development, considered as conservative, and usually studied in cultures far removed from our own secularized world. Liberalism and science, by contrast, were considered to be "modernity," that is, progressive and future-oriented categories used to describe our own culture and its advanced principles.

3 The Crisis of the First World War and the Rise of Oswald Spengler's Cultural Pessimism

Everything would change with the devastating events of WWI. With the "sacred canopy" of religious order lifted, the "traditional structures and lifeways" torn into pieces,[45] the pre-modern embeddedness within fixed conceptions of time and space "emptied out,"[46] and with "progress" no longer a viable option in light of the destructive historical circumstances, a new sense-making crisis ensued.[47] De Martino, like many of his contemporaries, started to doubt the validity of the premises of liberalism. In unpublished archival notes, written during the early 1930s, he commented that "the liberal individual is still a slave because of the existence of nature, an evil that dodges the jurisdiction of its will, an evil that it needs to endure." Consequently, so de Martino concluded, "the liberty of the individual of liberalism [is] a useless declamation."[48] As political thinkers started to doubt the validity of liberalism, scholars of religion too abruptly abandoned their faith in reason and in evolutionary theories while getting pulled into the whirlwind of crisis.[49] Talk about crisis and decline was one of the most popular responses to the collapse of the progress-liberalism-science nexus. In his analysis of the discourse of the crisis of modernity during the Weimar years, Michael Makropoulos has not only identified "crisis" and "contingency" as the two key terms for this period, but also emphasized the tremendous impact of WWI on the consciousness of modernity. "The 1920s,"

45 Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 84.

46 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 17.

47 Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 48.

48 Capocasale, "Gli appunti inediti giovanili di Ernesto de Martino per un 'Saggio sulla Religione civile,'" 59.

49 Donald Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 292.

so he remarks, "were not in this perspective the crisis of modernity, modernity was itself the completion of the historical crisis of the modern age."[50] Put differently, only with the cataclysmic failure of the myth of progress following the First World War does the crisis becomes so acute that even the past centuries are read under the category of "crisis."

As a student at the University of Naples, when the young Ernesto published his first article, he did so by standing on the shoulder of one of the twentieth-century's greatest crisis-thinkers, Oswald Spengler (1880–1936). Spengler's eponymous *The Decline of the West* (1918) had a "seismological"[51] impact when it was first published in 1918; hitting the "nerve of time,"[52] it became an immediate bestseller in the post-WWI climate of Germany. Even Ernst Cassirer, a neo-Kantian philosopher of a radically different orientation, was impressed by the book's fortune noting that "the cause of Spengler's success is to be sought rather in the title of his book than in its contents," as it "was an electric spark that set the imagination of Spengler's readers aflame."[53] Based on its pseudoscientific morphology of world history according to which each culture functions like a biological organism, moving through a series of stages that invariably culminate in a final period of destruction, it perfectly reflected the pessimistic worldview that dominated those years.

Although there existed individual voices of pessimism before the outbreak of the war—I am thinking here particularly of Jacob Burckhardt (1818–1897) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)[54]—and Spengler started his epoch-marking

50 Michael Makropoulos, "Krise und Kontingenz. Zwei Kategorien im Modernitätsdiskurs der Klassischen Moderne," in *Die "Krise" der Weimarer Republik: zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters*, ed. Moritz Föllmer and Rüdiger Graf (Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag, 2005), 56.

51 Charles R. Bambach, "Weimar Philosophy and the Crisis of Historical Thinking," in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. Peter Eli Gordon and John P. McCormick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 136.

52 Thomas Rohkrämer, *Eine andere Moderne?: Zivilisationskritik, Natur und Technik in Deutschland 1880–1933* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999), 285.

53 Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946), 289.

54 Note that many of Fritz Ringer's mandarins, Fritz Stern's politicians of cultural despair, David Harvey's modernists, and Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment figures were active before WWI. Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); Fritz Richard Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989); Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 243–68. While these thinkers are right in observing that certain pessimistic trends existed earlier, I tend to agree with Georg Iggers when he says, "Before the war [...] not only the broad masses,

work before its outbreak, it was Germany's disastrous defeat in 1918 that "tilted [its] delicate balance,"[55] throwing the country in an unprecedented crisis. Even more, the war has been described as "the great seminal catastrophe of this century,"[56] as a caesura that "initiated the European self-destruction and the end of European supremacy in the world,"[57] and as the beginning of a thirty-year long "European civil war."[58] It is therefore not surprising that Spengler's *Untergang* and its "epic metanarrative of how the sun of an entire civilization was setting, [turned] into an international bestseller."[59]

While this cultural pessimism might have been particularly prominent in Germany—perhaps, as Ian Kershaw speculates as a consequence of the "widespread feeling of national degradation" resulting from the *Treaty of Versailles* (1919), the blame for the war, and the significant debt payments—the sense of crisis was a pan-European phenomenon. Consequently, Spengler was only the most prominent of a series of prophets of crisis proclaiming the West's downfall in increasingly apocalyptic tones. Italy was pulled into the war in the summer of 1915, a year after the assassination of the heir to the Austrian throne. Unsurprisingly, the nation, which already before the war was one of the "weakest of those states that had developed a minimal level of modern industrialization,"[60] was "plunged into an even deeper structural crisis after the cessation of hostilities,"[61] which claimed the lives of six hundred thousand

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but also the academic world remained relatively immune from the underlying currents of cultural pessimism." Cf. Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 240. Similarly, Paul Fussell noted, "The Great War was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful 'history' involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future," defining it further as the war that "reversed the Idea of Progress." Cf. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 8, 21.

55 Dumont, *Essays on Individualism*, 154.

56 George F. Kennan, *The Decline of Bismarck's European Order: Franco-Russian Relations, 1875–1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3.

57 Jörg Fisch, *Europa zwischen Wachstum und Gleichheit: 1850–1914* (Stuttgart: Ulmer, 2002), 14.

58 Walther L. Bernecker, *Europa zwischen den Weltkriegen: 1914–1945* (Stuttgart: Ulmer, 2002), 13.

59 Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 212.

60 Stanley G. Payne, "Foreword," in *The Struggle for Modernity Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism*, ed. Emilio Gentile (Westport: Praeger, 2003), x.

61 Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 212.

of its young men. Besides Spengler, who was well received in Italy, the peninsula had its own share of cultural pessimists.[62]

In some ways, both the prophetic figure of Macchioro and the young Ernesto were part of this group of people. This is not only apparent if we look at their correspondence, but also if we examine de Martino's writings during those years. Between 1932 and 1934, a few years after his inaugural writing on his century's most famous pessimist, the newly-minted PhD published three articles in which he furthered his inquiries into the crisis of his civilization[63]—"Letter to the Universale" (1932), "Current Observations" (1934), and "Critique and Faith" (1934). Here too, de Martino's message remained the same: He spoke of the "days of crisis," of the "explo[sion] of the crisis of the System,"[64] of the "disorientation of the consciousness facing its fate to change its own *Weltanschauung* '*toto caelo*,'"[65] and of "a crisis [...] that befalls the West to this day."[66]

De Martino was aware of the fact that the change on the temporal axis—the replacement of "progress" with "decline"—had to be accompanied by a critique of the ontological and the epistemological convictions of modernity. In describing the latter, he struck up one of the most reverberant tunes of the pessimist's swan song by blaming the "excessive development of our critical faculty [which is] locking itself into the lucid concept of the philosopher" for the crisis of modernity.[67] Experts have noted that de Martino's "critical faculty" can be identified with "critical reason," the "calculating and utilitarian *ratio* of Enlightenment origin."[68] Regarding the ontological crisis, de Martino appreciated that the conceptualization of religion is the result of a backward-looking attitude that was "armed with historicism"[69] and characterized by an exclusive "enthusiasm [for] historical considerations: One could even say that for [the

62 Domenico Conte, *Catene di civiltà: studi su Spengler* (Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1994), 144–67; Michael Thöndl, "Die Jahre der Entscheidung im faschistischen Imperium. Die Rezeption von Oswald Spengler in Mussolinis Italien," in *Oswald Spengler als europäisches Phänomen der Transfer der Kultur- und Geschichtsmorphologie im Europa der Zwischenkriegszeit 1919–1939*, ed. Zaur Gasimov and Carl Antonius Lemke Duque (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 239–62.

63 These three articles have recently been republished by Domenico Conte: Conte, "Decadenza dell'Occidente," 509–17.

64 Ernesto De Martino, "Considerazioni attuali," *L'Universale* 5, no. 10 (March 1934): 2.

65 De Martino.

66 Ernesto De Martino, "Critica e fede," ed. Domenico Conte, *Archivio di storia della cultura* 23 (1934 2010): 515.

67 Ernesto De Martino, "La decadenza dell'Occidente," ed. Domenico Conte, *Archivio di storia della cultura* 23 (1929 2010): 508.

68 Andri, *Il giovane Ernesto De Martino*, 28.

69 De Martino, "Critica e fede," 1934 2010, 516.

historian] only the past holds dignity and grandiosity."[70] He also defined the darkness surrounding him as a "crisis of ideals and faith" and, citing a paragraph of Ernest Renan's *The Future of Science* (1891) that he "holds particularly dear," he blamed "the critical spirit" for "prohibiting chimeras by poisoning them." De Martino juxtaposed the modern conception of religion as historical fact to that of pre-modern times, when religion was conceived as myth, which is always marked by "propulsive," "enthusiastic," and based on a sense of "duty-to-be."[71] As we will see in the following chapter, "civil religion," which de Martino developed as an intellectual category with political relevance, can be regarded as an attempt to revive such a pre-modern form of religion in the garb of a modern movement, namely fascism.

70 Ernesto De Martino, "Considerazioni attuali," ed. Domenico Conte, *Archivio di storia della cultura* 23 (1934 2010): 511.

71 Ernesto De Martino, "Critica e fede," *L'Universale* 4, no. 17 (September 1934): 269–83.

CHAPTER 2

Civil Religion (1929–1335): The Return to Something New as Modernist Alternative to Mircea Eliade's Politics of Nostalgia

1 Rudolf Otto and the Return to Religion as Experience

During his early twenties, Ernesto de Martino published not only "The Decline of the West" and the three previously mentioned articles in the journals of the propagandistic apparatus of the GUF, but was also privately writing on a never-published monograph entitled "Essay on Civil Religion" ("*Saggio sulla religione civile*").[1] The draft consists of a total of 59 pages, written by hand in fountain pen and pencil on sheets of various different formats and sizes.[2] Collectively, these writings make it plain that the young Ernesto was both an active participant in the ideological formulation of fascism as a religion and an emergent historian of religion. For de Martino, civil religion was a program of cultural rebirth that was not only born from an acute sense of civilizational crisis, but also propelled by an indestructible faith that the union of religion and politics in the form of fascism would bring about renewal and greatness to a declining continent.

De Martino further believed that the discipline of religious studies played a particularly central role in dealing with the crisis befalling Western civilization. "In the whole cultural sphere," de Martino would write later in his life, "it is the history of religion that is the weakest and most sensitive sector." The discipline of religious studies, so the Italian scholar was convinced, is "the one in which the conflicts and contradictions break out with greater ease, [...] the domain, which, once the entire cultural world of which it is part enters into

1 The mutual references between his political and his scholarly work are rare, but not inexistent. In his letter to the *Universale*, for example, he wrote that the reader "should know that who is writing is actually a scholar of primitive religions and not, as it would seem, a politician by profession." Ernesto De Martino, "Lettera a 'L'Universale,'" ed. Domenico Conte, *Archivio di storia della cultura* 23 (1932 2010): 510.

2 For a study and careful transcription of this text, see the doctoral thesis by Capocasale, "Gli appunti inediti giovanili di Ernesto de Martino per un 'Saggio sulla Religione civile.'" Because I only had limited access to Capocasale's thesis, I cite the "Essay" in part from his transcribed text and in part from the handwritten version found in the archives.

crisis, manifests the first and the most extended signs of decline."[3] Even more importantly, and here de Martino decisively distanced himself from the pessimism of Spengler—accusing him of "dreaming up horrible massacres in which Germany acts as sadist gravedigger"[4]—he was also certain that it was the discipline of religious studies that had the energies necessary to bring about a rebirth of Western civilization.[5] In an article entitled "Myth, Religious Studies, and Modern Civilization," published a quarter of a century later, he retroactively identified the final years of WWI as the key moment of his time, not only because of their political import but also because they provoked a decisive response within the Western intelligentsia:

> It was precisely in 1917 that a theologian and historian of religions of the University of Marburg published a little book, whose fate would be extraordinary and which carried a notable influence, not only on the historical-religious methodology and the revaluation of the sacred, but on the consciousness and the cultural sensibility in general. [...] In some sense, the work of Rudolf Otto inaugurates the cultural era that is characterized by the crisis of historicism in Germany [...]. Indeed, in 1918 Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* appears, while in 1919 the first edition of the Barthian *Römerbrief*, together with Jasper's *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, opens up the so-called Kierkegaardian Renaissance.[6]

Despite the dearth of detailed studies on their relationship, Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and his immensely influential book—*The Idea of the Holy*—exerted a significant influence on de Martino's thinking about religion.[7] Published in 1917, a year before Spengler's epochal work, *Das Heilige* was "not a direct response to the War [but rather] the culmination of a [...] program that had begun to take

3 Ernesto De Martino, "La storia delle religioni. In margine ad un congresso internazionale," *L'Unità*, April 27, 1955, 3.

4 De Martino, "La decadenza dell'Occidente," 1929 2010, 507.

5 De Martino first appreciates "the prophetism" of Oswald Spengler as "one of the most interesting manifestations [...] of the problem of the West," before making it clear that his position differs in one key point, namely his belief in a "real rebirth." De Martino, 508.

6 Ernesto De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna," in *Furore, simbolo, valore* (1959; repr., Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002), 36–37.

7 A notable exception is the recent article by Sergio Fabio Berardini: Sergio Fabio Berardini, "Il sacro nella storia : Ernesto De Martino critico di Rudolf Otto," *Archivio di filosofia* LXXXVI, no. 3 (2018): 139–48.

shape almost twenty years earlier."[8] Yet it propelled Otto "almost overnight [...] into international notoriety"[9] as it was "in such accordance with the mood of the times"[10] that it went through 30 editions before 1936.[11] As one scholar would summarize its impact on the *Zeitgeist*: "[*Das Heilige* was] probably the most widely read German theological work of the twentieth century."[12] In Italy too, Otto's *magnum opus* made a splash in intellectual circles, provoking a host of commentaries early on.[13]

Contemporary scholars agree that Otto's book not only outlined the "hypotheses and methodological consideration of almost the entire study of religion during the Weimar period,"[14] but it was generally central to the establishment of "the science of religion [as] a normative science."[15] De Martino, similarly, consistently applauds Otto's contribution to religious studies and recognizes its immense methodological and theoretical value.[16] The most curious thing about Otto's book, in the eyes of de Martino, was that it had a dual function, which he called the "double-character of the Numinous"[17] or the "ambivalent wholly other":[18] It was just as much "enacted religion" as it was "philosophy of

8 Todd A. Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity: An Interpretation of Rudolf Otto's Philosophy of Religion* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 135.

9 Gooch, 133.

10 Adolf Von Harnack, "Rezension zu Rudolf Otto, 'Das Heilige,'" *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 45, no. 993 (1924).

11 Kocku Von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800–2000* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 125.

12 Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 1.

13 See, for example, Ernesto Buonaiuti, "La religione nella vita dello spirito," *Ricerche religiose* 2 (1926): 193–217; Benedetto Croce, "Recensione a R. Otto, 'Il Sacro,'" *La Critica* 26 (1928): 192. Unlike *Der Untergang*, Otto's book was already available to de Martino in its Italian version Rudolf Otto, *Il sacro: l'irrazionale nell'idea del divino e la sua relazione al razionale*, trans. Ernesto Buonaiuti (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1926).

14 Rainer Flasche, "Religionsmodelle und Erkenntnisprinzipien der Religionswissenschaft in der Weimarer Zeit," in *Religions- und Geistesgeschichte der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Hubert Cancik and Hermann Bausinger (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1982), 267.

15 Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 56.

16 Ernesto De Martino, "Il concetto di religione," in *Scritti minori su religione marxismo e psicoanalisi*, ed. Roberto Altamura and Patrizia Ferretti (1933; repr., Roma: Nuove edizioni romane, 1993), 49–51. Ernesto De Martino, "'Alter' e 'ater,'" in *Scritti minori su religione marxismo e psicoanalisi*, ed. Roberto Altamura and Patrizia Ferretti (Roma: Nuove edizioni romane, 1993), 86–88.

17 De Martino, "Il concetto di religione," 50; Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Breslau: Trewendt & Granier, 1917), 39.

18 De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna," 39, 41, 63.

religion."[19] As a consequence, he defined the numinous as a "hybrid product, in which the historical science of religious life and religious life in action blend together."[20] Again, de Martino's insights resonate with contemporary scholarship. Indeed, as Todd Gooch, an expert on Otto's thought, recently noted, *Das Heilige* was "not only a book about religion [but] also a religious book."[21] While many scholars have noted that Otto's argument was marked by a "doubleness,"[22] few have recognized that the root cause for this doubleness must be sought in the historical context of modernity and its crisis, which I adumbrated in chapter 1.

Inserting the doubleness of Otto's book into this study's narrative, it becomes apparent that the Marburgian's view was premised on a decisively anti-modern stance. If the secular liberal politics and the rise of science and reason were the marking traits of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Otto reversed these priorities: The theologian stood for the return of religion and the revaluation of the irrational. The two elements are, of course, intimately linked. Indeed, what made Otto's book so attractive was not only that it attempted to respond to the civilizational crisis of meaning by campaigning for the "'rediscovery' of religion,"[23] but that this "religion" had a particular nature. The rediscovery was to proceed not through reason, but through the religious experience of the numinous, which was based on a method of "listening inwardly in a spirit of empathy and intuition."[24]

Otto's emphasis on religion and the irrational perfectly reflected the German context of the interwar years, which was marked by an opposition to technology and ritual and an obsession with "individualism, spontaneity, and immediate experience."[25] As Kippenberg noted, for much of Europe of

19 De Martino, "Il concetto di religione," 48.

20 Ernesto De Martino, "Storicismo e irrazionalismo nella storia delle religioni," in *Scritti minori su religione marxismo e psicoanalisi*, ed. Roberto Altamura and Patrizia Ferretti (1957; repr., Roma: Nuove edizioni romane, 1993), 128.

21 Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 132.

22 Lynn Poland, "The Idea of the Holy and the History of the Sublime," *The Journal of Religion* 72, no. 2 (1992): 175; Dubuisson, *The Western Construction of Religion*, 60; Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Levi Strauss and Malinowski* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), 113; Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 179; Gregory D Alles, *Religious Studies: A Global View* (London: Routledge, 2008), 19.

23 Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 197.

24 Hans Thomas Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, trans. Christopher McIntosh (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 311.

25 Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 161.

the interwar years, a "*Verseelichung*," such as the one proposed by Otto, was seen as the only means of cultural renewal.[26] The Neapolitan scholar also regarded the Marburgian theologian's writings on religion as irrational experience as a perfect reflection of the spiritual condition of post-WWI Germany. He described Otto's *Das Heilige* as the beginning of "a new period of the cultural history of Europe (or, if you will, Euro-American)" marked by "the sacred, the myth, the ritual, the primitive, the magic, the verdant varieties of religions."[27] De Martino believed that "the 'ambivalent wholly other' configures itself as a moment beyond reduction to something else, as a given that is the ultimate *Thule* of analysis: One can relive it, describe it, and suggest it in some way, but one cannot properly regenerate it in thought."[28]

The letter exchange with his mentor and future father-in-law even shows that de Martino even flirted with the idea of getting himself absorbed in a conception of religion as something beyond reason, as an "experience." In his first letter, written in the summer of 1930, de Martino thanked Macchioro for encouraging him to read Rudolf Otto's *Il Sacro* and confessed that "this book has made a big impression" on him. He then introduced his most recent project on "the history of paganism" by shedding light on "the hidden meaning" of the usually neglected "Italian myths and legends."[29] In that same letter, he also revealed that the myths are illuminated through the power of two flaming torches, the first one being Otto's book, the second being his "own religious experiences."[30] It is well known, of course, that the Marburgian thinker's work has been described as an "experientialist theology"[31] and that *Das Heilige* contains a famous passage in which he urged the readers, who have not experienced the numinous "to not read any further."[32]

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26 Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 179.

27 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 258.

28 Ernesto De Martino, *Furore, simbolo, valore* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002), 39–40.

29 This letter was written in Moncalieri on August 18 1930. Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 117. Di Donato, "Una preistoria rivisitata," 144. Riccardo Di Donato and Mario Gandini, eds., *Le intrecciate vie: carteggi di Ernesto de Martino con Vittorio Macchioro e Raffaele Pettazzoni*, Carteggi, I; Anthropoi, 9 (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2015), 36.

30 Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 117. Di Donato, "Una preistoria rivisitata," 144. Di Donato and Gandini, *Le intrecciate vie*, 36.

31 Peter Eli Gordon, "Weimar Theology: From Historicism to Crisis," in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. Peter Eli Gordon and John P. McCormick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 162.

32 Otto, *Das Heilige*, 9.

2 Mircea Eliade's Politics of Nostalgia and the Rebirth of Western Civilization

Scholarship has described what happened in the discipline of religious studies in the wake of Rudolf Otto's work as an "irrationalist turn."[33] Ernesto was in many ways part of this general trend as he was attracted to Otto's *oeuvre* not only for its foundational role for the discipline of religious studies, but also because it was helpful in his own mission to lead Western civilization to experience its rebirth. As the world of progress was replaced by a world in decline, the belief in reason was superseded by an infatuation with the irrational, and political liberalism was replaced with religious forms of politics.

Now, the anti-modern nature of the response to ontological secularization and scientification points to the fact that the revaluation of religion and the turn to irrationalism are further accompanied by a temporal dimension. In Otto, the irrational dimension of the experience of the sacred is deeply associated with the longing for the primitive and archaic. This temporal attitude has been described as "the politics of nostalgia," one of the dominant tropes in interpreting the work of one of Otto's most influential heirs, namely Mircea Eliade (1907–1986). One year older than the protagonist of this book, Eliade not only became a historian of religion through the turbulent and war-ridden years of the twentieth century, but he also shared de Martino's understanding of modernity as crisis. In a letter to Emile Cioran from 1935, for instance, Eliade wrote not only that "Europe is dying," but also expressed a general "disgust for Europe" as a "continent that discovered profane sciences, philosophy, and social equality."[34]

At the same time, Eliade also shared the Neapolitan thinker's aspirations for religious rebirth through totalitarian politics. The Romanian thinker

33 Flasche, "Religionsmodelle und Erkenntnisprinzipien der Religionswissenschaft in der Weimarer Zeit"; Rainer Flasche, "Religiöse Entwürfe und religiöse Wirkungen von Religionswissenschaftlern," in *Die Religion von Oberschichten: Religion, Profession, Intellektualismus*, ed. Peter Antes and Donate Pahnke (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 1989), 203–217; Rainer Flasche, "Der Irrationalismus in der Religionswissenschaft und dessen Begründung in der Zeit zwischen den Weltkriegen," in *Religionswissenschaft und Kulturkritik: Beiträge zur Konferenz The History of Religions and Critique of Culture in the Days of Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950)*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Brigitte Luchesi (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 1991), 243–257. Horst Junginger, "Introduction," in *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, ed. Horst Junginger (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 53–54.

34 Mircea Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America: corespondență*, ed. Mircea Handoca (București: Humanitas, 2004), vol. 1: 151. The translation of this passage comes from Moshe Idel, who, in a footnote, explicitly links Eliade's cultural pessimism to that of Oswald Spengler. Moshe Idel, *Mircea Eliade: From Magic to Myth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 230.

understood his field of study to be a "saving discipline,"[35] and commentators have noted that he was driven by the idea that "the history of religions has a mission," representing a "scientific and academic discipline [...] that presents itself as the champion of a form of renewed religiosity." Although Natale Spineto is correct when he remarks that this "trust in the history of religion" and this "positive judgment on the possibility of the religious renewal of the contemporary world" could make us critically revisit the common scholarly perception, "which sees in Eliade a nostalgic of archaic forms of religiosity," it is nonetheless true that the Romanian scholar was fascinated by pre-modern spirituality.[36] The first use of the term "politics of nostalgia" goes back to Armin Geertz and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, who paradigmatically observed that "some historians of religion have advocated a personal and existentially relevant attitude to the world's religious traditions." "Foremost amongst these," so they continue, "is Mircea Eliade who presented modern man's estrangement from tradition as fundamentally detrimental to individual and social balance, hence the politics of nostalgia which seeks, on the basis of a universalist interpretation of religions, to restore Man as a complete and inherently spiritual being."[37] Another excellent example of the politics of nostalgia comes from Ivan Strenski, who argues that in Eliade's work, the "radical traditionalism of the Romanian right [was translated into] a sweeping ontological judgment upon the material, secular, modern world, asserting the value of nostalgia for the archaic, cosmic, and telluric understood as fundamental human categories."[38] Finally, Russell T. McCutcheon describes Eliade's politics of nostalgia as "a romantic, redemptive project, a political program for constructing a modern social reality on the basis of the presumed difference between tradition, understood as influential, original, and real, and modernity, understood as devolution, repetition, and unreal."[39]

The nexus of nostalgia-religion-irrationalism has frequently been tied to both fascism as a political movement and the methodological discussions

35 Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal, I, 1945–1969*, ed. Luc Badesco (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 537.

36 Natale Spineto, "Mircea Eliade: materiale per un bilancio storiografico," in *Esploratori del pensiero umano: Georges Dumézil e Mircea Eliade*, ed. Julien Ries and Natale Spineto (Milano: Jaca Book, 2000), 240–41.

37 Armin W. Geertz and Jeppe Sinding Jensen, "Tradition and Renewal in the Histories of Religions: Some Observations and Reflections," in *Religion, Tradition, and Renewal* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1991), 13.

38 Ivan Strenski, *Thinking about Religion: An Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2006), 102.

39 Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 158.

within religious studies during the Weimar years. In point of fact, even Otto had quasi-political convictions of a specifically German type of Christianity during the Nazi reign.[40] While fascism is a notoriously difficult term to define, the belief that it is associated with "religion"[41] and "irrationalism"[42] is as old as fascism itself. Since the works of Popper and Lukács in the 1940s and 1950s, we witness an unebbing stream of scholars who argue for the intimate link between fascist politics and separate forms of "philosophical irrationalism."[43] International scholarship has recently solidified this link between the "irrationalist" turn, the origin of fascism, and religious studies.[44] In the Italian context, the "Sandro Italico Mussolini School of Fascist Mysticism" (*Scuola di mistica fascista Sandro Italico Mussolini*) was the flagship of fascist irrationalism. As one commentator recently noted, the "term "*mistica*" (*mysticism*) was used at the school to represent a series of ideas to be relied upon and adhered to by means of a tradition or feeling, even if these ideas could not be justified in a rational manner."[45] In scholarship on fascism, its irrationalist tendencies have usually been identified with a series of parallel key attributes, which share

40 Pierre Gisel, Jean-Marc Tétaz, and Valérie Nicolet Anderson, eds., "Statut et forme d'une théorie de la religion," in *Théories de la religion: diversité des pratiques de recherche, changements des contextes socio-culturels, requêtes réflexives* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2002), 31.

41 Emilio Gentile, "Fascism as Political Religion," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2/3 (1990): 230; Emilio Gentile, *Il culto del littorio: la sacralizzazione della politica nell'Italia fascista* (Bari: Laterza, 1993), 276. See also Michela Nacci, "La crisi della civiltà: fascismo e cultura europea," in *Tendenze della filosofia italiana nell'età del fascismo*, ed. Eugenio Garin and Ornella Pompeo Faracovi (Livorno: Belforte editore libraio, 1985), 64–65.

42 Peter Davies and Derek Lynch, *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (London: Routledge, 2002), 92.

43 Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1945); György Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1954).

44 Hans G. Kippenberg, "Einleitung: Religionswissenschaft und Kulturkritik," in *Religionswissenschaft und Kulturkritik: Beiträge zur Konferenz The History of Religions and Critique of Culture in the Days of Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890–1950)*, ed. Hans G. Kippenberg and Brigitte Luchesi (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 1991), 27; Georg Dörr and Hubert Mohr, "Religionswissenschaft und Kulturwissenschaft: Die 'Schule von Rom' und die deutsche Religionsgeschichte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts," in *Epitomē tes oikoumenēs: Studien zur römischen Religion in Antike und Neuzeit*, ed. Hubert Cancik et al. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002), 268; Daniel Gold, *Aesthetics and Analysis in Writing on Religion: Modern Fascinations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 57; Gustavo Benavides, "Irrational Experiences, Heroic Deeds and the Extraction of Surplus," in *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, ed. Horst Junginger (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 263–82; Junginger, "Introduction," 88–89, 94, 97–98, 164–65, 308–12.

45 Antonio Morena, *Mussolini's Decennale: Aura and Mythmaking in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 37.

irrationalism's refusal to share in the enlightenment model of a world based on human reason: Revival of myth,[46] the primacy of experience,[47] and the value of emotions.[48]

3 An Alternative to the Politics of Nostalgia: Modernism and the Dialectic Conception of Palingenesis as the Return to Something New

While I have pointed to de Martino's experientialist traits in his study of religion and in his fascist leanings, it would be a mistake to place his civil religion into this regressive-nostalgic current that longs for the irrational. Unlike Eliade, the Italian thinker boasted a much more ambivalent conception of religion, irrationalism, and nostalgia. In *Naturalism and Historicism*, written in the late 1930s, he distanced himself from Otto's conception of religion as a "unique," and "*sui generis* sentiment," arguing that it is nothing more than a "murky mode of romantic feeling," a "sick (*malsano*) love for the primitive."[49] In the same text, he invokes the writings of his university teacher, Adolfo Omodeo, who sharply critiqued the German fascination with the primitive world.[50] Accordingly, de Martino located the irrationalist-nostalgic position in "certain recent forms of political-religious practice, certain dispositions of spirit, certain calls for ineffable experience," which are becoming increasingly important amongst "German intellectuals," who seem to be obsessed with the prefix "*Ur*."[51]

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46 Emilio Gentile, *Qu'est-ce que le fascisme? Histoire et interprétation* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 405. See also Emilio Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5, no. 3 (January 1, 2004): 326–75.

47 Emilio Gentile also showed that the theme of experience is essential to the fascist conception of itself as a religion. See, for example, Gentile, "Fascism as Political Religion," 234–35.

48 Mostafa Rejai, *Political Ideologies: A Comparative Approach* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 63. See also, Yves Bizeul, *Glaube und Politik* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), 248; Lowell Dittmer, "Political Culture and Political Symbolism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis," *World Politics* 29, no. 4 (1977): 567.

49 Ernesto De Martino, "Commemorazione Adolfo Omodeo," in *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, ed. Stefano De Matteis (1946; repr., Lecce: Argo, 1997), 103. It is striking that Croce used the term "*malsano*" to critique the re-emergence of "religious enthusiasm" in his *Aesthetics* in 1902. Benedetto Croce, *Estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale: teoria e storia* (Bari: Laterza, 1902), 67.

50 Adolfo Omodeo, "Intorno al problema tedesco," *La Critica*, 227–234, 38 (1940).

51 De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, 57–58.

Thus, unlike Eliade, who accepted Otto's identification of religion with *sui generis* experience with little hesitation,[52] the Neapolitan scholar accused phenomenologists of religion of anachronism, of a temporal infraction of the modern time regime. As one scholar noted, de Martino critiqued irrationalism because it "yearns for the return to a distant past, whether this be considered as the shady annihilation of the numinous or as the paradise of a non-repressed humanity."[53] In 1932, writing specifically about the revival attempts of Christianity, he observed that "it is a thing that is recognized by most people today" that Christianity is "an imposing complex of external rites and a vulgar commerce of charismas." However, he immediately relativized this awareness of his contemporaries by criticizing "a certain apocalyptic literature" that "still nourishes the hope that Christianity can reform itself, leading the Church back to the Gospel, without noticing that [...] a belief in the Gospel is not possible anymore today, for the simple fact that we have destroyed the myth of the supramundane." In this same passage, de Martino asserted his belief that a return to an earlier form of time conception and religious worldview is not only impossible but undesirable. "A reform 'within' the system," a return to a faith in transcendence, "would feel insincere, cerebral, fictitious: [It would be] the will to believe instead of simple and sincere faith."[54] In his *Essay on Civil Religion*, he similarly writes that civil religion distinguishes itself from earlier forms of spirituality because it is no longer premised on the idea of repetition. "We do not at all feel like exceptional or paradigmatic men, such that our grandchildren should imitate us. We have banned the concept of 'imitation' from our religion."[55]

In order to understand de Martino's civil religion, we need to appreciate that the first half of the twentieth century gave rise to two different models for conceiving palingenesis: On the one hand, a regressive-nostalgic current that dominated thinkers such as Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade; on the other hand, a progressive-dialectic current that was particularly popular amongst modernist thinkers.[56] De Martino, so much I anticipate already, forms part of the latter group. While the regressive-nostalgic model has received ample

52 McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*.

53 Cesare Cases, "Introduzione," in *Il mondo magico*, by Ernesto De Martino (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1973), XLVI–XLVII.

54 De Martino, "Considerazioni attuali," 1934 2010, 512.

55 Capocasale, "Gli appunti inediti giovanili di Ernesto de Martino per un 'Saggio sulla Religione civile,'" 38.

56 Martin A. Ruehl, "Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry: Stefan George and His Circle, 1918–1933," in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. Peter Eli Gordon and John P. McCormick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 244–45.

attention amongst historians of our discipline, the modernist-dialectic model is conspicuously absent in the scholarship on religion. This might be one of the reasons why de Martino's fascist past has received almost attention to date.[57]

Instead of nostalgia, it is palingenesis, as a dialectical process best described as "a rebirth of something new," that characterized de Martino's early thinking about political religion.[58] On the one hand, since he was not willing to subscribe to a pessimist worldview and abandon hope for an optimistic vision for his culture's future, the birth and growth implied by "*genesis*" was indispensable for him. On the other hand, since the pre-modern conception of time as mythical and the modern myth of progress can neither be revived nor their loss not be acknowledged, the "again" implied by the "*palin*" is both a necessity and an impossibility. In other words, there are two types of *naiveté* that were irrecoverable for de Martino: On the one hand, he could not return to a pre-modern time conception that would allow him to relive specific narratives, religious rituals, or political programs that offered an unbroken lineage between past, present, and future through their mythical and cyclical structure. On the other hand, he could neither undo the horrors of the WWI and its catastrophic consequences for the economic, political, and cultural circumstances, nor blindly return to the vision of evolution and growth that by-and-large dominated the thinkers of the preceding generations.

Even though scholars have frequently read the irrationalist trend in religious studies and fascism as a form of "politics of nostalgia," it is important that we come to terms with the fact that the nexus of irrationalism in religious studies and fascist ideology is approximate, at its best, and plain wrong, at its worst. Recent research on both Otto[59] and on fascism,[60] for instance, has documented that the term "irrationalism" needs to be used with great caution and that in many ways both the discipline of religious studies and political fascism

57 Despite this communality, the scholarly debates surrounding their fascist past is remarkably different. While Eliade's involvement with the Iron Guard, the extreme right, nationalist, and anti-Semitic legionnaire movement, has caused major controversy for decades—culminating in the "explosion of the Eliade scandal" during the 1990s—scholarship has been completely oblivious to de Martino's involvement with fascism until very recently. Even now, as early articles have been republished and the archives have revealed his obscure political past, one is surprised by the lack of outrage.

58 See the work of Asher Biemann for some stimulating reflections on Jewish Renaissance as the paradoxical return to a "new self." Asher Biemann, *Inventing New Beginnings: On the Idea of Renaissance in Modern Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

59 Gooch, *The Numinous and Modernity*, 178.

60 A. James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Emilio Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista* (*1918–1925*) (Bari: Laterza, 1975), 426–28.

were based on their own forms of reason. In its double paradox, in which both future progress and revival of the past are desired but not simply achieved, de Martino's palingenesis reflects the dilemma of his age in a split horizon of time. Awareness of the distinctive temporal dimension of the first half of the twentieth century, however, has not primarily emerged out of the historiography of religious studies but rather of political science. The rehabilitation of fascism as expression of modernity is the result of the industry of two exemplary thinkers: Emilio Gentile and Roger Griffin.[61] These two authors interpret fascism as a political-cultural movement that politically acts within a wider context, known as "modernism."

The Italian historian Gentile made a first major impact with the 1975 publication of his *The Origins of Fascist Ideology*,[62] in which he not only argued for the need to look at fascism as an ideologically productive movement, rather than just as "irrationalism" and a historical negativity, but he also attempted to bring fascism into contact with modernity and its "tragically contradictory" nature.[63] A few years later, he wrote: "The analysis of the relationship between fascism and modernity is certainly one of the fundamental themes that historiography needs to deal with, not only to understand fascism, but also the very nature of modernity of the twentieth century."[64] Since then, a series of other scholars have insisted on studying fascism as a form of "political modernism," "fascist modernism," "modernist fascism."[65]

One of these thinkers is the British historian Roger Griffin, who, in his *The Nature of Fascism* (1991), coined the expression "alternative modernism," to define fascist ideology.[66] Like Gentile before him, Griffin left his own mark on

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61 I can only think of one exception: Nacci, "La crisi della civiltà: fascismo e cultura europea," 46–48.

62 Gentile, *Le origini dell'ideologia fascista (1918–1925)*.

63 Gentile, *Qu'est-ce que le fascisme?*, 452–53.

64 Gentile, 452–53. See also, Emilio Gentile, "From the Cultural Revolt of the Giolittian Era to the Ideology of Fascism," in *Studies in Modern Italian History: From the Risorgimento to the Republic*, ed. Frank J. Coppa and A. William Salomone (New York: Peter Lang, 1986), 103–19.

65 Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, *Faschismus und Avantgarde* (Königstein im Taunus: Athenäum, 1980); Walter L. Adamson, "Fascism and Culture: Avant-Gardes and Secular Religion in the Italian Case," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 3 (1989): 411–35; Walter L. Adamson, "Modernism and Fascism: The Politics of Culture in Italy, 1903–1922," *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 2 (1990): 359–90; Walter L. Adamson, "The Language of Opposition in Early Twentieth-Century Italy: Rhetorical Continuities between Prewar Florentine Avant-Gardism and Mussolini's Fascism," *The Journal of Modern History* 64, no. 1 (1992): 22–51; Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

66 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 47–48.

scholarship by underlining that fascism attempted to bring about "a rebirth of the nation that would revivify what was perceived to be stagnant and degenerate."[67] Griffin defines fascism as "an intensely politicized form of the modernist revolt against decadence"[68] and argues that, with modernity "no longer [perceived] through the trope of progress but of 'decadence,'" fascists articulated "countervailing projects to enact alternative modernities,"[69] until "cynicism is transformed into utopian hopes of imminent metamorphosis, of *Aufbruch*, of palingenesis."[70] He emphasizes that palingenesis "is used within the framework of my ideal type to connote 'rebirth' not in the sense of restoration of what has been, which is an archetypal conservative utopia, but of a 'new birth' that retains certain eternal principles (e.g., 'eternal' Roman, Aryan, or Anglo-Saxon virtues) in a new, modern type of society."[71] Emilio Gentile, in turn, reciprocated again, drawing on and expanding upon Griffin's studies, to define fascism as a modernist movement of political and religious rebirth based on "the myth of national regeneration […] and metanoia."[72]

Returning to de Martino, I have already noted that his conception of palingenesis is doubly paradoxical, as both the "again" and the "birth" are dialectical in their logic. The "*palin*," as a paradoxical return to something that was before while simultaneously being something new, surfaces throughout most of his writings in this early period. In *Essay on Civil Religion*, for example, we find a young thinker, who is both highly critical of the temporalization of history and at the same time considers it to be unavoidable. He looks to undo the temporalization by returning to an older age while being fully aware of the impossibility of a true return to something original. Reflecting on the meaning of the word "return," he contemplates, "return, what could it mean? A return to the past has always something servile and brutal; in any case, something nonspiritual and human. […] Everything returns, and at the same time, everything

67 Payne, "Foreword," xii. Cf. Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 38–40.

68 Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 181. For an overview of this conception of fascism see Geoff Eley's chapter "Fascism as Modernism": Geoff Eley, *Nazism as Fascism: Violence, Ideology, and the Ground of Consent in Germany 1930–1945*, 2013, 210–11.

69 Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 45.

70 Griffin, 59.

71 Roger Griffin, "The Palingenetic Core of Fascist Ideology," in *Che cos'è il fascismo?: Interpretazioni e prospettive di ricerca*, ed. Alessandro Campi and Roger Eatwell (Roma: Ideazione, 2003), 97–122.

72 Emilio Gentile, "The Myth of National Regeneration in Italy: From Modernist Avant-Garde to Fascism," in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, ed. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 39. See also, Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 1.

is unrepeatable."[73] In "The Concept of Religion" (1933), similarly, de Martino pointed to a double bind regarding the religious worldview that was lost in the project of modernity. On the one hand, it is impossible to return to the religious age—it "dies," it is "surpassed," it is "replaced"—on the other hand, it cannot be forgotten—it is "preparation," it is "suggestion of truth," it is "disguise and draft," it "defends itself against dissolution."[74] In short, our modern world is like a shadow that continues to haunt us; it is, as de Martino put it, both our enemy and our daughter.[75] In a later writing, de Martino explicitly discusses this combination between nostalgic desire and forever-lost *naiveté* as follows:

> Thus, in the souls there is fermenting not truly a "return to religion"—which would require total oblivion of experiences and of events that we carry, whether we like it or not, in our blood—but at least an unresolvable clash between terror of history, nostalgia of Christian symbolism, and more or less awareness of the impossibility of forgetting the cultural process that has fatally opened up to modern man the sense of history and more even the integral humanism that is potentially linked to it.[76]

By contrast, in his political writings, de Martino explored the paradoxical nature of "*genesis*," which entails the birth of something new while simultaneously being a repetition of something that was there before. At first sight, the birth seems straightforward and does not seem paradoxical at all. In "Current Observations" (1934), he introduced the idea that there is an evolutionary sequence of three religions that dominated the Western religious awareness: Roman religion, Christianity, and civil religion. After summarizing "the two great directions in which the religious conscience unfolded" as the "mundane" religion of the Romans and the "supramundane" religion that is Christianity, de Martino affirmed his belief "that in this moment a third religion is born—that of modern nations, civil religion."

> Religious consciousness developed according to two great directions: It invested in the things of this world, or in those of the supramundane. The religions, which we could call worldly, consecrated the political and economic power of the community, they guaranteed their believers fruitful

73 Ernesto De Martino, "Saggio sulla religione civile" (Archival Notes, Napoli, 36 1933), 1.6.29, 1.6, Archivio Ernesto de Martino. Cited in Nigro, "La 'crisi delle scienze religiose'. Ernesto de Martino fra storicismo e irrazionalismo," 7.

74 De Martino, "Il concetto di religione," 52.

75 De Martino, 52–53.

76 De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna," 51.

> harvests, physical health, and successful wars: Only in exceptional cases did they embrace mystical and esoteric needs […]. The most illustrious example is the Roman religion. The supramundane religions, on the other hand, have planted in men a hope for a new order of things, completely different from the natural and social one, the hope in a Kingdom that, even if it is already enacted, will never be a kingdom of trades, of wars, or of worldly cures, but in essence one where women are neither given nor taken. The most illustrious example is Christianity. At present, I believe a third Religion has been born, the one of modern Nations, the Civil Religion.[77]

To be unambiguously clear, this civil religion was nothing else than the Italian Fascism of Benito Mussolini. While we find similar passages that suggest a simple progressive supplanting of Christianity by fascism in his *Essay on Civil Religion*, these archival notes also show that the genesis of fascism is subject to a dialectic process of transcendence and revival.[78] After describing the mundane religion of Roman paganism and transcendent Christianity in almost identical words to the ones cited above, de Martino proceeded to discuss the relationship between fascism and these earlier forms of religion in more detail:

> At the present moment, it is possible to find a third direction in which the religious consciousness of humanity can unfold. From the moment that Christianity is reduced solely to exploit its power of inertia it is only a shadow of itself. The myth of the supramundane is not relevant anymore, in the supramundane nobody believes anymore, and this is necessarily so. However, is it possible to return to call upon this consciousness in the first sense [of the Roman religion], nonetheless conserving the conquests realized in its second sense [as Christianity]? Can there be a Third Rome, which would also be ideally the third, as a separate moment in regards to the pagan and the Christian one? Indeed, it has already risen, it is fascist Rome.[79]

The dialectic relationship between fascism as the new civil religion and Christianity becomes apparent here. On the one hand, de Martino described Christianity as "a shadow," as "inertia," as "irrelevant" and as "destined to

77 De Martino, "Considerazioni attuali," 1934 2010, 513.

78 Fascism is described as "a providential State that makes God descend onto earth, has to succeed dying Christianity." Cited in Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 99.

79 De Martino, "Saggio sulla religione civile," 1.6.29. De Martino, 1.6.29.

failure."[80] On the other hand, it is apparent that Christianity is the foundation on which he built his new religion. In another instance, he clarified that civil religion would be inconceivable without the "vital part" of the Christian message, which de Martino located in particular in the messages of Jesus and Luther.[81] Fascism is neither "*genesis*," the creation of something new, nor the simple "*palin*," the return of something old—it is both. In this sense, de Martino anticipated the thinking of certain contemporary historians of ideas, who have argued that it was a double-relationship to Christianity, which is both renewed and transcended, that allowed for the rise of political religions in the twentieth century.[82] In fact, it is important to note that the dialectical conception of the temporal horizon of fascism is part of a larger religious-political system, which is marked by other dimensions that also reproduce the logic of dialectics.

> Just as the entire history of Christianity is a drama in between millenarianism and gnosis, between the society of the faithful in expectation of the Kingdom and the Church as the guardian of the spirit of truth, between sacrament that is a promise and sacrament that is the actual possession of divinity, civil religion is a drama in between action and doctrine, between movement and party, between faith that argues for things not seen and faith that is the substance of things hoped for.[83] [...] Civil religion will truly be a vital impulse that grows more and more, if it is able to conserve this drama between movement and party, between always feeling the nostalgia of its barbarities—of the origins—where its lyrical plenitude does not carry the mark of weariness for the triumph over blind action and the jealous wisdom of life, where forever—or as long as possible—it can call itself a continuous Revolution and continuous normalization. The church rose because it was necessary to firmly organize the community of believers [...] The party rises to regulate an energy that aims at power.

80 De Martino, "Saggio sulla religione civile," 1.6.29.

81 De Martino, 1.06.27.

82 See, for instance, Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 299–304.

83 "Faith that argues for things not seen and faith that is the substance of things hoped for" (fede che argomenta le cose non parventi e fede che è sostanza di quelle sperate): It appears that de Martino draws here from the Hebrew bible where we read: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). It is also possible that de Martino drew on Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, where he cited this very verse (Paradiso XXIV, 64).

4 Questioning the Rupture of Modernity from a Dialectical Perspective: The Self-Secularization of Religion and the Self-Mythicization of Politics

For de Martino, civil religion is a product of modernity because it is deeply linked to a modernist conception of history. "It is true that our religion," he writes in his notes, "does not have an eschatology […] but it has a soteriology, and it is in this sense that it moves considerably close super-natural types of religions." Not only that, he also notes that "inasmuch as it preaches a civil salvation, historically universal, but not super-historically defined, it reattaches itself to the best tradition of modern thought, [namely] to its historicist current."[84] My choice to read de Martino's civil religion in a dialectic rather than a regressive-nostalgic key is further supported by his interpretation of modernity and its processes of secularization and scientification. In fact, if the regressive-nostalgic thinkers regard the modernization process as a one-directional project leading to a dichotomous and teleological description of the modern world as a split between "liberalism" and "religion," "science" and "magic," "modernity" and "tradition," "history" and "myth," "progress" and "regression," and so forth, de Martino offered a thoroughly dialectic conception of modernization.

In a letter to Macchioro in 1935, de Martino described the chief characteristic of his fascist age as an ambiguous process: "In this moment, I am in the process of reliving the great antitheses of our civilization: Universalism and intransigence, historicism and faith, religion and politics, transcendence and immanence. I am trying to reconcile these terms and to serve God the best possible."[85] Upon final analysis, for de Martino, there is no antagonism and dualism in modernity and there is no need for an enemy. In fact, both politics and science contain their supposed antipode within themselves. Since the following two chapters are dedicated to a closer discussion of science and its dialectic relationship to religion and magic respectively, I focus here only on religion and politics: In short, de Martino believed that religion secularizes itself and politics makes itself religious.

As for the self-secularization of religion, the young Ernesto located both the specific collapse and the more general historicization of religion within the Christian worldview itself. Indeed, he argued that Christianity was conceived

84 Eugenio Maria Capocasale, "Gli appunti inediti giovanili di Ernesto de Martino per un 'Saggio sulla Religione civile'" (Napoli, Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, Università degli Studi "Federico II" di Napoli, 1997), 36.

85 Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 134.

out of a congenital tension between worldliness and other-worldliness and that the transcendence of this inherent conflict was axiomatically stirring in its own DNA. Based upon his later writings,[86] scholars have observed that de Martino attributed "a singular function of rupture to Christianity,"[87] as the "self-overcoming of religion"[88] as the "exit of religion."[89] For de Martino, Christianity "has opened up a road to an entirely human alternative" to conceiving history, "returning to man, and only to man, the responsibility of becoming."[90] In one of these later writings, first published in 1959, de Martino, proposed:

> It is precisely Christianity that has inserted into Western civilization a humanistic germ, which, growing and bearing fruit, has ended up ripping its protective shell, causing that conflict between Christian symbolism and humanism that can only be resolved with the birth of a new symbolism, compatible with the achieved humanistic consciousness and with the ever more intimately lived "sense of history."[91]

Anticipating these mature reflections, which were paralleled by some of the twentieth century's greatest minds,[92] there is a specific moment in *Essay on Civil Religion* (1933–1936) in which the young Ernesto articulated his insight that Christianity is responsible for its own loss of relevance in modernity:

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86 Ernesto De Martino, "Furore in Svezia," in *Furore, simbolo, valore* (1959; repr., Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002), 167–89; De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna"; Ernesto De Martino, "Dalla metastoria alla storia," in *La fine del mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, ed. Clara Gallini (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), 351–58.

87 Giordana Charuty, Daniel Fabre, and Marcello Massenzio, "Un livre fantôme à reconstruire en le traduisant," *La ricerca folklorica* Ernesto de Martino: Etnografia e Storia, no. 67–68 (April 2013): 158.

88 Marcello Mustè, *La filosofia dell'idealismo italiano* (Roma: Carocci, 2008), 197–98. For similar expressions see his preface to an excellent book by Sergio Berardini: Marcello Mustè, "Prefazione," in *Presenza e negazione: Ernesto de Martino tra filosofia, storia e religione*, by Sergio Fabio Berardini (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2015), 8–9.

89 Marcello Massenzio, "L'alterità culturale in Ernesto De Martino: una nozione complessa," in *De Martino: Occidente e alterità*, ed. Marcello Massenzio and Andrea Alessandri, Annali del Dipartimento di Storia (Roma: Università degli studi di Roma "Tor Vergata," 2005), 36.

90 Placido Cherchi, *Il peso dell'ombra: L'etnocentrismo critico di Ernesto de Martino e il problema dell'autocoscienza culturale* (Napoli: Liguori, 1996), 98–99.

91 De Martino, "Furore in Svezia," 169.

92 Similar arguments have also been made by Karl Löwith, Jakob Taubes, Jörn Rüsen, and Peter Koslowski. Rüsen, *Zerbrechende Zeit*; Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History*; Taubes, *Abendländische Eschatologie;* Peter Koslowski, "Absolute Historicity, Theory of the Becoming Absolute, and the Affect for the Particular in German Idealism and Historism: Introduction," in *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historism*, ed. Peter Koslowski (Berlin: Springer, 2005), 2.

"From the historical consideration of the greatness of Christianity we move to the verification of its present religious inadequacy. It is precisely from out of this religion's historical justification that we obtain the essential and definite character of its contemporary decline."[93]

As for the mythical component of liberalist politics, de Martino, anticipating valuable contemporary research on the subject,[94] noted that the progress of liberalism goes hand in hand with a backward-looking strategy intended to legitimize its political agenda. As a result of the aforementioned modernization processes, liberalism was forced to locate its practice of prognosis, both the retrospective search for evidence and the prospective creation of political vision, on the linear historical timeline and within a this-worldly realm. The "*signori dello spirito*," the liberal political thinkers, "reserve all of their acute and heart-felt convictions" exclusively for "the great movements of History,"[95] to reinforce the West's conception of its own history as the "history of liberty."[96]

However, as Koselleck has made known, this search for evidence of liberty in Western history, proved to be a daunting task, as liberalism—like many other revolutionary political movements of the *Neuzeit*[97]—contains "either a very limited or no horizon of experience at all."[98] In short, the dilemma of political liberalism was to legitimize historically a radically new idea, namely "liberty." As it is subject to the temporal-religious-political transformations that mark modernity, it replaces myth with history, faith with reason, religious prophecy with rational prognosis. "Liberalism," he wrote, "has presumed to stand in the place of God [in order to fulfil] its pretension to control the national political life."[99] "But," in the posthumously published notes for an article entitled "Law and Faith in Paul," he observes that "all of our marvelous liberal theories" have failed to free us, as "we are servants [and] liberty is a concept and not yet myth

93 De Martino, "Saggio sulla religione civile," 1.6.29.

94 As for liberalism's political agenda, the scholarship of David Harvey and Zygmunt Bauman on modern politics has clearly shown that its emphasis lies squarely on universality, similarity, and equality. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 12. As for the need for finding evidence in its own past, we can turn to the work of Mark Goldie and Alexander Ewing. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 105; Goldie, "The Civil Religion of James Harrington," 198.

95 De Martino, "Considerazioni attuali," 1934 2010, 512.

96 De Martino, "Lettera a 'L'Universale,'" 509.

97 Besides liberalism, Koselleck specifically mentions republicanism, democracy, socialism, and communism.

98 Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 373.

99 De Martino, "Critica e fede," 1934 2010, 516.

or ideal."[100] In "Current Observations," De Martino similarly maintained that "liberalism, in its pretension to control the national political life, represents itself from a historical point of view, as if the contrasts between the [different] parties were already available to a future historical consideration, assigning its part to every one of them."[101] Despite its convoluted architecture, the vital elixir of this sentence pours out of the same spring as the previous one: The political use of history in its retrospective orientation serves prospective goals.

Again, contorting his theorization into a baffling twist only rarely found in contemporary intelligentsia[102]—paradoxically linking it to his suggestion that Christianity is inevitably leading and destined to bring about its own secularization—de Martino claimed that modern, secular politics is principled on the generation of myths. In fact, illuminating liberalism's historical attempts at self-legitimization, he noted that they are ultimately akin to, but less effective than, religious myths. On the one hand, he likened liberalism's writing of its own history of liberty to two factors: First, "certain gnostic heretical myths where the youngest eon tries to retrace the hierarchic ladder of power to reach the supreme level," before being "punished for his arrogance by being plummeted outside of the pleroma;" second, to the "attitude of primitives, which, especially in these days of crisis," is dominated by the "terror of an irrelevant or even threatened world."[103] On the other hand, he indicated the inherent inadequacy of this strategy of historical myth-creation as the conscious attempt to generate a myth that one has "to believe in because its function is in some way essential for [one's] actions," is never enough: "The will to believe has not created even one believer."[104]

In this chapter, I observed that the palingenetic thread of de Martino's civil religion needed to be sturdy, as the wound of modernity has penetrated beyond the temporal stratum to cleave deeper layers of the cultural sheathing, with modern man feeling severed from God, broken loose from the harbor of community, and uprooted from the symmetry of nature. As embroidery of these layers in the symbolic tapestry of the Third Rome, they carefully suture

100 De Martino, "Appunti sul Cristianesimo: 'Cristianesimo Giudaismo Misteri,' 'Legge e fede in Paolo,' e 'L'esperienza eucaristica,'" 257.

101 De Martino, "Considerazioni attuali," 1934 2010, 512.

102 The political scientist Mark Lilla, who, due to his excellent work on Giambattista Vico, is himself no stranger to Italian intellectual history, has made strikingly similar observations in his most recent book on political theology. Lilla, *The Stillborn God*, 6. The work on Vico that I referred to is, of course, Mark Lilla, *G. B. Vico: The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

103 De Martino, "Lettera a 'L'Universale,'" 510.

104 De Martino, "Considerazioni attuali," 1934 2010, 512.

modernity's lesions between God and man, between men themselves, and between man and nature into the very fiber of fascism. De Martino further knew that the rhetorical dialectic of palingenesis was paralleled in Rome's architectonic transformation, which was also constructed according to a paradoxical celebration of both innovation and tradition. This is nowhere as apparent as in the vital center of the Ancient Roman geography, the *Via dell'Impero*, a massive road in the center of Rome that Mussolini commissioned to connect the *Colosseo* and *Piazza Venezia*. De Martino, unlike some of his contemporaries—such as Rudolf Otto, who described religious space as "emptiness and expansive space"[105]—put great emphasis on architecture as a realm for structuring political and cultural powers.

> I feel the *Via dell'Impero* like an architectonic expression, both material and spiritual, of the cosmic cycle. Everything returns, and at the same time, everything is unrepeatable. Does the Coliseum return? No. There is something that returns from the ancient spirit in the world in which I feel today the *Altare della Patria*: but, in the meantime, in my state of mind of today there is something more and better than the experience of the Ancients. You heard right, something more and better, not just different. The stars, which trace their orbits in the sky do not improve: Time is indifferent to them. But the temples constructed by humans, those improve. […] The orbit of the stars does not last: The *Via dell'Impero* lasts.[106]

The trip along the *Via dell'Impero*, accompanied by the flowing blood of unknown soldiers and the marching figure of the Duce, is a journey in time. But it is not a journey along the geographically straight line that starts at the ancient *Colosseo* and ends at the fascist state's *Piazza Venezia*, but zigzagging through churches of early Christianity, ruins of ancient Rome, and monumental palaces of unified Italy. For de Martino and his companions, fascism is the

105 Otto, *Das Heilige*, 84. Of course, Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* contains several pages that discuss the way the arts express the numinous. Otto speaks in particular of architecture and music. On the one hand, he acknowledges, "[There is] no doubt that the arts have means to bring forward a specific impression without reflection." On the other hand, he believes that their most effective way to express the numinous not through what is actually materially present, but rather through what is absent. He states, "[The arts know only two] direct means […] for expressing the numinous […], namely "darkness and silence." Otto, 82–84.

106 De Martino, "Saggio sulla religione civile," 1.6.29. For a discussion of the relationship between the concept of civil religion and the altare della patria, see Valerio Salvatore Severino, "Il Contraltare Della Patria. Cristianesimo e Laicità Nel Monumento Alla Terza Roma (1870–1935)," *Storia, Antropologia e Scienze Del Linguaggio* 26, no. 1–3 (2011): 407–66.

Third Rome, not because it comes after Christianity and the Roman Empire, but because it is a Rome that moves diagonally in time, weaving and stitching the laceration of temporality that was inflicted by the project of modernity. Palingenesis is both a return into the past and a leap into the future. But, as this chapter set out, this palingenetic move back to a past that is long gone to reach a future that exists only in the imagination is the only option left in the time between the world wars. As the following chapter will demonstrate, the Western world failed to find the right balance between innovation and conservation, leading our civilization into a much more profound catastrophe during WWII, which de Martino described as a "crisis of the presence."

CHAPTER 3

The Crisis of the Presence (1936–1944): The Antifascist Sacralization of Politics and the Rise of Magical Thinking during WWII

1 The Antifascist Turn in the Laterza Circle and the Continued Sacralization of Politics

De Martino's years as an emergent scholar of religion culminated in what is oftentimes considered his best book, his *magnum opus*, a remarkably eclectic and interdisciplinary study entitled *The World of Magic* (1948). Scholarship has rightly remarked that Macchioro, whose work was characterized by his "surprising ability to live and think on a number of logical *régimes,*"[1] was the decisive impetus for de Martino's broad thinking about magic. De Martino was particularly attracted to his teacher's work because of the latter's most famous book, namely *Zagreus*. Initially written in 1920 and republished in 1930 in a much-expanded version, *Zagreus* was not only a treatise on Greek mystery religion but also an attempt to offer a new method for its study. Specifically, in his hermeneutic effort to interpret the images discovered at Pompei as a liturgy of a ritual practice mimetically repeating the death and resurrection of the Dionysus in his *Zagreus*, Macchioro relied primarily on psychopathology and parapsychological findings.[2] As to be expected, this curious blending of archeological materials from Ancient Greece and contemporary psychological materials, led to some surprising conclusions about the nature of orphic initiation: Macchioro interpreted the neophyte's "identification with God" as a process of actively splitting the self in order to achieve a "substitution of personality;"[3] he compared key elements of the ritual performed by the new initiates, such as the perceptual fixation on points of light or on mirror, the repetitive sounds drums, or the use of perfumes, to techniques of hypnosis;[4] and he weighed Proclus' comments on the "hallucinatory facts" experienced by the initiates in light of Charles Richet's *Treatise on Metapsychics* (1922).[5]

1 Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 210.
2 Vittorio Macchioro, *Zagreus: studi intorno all'orfismo* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1930), 169–285.
3 Macchioro, 233–37.
4 Macchioro, 233–37.
5 Macchioro, new edition: 183. Charles Robert Richet, *Traité de Métapsychique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1922).

De Martino received the entire filing cabinet of his father-in-law's parapsychological research as a sort of "final consecration,"[6] following his marriage to Anna on December 26, 1935. What has been called "the symbol for an entire life's work" for Vittorio,[7] made a lasting contribution to virtually all of his disciple's major writings moving forward. This being said, in many ways, de Martino's new venture was also a step away from the prophetic guide of his student years. He not only shifted his thematic focus from civil religion to magic, but he also gradually widened the ethnographic realm of his inquiry to move beyond Christianity and ancient Greco-Roman religion, that is to say the Western civilization's cultural heritage. Instead, he started to embrace so-called "primitive" societies, which he chose to call "civilizations that are most distant from ours."[8] Relying on the bibliographic assistance of two of Italy's great anthropologists, Raffaele Pettazzoni and Renato Boccassino (1904–1976), he spent the years between 1938 and 1942 accumulating an impressive collection of "magical facts" from a wide array of diverse cultures and contexts. Commenting on this period of de Martino's life, scholars have spoken of a "gradual discovery of a new world" and a "fieldwork by correspondence," not unlike the early armchair anthropologists.[9] De Martino, indeed, dove into many different worlds. Through the German ethnographer, Martin Gusinde, he visited the Selk'nam, yâmanas and kawéskar Indians of Tierra del Fuoco; with the Danish researcher Knut Rasmussen by his side, he imagined himself amongst the Inuit of Greenland; with the help of the missionizing Father Trilles, he walked the woods amongst the pygmies of the Equatorial Forest; with Paul Schebesta's study, he journeyed to the Ituri forests; and, finally, Sergei M. Shirokogoroff offered him a glimpse what it was like to live with the shamans of the Tungus.

Parallel to his disciple's expansion of horizons, Macchioro's position gradually degraded in the academic landscape of the Italian peninsula during the second half of the 1930s. When de Martino first contacted the *dottore*, he was an eminent figure in religious studies and in archeology, whose extravagant ideas, creative methodology, and innumerable engagements in foreign lands made him a propitious interlocutor for a young scholar in the "panorama of the small Italy of fascism."[10] By the late 1930s, Macchioro was a different man in a rapidly transforming nation. The implementation of the racial laws in 1938

6 Andri, *Il giovane Ernesto De Martino*, 159.

7 Di Donato, "Preistoria di Ernesto de Martino," 29–30.

8 De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, 283.

9 Gino Satta, "Le fonti etnografiche del 'Mondo magico,'" in *Ernesto De Martino e la formazione del suo pensiero. Note di metodo*, ed. Clara Gallini (Napoli: Liguori, 2005), 291; Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 240.

10 Di Donato, "Introduzione," 22.

represented a life-changing event, not unlike the years he spent during WWI twenty years earlier, when fighting alongside his fellow Italians. The new legislation not only forced Macchioro to retire from his archeological activities and to give up any hope of finally securing a professorship, but also led to a profound transformation of his personal and religious identity: Banned from academia, he converted to Catholicism, started writing novels, and took on the pseudonym of Benedetto Gioia.

His pen-name, of course, is a direct reference to what would become the most important intellectual point of reference for the remainder of de Martino's life, namely the idealist philosopher, Benedetto Croce (1866–1952). Of course, even the last name selected by Macchioro represents a calculated move as he used the name Gioia, which signifies "joy," to replaced Croce, which not only means "cross," but also brings with it a series of negative connotations, such as pain, burden, or curse.[11] After his disciple is introduced to Croce in late 1937, at his residence in Villa Laterza in Bari,[12] Macchioro tried everything to keep de Martino under his intellectual domain. His various strategies ranged anywhere from simply imploring him to "throw away this Crocean nonsense (*baggianata*)"[13] to introducing him to his "unique Romanian disciple" Mircea Eliade,[14] to publishing his novels under the name "Benedetto Gioa," to finally writing him a letter about a meeting with Croce himself during which the latter showed decisive openness to some of Macchioro's increasingly occult interests in cartomancy, dream divination, and so forth.[15] The rupture, however, was inevitable and the master's heated letter in the closing days of 1939—one year

11 Consider, for instance, the expression croce e delizia ("cross and delight"), which is generally used when something is a mixed blessing, both a blessing and a curse, or something that involves both pleasure and pain. I thank the anonymous reviewer for this reminder and example.

12 Girolamo Imbruglia, "Tra Croce e Cassirer," in *La contraddizione felice? Ernesto de Martino e gli altri*, ed. Riccardo Di Donato (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 1990), 97–98; Valerio Salvatore Severino, "Ernesto de Martino nel circolo crociano di villa Laterza: 1937–1942. Contributo a una contestualizzazione politica de il mondo magico," *La Cultura* 40, no. 1 (2002): 89–106.

13 Di Donato, "Preistoria di Ernesto de Martino," 35.

14 Di Donato, 32–33; Silvia Mancini, "Postface," in *Le monde magique*, by Ernesto De Martino (Paris: Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2003), 404–6; Gennaro Sasso, *Ernesto de Martino fra religione e filosofia* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2001), 88; Pietro Angelini, "Il rapporto tra Ernesto de Martino e Mircea Eliade," in *Ernesto de Martino nella cultura europea*, ed. Clara Gallini and Marcello Massenzio (Napoli: Liguori, 1997), 212.

15 This letter written on May 30 1939, half a year before their last and final correspondence, has been discussed extensively in recent years. Cf. Di Donato, "Preistoria di Ernesto de Martino," 35–38; Sasso, *Ernesto de Martino fra religione e filosofia*, 30–34; Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 124; Andri, *Il giovane Ernesto De Martino*, 233–34.

after the birth of his second grand-daughter Vera—offers the last evidence of their intense relationship.

Macchioro's adversary was indeed formidable. During much of the totalitarian regime of fascism, at least from 1924 until the end of the war in 1945, Croce held a unique position amongst Italian intellectuals as he was the only anti-fascist voice tolerated by Mussolini. After entering the so-called Villa Laterza circle, which formed in Bari around Croce, de Martino started to openly reject the fascist regime in the late 1930s.[16] Married to a Jewish woman and actively anti-fascist, he came to be marginalized by the fascist authorities and started to express increasingly radicalized views. In November 1942, he became a founding member of the Liberal-Socialist Party (*Partito liberalsocialista*) and that same year his name appeared on a blacklist of persons that are potentially damaging to the fascist regime. After being banned from teaching and losing his job, he went into hiding, spending the next two years in clandestineness in Cotignola, in the countryside around Ravenna, in the North of Italy.[17] Yet, even though he became active in an antifascist circle of liberals associated with Benedetto Croce and the *Laterza* Publishing House in the year after his move to Bari in 1935, de Martino's thoughts and ideas remained steeped in religious sentiment and mystical rhetoric.

In 1936, de Martino sends Macchioro a "declaration of his faith in history," which has rightly been described as "a sacralization of history."[18] Then, in 1941, de Martino crafted a manifesto of liberal-socialist faith, which formed the basis of a solemn oath sworn by the members of the Barese circle.[19] The final lines of the manifesto read as follows: "Thus, I swear, in the presence of the past generations that reached up to me, in the presence of the dead, the sacrificed, the aching, for love of liberty, in the presence of the future generations that

16 Some of the more prominent members of this group were Tommaso Fiore, Carlo Muscetta, Fabrizio Canfora, Michele Cifarelli, Michele Abbate, Domenico Loizzi, and Nicola Sansone. For more details on this period of his life, see Severino, "Ernesto de Martino nel circolo crociano di villa Laterza"; Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 153ff.

17 This period has remained a black hole in scholarship on de Martino, who himself rarely spoke about his participation in the Resistance. For a promising new study, which appeared only shortly before the completion of my manuscript, see Riccardo Ciavolella, *L'etnologo e il popolo di questo mondo: Ernesto De Martino e la Resistenza in Romagna (1943–1945)* (Milano: Meltemi, 2018). For a more general overview of the various stages of scholarship on this perioid, see Pietro Angelini, "L'anno Zero Di de Martino," *Nostos* 4 (2019): 9–49.

18 Conte, "Decadenza dell'Occidente," 498.

19 Domenico Loizzi, "Bari antifascista," in *Studi storici in onore di Gabriele Pepe*, ed. Gabriele Pepe and Giosuè Musca (Bari: Dedalo, 1969), 819–27; Severino, "Ernesto de Martino nel circolo crociano di villa Laterza."

already start within me, here and today, [to render] their lives more human and more worthy."[20]

De Martino's anti-fascism was a religious undertaking that aimed at healing the civilizational crisis affecting his world with the ultimate goal of a complete utopian palingenesis. More specifically, "The Oath," redacted as anti-fascist manifesto, retained a series of distinctive traits of his earlier thinking: The definition of the cultural context as one of crisis and catastrophe,[21] the mystical rhetoric of a universal Spirit and the individual responsibility for the good of unification and totality,[22] the continuous lineage of Europe's two thousand-year history and his own responsibility for the future generations,[23] the emphasis on fervor and activism rather than philosophical inactivity,[24] the call for an evangelization of his political convictions,[25] the apocalyptic and palingenetic ideas of rebirth, illumination, and revival,[26] the celebration of soldier-hood and the call for constant battle,[27] and the sacrificial rhetoric that culminates in presenting himself as Christ carrying the pain for humanity.[28] In short, despite his political conversion, de Martino remained engaged in the missionizing project of his civil religion. Charuty pertinently described de Martino's project as a "paradoxical form of battle for secularity (*laïcité*), which presents itself as a religious struggle," and Mancini rightly commented that "the idea of civil religion and of civil symbolism never definitely disappears from the Demartinian reflection, not even after he takes his distance from the youthful fascism and his progressive political engagement on the left."[29]

Although it might sound surprising to find de Martino's underlying attitude unchanged despite his turn from fascism to liberalism and later socialism, the evident constancy of crisis and the need for recovery through radical action is anything but atypical of his age. Indeed, if the political aberrations of the twentieth century are seen through the lens of crisis, as "a disease of our own world," as Louis Dumont says, rather than the invention of specific

20 Ernesto De Martino, "Il giuramento," in *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, ed. Stefano De Matteis (1941; repr., Lecce: Argo, 1997), 261.
21 De Martino, 260.
22 De Martino, 259.
23 De Martino, 259.
24 De Martino, 259.
25 De Martino, 260.
26 De Martino, 261.
27 De Martino, 260.
28 De Martino, 259.
29 Silvia Mancini, "Fra pensiero simbolico, religione civile e metapsichica: la storia delle religioni nel primo Novecento italiano," in *Storia d'Italia, Annali 25: Esoterismo*, ed. Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Torino: Einaudi, 2010), 644.

people and nations,[30] then the "cultural despair" was bound to produce similar responses.[31] In the wake of Spengler's pessimistic reading of civilizational crisis, Europe was marked by a "fever of experiment in all political camps."[32] As a consequence, scholarship has gradually moved away from seeing the rise of fascism as an isolated event, investigating it instead as part of a larger rise of "totalitarianism."[33] This shift of perspective in the wake of the "totalitarianism debate," which allowed critics to unite fascism and Stalinism under one umbrella term, enables us to make sense of the curious fact that de Martino's underlying thinking remained the same despite his shift in political self-identification. Indeed, just as de Martino moved relatively fluidly between his early years as a fascist, towards Croce's liberalism, and then towards socialism, scholarship has clearly demonstrated that these political orientations were not independently existing entities, but rather systems that were embedded in a larger historical context of crisis and connected to each other in complex mutual relationships.

It has further been argued that liberal and socialist worldviews accommodated the rise of fascism[34] and that the October Revolution and rise of socialism in Russia inflamed a reaction of the political right in the rest of Europe, thus contributing greatly to the rise of fascism.[35] Even more, scholarship on totalitarianism has pointed to the fact that both fascism and Bolshevik socialism were equally engaged in a sacralization of politics.[36] This also holds true for de Martino. In an article from 1944, he introduced a new religion, calling it the "Religion of Liberty," a purely immanent and this-worldly form of religion that is supposed to replace Christianity. He criticized the "young" that call out for the "moralization of political life." Their "unbridled activism without

30 Dumont, *Essays on Individualism*, 151–52.

31 Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), xxi–xxii.

32 H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890–1930* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979), 372.

33 Carl J. Friedrich, Michael Curtis, and Benjamin R. Barber, *Totalitarianism in Perspectives: Three Views* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1969); Henry Ashby Turner, *Reappraisals of Fascism* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975); Juan José Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000).

34 Horst Junginger, *Von der philologischen zur völkischen Religionswissenschaft: das Fach Religionswissenschaft an der Universität Tübingen von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ende des Dritten Reiches* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 306–7.

35 Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche: die Action française, der italienische Faschismus, der Nationalsozialismus* (München: R. Piper & Co., 1963); Ernst Nolte, *Der Europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945: Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1987); Bernecker, *Europa zwischen den Weltkriegen*, 22–23.

36 Eric Voegelin, *Die politischen Religionen* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer Verlag, 1939); Bernecker, *Europa zwischen den Weltkriegen*, 31–32.

scruple," he continued, "will lead to the dissolution with politics." Instead, he suggests that as long as Christianity, with its aspiration for moral guidance on principles beyond this life, is our civilization's primary religion, politics will continue to be "destined to break down to a simple conflict of power."[37] With these words, de Martino called his readers to return to the "religion of liberty" as their guiding principle, which would render political activity more morally conscientious.[38] In all of his writings during these years, de Martino suggested that his religion of liberty, the "social gospel,"[39] has to combat traditional forms of religion through disciplined order, action, and war;[40] that this war is based on collectivity and solidarity amongst the people;[41] and that Italians should take animus from the Russian example, which shows that even a dictatorship can lead to "real progress of liberty."[42] "Thus, when speaking of the religion of liberty," he wrote in the final years of the world conflict, "it is important to first and foremost be aware of the fact that we are concerned with a positive religion, that is a particular credo, which opposes all others and which combats all of them in a holy war, severe, daily, uncompromising, merciless."[43]

Although de Martino might have changed the label of his religious-political projects, the tendency to sacralize politics by elevating it to the status of a palingenetic energy expressed in struggle and community, which can save a civilization in crisis, remained a constant well into the 1940s. To underline how constant the fascination with the religious potential of political systems was in his thought, one only needs to look at the articles collected in *Fury, Symbol, and Value*, published in 1961. Here, de Martino cited contemporary Russian debates on socialist symbols, myths, and rituals, which—abundantly decorated with references to sacrifice, martyrdom, and struggle—demonstrate the full potential of socialism as a modern form of religion.[44] He admitted that the "religion of liberty" has failed, becoming "exhausted rather than growing," as it "got caught in ever more resounding contradictions," which were rooted in

37 Ernesto De Martino, "Politica, morale e religione," *La voce dei giovani* 1, no. 2 (July 1944): 1–2. See also, Cesare Milaneschi, "Ernesto de Martino e il Cristianesimo," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 51, no. 9 (1985): 249–50.

38 De Martino, "Politica, morale e religione.".

39 Ernesto De Martino, "Conoscerci," *La voce dei giovani* 1, no. 3 (August 1944): 2.

40 De Martino; Ernesto De Martino, "Noi e i cattolici," *La voce del popolo* 1, no. 16 (July 1, 1944): 1–2. Ernesto De Martino, "Collettivismo," *La voce del popolo* 1, no. 14 (April 20, 1944); De Martino, "Conoscerci."

41 De Martino, "Collettivismo"; De Martino, "Conoscerci."

42 Ernesto De Martino, "Della repubblica," *La voce del popolo* 1, no. 16 (July 1, 1944): 2; Ernesto De Martino, "Capitale e capitalismo," *La voce del popolo* 1, no. 16 (July 1, 1944): 2; De Martino, "Conoscerci."

43 Ernesto De Martino, "Noi e la religione," *La voce del popolo* 1, no. 14/15 (April 20, 1944).

44 De Martino, "Furore in Svezia," 186.

"limitations of classes," yet still professed that socialism offers currently the closest version to a "new unifying symbol."[45] This "civil symbolism is in complete accordance with socialist humanism, capable of entirely filling the emptiness left by traditional forms of religion," and bases its legitimacy on the appeal "to the founding event of the October Revolution [...] as the passage from socialism to communism, as the liberation of colonial and semi-colonial people, as the socialist unification of our planet, and as the conquest of cosmic space."[46]

2 The Crisis of the Presence: Extreme States of Consciousness in Primitive Societies and the Shamanizing of Hitler in Europe

Despite his continuous infatuation with political forms of religion—Croce known for his rigorous philosophical perspective—quickly became a great inspiration for the young Ernesto. Unlike his fascist past—which he never officially addressed—de Martino would years later nostalgically remember the years he came under Croce's tutelage, noting that "those were the years during which a small part of the Italian youth sought refuge in the austere and serene rooms of the Filomarino Palace to spell out anew the elementary human discourse, which was not possible elsewhere, sometimes not even in one's own family."[47] Intellectually speaking, the first writing by de Martino that was formulated under the sway of Croce's historicist philosophy was *Naturalism and Historicism in Anthropology*, published in 1941 but written between 1937 and 1939.[48] The book, dedicated to his university teacher Adolfo Omodeo, was published by the Laterza, a publishing house, whose history is closely tied to the antifascist and idealist thinking of Benedetto Croce. As Sasso noted, "almost everyone that has spoken" of de Martino's first book, noted that

45 De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna," 77–78; De Martino, "Furore in Svezia," 187.

46 De Martino, "Furore in Svezia," 188.

47 Ernesto De Martino, "Promesse e minacce dell'etnologia," in *Furore simbolo valore* (1962; repr., Milano: Feltrinelli, 2002), 86. Constructed in the fifteenth century, the Filomarino Palace was the residence of Benedetto Croce until he died in 1952.

48 The book, which de Martino wrote in Bari, starting in 1937, was printed in 1940 and finally made available in libraries in 1941. After more than fifty years, it has finally been republished by Stefano de Matteis in 1997. I will cite from this edition. De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*. The book has not yet been translated into English. The best English analysis of this text is to be found in a writing by an expert on Fascism from UC Berkeley, who I repeatedly cite in the second chapter of this dissertation: Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, "Of Tears and Tarantulas: Folk Religiosity, de Martino's Ethnology, and the Italian South," *California Italian Studies* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 43–45.

it "presents the character of the Crocean orthodoxy,"[49] and the author himself would later describe it as a "book written and conceived in the furrow of the most orthodox Crocean historicist tradition."[50] The book was a great success amongst the Italian intelligentsia, provoking a flood of positive reviews and reactions.[51]

In *Naturalism and Historicism*, de Martino used the stimulus of Croce's historicism to critique anthropological currents of thought that he defined as "naturalist:" The pre-logism of Lévy-Bruhl, the sociology of Durkheim, and the historical-cultural school of father Schmidt. In other words, de Martino dismembered the generalizing anthropological schools brought to Italy from abroad with the sharpest scalpel available to the Italian mind, namely historicist thinking: "Anthropology is the story of civilizations that are most distant from our Western one. As such it is by no means an autonomous science with its own methodologies, but constitutes the empirical—and hence approximate—edge of a sphere of possible historical research."[52] Despite its immediate success, *Naturalism and Historicism in Anthropology* was soon to be forgotten by Italian academia.[53] Today's scholars even argue that it is "little more than a derivative scholastic product,"[54] or just plain "unreadable."[55] In retrospect, the book's fortune was also impacted by the unfavorable political climate in which its author found himself as the Second World War ramped up.

However, de Martino did not let this hostile environment deter him from his mission. He continued to work tenaciously on his intellectual endeavors, which would finally culminate in his second book, *The World of Magic*. Although published only in 1948, it was mostly written on his portable Olivetti typewriter during his time in Bari and his years in hiding in the *Ravennate*. The dedication reads: "To my Anna, who has saved the manuscript of this work

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49 Sasso, *Ernesto de Martino fra religione e filosofia*, 1. Cases, "Introduzione"; Giuseppe Galasso, *Croce, Gramsci e altri storici* (Milano: Il saggiatore, 1968).

50 Ernesto De Martino, "Intorno a una storia del mondo popolare subalterno," *Società* 5 (1949): 411–35. I'm citing from a republished edition in 1977: Ernesto De Martino, "Intorno a una storia del mondo popolare subalterno," in *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto de Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948–1955*, ed. Carla Pasquinelli (La Nuova Italia, 1977), 71.

51 We have almost immediate reviews by Omodeo, Antoni, Cantoni, and Pettazzoni and later ones by Cesare Pavese e di Giuseppe Cocchiara. Furthermore, it is clear that Croce, after receiving a personal copy from de Martino himself, has read the book as well.

52 De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, 225.

53 Although the book has been reedited by Stefano de Matteis and the publisher Argo, it still remains his least respected work. De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*.

54 Cases, "Introduzione," ix.

55 Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 221.

out of the ruins of Cotignola." *The World of Magic*, which, as one annotator observed so eloquently, looks like "a 'perfidious *collage*': fruit of six years of assiduous reflection and reconsiderations, but also of escapes, relocations, and rescues," receives its final structure in the months after the war.[56] Despite de Martino's effort to integrate his long journey into a coherent whole, the book appears nevertheless fraught with internal tensions.

On the one hand, as I have shown elsewhere, Ernesto's earlier investigations into magic were dedicated to the obsessive collection and categorization of ethnographic and parapsychological facts and states of consciousness, independently of their cultural-historical context.[57] On the other hand, his later thinking displayed the opposite procedure, namely the historicization of this data. The second chapter of *The World of Magic* is central, not only for its position within the book, but also for its intellectual merits. In arguing that magic plays a central role in the solid establishment of humanity's uncertain, fragile, threatened presence as an individuated self, his thinking moved into its "theoretically highest" realms.[58] Looking back a decade later, de Martino himself perceived a rupture with his previous ideas, noting that it is only in the second chapter of his composition that he implements a historicization of primitive magic by offering a "sketch of a general theory of magic as a well-defined historical world."[59]

Putting the person into the center of his historical-cultural study of magic, de Martino argued that the true power of magic lies not in the production of specific phenomena and states of consciousness but in the drama of the "risk and redemption of the presence."[60] There is no doubt that the theory of "the crisis of the presence" (*la crisi della presenza*) is one of Ernesto de Martino's most important contributions to the study of religion. Studying primitive societies, he argued that they rely on magic in order to defend themselves against the crisis of the presence—a loosely defined state in which individuals and communities lose their identity and their ability to act and respond to their surroundings. Apart from a few scattered insinuations—where he described it

56 Pietro Angelini, *Ernesto de Martino* (Roma: Carocci, 2008), 42.

57 Flavio A. Geisshuesler, "A Parapsychologist, an Anthropologist, and a Vitalist Walk into a Laboratory: Ernesto de Martino, Mircea Eliade, and a Forgotten Chapter in the Disciplinary History of Religious Studies," *Religions* 10, no. 304 (2019): 1–22.

58 Placido Cherchi and Maria Cherchi, *Ernesto de Martino: dalla crisi della presenza alla comunità umana* (Napoli: Liguori, 1987), 29.

59 Ernesto De Martino, "Crisi della presenza e reintegrazione religiosa," *Aut aut* 31 (1956): 17.

60 Ernesto De Martino, *Il mondo magico: prolegomeni a una storia del magismo* (1948; repr., Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012), 110.

as the "soul" (*anima*),[61] as "being-there" (*esserci*),[62] and as "the feeling of individual unity"[63]—de Martino avoided substantial definitions of the concept of "presence" (*presenza*). Instead, almost all of the references to presence in *The World of Magic* are either related to the risk of being lost or to the potential of its redemption. The idea that the presence receives its significance in between crisis and redemption, indeed, would remain stable throughout the rest of his life. In posthumously published notes, we read of the crisis of the presence as both a "radical losing oneself," a "radical risk of alienation," a "total annihilation of man," and an "institutional program of interruption (*arresto*), of configuration, and of recovery of the self-alienating (*alienarsi*) as mere crisis."[64]

Unlike in modern societies, magic is a necessary phenomenon in extra-European cultural realities because the sense of self is fragile, unstable, and exposed to the constant risk of being lost. Looking at specific states of consciousness described in primitive societies, such as *latah*, *olon*, or *amok*, he remarked that they are the "polariz[ation] of the presence in a certain content" or the "collapse of the distinction between the presence and the world." Ultimately, so de Martino concluded, their true significance lies in the fact that in primitive societies the presence is in a constant state of crisis, marked by "fragility," "loss," and "abdication."[65] The self in magical societies, so he would deepen his reflections in the following years, is an expression of "real human precariousness in the world,"[66] it is "a presence that is not decided and guaranteed, but rather fragile and unstable, and thus continually exposed to the risk of not preserving itself in light of becoming."[67]

The presence, however, would have hardly been de Martino's concept if it did not involve some sort of reflection on his own civilization that reached well beyond his studies of other cultures. Drawing on his earlier studies of the rupture of modernity, such as his interpretation of secularization and scientification, de Martino knew well that Western society differs from that of non-European peoples because it conceives at least of the possibility of a stable self. Our modern "Western experience" of the self as a stable and autonomous entity,

61 De Martino, 75, 76, 77, 79.

62 De Martino, 75, 79, 129, 160.

63 De Martino, 207.

64 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 451.

65 De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 72–73.

66 Ernesto De Martino, "Etnologia e cultura nazionale negli ultimi dieci anni," *Società* 9, no. 3 (September 1953): 315, 322.

67 Ernesto De Martino, "Angoscia territoriale e riscatto culturale nel mito Achilpa delle origini. Contributo allo studio della mitologia degli Aranda," in *Il mondo magico: prolegomeni a una storia del magismo* (1948; repr., Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012), 227.

de Martino explained, is a "relatively recent" achievement that separates us historically from other cultures.[68] De Martino pointed to Greek philosophy,[69] to Christianity,[70] and to Kant,[71] to explain why our presence, unlike the presence in primitive societies, is marked by givenness and stability. On the other hand, de Martino was fully aware that since "the being-there of the person emerges as a mediated result … as a cultural good—created through struggles, dangers, defeats, compromises, victories"[72]—the presence is a work in progress that needs to be sustained because it is always susceptible to be lost again. In a long footnote in the very heart of his book, de Martino cautions his readers:

> It is necessary to briefly warn that there are, even in our civilization, "marginal situations" […] in which these forms [of the crisis of the presence] can keep themselves vital, or rather produce themselves anew […]: It suffices to think about the magical traditions still alive among our peasant populations, about the magic of the spiritist circles, and about [the magic] that is related to specific psychopathic states, such as psychasthenia, schizophrenia, and paranoia. In all of these cases we have to do with a persisting and reproducing, in more or less authentic forms, of the modes of the magic reality and of the correlative existential drama […]. Moreover, also the educated and "normal" man can, in his daily life, be more or less fleetingly touched by these archaic realities. The fact that this reproduction of the magic reality is possible even for the Western, educated man, indicates how the established and guaranteed presence is a historical good, and, as such, is […] revocable.[73]

In light of such comments, de Martino's reflections on the crisis of the presence have rightfully been tied to the specific socio-political context that surrounded him. Already in 1979, Carlo Ginzburg placed *The World of Magic* next to *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (1947) by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer and *Fear of Freedom* (1946) by Carlo Levi, grouping them together under the category of "the books of the year zero."[74] The year 1944, so scholarship has since argued, was the apex of the Second World War and Nazi-fascist rule, leading to a

68 De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 76.
69 De Martino, 156.
70 De Martino, 157.
71 De Martino, 159.
72 De Martino, 161.
73 De Martino, 129.
74 Carlo Ginzburg, "'La fine del mondo' di Ernesto de Martino," *Studi storici* 40, no. 1 (1979): 239. Carlo Levi, *Paura della libertà* (Torino: Einaudi, 1946); Max Horkheimer and Theodor

collective crisis of catastrophic proportions that threatened the very existence of Europe as a continent.[75] Years later, in "Myth, Religious Studies, and Modern Civilization," de Martino expressed this threat to the existence of his culture by drawing on the ideas of two other central figures in the twentieth-century study of religion, namely Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung.

> Our fathers had taught us that Europe had decidedly embarked upon the royal road of progress and reason. At this point nothing could put the cultural achievements, accumulated during almost two thousand years of European history, into danger. But now, the "dark side of the soul" regained dominion and seemed to reunite with the "primitive world," which was not yet sufficiently exorcised. Traveling on the road of neurotic regressions of his Viennese clientele, Dr. Freud believed to discover some *concurrency* between these regressions and the cultural institutes of anthropological civilizations. Likewise, Jung believed to be able to edify his theory of archetypes of the collective unconscious on the bases of other concurrencies between symbols of the dream life, the phantasies of the psychotic [patients], and the figures of the myth. Regardless of the judgment cast upon these psychoanalytic theories, they documented at least that much: the solemn exorcism of traditional reason had not been entirely successful and the ciphered depths of the soul reappeared hand in hand with the ciphered cultures of our planet to pose a problem for modern civilization.[76]

His boldest book must be analyzed in the socio-political context that surrounded him. In an earlier version of this article published in 1953, de Martino explicitly prefaced this passage by a reference to WWII, noting that "these were the years during which Hitler shamanized in Germany and in Europe."[77] During this time, the Neapolitan historian of religion, living in hiding, experienced his very personal crisis of hunger, cold, and death. Taking refuge in the house of Rosita Parrà, the wife of Vittorio Macchioro, it was in Cotignola that he joined in the activity of one of the many small clandestine groups of the Italian resistance movement (*Resistenza*), living an underground existence made up of

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W Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: philosophische Fragmente* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1947).

75 Ernesto Galli della Loggia, "Apocalissi culturali e cultura nazionale," in *Dell'apocalisse. Antropologia e psicopatologia in Ernesto de Martino*, ed. Bruna Baldacconi and Pierangela Di Lucchio (Napoli: Guida, 2005), 32.

76 De Martino, "Promesse e minacce dell'etnologia," 86.

77 De Martino, "Etnologia e cultura nazionale negli ultimi dieci anni," 314.

anti-fascist propaganda and militancy. Politically, he was particularly involved to the Italian Labor Party (*Partito italiano del lavoro, PIL*) and he wrote fervently in favor of a new religion of liberty (*religione della libertà*) in journals such as *La Voce del popolo* and *La Voce dei giovani*.[78] From the time of Mussolini's arrest and the fall of fascism on July 24, 1943, until the end of the war, the region along the river Senio became one of the most violently contested areas in all of Italy and de Martino found himself under constant threats of the raids of the German SS and the Gestapo, as well as the squads of the newborn Italian Social Republic (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*).[79] In fact, after Mussolini's proclamation of this second Italian state—which is more commonly known as the "Republic of Salò" (*Repubblica di Salò*)—on September 18 1943, Italy's war became a civil war in which Italians would fight amongst themselves.

3 The Dark Side of the Soul Resurfaces in Religious Studies: The Split between the Insider-Phenomenological and the Outsider-Explanatory Approaches

After the war ended, continuing to pendulate in between crisis and redemption, de Martino returned to Bari to complete his research and finish his book.[80] Since its publication, it has been read in Italy and abroad—translated in no less than seven languages[81]—and is by many considered his "most innovative and current work."[82] It has rightly been called his "masterpiece" (*capolavoro*).[83] But why was this period such a critical moment in the history of the twentieth

78 Ernesto De Martino, "Intorno alle 'Dottrine sociali delle chiese e dei gruppi cristiani,'" *La Nuova Italia* XVI, no. 5–6 (June 1943): 51–53; De Martino, "Collettivismo"; De Martino, "Noi e la religione"; De Martino, "Capitale e capitalismo"; De Martino, "Della repubblica"; De Martino, "Noi e i cattolici"; De Martino, "Conoscerci"; Ernesto De Martino, "Danaro e banche," *La voce del popolo* 1, no. 17 (August 1944).

79 Cesare Bermani collects a series of testimonies that give the reader a vivid sense of the dangers that de Martino was in during those months of his life. Bermani, "Tra furore e valore: Ernesto de Martino."

80 De Martino met Pavese in the spring of 1943 in Rome, where the editor Einaudi recently opened an office in Via Monteverdi. See also, Pietro Angelini, "Prefazione," in *Dal laboratorio del mondo magico. Carteggi 1940–1943*, ed. Pietro Angelini (Lecce: Argo, 2007), 9.

81 The book has been translated into English, French, Spanish, Czech, Hungarian, Polish. According to Ginzburg, it has also been translated into Japanese, but I could not verify that yet.

82 Adriano Santiemma, "La religione tra phainómenon e genómenon, tra natura e cultura," in *Le religioni e la storia: a proposito di un metodo*, ed. Gilberto Mazzoleni and Adriano Santiemma (Roma: Bulzoni, 2005), 59.

83 Mustè, *La filosofia dell'idealismo italiano*, 193.

century for de Martino? What was the difference between 1918 and 1944? If de Martino was long convinced that his own continent suffered from a massive civilizational crisis, the crisis of the presence nourished these reflections with new energy—ultimately leading him to identify the realm of science as the place where our presence was most threatened. In other words, if WWI represented the collapse of the progressivist world-view, throwing the Western world into a civilizational crisis, it was in the following decades that the crisis reached its fullest extent by embedding itself within scientific thinking itself.

The scientific reactions to the crisis of the self, were indeed oftentimes radical in nature. If the most extreme example of this loss of certitudes into reality might be Oswald Spengler's claim that even mathematical numbers are ultimately relative,[84] Edmund Husserl's *The Crisis of the European Sciences* represents a good illustration for the crisis of the self. In this piece, written in the last years of his life between 1934 and 1937, the German phenomenologist argued that the crisis of positivist science ultimately led to a crisis of meaning of humanity and its cultural life. His response, as we all know, was the establishment of a transcendental phenomenology that would salvage not only the status of reason, but also of the subject.

De Martino, who was convinced that the discipline of religious studies was particularly sensitive to the divisive forces at work within the crisis-consciousness of the modern West, believed that the crisis not only afflicted the realm of science but actually infiltrated it from the inside. One of the key categories through which the crisis of the self was internalized in the scientific study of religion was "magic." While it is well known that already Tylor, Frazer, and Malinowski saw magic as the origin of science,[85] de Martino was less interested in substantive definitions of the concept, but rather its relational importance as a form of radical alterity.[86] Wouter Hanegraaff has recently argued that modernity was not only defined by the split between "religion" and the realm of "the secular," but also a "*third* domain, referred to by such terms as 'magic' or 'superstition.'"[87]

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84 Reinhard Laube, *Karl Mannheim und die Krise des Historismus: Historismus als wissenssoziologischer Perspektivismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 41; Cathryn Carson, "Method, Moment, and Crisis in Weimar Science," in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, ed. Peter Eli Gordon and John P. McCormick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 193; Bambach, "Weimar Philosophy and the Crisis of Historical Thinking," 138.

85 Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 125–26, 139–40.

86 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 216–19; Styers, *Making Magic*, 145–46.

87 Hanegraaff, "Reconstructing 'Religion' from the Bottom Up," 577.

> Because this fact goes unrecognized, what usually happens is that the third term is tacitly removed from the equation instead of being included under the umbrella of "religion." The deep irony is that by thus treating the third term as largely irrelevant to the concept of "religion," thereby rendering it invisible, even contemporary deconstructionists end up perpetuating the very same Christian-Protestant ideologies whose legacy they are trying so hard to deconstruct! If the triadic perspective continues to make intuitive sense to us even today, this is because our intellectual culture has inherited the profound disdain for "pagan/ idolatrous/ magical/superstitious" beliefs and practices that has always been typical of orthodox (and most particularly Protestant) Christians. Secular thinkers who embrace the values of rationality and science have unwittingly adopted the same normativities from their Protestant forebears. In short, [...], both Christianity *and* secular modernity define their very identity against this "Other."[88]

De Martino would have fully agreed with the expert of Western esotericism. While his theory of de-historification was concerned with the logic of magic, he maintained, throughout his career, active research projects into how historians of religion have dealt with magic. "Western civilization," so he most famously wrote in *Magic and Civilization*, "has come to shape itself as modern civilization through an assiduous anti-magical polemic (*polemica antimagica*)."[89] One consequence of the "Hellenic-Christian anthropology and the anti-magical polemic innate in our civilization," he remarked in *The World of Magic*, is that "being-there appears to us now as [...] given to man by nature, [as something] that he did not do, and therefore as the unknowable, the irrational, the mysterious *par excellence*."[90] In other words, de Martino was concerned that the existence of the discipline of religious studies is itself indebted to our culture's attitude towards magic as something radically other. Similar to contemporary researchers of identity politics, such as Gerd Baumann, de Martino realized that alterity is structured along the lines of a binary oppositions ("good" vs. "bad"), which is itself subject to reversal as rejection can turn into fascination, and vice versa. Specifically, de Martino also grew more aware of the fact that

88 Hanegraaff, 595–96. As an anonymous reviewer rightly noted, the distinction between religion and magic is not simply a modern phenomenon, as this distinction can be traced all the way back to the Ancient Greeks and Romans.

89 Ernesto De Martino, *Magia e civiltà* (Milano: Garzanti, 1962), 5–6. The notion of the polemic is omnipresent in the book. In the roughly three dozen pages written in his own pen, de Martino uses the term "anti-magical" no less than twenty-four times.

90 De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 161.

the polemic surrounding magic gave rise to two radically opposed and mutually exclusive perspectives that ultimately account for the split within the discipline of religious studies and anthropology itself, namely what I called the insider-phenomenological and the outsider-explanatory approaches.

> It is a unique fact that our age knows not only a copious literature related to the revaluation of the sacred as a category, but also an equally massive literature, in which the decline of religious life in the modern world is being discussed: One could say that the sacred has never before been so eruditely defended as a fundamental value of human existence as in our period, while at the same time, the realization of the eclipse, the agony, or even the death of the sacred has never before been as intense as today.[91]

The former of these is already well known to the reader as it was the primary focus of the preceding chapter. Indeed, isn't Eliade's politics of nostalgia a search for that which is magically "other"? In *Magic and Civilization*, de Martino explained that in certain currents, "magic thought appeared in just as authentic a manner as rational thought." "This perspective," so de Martino warned, is also problematic precisely because "the Western opposition between magic and reason has come to lose its meaning, the *aut-aut* resolved itself in the indifference of an *et-et* that left open the possibility to return to irrationalistic ideals of life and traditions." Eliade's nostalgic tendency, which was based on something akin to remembering the way things were before the magical worldview was abandoned by Western society, involves "the lack of loyalty to this history of our own civilization."[92]

By contrast, the perspective of the outsider-explanatory approach vilified and rejected the alterity of magic. De Martino called this the "anti-magical polemic of scientific thought" and recognized it primarily in the writings of Frazer, Durkheim, Malinowski, Freud, and Lévi-Strauss.[93] In these works, the Italian thinker found traces of the process of othering that has created modern Western identity. While he concluded his book by noting that all of them remained "unknowingly prisoners of some immediate themes of the anti-magical polemic of Western civilization,"[94] de Martino was particularly drawn to the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss because his radical opposition to the insider-phenomenological approach perfectly illustrated the internalized

91 De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna," 76.
92 De Martino, *Magia e civiltà*, 213–14.
93 De Martino, 79.
94 De Martino, 213.

crisis within the discipline of religious studies. It is well known that the French structuralist was radically opposed to any form of nostalgia, primitivism, phenomenology, or existentialism—in short, all the currents that collude in the insider-phenomenological approach to religion. As Ivan Strenski has argued,

> Lévi-Strauss's "mythology" remains emotionally or even imaginatively inaccessible to any exotic primitivist industry: structures are impersonal and abstract, not "warm," not rich with images. Despite Lévi-Strauss's personal prestige on the public intellectual scene in France as a kind of modern *philosophe*, structural mythology itself has never become a durable cultural fad in the way that theories of Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade and Carl Jung, as set out in their far more popular works, have.[95]

Lévi-Strauss himself did not hold back with critique of the phenomenological current in religious studies, attacking specifically its tendency to set apart the sacred as a special realm of meaning. He is trenchant in his analysis of thinkers who "believe too readily that they have succeeded in grasping, beyond their own preconceptions, the ideas of the indigenous people [as] their descriptions are too often reduced to a phenomenology."[96] In the fourth volume of his *Mythologiques*, entitled *The Naked Man* (1971), we find a similarly "deflationary" position typical of the outsider-explanatory approach. Here, the French anthropologist argued that much of contemporary scholarship is "imbued [...] with mysticism," in search of a "mythology to be full of hidden meaning."[97] He suggests that while he considers the "religious field as a stupendous storehouse of images that is far from having been exhausted by objective research," he nonetheless insists that "these images are like any others."[98]

As mentioned, scholarship has not neglected to notice this anti-essentialist approach in commenting on Lévi-Strauss' work. Strenski, for instance, has observed that the French structuralist is frequently critical of Eliade, specifically because of his "reputation for seeing myths as expressions of religious nostalgia for the primordial beginnings, as declarations of a primitive ontology."[99] In the continuation of the above-cited passage, Lévi-Strauss took

95 Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History*, 163.

96 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Comparative Religions of Nonliterate Peoples," in *Structural Anthropology Volume II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 67.

97 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man: Introduction to a Science of Mythology IV* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 645–46.

98 Lévi-Strauss, 639.

99 Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History*, 157.

a direct stance against the frequently nostalgic orientation of the insider-phenomenological approach:

> The fallacious complaint that the myths have been impoverished hides a latent mysticism, nourished in the vain hope of the revelation of a meaning behind the meaning to justify or excuse all kinds of confused and nostalgic longings, which are afraid to express themselves openly. We have to resign ourselves to the fact that the myths tell us nothing instructive about the order of the world, the nature of reality or the origin and destiny of mankind. We cannot expect them to flatter any metaphysical thirst, or to breathe new life into exhausted ideologies.[100]

It has been repeatedly stated that French structuralism formed its program based on following a "scientific approach."[101] Lévi-Strauss, expert of the indigenous peoples of South and North America, is no exception as his goal can be summed up as the development of a "full-scale science of culture."[102] As Paul-François Tremlett, in one of the rare monographs dedicated to Lévi-Strauss as a scholar of religion, commented, the French thinker "consistently privileged science and made use of science as a special discourse to give his own work authority, and as a means of legitimating an alliance of social anthropology with structural linguistics."[103]

Reader of the classic structuralist writings of Lévi-Strauss, particularly *Elementary Forms* (1949), *Structural Anthropology* (1958), and *Savage Thought* (1962),[104] de Martino was also fascinated by how structuralist linguistics can teach us about unconscious mechanisms at work in culture.[105] As François Dosse, in his careful study of structuralism's rise and decline in France, has unveiled, structuralism dominated the French intellectual life, representing

100 Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, 639.

101 Agnes Heller, "Death of the Subject?," in *Constructions of the Self*, ed. George Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 270; François Dosse, *History of Structuralism. Vol. 1: The Rising Sign, 1945–1966* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 159, 191, 382–383, 387, 390–391; François Dosse, *History of Structuralism. Vol. 2: The Sign Sets, 1967–Present.* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 47, 450.

102 Roberts, *Nothing but History*, 42.

103 Paul-François Tremlett, *Lévi-Strauss on Religion: The Structuring Mind* (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2008), 22. Strenski describes his approach as a "thoroughgoing naturalism." Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History*, 131.

104 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 266–68, 403–13, 623–27, 688–89. See also, Ernesto De Martino, "Etnologia e civiltà moderna," *Cultura e Scuola* 2 (September 1964): 14.

105 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 405.

"the *koine* of an entire intellectual generation."[106] While structuralism has found a broad range of intellectual expressions—the Marxist theory of Louis Althusser, the literary studies of Roland Barthes, the philosophy of Michel Foucault, the psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, the comparative philology of Georges Dumézil, or the literary theory of Pierre Macherey—de Martino encountered and appreciated the structuralist project primarily because of the monumental work of the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss.[107] His attitude towards the structuralist science of Lévi-Strauss is favorable. He believed that the history of religions as he practices it should be "enriched by the instances ripened in the course of the development of sciences such as sociology, psychiatry, cultural psychiatry, folklore, traditional anthropology, anthropology, and linguistics."[108] De Martino recognized that the approach proposed by Lévi-Strauss is premised on a "reduction"—particularly he speaks of a "reduction to the common and to the unconscious" of myths—and described the operation as an "opportunity" that has "value."[109]

4 The Savior of the European Sciences: The Redemption of the Presence and the Unifying Power of Magic

It is here that de Martino's work reveals its redemptive side. Indeed, just as Lévi-Strauss' structuralism allows the scholars of religion to penetrate what lies behind the veil of consciousness in order to bring to light the underlying structure and meaning of the unconscious, *The World of Magic* was a means to gain a deeper understanding of the crisis afflicting Western civilization. In both cases, this unveiling of latently active unconscious dynamics creates the value of understanding and self-awareness, which are the foundations for any attempt to transcend the crisis of the presence.

Placido Cherchi, a student of de Martino during the last years of his life at the University of Cagliari, argued that the years of the war were not only those of the apocalypse but also "the starting point of a historical re-founding."[110] In his insightful book, the anthropologist argues that the experience of the

106 Dosse, *History of Structuralism. Vol. 1: The Rising Sign, 1945–1966*, xxiv.

107 John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2012), 239.

108 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 406–7.

109 De Martino, 413.

110 Placido Cherchi, *Il signore del limite. Tre variazioni critiche su Ernesto de Martino* (Napoli: Liguori, 1994), 34.

war should be seen as a "ritual of puberty, a terrible initiatic event,"[111] as de Martino's own "rite of passage."[112] Although generations of Italian intellectuals, from Croce to Arnaldo Momigliano, were right in acknowledging the "irreparably destroyed" political, economic, and moral foundations that "Italian generations had constructed for a century" and the "never fully to be overcome [...] changes of cultural interests and orientations,"[113] de Martino continued to cultivate a decisively palingenetic vision of history. Although his writings made it obvious that the distant world of primitives was in reality threateningly close—or even within himself and his own culture—de Martino remained optimistic and regarded crisis as the basis for rebirth of Italy. Most recently, Ulrich Van Loyen has pointed to this salvific component of de Martino's book on magic. I wholeheartedly agree with my German colleague's comment that one of the most important dimensions of de Martino's *magnum opus* "lies in its intention [...] to save Europe."[114] In some passages of his unpublished autobiography, de Martino intentionally put on the cloak of the cultural savior, only to reveal that it is sowed into his very skin in the form of an "atypicalness" that predestined him for his calling:

> Without relieving myself of even the smallest bit of responsibility, it is to be observed that in the great periods of crisis and renovation of civilization; when old connections are dismantled, and new ones disclose themselves, yet without being able to say that a new order has yet arisen, one records a spike in atypical men that violate all the norms. I believe to be one of these men.[115]

Although de Martino was, without a doubt, a crisis-thinker, his work was never giving into pessimism, but instead regarded crisis as a productive motor for cultural innovation. Already in *Naturalism and Historicism*, de Martino called upon the "historian" in order to rebuild a new world out of the rubble of crisis: "Concerning the historian's role in the drama and the task (*compito*) that is his,

111 Cherchi, 25.

112 Cherchi, 33.

113 Benedetto Croce, *Quando l'Italia era tagliata in due; estratto di un diario, luglio 1943–giugno 1944* (Bari: Laterza, 1948), 44; Arnaldo Momigliano, "Per una storia delle religioni nell'Italia contemporanea: Antonio Banfi e Ernesto de Martino tra persona e apocalissi," in *La Contraddizione felice?: Ernesto De Martino e gli altri*, ed. Riccardo Di Donato (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 1990), 13.

114 Ulrich Van Loyen, "Die Abenteuer der Geister: Ernesto de Martino und die Anthropologien des besessenen Südens," in *Der besessene Süden: Ernesto de Martino und das andere Europa*, ed. Ulrich Van Loyen (Wien: Sonderzahl, 2016), 12.

115 De Martino, *Vita di Gennaro Esposito, Napoletano*, 25–27; Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 58.

he responds to the call of the times (*appello dei tempi*) by offering his contribution, which is a greater power of individuation, a preparation for a greater power for action."[116] In the case of the world of magic, which he encountered through his readings in ethnography, de Martino argued that some cultures were able to offer an appropriate response to the crisis. In short, he believed that magic operated by means of a dramatic process, which he called "de-historification," which gradually led from the crisis to the "redemption of the presence" (*il riscatto della presenza*).

Further, the theory of de-historification not only addressed extra-European societies and the role that magic played therein, but also served as a conceptual tool to reevaluate the split scientific tradition of Western research on magic. First and foremost, de Martino used magic as a unifying idea for the discipline of religious studies. If he wrote earlier that "our civilization is in crisis," because it is "divided in separate entities ("*compartimenti-stagni*") and lacks [...] unity of thought,"[117] he called magic the "unifying problem" that "could make apparent the artificial nature of the separation," and "break the boundaries of the empirical partitions of knowledge."[118]

> The unity of our culture is essentially entrusted to unifying problems, which are, by means of their nature, apt to break the limits of the academic partitions of knowledge, which specialists sometimes mistakenly hold for determinations of things that exist *in re*. Thanks to their "connecting" function, they are apt to defeat the enduring influence of positivistic particularization and chipping. Now, the problem of the history of magic constitutes precisely one of these unifying problems. The historian, the philosopher, or the man of culture, who has nourished himself from the sources of modern humanism, finds the most favorable conditions for coming together with the psychological enthusiast, the psychiatrist, and generally any naturalistic thinker, on this ground. Here, he finds the conditions to pick up the "human" discourse, which seems to be interrupted since the period of romanticism, together with his colleagues.[119]

This unifying thrust of de-historification for the discipline of religious studies is best illustrated by means of a discussion of how de Martino engages in the works of two ideal types of the split discipline, namely Mircea Eliade and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

116 De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, 57.
117 De Martino, 56.
118 De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 186.
119 De Martino, 5.

CHAPTER 4

De-historification (1944–1948): Shamanic Magic and the Dialectic Movement between Mircea Eliade and Claude Lévi-Strauss

1 The Integration of Eliade and Lévi-Strauss: Sacred Poles and Songs of Labor as Forms of De-historification

After Vittorio Macchioro recommended Eliade's *Yoga: An Essay on the Origins of Indian Mysticism* (1936) to his new son-in-law shortly after its publication, de Martino's legacy leaves no traces of the Romanian giant for a decade.[1] Even though Eliade's lengthy article entitled "The Problem of Shamanism" (1946) is absent in de Martino's *The World of Magic*,[2] it is around this same time that he recommenced to engage the work of his famous Romanian counterpart. Responding to the recently published *Techniques of Yoga* (1948), de Martino showed himself visibly impressed with it, particularly with its sensibility for the religious conception of time and history.[3] His review, published in Pettazzoni's prestigious journal *Studies and Materials of History of Religions*,[4] was generous with praise.

> This work by Mircea Eliade responds very well to the general requirement for the Western culture to broaden its own humanism and to renew its own problems by means of the comprehension of forms of spirituality that are ideally distant from ours. According to the author, the paradox of Yoga (reintegration in all the forms of the indistinct, in the primordial unity) can be understood in light of the archaic aspiration to abolish history, to restore the auroral state, periodically and ritually renewing the "archetype time," the time of the origins. […] Without a doubt, this interpretation of yoga and of its techniques is extremely suggestive and incisive.[5]

1 Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Essai sur les origines de la mystique indienne* (Paris: Geuthner, 1936).
2 Mircea Eliade, "Le problème du chamanisme," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 131, no. 1 (1946): 5–52.
3 Mircea Eliade, *Techniques du yoga* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).
4 Ernesto De Martino, "Recensione a M. Eliade, 'Techniques du yoga,'" *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 21 (1948): 130–32.
5 De Martino, 130.

Even more, he also added it, fresh off the press, to the books to be published in the *Purple Series*.[6] Charging his wife—from whom he just recently separated—with the task of translating the book from French into Italian, de Martino himself redacted the preface to the translation. De Martino's various efforts to promote his colleague's work were not only instrumental in the reception of Eliade amongst a general Italian public,[7] but also points to a shared fascination with the theory of religion as a "flight from history." This, indeed, was the most significant novelty of Eliade's new book and would turn into a cornerstone for the rest of Eliade's work and de Martino's analysis thereof.[8] Unlike his all too often ignored interests in parapsychology,[9] scholarship has rightly noted to what extent de Martino's most significant theoretical contribution to his field of study is indebted to Mircea Eliade's writings on time and history.[10]

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6 Mircea Eliade, *Tecniche dello yoga* (Torino: Einaudi, 1952).

7 Pietro Angelini, "Eliade, de Martino e il problema dei poteri magici," in *Mircea Eliade: le forme della tradizione e del sacro*, ed. Giovanni Casadio and Pietro Mander (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2012), 11–38.

8 Raffaele Pettazzoni, "The Truth of Myth," in *Essays on the History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1954), 11–23; Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 215; Douglas Allen, "Ist Eliade antihistorisch?," in *Die Mitte der Welt: Aufsätze zu Mircea Eliade*, ed. Hans Peter Duerr (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984), 106–27; Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History*; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Phillippe Borgeaud, "Mythe et Histoire Chez Mircea Eliade. Réflexions d'un Écolier En Histoire Des Religions," *Institut National Genevois, Annales 1993*, 1994, 33–48; Natale Spineto, "Introduction," in *L'histoire des religions a-t-elle un sens? Correspondance 1926–1959* (Paris: Le Cerf, 1994); Christian Wachtmann, *Der Religionsbegriff bei Mircea Eliade* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996); Natale Spineto, "Raffaele Pettazzoni e la verità del mito," *Rivista di storia della storiografia moderna* 17 (1997): 59–65; Philip Vanhaelemeersch, "Eliade, 'History' and 'Historicism,'" in *The International Eliade*, ed. Bryan S. Rennie (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 155–61.

9 Geisshuesler, Flavio, "A Parapsychologist, an Anthropologist, and a Vitalist Walk into a Laboratory: Ernesto de Martino, Mircea Eliade, and a Forgotten Chapter in the Disciplinary History of Religious Studies."

10 Ugo Bianchi, *History of Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 197–98; Giuseppe Giarrizzo, "Note su Ernesto de Martino," *Archivio italiano di storia della cultura* VIII (1995): 162; Angelini, "Il rapporto tra Ernesto de Martino e Mircea Eliade," 216–19; Angelini, "Eliade, de Martino e il problema dei poteri magici"; Giovanni Casadio, *Lo sciamanesimo. Prima e dopo Mircea Eliade* (Roma: Il Calamo, 2014); Cecilia Gatto Trocchi, "L'occultismo in Occidente secondo Eliade: fascinazioni e inquinamenti," in *Confronto con Mircea Eliade: archetipi mitici e identità storica*, ed. Luciano Arcella, Paola Pisi, and Roberto Scagno (Milano: Jaca Book, 1998), 319–36; Sergio Botta, "La via storicista allo sciamanesimo: prospettive archeologiche e storia delle religioni," in *Sciamani e sciamanesimi*, ed. Alessandro Saggioro and Leonardo Ambasciano (Roma: Carocci, 2010), 59–86; Christine Bergé, "Lectures de De Martino en France aujourd'hui," *ETHN Ethnologie française* XXXVII, no. 2 (2001): 537–47.

Before exploring the interactions between de Martino and his Romanian colleague, however, it is important to note that the magnetic enthrallment with temporality and its role in religion was already a core characteristic of the young Ernesto. In notes written during the 1930s, for instance, we read:

> Religion is the negation of development. Rituals and myths, in enormously distant lands and times, repeat apparently similar situations: There is something, at the root of religion, which does not want to become, which desperately attempts to solidify the spirit in nature. [...] Hence, the historian of religion is compelled to make history (*fare la storia*) of that which is, by its very nature, the aspiration to avoid history. Writing (*fare*) the history of a religion means to reproduce (*rifare*) the process by which this aspiration was defeated and consumed—like all human aspirations—by time. In this sense, religion is unwillingly history, [it is the] drama between reality (development) and abstract being (nature).[11]

This being said, the term "de-historification" rose to prominence only after de Martino actively engaged the work of Mircea Eliade in the years immediately following the war.[12] Of the dozens of examples throughout the rest of his life,[13] the clearest expression of Eliade's religious conception of time as characterized by a "nostalgia for origins," is arguably to be found in his *Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (1949).[14] In the book, which he considered to be his most important one,[15] Eliade famously claimed that religion seeks to escape our historical reality choosing to "live in an 'eternal present,' outside of time [...] by deliberately repeat[ing] such and such acts posited *ab origine* by gods, heroes, or ancestors."[16]

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11 Capocasale, "Gli appunti inediti giovanili di Ernesto de Martino per un 'Saggio sulla Religione civile,'" 19–20.

12 Ernesto De Martino, "Note di viaggio," *Nuovi Argomenti* 1, no. 2 (June 1953): 47–79.

13 See, for example, Mircea Eliade, *Images et symboles: essais sur le symbolisme magico-religieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952); Mircea Eliade, "Kosmogonische Mythen und magische Handlungen," *Paideuma* VI (1956): 194–204; Mircea Eliade, *Mythes, rêves et mystères* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957); Mircea Eliade, "The Prestige of Cosmogonic Myth," *Diogenes* XXIII (1958): 1–13; Mircea Eliade, "The Quest for the 'Origins' of Religion," *History of Religions* 4, no. 1 (July 1, 1964): 154–69; Mircea Eliade, "Cosmogonic Myth and 'Sacred History,'" *Religious Studies* 2, no. 2 (1967): 171–83.

14 Mircea Eliade, *Le Mythe de l'éternel Retour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

15 Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), ix.

16 Eliade, 5–6.

De Martino believed that his colleague was correct in assuming that the flight from historical reality was an essential trait of religion. Even more, he agreed that that religion is a complex consisting of both ritual and myth, in which the ritual repetition of mythic accounts allows the practitioner to negate or obscure history, thus escaping historical reality through the metahistorical universe of myth. As the subtitle to the book's French edition—*Archetypes and Repetition*—implies, Eliade argued that ritual acts are used "to annul past time, to abolish history by a continuous return in *illo tempore*, by the repetition of the cosmogonic act."[17] De Martino summarized this posture as follows:

> According to Eliade, the historian of religion studies facts that, despite being inserted into the flux of becoming, manifest a behavior that to a great extent transcends the historical behavior of the human being. At the heart of the various religions always the same "archetypes" are at work, that is to say the same images and the same fundamental symbols, in which the human condition as such expresses itself beyond all ages and all civilizations. In this way, according to Eliade, the religious pretense to escape history and to resolve it in the ritual repetition of archetypes, has a certain sense of effective ontological value: the historian and the phenomenologist of religion get mixed up with the man engaged in religion in at least one aspect, inasmuch as they confirm the fundamental religious aspiration to escape from history.[18]

It was in 1952, shortly after Eliade himself published his most famous book on the theme as *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951),[19] that de Martino personally contacted the Romanian scholar. In his letter, he informed the Romanian scholar about his plans to publish an investigation on the myth and ritual practices surrounding the sacred pole of an Australian aborigine nomadic people made famous in Eliade's studies. That same year, the results of this investigation were published in the form of an article entitled "Territorial Anguish and Cultural Redemption in the Achilpa Myth of Origins" (1952).[20]

17 Eliade, 81.

18 Ernesto De Martino, "Prefazione," in *Trattato di storia delle religioni*, by Mircea Eliade (Torino: Einaudi, 1954), IX.

19 Mircea Eliade, *Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase* (Paris: Payot, 1951).

20 Ernesto De Martino, "Angoscia territoriale e riscatto culturale nel mito Achilpa delle origini. Contributo allo studio della mitologia degli Aranda," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 23 (1952 1951): 52–66.

In this composition, which has been lauded as "one of the highest and most mature expressions of contemporary anthropology,"[21] de Martino investigated the myths and practices of an Australian people; paying particular attention to its use of a ceremonial pole, known as "Kauwa-Auwa." The Italian scholar of religion demonstrated how the ritual object is used to relieve the nomadic people's anxiety associated with constantly having to move to new places. Explicitly acknowledging his debt to Eliade, he argued that the pole is central to certain "rituals," which are performed to "symbolically repeat the act of creation."[22] For de Martino, Eliade's studies on "foundational events that took place in *illo tempore*" are "relevant" because they show how religion works with acts that "can be ceremonially reiterated."[23]

In his subsequent writings, de Martino deepened his exploration of the crisis and the recovery of the "presence" as "de-historification."[24] Focusing on primitive societies and magical practices, he argued that they are cultural techniques of recovery that address critical moments of existence and act as protection to both individual and collective identities, ultimately leading to the strengthening of the presence by imbuing it with community values. De-historification works by temporarily concealing the destructive potential of personal and collective crises, be they natural disasters, economic oppression, or the loss of a family member. In so doing, it transposes these critical moments and their negative implications into a metahistorical realm where the incidents are actively mastered and brought under control. De-historification, therefore, does not only allow to frame the historical crisis in a mythic and optimistic horizon where it has already been resolved at the beginning of time, but it also aids the reintegration of the individuals and communities affected by the incident.

In another article, de Martino remarked again that what Eliade calls "the archaic ontology" consists in the "resolution of the historical becoming in the repetition of mythic archetypes, primordial events that took place once and for all in *illo tempore*."[25] This repetition of myths in order to escape history, so de Martino observed, could be summed up with the expression "stepping

21 Marcello Massenzio, "Destorificazione istituzionale e destorificazione irrelativa in E. de Martino," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 51, no. 9 (1985): 199.

22 De Martino, "Angoscia territoriale e riscatto culturale nel mito Achilpa delle origini. Contributo allo studio della mitologia degli Aranda," 2012, 227.

23 De Martino, 227.

24 Ernesto De Martino, "Fenomenologia religiosa e storicismo assoluto," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 24–25 (1954 1953): 1–25. See also, the ample archival notes on this theme published by Marcello Massenzio. Ernesto De Martino, *Storia e metastoria: i fondamenti di una teoria del sacro*, ed. Marcello Massenzio (Lecce: Argo, 1995).

25 De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna," 44.

back" (*passo indietro*). He used this formulation to discuss his Romanian colleague's conception of magic and argued that "the scholar who has treated this 'step backwards' in the mythical-ritual nexus the longest and with the greatest abundance of data, is, without a doubt, Mircea Eliade."[26]

This being said, the Italian thinker's theory was not only shaped by Eliade but also influenced by another giant in the twentieth century study of religion, namely Claude Lévi-Strauss. While it is certainly correct that Lévi-Strauss took a decisive step away from the insider-phenomenological approach, de Martino understood that the crisis within the discipline of religious studies during his time was not only one of a split between seemingly incommensurable positions but also one of a lack of self-awareness. In fact, he believed that the two paradigmatic representatives of the insider and the outsider approaches had much more in common than they themselves thought.

First of all, they shared a thematic interest. Just like de Martino and Eliade, the French anthropologist dedicated much of his intellectual activity to the study of magic and shamanism. Born in the same year as de Martino and a year after Eliade, he shared important preoccupations that were cultivated by his Italian and Romanian colleagues. It was in 1949—in between the publications of de Martino's *The World of Magic* and Eliade's *Shamanism*—that Lévi-Strauss published two of his most influential articles on the topic, namely "The Sorcerer and His Magic" and "The Effectiveness of Symbols."[27] In his analysis, the French anthropologist applied himself to interpret a song of healing that was uttered by a Cuna Indian shaman during an obstructed labor. Lévi-Strauss suggested that the shaman's séance of healing plays on mythical motifs of Indian culture and that this allows him to alleviate the pain of the woman. During the episode, the spiritual healer envisions that the soul of the laboring mother was stolen by Muu, the sacred power regulating the gestation of the fetus. What ensues is a journey upon which the shaman must embark in order to recover the captured soul. As he travels to the country of Muu and her daughters, these mythical locales become identified with the human body, specifically with physical attributes relevant to a woman in labor. The way of Muu becomes her vagina, whereas the abode of the mythical demon signifies the uterus of the pregnant woman. Throughout the song, the shaman retells

26 De Martino, 43–44.

27 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "L'efficacité Symbolique," *Revue de L'histoire des Religions* 135, no. 1 (1949): 5–27; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Le sorcier et sa magie," *Les Temps Modernes* 41 (March 1949): 385–406. Both articles were republished in *Structural Anthropology:* Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Sorcerer and His Magic," in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 167–85; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols," in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 186–205.

his struggle against evil spirits and the culminating battle against Muu over his patient's soul. Finally, isomorphically linked through the healer's song, both the shamanic flight and the physical labor culminate in triumph: Just as the spirit releases the soul of the mother, the obstacles to the delivery of her baby are removed.

De Martino held the French anthropologist's interpretation of magic in high esteem, analyzing it repeatedly and extensively throughout a series of writings during the 1950s and 1960s.[28] He was so impressed with Lévi-Strauss' account of the Cuna healing song that he published a translated version of the latter article in his *Magic and Civilization*.[29] De Martino also addressed at least one letter to his colleague, attaching a copy of one of his own books of the Southern Trilogy.[30] The Italian historian of religion saw Lévi-Strauss as an ally because he shared his conviction that the "fundamental perspective to evaluate the efficacy of magical symbols is not naturalistic but historical-cultural."[31] Lévi-Strauss' interpretation, in fact, was not naturalistic. The other way around, the *anthropologue* argued that the song's therapeutic efficacy rests in the isomorphic relationship between the symbolic realm of the text and the severe physical parturition difficulties. As de Martino himself noted, "the part of the magic enchantment (*incantesimo*) that narrates the shamanistic *agon* against Muu maintains itself constantly between mythical symbolism and physiological realism, with a continual passage from one to the other level."[32] In other words, de Martino saw in Lévi-Strauss' account—marked by an oscillation between "the symbolic description of that which we could call the visceral landscape and the continual reference to the physiological reality of the uterine world in labor"[33]—glimpses of his own endeavors during the 1950s. As I will show later, during those years, de Martino was one of the first

28 De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna"; Ernesto De Martino, "L'approccio etnologico della fenomenologia paranormale," *Giornale Italiano per la ricerca psichica* 1, no. 2 (May 1963): 81–86; Ernesto De Martino, "La Funzione Della Magia Nel Mondo Primitivo," *Vie Nuove*, October 22, 1964; De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 266–68, 403–7, 623–26.

29 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "L'efficacia dei simboli magici," in *Magia e civiltà*, ed. Ernesto De Martino (Milano: Garzanti, 1962), 222–46.

30 I will discuss de Martino's Southern Trilogy in the following chapters. In a letter sent on October 2 1961, Lévi-Strauss thanks his colleague for sending him the "beautiful book," promises that he "will read it with considerable interest," and assures him that he will write a "report on it." Pietro Angelini, "Dall'epistolario di Ernesto de Martino," *Quaderni del dipartimento di scienze sociali dell'Istituto universitario orientale* III, no. 3–4 (1989): 211.

31 De Martino, *Magia e civiltà*, 220–21.

32 De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna," 49.

33 De Martino, 49.

to argue that the phenomenon of "Tarantism" (*tarantismo*)—involving spider-bitten women in the Italian South, exorcised by means of the ritual playing of the *Tarantella*—was not the result of a merely biological disease but rather a cultural phenomenon imbued with a rich symbolic horizon. Just as in the case of Lévi-Strauss' laboring woman, the *Tarantate* were not healed by means of physical intervention but rather through the efficacy of cultural practices.

De Martino brought his own predilection for how magic alters the conception of time in order to overcome difficult situations to his reading of Lévi-Strauss's piece on the Cuna healing ritual. Noting that the "magic performance of the shaman opens with a long and meticulous description—like a film in slow-motion—of the antecedents of the present situation," de Martino proceeded to emphasize aspects that remind us of his own treatment of the efficacy of magic practices. More specifically, he recovered the expression "stepping backwards," which we already encountered in his discussion of Eliade, and applied it to the French anthropologist's theory of magic healing.

> [The song] narrates the beginning of the crisis, the loss of consciousness of the midwife, her visit to the shaman, the shaman's departure to the hut of the parturient, and his arrival. In other words, his "cure" initiates with a step backwards that reclaims the events of retrospective interest starting from the inception of the crisis. With an incredible abundance of details it incisively describes—as if "recommencing from the beginning"—[…] the complete sequence of events.[34]

In "Myth, Religious Studies, and Modern Civilization," de Martino used strikingly similar terms to introduce Lévi-Strauss' study. Here too, he argued that what unites his own work with that of the French structuralist is the emphasis on "the step backward" (*passo indietro*), noting that it operates through a "ritual return of an initial mythic situation."[35] He proceeds to note not only that the "structure of this magic enchantment demonstrates a complex symbolism," but also specified that "this symbolism is oriented in part towards the recovery of the initial situation, and in part towards the reliving of the conflicts and somatic processes of the labor in resolved terms."[36]

Of course, while it is not his dominant focus, such a "temporal" reading of Cuna shamanism is by no means absent in the French structuralist's interpretation. De Martino astutely supported his interpretation by citing Lévi-Strauss'

34 De Martino, "L'approccio etnologico della fenomenologia paranormale," 82.
35 De Martino, "Mito, scienze religiose e civiltà moderna," 48.
36 De Martino, 49.

own observation on the fact that "everything occurs as though the shaman were trying to induce the sick woman—whose contact with reality is no doubt impaired and whose sensitivity is exacerbated—to relive the initial situation through pain, in a very precise and intense way, and to become psychologically aware of its smallest details."[37] Throughout his examination of the Cuna healing episode, de Martino integrated the positions of Lévi-Strauss with those of Eliade. Fundamentally, he set up Lévi-Strauss' account in between that which is "antecedent" (*antecedente*) and "initial" (*iniziale*), on the one hand, and that which "present" (*presente*), on the other. Not only that. He also reproduced the idea of a ritual repetition of the myth, which he inherited from Eliade, in order to bring movement into those two extremes on the temporal spectrum. Notions that de Martino used abundantly throughout his analysis of Lévi-Strauss' work—the "the step backwards" (*passo indietro*), "slow down" (*rallentare*), "recovery" (*ripresa*), "reliving" (*rivivere*), and "starting from the top" (*ricominciare da capo*)—serve to highlight the importance of a dehistoricized temporality even if that idea has a negligible relevance in the French anthropologist's study.

2 Historicizing the De-historifying Tendencies of the Modern Magicians in the Study of Religion

De-historification—focusing on the trope of the "step backwards"—involved not only the establishment of a dialogue between two seemingly incommensurate perspectives within a split discipline, but also a historicization of the crisis itself. In other words, de Martino suggested that his fellow scholars of religion were trying to salvage their discipline's presence through de-historification just as the shaman did in primitive society. This attitude was particularly prevalent in his treatment of Eliade, whom de Martino accused of taking the religious practitioner's account at face value, so much so that the "*pretense*" to abolish history "ends up becoming the theory, even the theology of the anthropologist and of the historian of religion, who is thus himself being transformed into a mystic and an occultist in front of our eyes."[38] The most articulate critique of this position is to be found in de Martino's collective review of three of Eliade's writings—besides the ever-present *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1949), he also addressed *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951),

37 Lévi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols," 193.

38 De Martino, "Etnologia e cultura nazionale negli ultimi dieci anni," 329. For an almost identitical formulation, see also, De Martino, 337.

and the *Eranos Jahrbuch* article entitled "Psychology and History of Religions: Concerning the Symbolism of the 'Center'" (1951).[39] In his review, written in 1952, after recognizing his debt to Eliade's idea that religion consists of a "the ritual iteration of mythic archetypes," de Martino proceeded to express his reservations: "Where we can't follow the author—and here, we fear that he risks to confuse the true motive for the hermeneutic theme proposed by him—is in the *anti-historic polemic*, which, to say it candidly, seems to me to be set up on a radical misunderstanding of what historicism is in its most mature form."[40]

The Italian historian of religion contended that the flight from history, which Eliade observed in religion, was not only impacting his ahistorical approach, but also shaped his personal anti-historical philosophical orientation—so that "any distinction between science and object of science, between religious historiography and religious worldview is wiped out."[41] In response, de Martino reasserted his conception of historicism as "a theory of human (not mythic) productivity of cultural values," according to which "even the religious pretension to save oneself from history, is part of history."[42] In another writing from the mid-1950s, de Martino expressed this commitment to a secularist and historicist reading of religion as follows:

> On the contrary, even though religious de-historification is lived by the believer as refusal of the "human condition," what it brings about is not a real de-historification, [...] but rather the opening up of the operative powers of man, so that he matures in the shadow of the divine and the profane; and the secular discloses itself within the sacred.[43]

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39 Mircea Eliade, "Psychologie et histoire des religions, à propos du symbolisme du 'Centre,'" in *Eranos-Jahrbuch: Mensch und Ritus*, ed. Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, vol. 19 (Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1951), 247–82. Ernesto De Martino, "Recensione a M. Eliade, 'Le mythe de l'éternel retour, archétypes et répétition,' 'Psychologie et histoire des religions, à propos du symbolisme du "centre",' 'Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase,'" *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 23 (1952): 148–55.

40 De Martino, "Recensione a M. Eliade, 'Le mythe de l'éternel retour, archétypes et répétition,' 'Psychologie et histoire des religions, à propos du symbolisme du "centre",' 'Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase,'" 149.

41 De Martino, 152–53.

42 De Martino, 149–50.

43 Ernesto De Martino, "Fenomenologia religiosa e storicismo assoluto," in *Storia e metastoria: i fondamenti di una teoria del sacro*, ed. Marcello Massenzio (1954; repr., Lecce: Argo, 1995), 63.

De Martino's critique of the second de-historifying magician of the twentieth century, Lévi-Strauss, is subtler in nature. This is, at least partly, due to the fact that the French anthropologist was not primarily concerned with the question of time. While we saw that de Martino interpreted Lévi-Strauss' account of shamanic healing through a temporal horizon—the "step back"—there is no doubt that the latter's structuralism was not amenable to such an approach precisely because of its neglect for history. As Dosse noted, in structuralism "war was declared against historicism, the historical context, the search for origins, diachrony, teleology and the argument was made in favor of permanent invariables, synchrony, and the hermetic text."[44] Inspired by the linguistics, Lévi-Strauss asserted the primacy of universal structures of the human mind over historical variations in different cultures. Already in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949),[45] Lévi-Strauss distanced himself from historians and their genetic approach. According to the French scholar, the origin of the structures that the anthropologist studies is nowhere near as important as their function within the system.

De Martino, however, quickly realized that this apparent disregard for history is ultimately just as much a result of the crisis of modernity as Eliade's nostalgia of the *illo tempore*. Paradoxically, it is precisely this emphasis on a universal functioning rather than specific historical origins and developments that the structuralist instantiation of the outsider-explanatory approach comes to join the so-called "historians of religion" of the insider-phenomenological orientation. Let us recall Mircea Eliade's own conception of how the history of religions is to contemplate myth:

> Becoming aware that every religious form has a history and that is built into a well-defined cultural complex does not complete the task of the historian of religions. In fact, he still has to understand and clarify the meaning, the intention, and the message of this religious form. [...] In other words, the historian of religions is required by his scientific discipline to deal with the timeless constants of religious experience and with the structures, irreducible to historicity, which derive therefrom.[46]

Like Lévi-Strauss, Eliade prioritized timeless structures over historical particulars. It is in this nostalgia for the archaic structures—what Eliade

44 Dosse, *History of Structuralism. Vol. 1: The Rising Sign, 1945–1966*, 386, 23.

45 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1949).

46 Mircea Eliade, "Mythologie et histoire des religions," *Diogène* 9 (January 1955): 101–2.

repeatedly called the "timeless constants of religious experience"[47]—that de Martino rightly pinpointed a crucial communality between the Romanian historian of religion and Lévi-Strauss' structuralist endeavor. Both Eliade and Lévi-Strauss—despite their radically different positions on the insider-outsider, phenomenology-explanation, essentialization-naturalization spectrum—were ultimately more intent on finding structures rather than content, constants rather than transformations, mental invariants rather than cultural particulars. For both scholars, the study of religion was premised on the search for universals, with historical evidence being hardly more than the raw material upon which to build the structure of a universal category, whether this be kinship, myth, or the *homo religiosus*.

De Martino's intuitions have been confirmed by some contemporary researchers. Paul-François Tremlett, speaking of "a number of perhaps counter-intuitive similarities between structuralism and the phenomenology of religion," rightly emphasizes their shared "strategic essentialism."[48] In "Religious Symbolism and Historical Becoming," another one of the rare articles discussing this matter, the Italian anthropologist Sonia Giusti spoke about the parallels in their respective approaches to history as follows:

> Lévi-Strauss' affirmation that it is not men who tell myths but rather myths who narrate men also counts for Eliade. In both cases, one tries to understand, through myths, the reasons for human behaviors on the bases of universal structures. The difference is that while for Lévi-Strauss the motifs for myths are to be found in the mental structures by means of which humans culturally perceive the world, for Eliade the motifs for myths are located in the metaphysical structures, which explode in symbols.[49]

The *anthropologue* was particularly passionate about myths as an expression of a culture's unconscious, arguing that his studies of myths were able to discover underlying and universal structures of cultures. Comparing the study of myths to the analysis of grammar, he believed that the meaning of mythical stories lies not in their content, but rather in their structure. Citing Carmen

47 For another example, see one of his letters to his teacher Pettazzoni: Mircea Eliade and Raffaele Pettazzoni, *L'histoire Des Religions a-t-Elle Un Sens? Correspondance 1926–1959*, ed. Natale Spineto, CERF (Paris: Le Cerf, 1994), 62.

48 Tremlett, *Lévi-Strauss on Religion*, 101.

49 Sonia Giusti, "Simbolismo religioso e divenire storico," in *Confronto con Mircea Eliade: archetipi mistici e identità storica*, ed. Luciano Arcella, Paola Pisi, and Roberto Scagno (Milano: Jaca Book, 1998), 419–20.

Bernand, we could say that "the content disappears in favor of the structural logic."[50] Lévi-Strauss was especially concerned with binary oppositions as he considered them to be the most dominant structural logic of both language and myths. In the words of another commentator, we could say that "dividing the world into mutually exclusive categories produces meaning: culture/nature, man/woman, black/white, good/bad, us/them."[51] Besides Freudianism, it is well known that Lévi-Strauss developed his thinking about culture in close reliance upon linguistics, which he considered to be the most "scientific" of all the social sciences.[52] Of particular importance was the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913).[53] Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), consisting of notes by his students on a series of lectures given at the University of Geneva, is famous for making linguistics into a system based on difference and relationships.[54] According to Saussure's theory, the "signifier" (*le significant*, e.g. the sound image "cat") and the "signified" (*le signifié*, e.g. the concept or mental image of a cat) are not given naturally, but stand in an arbitrary relationship.[55]

Now, in Saussure's linguistics, this arbitrariness of language is counteracted by the emphasis on a fixed system of language (*langue*).[56] As Terence Hawkes has illustrated, Lévi-Strauss appropriated Saussure's system of linguistics to offer a universal science of culture. Thus, although he "stalks it through the particular varieties of its *parole*," the French anthropologist's priorities are not idiographic but rather nomothetic as he searches for "the *langue* of the whole culture, its system and its general laws."[57] It has even been argued that "in his scheme the diversity of local nuance is lost in the unity of universal systematicity."[58] Against the grain of the paradigms of cognitive, cultural, and historical

50 Carmen Bernand, "Anthropologie religieuse," in *Théories de la religion: diversité des pratiques de recherche, changements des contextes socio-culturels, requêtes réflexives*, ed. Pierre Gisel, Jean-Marc Tétaz, and Valérie Nicolet Anderson (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2002), 160.

51 Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, 239.

52 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "L'analyse structurale en linguistique et en anthropologie," *Word* 1, no. 1 (April 1, 1945): 33–53.

53 Michael Lane, *Structuralism: A Reader* (London: Cape, 1970), 13–14; Dosse, *History of Structuralism. Vol. 1: The Rising Sign, 1945–1966*, xxii, 200.

54 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Lausanne: Payot, 1916), 144, 168–69.

55 Saussure called the arbitrariness of the link between signifier and signified "the first principle of linguistics." Saussure, 100, 182; Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (London: Fontana Press, 1976), 19–29.

56 Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 182–83; Roy Harris, *Reading Saussure: A Critical Commentary on the Cours de Linguistique Générale* (La Salle: Open Court, 1987), 132, 219.

57 Terence Hawkes, *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977), 39.

58 Paul Stoller, "Rationality," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 246.

relativism, Lévi-Strauss argued that there existed a hidden but universal pattern organizing all human mental and cultural life. Russell T. Mccutcheon, a declared advocate for the outsider-explanatory approach to religion, emphasizes that this tradition "models itself after the natural sciences in attempting to generate universal theories of human behavior from the analysis of specific cases."[59] This approach is "based on certain generalized regularities in their observations, generalizations which they might label as laws," aiming at determining "the economic, political, psychological [...] causes" of religious behavior.[60]

In posthumously published notes,[61] de Martino discussed Lévi-Strauss' "History and Anthropology" (1949), which would become the opening essay of *Structural Anthropology*.[62] Here, he noted that his French colleague made a distinction between the science of history, which "organizes its data in relation to conscious expressions of social life," and anthropology, which "proceeds by examining its unconscious foundations."[63] Lévi-Strauss himself wrote:

> The issue can thus be reduced to the relationship between history and ethnology in the strict sense. We propose to show that the fundamental difference between the two disciplines is not one of subject, of goal, or of method. They share the same subject, which is social life; the same goal, which is a better understanding of man; and, in fact, the same method, in which only the proportion of research techniques varies. They differ, principally, in their choice of complementary perspectives: History organizes its data in relation to conscious expressions of social life, while anthropology proceeds by examining its unconscious foundations.[64]

As one commentator aptly put it, it is "the radicalization of these notions like system and model, sometimes mathematizable (*mathématisable*) like structures of kinship," which forms the basis for his firm belief in the "incontestable

59 Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999), 128.

60 McCutcheon, 5.

61 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 403–5.

62 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Histoire et ethnologie," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 54, no. 3/4 (1949): 363–91; Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction: History and Anthropology," in *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 1–30.

63 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 18. See also, Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Histoire et ethnologie," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 54, no. 3/4 (1949): 363–91.

64 Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction: History and Anthropology," 18.

superiority of anthropology over history."[65] Later in life, de Martino increasingly started to regard the work of the French structuralist as a problematic endeavor. Telling the story of how Lévi-Strauss argued that the anthropologist should assume "the point of view of God […] to understand humans as if they were completely outside of the game (*fuori gioco*) […] as if he were an observer of an unknown planet and as if he had an absolutely objective and complete perspective, […] as if they were ants,"[66] de Martino continued:

> It seems to me that this scientific ideal of considering humans like ants transforms itself into the prophetic message that humanity reduces itself inevitably into a sort of anthill: that is, the message that humanity inevitably advances towards an apocalypse without *eschaton*, towards the total ruin of what is human. This then is not even any longer a prophetic message but a cold scientific prediction, which already dictates that we should adapt to the event just as it is necessary to adjust oneself in the autumn for the following and inevitable winter.[67]

De Martino, in response, remarked that such "distinctions do not hold up because historiography has always been engaged, at least in its more mature age, in reconstructing the unconscious motivations and the unintentional results of the human acting in society."[68] He described Lévi-Strauss' division as "artificial and incongruous," and argued instead that "all that there is, is the one historical science."[69] According to de Martino, this type of historian is not primarily interested in "reproducing the manner in which the consciousness of the historical agents comprehends its own acting." Rather, "after having ascertained this consciousness, he moves […] to reconstruct the true meaning of an individual initiative, an institution, an epoch, a civilization, and, in general, any 'event'." De Martino emphasized that this move is a move "beyond"—both in the "sense of its motivation and its results." It is a maneuver, he specified "beyond the consciousness, which the contemporaries that were engaged in it would have had" of their own historical action.

Invoking Karl Marx's dictum that "men make their own history, but they do not know that they are making it" (*gli uomini fanno la loro propria storia, ma non sanno che la fanno*), de Martino further noted that Lévi-Strauss used "this

65 Richard Marin, "La Nouvelle Histoire et Lévi Strauss," *Caravelle. Cahiers Du Monde Hispanique et Luso-Brésilien*, 2011, 165.

66 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 689.

67 De Martino, 689–90.

68 De Martino, 404.

69 De Martino, 405–6.

famous formula" in the sense that the "first term justifies history, the second anthropology."[70] Thus, de Martino ultimately criticized his French colleague for the same reasons that he rejected Eliade's conception of science. By relegating the actual historical circumstances outside of the purview of their intellectual endeavors, they not only rejected the study of history in societies where magic is practiced but also failed to address their own anti-historical bias. In other words, de Martino used his theory of de-historification to historicize his contemporaries' tendency to flee from history. De Martino, by contrast, gave Marx's notion a different spin, as he used it as an argument for an integrated and unified historical science that studies the historical import of magic both in its explicit and implicit dimensions:

> [...] it is also to be noted that [...] the writer of this formula—and in reality the entire orientation of Western civilization—is a man who "knows" that human history is made by men. This is why the formula of Marx justifies the use of a unitary historicist criterion in the interpretation of all human facts. This criterion is the recognition that any historiographical research starts from the analysis of conscious human facts to move towards the problem of the "unconscious" results of human actions [that lie] beyond the motivations and objectives, which come to the awareness (*coscienza*) of the actors: Historically "true" is the entire process, which leads from the unconscious motivations, via a certain necessary limitation of consciousness, to trace back to certain results which are found beyond this limitation.[71]

De Martino's theory of religion as de-historification would remain central to his work until the end of his life. In posthumously published notes from his final years of research, we find passages in which he both acknowledges the mechanism of religious life as Eliade saw it and decisively argued for its profoundly worldly and civilizational function.

> If one does not accept [the autonomy of humanity] then there is nothing left to do but to negate the reality of this condition, to conceal it and mask it in the grand protective themes of religious life, of myth and ritual, of theology and metaphysics, of magic and mysticism. There is nothing left to be done than to reduce the rhythms of daily labor to a world of

70 De Martino, 404. For the passage, on which de Martino comments, see Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction: History and Anthropology," 23.

71 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 405.

> signs and symbols and to carry out the task of establishing—here and now—a new order in the shadow of an order that is already established in *illo tempore*. In that case, the doing (*il fare*) will be masked in repeating and in imitating, the being awake will be included in dreaming, and one will be in history as if not being part of it because one is already outside of it. However, in the meantime through this *pia fraus*, one will work and create, and the building of civilization will be constructed.[72]

Amongst these final notes, we also come across reflections on some other pieces of writing of the French anthropologist that sport more sensibility to historical issues. Judging by a section entitled "The Concept of De-historification in Claude Lévi-Strauss," it appears that the Italian thinker intuited that the *anthropologue*'s work was by no means devoid of thinking about the importance of history. On the contrary, de Martino cited a passage from *The Savage Mind* (1962), in which we read:

> I have suggested elsewhere that the clumsy distinction between "peoples without history" and others could with advantage be replaced by a distinction between what for convenience I called 'cold' and 'hot' societies: the former seeking, by the institutions they give themselves, to annul the possible effects of historical factors on their equilibrium and continuity in a quasi-automatic fashion; the latter resolutely internalizing the historical process and making it the moving power of their development.[73]

Had de Martino lived another twenty years, his intuitions would have been confirmed. In fact, in later years, Lévi-Strauss took on a position that was strikingly similar to that of de Martino. In a paper presented at the Marc Bloch Conference in 1983, the French structuralist relativized his distinction between "hot" and "cold" civilizations, arguing that he "did not intend to define real categories but only a heuristic goal." In the same paper, which was published as "History and Anthropology"—taking the same name as his article written over three decades earlier—he further relativized his previous stance.

> All societies are historical in the same way, but some admit it frankly while others revolt against it and prefer to ignore it. Thus, if one can rightfully classify societies on an ideal scale—not according to their degree of

72 De Martino, 356.

73 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 233–34.

> historicity, which is similar for all of them, but to the manner in which they feel it—it is important to locate and analyze borderline cases: under which conditions and in which form do collective thinking and individuals open themselves to history? When and how, do they no longer look at it as disorder and threat but instead see in it a tool for acting upon and transforming the present?[74]

Another example of this growing awareness of the historical reality in so-called "cold" societies comes from an interview with Didier Eribon from 1988. If he earlier described them as outside of history, he now notes that "they imagine themselves as primitives because their ideal is to stay in a state when the gods created them at the origin of time. Of course, they create themselves the illusion and don't escape history any more than all others."[75] While de Martino would have wholeheartedly agreed with such statements—likely noting that the societies in question are the ones that have perfected the logic of producing history through de-historification—he nonetheless went further than the French anthropologist. In fact, the Italian thinker openly critiqued the contemporary scientists' tendency to de-historify time. In his discussion of Lévi-Strauss and Marx, for instance, de Martino demonstrated a dialectical approach, which moves decisively beyond any type of black and white, or hot and cold thinking. Instead, he insisted that Marx's formulation needed to be relativized as the two extremes are ultimately not capable of existing on their own. On the one hand, "if men really did absolutely not know [that they make history], they could never conquer this knowledge." On the other hand, "if this knowledge could one day be fully conquered and making history coincided precisely with the operative consciousness that one has of it, on this day history would also end. [In that case], historiography would kill history."[76]

3 The Magic Christ of Science: Heroic Historicism and the Active Provocation of Crisis in Pursuit of Critical Thinking

In introducing de-historification, I noted that it is intended to help individuals and societies overcome critical moments of existence by transporting historical reality into a space outside of time. It operates by temporarily concealing the destructive potential of the crisis by transposing the present events into a

74 Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Histoire et ethnologie," *Annales* 38, no. 6 (1983): 1218.
75 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *De près et de loin*, ed. Didier Eribon (Paris: O. Jacob, 1988), 176.
76 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 405.

metahistorical realm where the incidents are actively mastered and brought under control. In de-historification, the crisis has always already been resolved at the beginning of time. Now, basing his study on the countless examples he drew from ethnographies of primitive societies, de Martino argued that de-historification may also work by actively simulating or provoking a crisis. The shaman, according to this understanding, is a heroic figure who protects the presence of others through his courageous engagement in magical practices. De Martino went even as far as calling the shaman a "veritable magic Christ, mediator for the entire community of being-in-the-world as redemption from the risk of not-being-there."[77] In other words, what sets the shaman apart from other members of the community is that he actively seeks out the crisis. The shaman is the key protagonist in the world of magic and the technique of de-historification precisely because he actively provokes the instability of the self through trance-like states.

> While the members of the community can lose their united presence without restitution, in such a way that their fragile being-there is an unstable psychic cosmos that risks to precipitate into chaos at any moment, the shaman is the hero that knew how to bring himself to the threshold of chaos and that has been able to make a pact with it. Indeed, it is because the shaman has become the unconditional master of his own frailty, that he has also acquired the capacity to overcome the limits of his own being-there and to make himself into the clairvoyant and organizing center of the weakness of others.[78]

Likewise, since de Martino's discussion of shamanic magic as de-historification always fertilized his understanding of science during the years before and after WWII, it is not surprising that he applied the move from crisis to recovery to his analysis of religious studies. Becoming a magic Christ himself, a "mediator for the entire community (of scientists)," he used de-historification to lead his field from the state of a split discipline that is driven blindly by its anti-magical polemic to a critical discourse on magic. De Martino described this type of approach "heroic historicism" (*storicismo eroico*),[79] and argued that his philosophy of science is dedicated to "the boundless task of spiritual resolution of reality, which, thanks to effective thinking, melts time after time the intellectualist concretion that seems to put a limit to immanence. Time and

77 De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 98.
78 De Martino, 94–95.
79 De Martino, 3.

time, it leads the inertia of the *fact* (*fatto*) back to human *making* (*fare*) and *molding* (*plasmare*)."[80] Like the shaman's practice of redemption of the presence, however, this movement is never linear, but rather a dialectical process that uses crisis as the motor for recovery. De Martino's own growth as a thinker in religious studies operated by means of a stitching movement in between two tissues that only exist because of the rupture within the discipline itself.

Let us look at this heroic process of unifying a ruptured science in more detail. De Martino usually opened up his articles on de-historification by praising the importance of the insider-phenomenological approach for excelling at "the description of that which appears to the consciousness of the believer"—such as "the encounter with the numinous, the being seized by the radically other, the reabsorption of the here and now in the ritual repetition of an inaugural metahistorical event, [and] the permanent nexus between mythic figuration and ceremonial act."[81] However, in all of his writings, de Martino was equally quick at curtailing his enthusiasm with the caveat that this methodological orientation limits its analysis to the position of the believer: "That which is the starting point for the man engaged in religion," so he wrote, "constitutes [...] only a stage or a moment of the true hierogenetic process to be reconstructed." By invoking the slogan "*Mitsingen ist verboten*," which is "written on a sign in the concert halls of Germany," de Martino explains that "for the historian of religion in any capacity, it is equally forbidden to compete with the believers in the immediate testimony regarding the presence of the numinous."[82] Specifically, de Martino distanced himself decisively from Eliade's abolition of history. Just as the two authors disagreed about the "reality" of magic, so they differ in their conception of the "reality" of de-historification. In his 1952 review to *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, de Martino succinctly described the difference in their respective positions as follows:

> Eliade affirms that man opposes history even when he attempts to make it—even when he pretends to be nothing else than history—but the truth is that man is in history even when he pretends to escape it. As a consequence, from this perspective, the great cultural theme of the iteration

80 De Martino, 4.

81 Ernesto De Martino, "Mito e religione," in *Profezie e realtà del nostro secolo: testi e documenti per la storia di domani.*, by Franco Fortini (Bari: Laterza, 1965), 534.

82 De Martino, "Storicismo e irrazionalismo nella storia delle religioni," 77.

> of mythic archetypes appears like a paradoxically productive pretense, which—despite its [contrary] intention—is new history.[83]

Just like Guilford Dudley—who defined him as an "anti-historian of religion"[84]—Vittorio Lanternari—who described him as dominated by a "visceral anti-historicism inspired by a vein tending towards mysticism"[85]—or Gavin Flood—who accused him of "implicit theological and ahistorical understanding of religion"[86]—de Martino realized that Eliade's inability to distance himself from the believer's point of view seriously hampered his hermeneutic approach to religion. In what might be the most concise summary of the controversy between the two, Nicola Gasbarro notes how de Martino differs from Eliade because he insists on a distinction between the mechanism of de-historification active in religious practice, on the one hand, and the scholars historicizing activity guiding his interpretation, on the other.

> For Eliade, the mythic-ritual nexus is dehistoricizing: the situation of crisis is traced back to a mythic model that has already resolved the unresolvable, and the ritual does nothing more than to sacrally repeat this paradigmatic miracle. De Martino is concerned with a technical de-historification that leads to redemption, to the entry into the specific cultural history, transforming the given situation into value. The mechanism is dehistoricizing, but the effect and the function are historical.[87]

De Martino's confrontation with Eliadean ideas about religion and history remained stable throughout his life. For instance, in the notes for his posthumously published book on the apocalypse, de Martino offered elaborate commentaries on several of his colleague's books. In a section dedicated to *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (1957), he observed that "historiography has the task to convert that which men believe to do, into that which men are really doing in order to legitimize either their beliefs or the reality that manifests

83 De Martino, "Recensione a M. Eliade, 'Le mythe de l'éternel retour, archétypes et répétition,' 'Psychologie et histoire des religions, à propos du symbolisme du "centre",' 'Le chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase,'" 150.

84 Guilford Dudley, "Mircea Eliade as the 'Anti-Historian' of Religions," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44, no. 2 (1976): 345–59.

85 Vittorio Lanternari, *La mia alleanza con Ernesto de Martino e altri saggi post-demartiniani* (Napoli: Liguori, 1997), 24.

86 Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Continuum, 1999), 5–6.

87 Nicola Gasbarro, "Ernesto de Martino: microstoria di un 'nostro,'" *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 51, no. 9 (1985): 219.

itself because of them."[88] De Martino, deeply grounded within the discipline of religious studies, was cognizant that the field gave rise to scholarly approaches that were precisely trying to distinguish between that what people believe to be doing and that what they are truly doing. One of these thinkers, of course, was Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his study of the shamanic healing practice, for example, the French anthropologist famously interpreted the shaman's activity that he encountered in the region of northwest Colombia and southern Panama as a form of psychoanalysis. In his study, Lévi-Strauss made frequent reference to the work of Sigmund Freud, speaking of psychoanalysis as "the modern version of shamanistic technique."[89]

> In both cases, the purpose is to bring to a conscious level conflicts and resistances which have remained unconscious, owing either to their repression by other psychological forces or—in case of childbirth—to their own specific nature, which is not psychic but organic or even simply mechanical. In both cases also, the conflicts and resistances are resolved, not because of the knowledge, real or alleged, which the sick woman progressively acquires of them, but because this knowledge makes possible a specific experience, in the course of which conflicts materialize in an order and on a level permitting their free development and leading to their resolution.[90]

Lévi-Strauss not only compared the traditional healer to a primitive psychoanalyst, but also made the claim that the mechanism of healing could operate in the same way as abreaction in Freudian analysis. According to this model of healing, the reaction of the treatment takes on both a mental and a physical dimension, even if it is elicited exclusively through psychological influence. Commenting on a series of "characteristics" that can be found in "the shamanic cure," the French anthropologist noted that "we know that its precondition is the unprovoked intervention of the analyst, who appears in the conflicts of the patient through a double transference mechanism, as a flesh-and-blood protagonist and in relation to whom the patient can restore and clarify an initial situation which has remained unexpressed or unformulated. All these characteristics can be found in the shamanistic cure."[91] The Belgium-born theorist took inspiration from the Freudian theory of the

88 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 272–73. Eliade, *Mythes, rêves et mystères*.
89 Lévi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols," 204.
90 Lévi-Strauss, 198.
91 Lévi-Strauss, 198.

unconscious as he sought to discover the "unconscious foundations" of society.[92] As anthropologist, Lévi-Strauss believed that his task was "to grasp, beyond the conscious and always shifting images which men hold, to the complete range of unconscious possibilities."[93]

By acknowledging a deeper layer hidden behind the conscious awareness of humans, he recognized that the perspective of the religious practitioners needs to be critically investigated as they likely lack awareness of the true causes, reasons, and mechanisms of their beliefs. In *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964), Lévi-Strauss argued that he is not primarily preoccupied with how "men think in myths, but how myths operate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact."[94] As André Green asserts, the French anthropologist contended not only that the "role of consciousness is to lie to itself," but also that the "unconscious structure plays the role of an indicator of the true message of the human spirit."[95]

De Martino was attracted to the outsider-explanatory approach because it moves beyond pure phenomenology and description of myth and ritual in order "to explain why people employ either of these devices in their daily lives in the first place."[96] Like the naturalistic current, de Martino was trying to move beyond the perception of the believer. However, unlike the type of approach propagated by thinkers like Donald Wiebe, he did not simply "presume that when religious people claim to have had supernatural experiences that defy rational explanation, they are mistaken in some way."[97] On the contrary, while he accused Eliade of failing to critically question the pretenses of religious people, he criticized the proponents of the outsider-explanatory approach for disregarding the intentions of the believers.

> Historiography, as science of the critique of human cultural actions (*operosità culturale umana*), is the measuring of the pretenses of human acting. It is the passage from that which man believes to be doing to that which he is really doing. Thus, it is the analysis of the unconscious motivations and of the unconscious results of a certain type of operating. But what man believes to be doing is not accidental in regards to that which

92 Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 18.

93 Lévi-Strauss, 23.

94 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to the Science of Mythology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 12.

95 André Green, "Le rejet de la psychanalyse par C. Lévi-Strauss," *Revue française de psychosomatique*, no. 38 (December 13, 2010): 145.

96 McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*, 107.

97 McCutcheon, *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, 127.

> he really does. Limiting oneself to the reduction of all human pretenses to their effective reality is bad historiography because in this way the other important moment of the historical research stays in obscurity, namely the reconstruction of the historical necessity of the world of pretenses. […] The sacred mythical-ritual symbolism includes, for example, a series of pretenses: But if one were to believe that one has completed one's own historical task by limiting oneself to reduce this symbolism to "that which men really do," then a whole series of problems of fundamental historical importance would fall away: The genesis, the structure, and the function of the mythical-ritual symbolism and its diverse ways of connecting itself to the totality of cultural life.[98]

In this chapter, I showed that while de Martino's de-historification was a theory of magic that addressed the perplexing thoughts and practices he found in "primitive" societies, its ultimate aim hit much closer to home. Developing his thinking through a dialogue with Mircea Eliade and Claude Lévi-Strauss, he identified "magic" as a category of crisis that perfectly embodied modernity and produced a decisive split in the discipline of religious studies in the twentieth century. Evolving his approach beyond that of his more famous colleagues, he expanded the scope of de-historification to use it as a tool for critical thinking that actively engages the crisis through dialectics and historicization. De Martino regarded his own age as an age of magic. An age that is best imagined as the drama of the loss and redemption of the presence. On the one hand, the presence—that is the person, the individual, the being-in-the-world—is no longer guaranteed and under constant threat of being lost. On the other hand, we witness the emergence of extraordinary figures, who are capable of navigating these moments of crisis and to help their community overcome them. If de Martino called the shaman of the "primitive" age a "magic Christ," then he himself was a modern day shaman, a "hero of the presence."[99] Just as Sergio Berardini has rightly pointed out that "in the shaman, it is possible to see the 'first' *weltgeschichtliche Individuum* through which the spirit 'has become man',"[100] de Martino's critical theory of de-historification is an attempt to re-found the self as a historical actor in light of the crisis of modernity. De Martino's dialectical thinking reproduced the shamanic process of de-historification. Just as the shamanic crisis is a feigned one, de Martino at

98 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 460.

99 De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 122.

100 Sergio Fabio Berardini, *Ethos, presenza, storia: la ricerca filosofica di Ernesto de Martino* (Trento: Università degli studi di Trento, Dipartimento di lettere e filosofia, 2013), 132.

first engaged with Eliade and Lévi-Strauss in a way that inevitably reproduced the crisis within the modern discipline of religions studies. In both cases, the dissolution of the self, the crisis of the presence—which is usually feared as an expression of utter abdication of identity—is voluntarily pursued and sought out. In a central passage of *The World of Magic*, we read:

> [...] sometimes in the world of magic, the dissolution of being, the risk of the presence, seems to acquire the significance of a dominant ending that is voluntarily pursued. Solitude, darkness, fasting, very rigorous trials, orgiastic dance, concentration, monotonous chant, rolling of drums, incubations, fumigations, narcotics: Couldn't it be that these techniques appear for the stimulation of the trance and the deliberately sought-out collapse of the horizon? In that case, we would have to demonstrate that the presence of these techniques does not only contradict, but even confirm the theme of the threatened being-there that redeems itself.[101]

This unhinging and reassembling, this putting into crisis and subsequent redeeming, was nothing else than an expression of the heroic historicism that de Martino advocated as a response to the lazy historicism of mainstream Italian thinking during his time. As Pietro Angelini noted, "a 'heroic' historicism cannot and should not back down. The heroism, on the part of de Martino, is located precisely in this resolution to *not* write a history of magic. Because it is a history that is yet to be founded, and in order to do that it is required to descend on one's own into that dark crevasse out of which Western man has immerged, wounded but victorious."[102] Due to his dialectical move from crisis to critique, complementing the insider-phenomenological insight into the functioning of religion with the outsider-explanatory thrust of analysis, de Martino would generally be harsher in his critique of Eliade than of Lévi-Strauss. However, as his dialectical method of thinking critically about religion would not come to rest in either one of the two extremes, we will soon see that de Martino not only expressed significant sympathy for the self-reflexive trends in Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropique*, but also voiced increasingly harsh criticisms later in his life.

101 De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 85–86.

102 Angelini, *Ernesto de Martino*, 31.

CHAPTER 5

Critical Ethnocentrism (1949–1959): The Southern Period and the Articulation of a Post-colonial Anthropology alongside Claude Lévi-Strauss

1 Notoriety without Success: Controversies with Croce and Intellectual Isolation within the Roman School of History of Religions

The World of Magic can be regarded as a symbol for de Martino's fundamental role as a promoter for the study of religion on the Italian peninsula. Because of his involvement with some of Italy's most distinguished publishers, such as Giangiacomo Feltrinelli (1926–1972), Alberto Mondadori (1914–1976), and Giulio Einaudi (1912–1999), it has been argued that "half of the books published in the field of anthropology and religious studies" between the late 1940s until the mid-sixties, 'carried the stamp of de Martino'."[1] His collaboration with the Einaudi publishing house was an immense success, leading to the publication of a series known as *Collection of Religious, Anthropological, and Psychological Studies* (*Collezione di studi religiosi, etnologici e psicologici*).[2] It was co-directed by de Martino and the renowned Italian literary figure Cesare Pavese (1908–1950) until the latter's suicide in 1950. Supported by Raffaele Pettazzoni and Angelo Brelich, two important historians of religion—who collaborated with translations and introductions[3]—the series is also commonly known by the name *Purple Series* (*Collana viola*) for the distinguishing color of its cover.

However, his *magnum opus* also stands for de Martino's isolation within this disciplinary matrix. Indeed, his professional development as a historian of religion was not burgeoning as he had hoped. In 1948, after his book was published as the first volume of the *Purple Series*, de Martino was rejected from a teaching position in anthropology at the Sapienza University in Rome. There, two of his closest allies, Boccassino and Pettazzoni, considered his work to be too philosophical and not anthropological enough. In the words of one

1 Angelini, 10.

2 Gilberto Mazzoleni, "Il mito, il rito e la storia secondo la scuola storico-religiosa di Roma," in *Le religioni e la storia: a proposito di un metodo*, ed. Gilberto Mazzoleni and Adriano Santiemma (Roma: Bulzoni, 2005), 34.

3 Mancini, "Fra pensiero simbolico, religione civile e metapsichica," 655.

commentator, we could say that de Martino "experienced notoriety but no success."[4] The academy rejected him for his wide range of concerns and orientations that failed to align with any single one of the intellectual orientations of his time. He was neither really accepted by the proponents of the Italian School of History of Religions nor willing to limit his curiosity in psychological interpretations of religion, which remained largely foreign to this tradition of scholarship. Placido and Maria Cherchi's illustrative description of de Martino's "anchoring within the historical post-pettazzonian school [as] the docking of a solitary seafarer at a hospitable island," might be the most appropriate sketch of his affiliation to the Roman school.[5]

Without a professorship, de Martino had no choice but to teach in high schools. After working in Lucca and Faenza, he returned to Bari in 1945 to resume his teaching position there.[6] At this time, he was joined by his wife and his two children, who returned from Cotignola, carrying *The World of Magic* in their luggage. In the summer of 1947, de Martino finally accepted the call from the *Liceo Virgilio* in Rome and began teaching there by the side of his wife Anna, who was employed as an art history teacher. However, even though he was officially engaged there from 1947 to 1959, de Martino was frequently on leave for numerous reasons.[7] Most importantly, the post-war years were marked by physical sickness and de Martino spent months in the hospital, undergoing several surgeries for various ailments on his lungs between 1948 and 1951.

More importantly, his *magnum opus* led to further isolation by challenging Croce's historicist philosophy. Indeed, de Martino explicitly dedicated his study to dimensions that were far from being considered legitimate objects of study by his teacher. Taking Hamlet's reminder to Horatio—"there are more things in heaven and earth [...] than are dreamt in your philosophy"—as his guiding principle, de Martino addressed the crisis of classical Italian historicism. Describing it as "lazy" (*pigro*) and "preaching" (*sermoneggiante*), he claimed that this type of philosophy "tends to interpret the dignity of the real as spirit in a metaphysical sense and to transmute it into a static truth,

4 Riccardo Di Donato, "Ernesto de Martino," in *Il Contributo Italiano Alla Storia Del Pensiero—Storia e Politica (2013)* (Milano: Enciclopedia Treccani, 2013), http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ernesto-de-martino_%28altro%29/.

5 Cherchi and Cherchi, *Ernesto De Martino*, 20.

6 Patrizia Marzo, "Etnografia e servizio sociale: il contributo interdisciplinare di Vittoria De Palma," *Rassegna di Servizio Sociale dell'EISS* 1 (March 2011): 61.

7 Ernesto De Martino and Pietro Secchia, *Compagni e amici: lettere*, ed. Riccardo Di Donato (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1993), xix.

in which the mind rests, dogmatizing."[8] In 1946, in a commemoration for his first teacher Adolfo Omodeo, de Martino similarly criticized the mainstream of Italian historicism for being "sermonizing or even psalmodious," regarding history "detached from the real plexus of reconstructive thought," thus inevitably converting itself "into a new philosophy of history."[9]

Croce would not have been the intellectual leader of an entire generation if he didn't counter the challenges posed by his student. In his review of *The World of Magic*, Croce addressed it within the context of "the years that we are currently living in," noting on "the serious and terrifying drama," which was manifesting in his contemporaries' "tendency to immerge and submerge themselves into the irrational."[10] He rhetorically asked whether we will "invoke the wizards, which we have already experienced in the form of dictators of undifferentiated and totalitarian states, entering into a new savage age only to leave it after a few centuries," or, whether we will instead "stand by our own interior strengths and resist?" Before closing his review with a harsh critique of "the sanctification or at least veneration that de Martino cultivated for the wizard, putting him at the origin of history and civilization,"[11] Croce deployed his forces into the battlefield. He lambasted his rebellious student for making the transcendental unity of self-awareness, that is "the presence," into his "supreme principle," thus "severing the spiritual unity of his forms with an impossible incision."[12] Croce argued that "neither the categories of consciousness, language, art, thought, practical life, moral life, nor the synthetic unity that groups all these things, are historical products—products of epochal manifestations of the spirit—but rather they are spirit that creates history."[13]

Since the acute observations by Renato Solmi in 1952, scholarship has argued that de Martino, in response to these reprimands, returned within the fold of Croceanism by abdicating his interpretation of the historicity of the self. Commentators used a diverse range of terms—such as "return" ("*ritorno*"), "reverence" ("*riverenza*"), "retraction" ("*sconfessione*"), or "repentence" ("*pentimento*")—to describe de Martino's attitude towards Croce after the publication

8 De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 4.

9 De Martino, "Commemorazione Adolfo Omodeo," 341.

10 Benedetto Croce, "Intorno al magismo come età storica," in *Il mondo magico: prolegomeni a una storia del magismo*, by Ernesto De Martino (1948; repr., Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2012), 253.

11 Croce, 253.

12 Croce, 249.

13 Croce, 248.

of *The World of Magic*.[14] In three specific instances throughout the 1950s, in fact, de Martino stated that "Croce was right,"[15] avowed to "have gradually rejected the postulation of a magic world as a historical age,"[16] and clarified that "history is never the history of categories but takes place within the categories."[17]

2 Shaking Earth and Intellectual Transitions: Political Militancy and Ethnographic Journeys in the Italian South

This being said, de Martino's relationship with Croce remained ambivalent even after his supposed return. After the war, it was his political activity that forced de Martino to distance himself from his teacher. In fact, even after becoming president of the Liberal Party and publishing *History as the Story of Liberty*, Croce "had little taste for politics."[18] In the words of David Roberts, we could say that de Martino was one of those "intellectuals," who, "at a moment of dramatic collective decision for his culture," took their distance from Croce "because he didn't seem to have anything convincing to say on a number of matters of immediate concern." Croce, so these critics claimed, offered little more than "a sterile conception of liberty, an empty faith in history, and an evasive, politically expedient interpretation of fascism."[19] As a result, young Italians like Ernesto "were bound to shop around when the culture opened up after fascism" and Croce "inevitably seemed a bit provincial."[20]

Once again, the semi-fictional earthquake narrative surrounding his birth, somewhat paradoxically, allows the intellectual historian to firmly implant de Martino within the ground of his native land. Just as Benedetto Croce lost his parents and his only sister on the island of Ischia during the earthquake of July 1883, two other thinkers who moved decisively beyond the orbit of the

14 Renato Solmi, "Ernesto De Martino e il problema delle categorie," *Il mulino*, no. 7 (May 1952): 315–27; Cases, "Introduzione"; Sasso, *Ernesto de Martino fra religione e filosofia*, 253ff.

15 De Martino, "Crisi della presenza e reintegrazione religiosa," 19.

16 De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 273.

17 Ernesto De Martino, "Prefazione," in *Le origini dei poteri magici*, by Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Henri Hubert (Torino: Boringhieri, 1951), 9–14.

18 David D. Roberts, *Benedetto Croce and the Uses of Historicism*, First (Stanford: University of California Press, 1987), 26.

19 David D. Roberts, *Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 79.

20 Roberts, 69.

historicist philosopher lost their closest family members in earthquakes.[21] The novelist Ignazio Silone (1900–1978) lost his mother in the earthquake in the Abruzzi in 1915 and the historian Gaetano Salvemini (1873–1957) lost his wife, his sister, and all five of his children in the Messina earthquake described by de Martino in his semi-fictional birth-narrative. De Martino knew both figures and shared their concern for opening up the Italian intellectual horizon to the Italian South, Marxist social theory, and existentialist thought—in short, influences that decisively transcend the concerns of Italy's most important philosopher of this time.

Of course, the ultimate fruit of this expansion of horizons is the so-called "Southern Trilogy," which consists of *Death and Ritual Weeping* (1958), *South and Magic* (1959) and *The Land of Remorse* (1961). The years in question were marked by increased integration of de Martino's bourgeois identity with that of the masses of the Italian South. Before leaving for Rome to teach at *Virgilio*, de Martino met a new love in the form of Vittoria de Palma (b. 1930),[22] who was his student of philosophy in Bari in the 1946–1947 school year. As a consequence, de Martino repeatedly tried to dissolve his marriage with Anna through the Catholic Church. In Italy, a land where divorce had no legal basis at this time, de Martino's attempts remained unsuccessful and he had no choice but to make Vittoria his new "life partner." Separating from his wife in the late 1940s, he nonetheless employed her to translate Eliade's *Techniques of Yoga* (1948) and continued to share an intense political militancy with her.[23]

As for the two new lovers, upon their move to Rome, Vittoria dedicated her time to the study of anthropology, opening up the possibility for shared ethnographic expeditions in the Italian South during the 1950s. In the preface to

21 Adamson, "The Language of Opposition in Early Twentieth-Century Italy"; David Gilmour, *The Pursuit of Italy: A History of a Land, Its Regions and Their Peoples* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

22 After the work of Charuty, which contains a few precious pages of information, the best study on De Palma is a recent article by Marzo. Marzo, "Etnografia e servizio sociale"; Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 46–50. As for the date of birth of Vittoria, things are not clear to me: in her study, Marzo says that she was born in 1927. Di Donato, on the other hand, mentions once that she was 21 in 1951 and another time that she was 20 in 1949. What is even more perplexing is that Marzo cites the first of Di Donato's passages without commenting on the obvious discrepancy regarding the DOB that she states in the opening passages. Marzo, "Etnografia e servizio sociale"; Riccardo Di Donato, *I greci selvaggi. L'antropologia storica di Ernesto de Martino* (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1999), 161, 187. Through personal inquiries with Adelina Talamonti, this plot has received another twist. While I was able to verify that her official birthdate is August 25, 1927, she claims that her document is not correct and that she was instead born in 1928.

23 Mancini, "Postface," 414.

Death and Ritual Weeping, the first book of the Southern trilogy, de Martino offered his partner a beautiful dedication, highlighting how her practical and emotional qualities contributed immensely to the success of his study on practices of lamentation in the Italian South.[24] Financially too, with de Martino's salary from his job as a high school teacher as the only source of income, the situation of the couple was anything but comfortable and marked by significant hardship; a circumstance which quite possibly contributed to Ernesto's increasing identification with the underprivileged strata of the South of Italy.[25]

In *The Land of Remorse*, certainly his most popular book, de Martino offered a study of the spider-bitten women of Southern Italy. Based on fieldwork conducted in the Salentine peninsula in 1959, de Martino studied Apulian tarantism, a form of possession related to the belief in the bite of a mythical tarantula and exorcistic dance practices that operate by means of a special type of music whose name derives from that of the spider, the so-called *Tarantella*. De Martino's work, drawing on interdisciplinary research, offered an account of the phenomenon that is both rigorous and compassionate as the possession cult is not reduced to a mental illness but rather explained in light of its cultural history, specifically the consistent marginalization of the Italian South. In the book, he cites a Jesuit missionary, Michele Navarro—who himself described the lands as an "Italian India" ("*Indias de por acá*")—to demonstrate how the South was conceived of as a radical alterity.[26]

It is apparent that de Martino, unlike Croce's "narrowly Eurocentric historicism," envisioned his scholarship as centered on the marginalized groups of people that had only recently "irrupted into history."[27] This is nowhere as apparent as in *South and Magic*, a study of ceremonial magic and witchcraft in southern Italy, in which the problematic nature of magic for Western society becomes the driving question of investigation.[28] In fact, a local correlate of the global processes of decolonization and liberation of Western imperialism, the irruption of subaltern masses was accompanied by a national rise to prominence of the Southern population of Italy, which suffered from its own

24 Ernesto De Martino, *Morte e Pianto Rituale Nel Mondo Antico. Dal Lamento Pagano Ai Pianti Di Maria* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1958).

25 Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 46–47.

26 Ernesto De Martino, *La terra del rimorso* (Milano: Il saggiatore, 1961), 43.

27 De Martino, "Intorno a una storia del mondo popolare subalterno," 1949, 421; De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 277–78.

28 Ernesto De Martino, *Sud e Magia* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1959). This book has been translated into English with a slightly different title: Ernesto De Martino, *Magic: A Theory from the South*, trans. Dorothy Louise Zinn (Chicago: Hau Books, 2015).

sort of suppression in the preceding centuries.[29] The "South," also known of *mezzogiorno* (literally meaning "mid-day" in Italian), designates large parts of the country whose participation in the processes of modernization has lagged behind the rest of the country. Until today the region is described as primitive and savage, poor and agricultural, feudal and corrupt, patriarchal and discriminatory, superstitious and irrational.

Although the idea of the "Italian India"—stemming from the sixteenth century when the South consisted of the Neapolitan Kingdom of the Two Sicilies—shows the remarkable constancy of this "othering," the "Southern Question" truly emerged after the Unification of Italy (*Unità d'Italia*) in 1860. In many ways, it reached its peak towards the middle of the twentieth century.[30] First, the liberation of the Southern part of the country from Mussolini in the fall of 1943 was followed by several uprisings of the peasants who occupied the so-called *latifundia*, large tracts of privately owned lands.[31] Then, in 1945, when fascism was finally defeated in the North, the Southern Question polarized even more as the *mezzogiorno* was discriminated as a radical form of alterity, separated by an invisible yet insurmountable boundary.

While these three book-length explorations of various phenomena of religious and magic practices in the Italian South have received some attention in recent years—with two of them having even been translated into English—it is important to note that there exist also other sources of interest for the reconstruction of de Martino's Southern Period.[32] In fact, in his bibliography, we find a list of over 80 smaller publications in between 1948 and 1957, which not only protocol de Martino's remarkable ethnographic journeys into the Italian South and the refinement of the theoretical conceptions of religion and magic, but also his political maturation as a socialist and communist activist. De Martino was a key figure in Italy's coming to terms with the crisis of the South, particularly through his publication of an article entitled "About a History of the World of the Subaltern Masses" (1949). The article, published in the journal *Società*, hit the Italian intelligentsia like a bomb and caused a vast and fertile, albeit heated, debate with some of Italy's leading thinkers, which would

29 Cherchi, *Il peso dell'ombra*, 27.

30 Norberto Bobbio, *Ideological Profile of Twentieth-Century Italy*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), xviii–xx.

31 Carla Pasquinelli, ed., "Introduzione. Gli intellettuali di fronte all'irrompere nella storia del mondo popolare subalterno," in *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto de Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948–1955* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1977), 1–2.

32 Ernesto De Martino, *The Land of Remorse: A Study of Southern Italian Tarantism*, trans. Dorothy Louise Zinn (London: Free Association Books, 2005); De Martino, *Magic*.

last well into the following decade.[33] The controversy not only dominated the pages of the Communist journal, where de Martino would publish no less than eight articles, but also a host of other less specialized journals and daily newspapers—most prominently *L'Unità*, *Avanti!*, *Il Mondo, Il Nuovo Corriere, Nuovi Argomenti, Paese Sera*, *Cronache meridionali*, and *Rinascita*.

The discovery of exotic lands just a stone's throw away from Rome after WWII was also a decisive moment in the development of Italian anthropology, a discipline still in its emerging stages in a country that was not marked by important colonialist expansions.[34] One student of de Martino described it as a veritable culture shock, a "trauma produced by the confrontation with a total alterity."[35] De Martino himself used the term "ethnological expedition" ("*spedizione etnologica*") to describe his journeys into the Italian South, in order to emphasize this spirit of discovery.

Not unlike his youthful fascination with fascism as a civil religion, it was once again political activism that preceded de Martino's intellectual engrossments with the Southern Question. After returning from the front of the Senio during his time as a partisan in hiding, Ernesto became politically active in the Italian South and made himself a name as a founding member of the Italian Labor Party (*Partito italiano del lavoro*, PIL). In August 1944, he participated, together with his university teacher Adolfo Omodeo, at the Congress of the Action Party (*Partito d'Azione*, PdA) in the Southern town of Cosenza. After the Liberation (*Liberazione*), the party, which was played such an important role during the Resistance, would no longer satisfy de Martino's thirst for political militancy and so he maneuvered even more left on the political spectrum by joining the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (*Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria*, PSIUP) in 1945, then the Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano*, PSI) in 1948, and finally the Communist Party in 1953.[36]

This political militancy—particularly during his years in the PSI, when he worked as the party's secretary in Bari, Molfetta, and Lecce—led de Martino

33 Most of the articles fertilizing this debate have recently been republished in Raffaele Rauty, *Quando c'erano gli intellettuali: rileggendo "Cultura popolare e marxismo"* (Milano: Mimesis, 2015). I cite from this version.

34 Rainer Wassner, "Der Beitrag von Ernesto de Martino zur italienischen Kulturanthropologie," *Anthropos* 78, no. 1/2 (1983): 43.

35 Amalia Signorelli, *Ernesto de Martino: teoria antropologica e metodologia della ricerca* (Roma: L'asino d'oro, 2015), 96.

36 The date of entry into the PCI is anything but clear either. For many years scholars claimed that he became a communist in 1949 or 1950. However, an article by Valerio Severino has shown that he only officially joined the party in 1953. Valerio Salvatore Severino, "Ernesto de Martino nel PCI degli anni Cinquanta tra religione e politica culturale," *Studi storici* 44, no. 2 (2003): 527.

gradually into ethnographic work. Although a completely outline of de Martino's fieldwork remains a desideratum, his archival notes offer us a picture of his thorough exploration of the Italian South.[37] In 1946, while in Bari, he conducted a first "informal" research on the people in the South for the bimonthly Marxist journal *Quarto Stato* to scrutinize the socio-economic transformations in the area in the immediate after-war years.[38] In "Anthropology and National Culture in the Last Ten Years" (1953), an article rich in autobiographical references, de Martino retraced his development from *Naturalism and Historicism* to *The World of Magic* through the years of historical crisis of the 1930s and 1940s, before underlining the importance of his political engagement for the third step in his intellectual development, the transition from an armchair anthropologist to an engaged ethnographer.

> Precisely in the years that followed the Liberation, during my political activity in Puglia as secretary of the Socialist Federation of Bari and as commissioner of the one in Lecce, I happened to meet a humanity that until then had a substantially conventional existence, which meridionalistic literature, traditional ethic-political historiography, and the very tedious and frigid folkloristic writings could present me with. [...] But I entered into the homes of the Apulian peasants as a "friend," as an explorer of men and of forgotten human stories, who at the same time spies on and controls his own humanity; as someone who, alongside the people he met, wants to become a participant in the constitution of a better world in which we all, I who searched and they who were found, would have become better.[39]

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37 Some of this material has been made available by a massive project of research entitled "Study and Classification of the Archive of Ernesto de Martino" (*Studio e classificazione dell'archivio di Ernesto de Martino*), which was coordinated by Clara Gallini. For some results of this effort, see Clara Gallini, "La ricerca sul campo in Lucania. Materiali dell'archivio de Martino," *La ricerca folklorica*, no. 13 (April 1, 1986): 105–7; Ernesto De Martino, *I viaggi nel Sud di Ernesto de Martino*, ed. Clara Gallini and Francesco Faeta (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999); Ernesto De Martino, *La ricerca sui guaritori e la loro clientela*, ed. Adelina Talamonti (Lecce: Argo, 2008); Ernesto De Martino, *Etnografia del tarantismo pugliese: i materiali della spedizione nel Salento del 1959*, ed. Amalia Signorelli and Valerio Panza (Lecce: Argo, 2011).

38 Ernesto De Martino, "Inchiesta di 'Quarto Stato' sul mezzogiorno. Terra di Bari," *Quarto stato* 25–26, no. 30 (January 1947): 32–36; Ernesto De Martino, "Cultura e classe operaia," *Quarto stato* 3, no. 1 (December 1948): 19–22.

39 De Martino, "Etnologia e cultura nazionale negli ultimi dieci anni," 318–19.

De Martino gradually expanded his independent research, shifting his focus away from a purely materialistic reading of the Southern Question to shed light on the cultural aspects of the region. In "Lucanian Notes" (1950) and "Travel Notes" (1953), we not only find the first portents of the immensely important concept of "critical ethnocentrism," but also an increasing interest in folk songs, popular theatre, life stories of peasants, and religious and magic beliefs. His intention to integrate these marginalized realms of society finds an expression in a previously underestimated document of de Martino's Southern Period, namely the first radio transmission of his expedition from 1953. In "Expedition in Lucania," he reported several cases of "unfortunate" (*sventurato*) birth accounts. In light of de Martino's depiction of his own nativity scene in the wake of cosmic trauma, it is particularly the case of Caterina Guglia, which proves relevant. Introducing the story of the old woman, de Martino noted that her birth-account shows that "the theme of the unfortunate birth lights up in images, which speak of a true catastrophe that accompanies the birth." In the poetic verses recounting her own story, Caterina sings:

> When I was born
> My mother died
> My father died the following day
> Even the midwife died
> I went to get baptized
> With nobody around me
>
> When I was born
> The deepest seas dried up
> And for that entire year
> There was no spring in this world
> When I was born
> The stars turned dark
> And the sun stopped shining.[40]

The almost autobiographical nature of de Martino's documentation does not end here. The anthropologist commented on the account by noting that Caterina "did not remember the exact year of her birth, but only knew that she was born in the year of the earthquake" and that "she remembered the verses

40 Ernesto De Martino, *Panorami e spedizioni. Le trasmissioni radiofoniche del 1953–54*, ed. Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani and Letizia Bindi (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002), 91–92.

of her birth as a catastrophe with immediate memory."[41] In more explicitly autobiographical writings of those years, we find that de Martino frequently experimented with ways to overcome his own limitations as a man torn between intellect and action. Here, he not only identified ethnographically with the destiny of the subaltern classes, but also believed that it was through political action that his internal tensions could be overcome. More precisely, it is through the militancy as a communist that he united the numerous threads consisting of the historical-cultural crisis of the world surrounding him, his fragmented personality, and his reforming mission as a public intellectual:

> I am an intellectual of transition, torn by contradictions, [...] born into the urban lower middle class of the Italian South. I carry within me the numerous weaknesses and the vile sentimentalism of this class without destiny. Nonetheless, I have learned to understand this painful condition and I apply myself to construct myself on a theoretical plane, as a man that I am not in reality. But the contradictions of my being, which reflect themselves ceaselessly in my thoughts, render this path exhausting and problematic. Great theoretical lucidity and many contradictions in real life, a powerful spirit and a fragile existence: This is who I am. All the freedom that I am deprived of in action is transformed, in a cathartic way, into freedom of conceptualization. [...] I cannot reform myself without reforming the world. But, in truth, by the time the world will be transformed, I will not have been on this earth for many centuries. My shortcoming is the product of secular imperfections, of the society to which I belong. In order to overcome them on the plane of reality, one would have to undo concretions of history that have been transmitted from generation to generation; a feat beyond my power. I am nothing more than a hero of the spirit, within the bounds of a purely speculative heroism. Why did I join the working class? Because I hate myself as man, because I detest the lower middle-class traditions of the *mezzogiorno* that have made me who I am: Uncertain, hesitating, full of contradictions, and feeble in the world of action. This certainly is my "shortcoming." My "greatness" is to have gained a pitiless awareness of this fact and to have joined the class that will reform the world.[42]

41 De Martino, 91.

42 Milaneschi, "Ernesto de Martino e il Cristianesimo," 252; De Martino and Secchia, *Compagni e amici*, XXI; Mancini, "Postface," 495–96; Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 37.

3 The Rise of the Cultural-Discursive Paradigm and Self-Reflexive Anthropology

It is in light of this emotional and self-critical language that scholarship recently argued that de Martino must be regarded an anticipator of post-colonial thought in his own right.[43] Although he undertook his expeditions primarily on Italian soil—particularly amongst the peasants of the Southern regions—this encounter provoked a profound perspectival shift in his thinking that parallels developments in the global post-colonial, interpretative, and self-reflexive approaches.[44] After a period of confidence and complacency following WWII—a sort of hibernation after the great global crisis—a new type of critical thinking began to emerge in the 1960s to then develop into a full-fledged paradigm across multitudinous fields of the humanities during the 1970s and 80s.[45] This period was marked by important socio-political upheavals, such as the independence movements in the Third World, the relinquishment of colonies by European powers, the American war in Vietnam, and the rise of civil rights movements. Clifford Geertz described this paradigm shift in terms of a transition from "othering" to "self-doubt" that very accurately reflect de Martino's own metamorphosis:

> The trouble begins with uneasy reflections on the involvement of anthropological research with colonial regimes during the heyday of Western imperialism and with its aftershadows now; reflections themselves brought on by accusations, from Third World intellectuals, about the field's complicity in the division of humanity into those who know and decide and those who are known and are decided for. [...] But it hardly ends there. Driven on by the enormous engines of postmodern self-doubt—Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Gramsci, Sartre, Foucault, Derrida, most recently Bakhtin—the anxiety spreads into a more general worry about the representation of "The Other" (inevitably capitalized, inevitably singular) in ethnographic discourse as such. Is not the whole enterprise but domination carried on by other means: "Hegemony,"

43 Fabrizio M. Ferrari, *Ernesto De Martino on Religion*.

44 Francesco Faeta, *Questioni italiane: demonologia, antropologia, critica culturale* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2005).

45 Georg G. Iggers, Q. Edward Wang, and Supriya Mukherjee, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2008), 251–52; Julian Hamann, *Die Bildung der Geisteswissenschaften: Zur Genese einer sozialen Konstruktion zwischen Diskurs und Feld* (München: UVK Verlag, 2014), 211–12.

> "monologue," "*vouloir-savoir*," "*mauvaise foi*," "orientalism"? "Who are we to speak for them?"[46]

Scholars of religion too, gradually gained a more sophisticated understanding of the earlier approaches and how they related to processes of modernization and colonialism. Upon closer analysis, they discovered that modernization was just as divided as the discipline of religious studies and, with time, it became clear that the insider-phenomenological and the outsider-explanatory models were essentially representative of two alternative modes for envisioning our own culture within this complex construction of modern Western identity. If the first approach was usually implicated in a critique of modernity by taking the culturally and religious other as a model for a superior civilization, the second approach was deeply grounded within modernity's values and usually construed "religion" as a retrograde and primitive form of society that is to be abandoned and overcome by means of modern politics and science.

These radically opposed approaches to religion form part of a unified vision. We could define this perspective as the "ontological paradigm" and insert it within a phenomenon that has been described as the "ambiguity of modernity": Religion is either a higher reality that needs to be approached through personal experience in order to revive modern humanity's reality or it is an epiphenomenon of other cultural practices that needs to be abandoned in order for the process of modernization to come to its conclusion. Just as Zygmunt Baumann found the stability of modernity to be hinging on its instability as the "dysfunctionality of modern culture is its functionality," the discipline of religious studies functioned because of its double nature as represented in the insider-phenomenological and the outsider-explanatory approaches.[47] "When we lack the second level of self-reflexive critique, when we presume that our categories and 'worlds' are completely adequate presentations of the world around us," so McCutcheon explains, "we are left with the peculiar modernist view of the world, which, in an utter irony, is shared by religious and positivist scholars of religion alike."[48]

In *Beyond Phenomenology* (1999), Gavin Flood offers a lay of the land of the discipline of religious studies by the end of the twentieth century, arguing that the scholar has three approaches at his disposal. The first two—which

46 Clifford Geertz, *Available Light Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 95.

47 Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, 9.

48 Russell T. McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 61.

correspond closely to the insider-phenomenological and the outsider-explanatory approaches—have existed for a long time and are premised on the "dichotomy of reductive explanation […] and empathetic phenomenology." The third, by contrast, is a relatively new development, which Flood proceeds to define it as follows:

> This position is both critical and dialogical. It desires both to understand and to offer explanations of religion or religious practices as completely embedded within other cultural practices, but reflexively recognizes the embodied/embedded, narrative nature of the enterprise. In this way it draws upon postmodern critiques of modernist, overarching rationality, but recognizes that any embodied narrative draws upon cultural values which it inevitably articulates, and, at least in the late modern world, is sensitive to the human reasons as to why people elect certain cultural practices.[49]

The proponents of what I call the cultural-discursive paradigm insist that there is no value-free form of science because of the impact of our own priorities. This type of awareness is premised on the idea that the relationship between the self and the other is more complicated than a simple binary, as it is shaped by issues of power, voice, and perspective. In light of this, the human sciences, particularly the disciplines of anthropology, history, and religious studies, became culturally and discursively self-reflective undertakings.

4 *Tristes Tropiques*, Critical Ethnocentrism, and the Anticipation of the Cultural-Discursive Paradigm

De Martino anticipated some of these transformations on the international scene by at least a decade as he emphatically presented anthropology as a science that is not concerned with what is culturally other, but rather with the self-reflexive return to one's own culture. This becomes particularly apparent if his concept of "critical ethnocentrism," which Vittorio Lanternari described as "one of the most refined and acute instruments and methods that anthropological science has ever elaborated."[50] Already in *Naturalism and Historicism in Anthropology*, De Martino anticipated the cultural-discursive paradigm's sensibility for power, explaining that "a colonial politics enlightened by

49 Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, 148.

50 Lanternari, *La mia alleanza con Ernesto de Martino e altri saggi post-demartiniani*, 124.

ethnological knowledge is politics and not ethnology" just as "the ethnologist who works for the colonial administrator is a politician." Rather than colonizing other cultures, he concluded, the anthropologist should "promote a different orientation of ourselves towards ourselves by means of a broadened awareness of our being that has to emerge from anthropological knowledge."[51] Similarly, in *The World of Magic*, he spoke of anthropology's task to "raise problems whose solution leads to the expansion of self-awareness (*all'allargamento dell'autocoscienza*)."[52] Finally, during the Southern Period, these ideas would culminate in a new method for anthropology, which he described as follows:

> In critical ethnocentrism, the western (or westernized) anthropologist assumes the history of his own culture as a unit of measurement of alien cultural histories. At the same time, in the act of measuring, he gains awareness of the historical prison and of the limits of use of his own system of measurement and opens himself to the task of a reform [...] of the very categories of observation, which were at his disposal at the beginning of the research. Only by critically and deliberately putting the history of the West at the center of the contrasting research can the anthropologist contribute to the inauguration of a vaster anthropological awareness than the one contained in dogmatic ethnocentrisms.[53]

To define the key traits of de Martino's critical ethnocentrism, it might be best to investigate his confrontation with one of his century's greatest intellectuals, namely Claude Lévi-Strauss. Although the relationship to the French structuralist was so important that it would occupy de Martino until the very end of his life, featuring prominently in his posthumously published notes,[54] the origin of his fascination was likely the ethnographic encounter with the people of the Italian South. Not unlike Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the most famous ethnographers and inventor of the term "participant observation," de Martino and Lévi-Strauss developed some of their most important theories in the context of ethnographic field research.[55] In both cases, we note a dras-

51 De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, 225.

52 De Martino, 213; De Martino, *Il mondo magico*, 3.

53 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 396–97.

54 De Martino, 394–98.

55 For one of the first reflections within official anthropology on the challenges involved in the ethnographic encounter, one must turn Malinowski. See, for example, Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge, 1922), xv, xvii.

tic transformation of their conception of anthropology, which moved from the anonymous neutrality of science—encountered earlier in their psychoanalytic theorizing on ritual efficacy—to the human warmth and emotions of the personal experience in the field. Although in the preceding chapter, I have shown that the French structuralist program must be inscribed within the outsider-explanatory approach, this is only part of the truth. In fact, ultimately both de Martino and Lévi-Strauss can be regarded as important anticipators of the cultural-discursive paradigm in anthropology.

4.1 *Anticipating Said's* Orientalism*: Anthropology of Guilt and the Ethnographic Encounter*

A first trait of post-colonial anthropology that can be found in the works of both Lévi-Strauss and de Martino is a type of "crisis of conscience." As Robert McCauley and Thomas Lawson recently suggested, anthropologists of the cultural-discursive paradigm "are abandoning explanatory theorizing and some are abandoning science altogether out of guilt about the role that anthropological research has played in colonial repression."[56] The transformations in geopolitical reality in the 1960s and 70s were accompanied by a general rise of awareness of long-standing forms of complicity between anthropology and imperialism, which is best epitomized in one of the most impactful books of the cultural-discursive turn, namely Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). The cultural critic argued that academic orientalism was "a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[57] In arguing for a self-critical attitude towards academic conceptions of the culturally other—paying particular attention to issues of imperialism and power—Said's *oeuvre* stands for the rise of postcolonialism in the humanities.

If Alessandro Testa even went as far as arguing that Lévi-Strauss cultivated post-colonial "sensibilities" in his *Structural Anthropology*,[58] this tendency becomes particularly evident in another one of the French anthropologist's works, namely *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). The book has rightly been described as one that is infused with "pessimism," giving a "vivid feeling of the profound metaphysical despair," and offering a picture of "the entire civilized world

56 E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, "Crisis of Conscience, Riddle of Identity: Making Space for a Cognitive Approach to Religious Phenomena," in *Philosophical Foundations of the Cognitive Science of Religion*, ed. Robert N. McCauley (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 55.

57 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 11.

58 Alessandro Testa, "Estasi e crisi. Note su sciamanismo e pessimismo storico in Eliade, de Martino e Lévi-Strauss," in *Sciamani e sciamanesimi*, ed. Alessandro Saggioro and Leonardo Ambasciano (Roma: Carocci, 2010), 107–8.

[as] moving rapidly and inexorably towards its ecological self-destruction."[59] Lévi-Strauss, retracing his ethnographic expeditions amongst the indigenous tribes of Brazil from the Mato Grosso to the Amazon, reflected on his complicity in constructing anthropology as a science that imposes itself on other cultures. In the beginning of this book, famously opening with the sentence "Travel and travellers are two things I loathe," Lévi-Strauss explained that "fifteen years have passed since I left Brazil for the last time and often, during those years, I've planned to write this book, but I've always been held back by a sort of *shame* and *disgust*."[60] Unlike his structuralist books, which were premised on a pure science from "the point of view of god," in *Tristes Tropiques*, we read of a more coercive type of scholarship as other cultures are said to be "like game-birds in the trap of our mechanistic civilization"[61] in a process of "overcoming all others."[62] Rhetorically, he asked: "I sometimes wonder if I was not attracted to anthropology, however unwittingly, by a structural affinity between the civilizations which are its subject and my own thought-processes." He continued by comparing his thinking to a "brush-fire" as it "burns itself into territory, […] leaving devastation behind."[63] In another passage, he noted that his ethnographic journeys taught him that "the notion of travel has become corrupted by the notion of power," before elaborating as follows:

> The great civilization of the West has given birth to many marvels; but at what a cost! As has happened in the case of the most famous of their creations, that atomic pile in which have been built structures of a complexity hitherto the order and harmony of the West depend upon the elimination of that prodigious quantity of maleficent by-products which now pollutes the earth. What travel has now to show us is the filth, *our* filth, that we have thrown in the face of humanity.[64]

There is no doubt that *Tristes Tropiques* played a fundamental role in the development of de Martino's critique of anthropological ethnocentrism. In the introduction to *The Land of Remorse* (1961), de Martino cited Lévi-Strauss' ethnographic self-reflection no less than three times—including the passage

59 John Raphael Staude, "From Depth Psychology to Depth Sociology: Freud, Jung, and Lévi-Strauss," *Theory and Society* 3, no. 3 (1976): 331–32.

60 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Criterion Books, 1961), 17.

61 Lévi-Strauss, 42.

62 Lévi-Strauss, 90.

63 Lévi-Strauss, 56.

64 Lévi-Strauss, 39.

of remorse and redemption cited above.[65] More generally speaking, during the Southern Period, de Martino frequently spoke of anthropology in similar terms, as "guilt," "remorse," "responsibility," and "redemption" became vital notions for framing his endeavours. It also appears that de Martino anticipated many of the core ideas of his French colleague as his own transition from an armchair anthropologist to that of an engaged ethnographer led him to develop a new understanding of his role as a scientist. Anthropology, so Placido Cherchi put it, became "a real encounter, a living testimony to one's own dramatic 'diversity'."[66] While de Martino acknowledged that he needed to repay an "immense debt incurred" towards the peasants he studies in the South in an article from the early 1950s[67]—such references continue well into the 1960s[68]—the most famous passage is contained in an article entitled "Lucanian Notes;" a text published half a decade before Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques*. Following his first encounter with the peasants in what is now the Italian region of Basilicata, he described it as a powerful moment that provoked a "feeling" (*sentimento*), which is "more than anything an anxious sense of guilt." Finally, he confessed that "in front of these beings held down at the status of beasts despite their aspiration to become humans, I personally, as a petit-Bourgeois intellectual from the *mezzogiorno*, feel guilty."[69]

4.2 *Anticipating Fabian's* Time and Other*: Anthropology as Self-Reflexivity and Introspection*

Clifford Geertz not only described Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques* as "the finest of his texts and the one that most illuminates the whole of his work,"[70] but also argued that it is "probably the most emphatically self-referring anthropological text we have, the one that absorbs the world's 'why' most shamelessly into a 'how to write.'"[71] Similar things can be said about de Martino's "Lucanian Notes." Like in Lévi-Strauss' work, we are dealing here with an essay "whose subject is in great part itself; whose purpose is to display what, were it a novel,

65 De Martino, *La terra del rimorso*, 40–41.

66 Cherchi, *Il peso dell'ombra*, 32.

67 Ernesto De Martino, "Importanti sviluppi della iniziativa Zavattini," in *L'opera a cui lavoro: apparato critico e documentario alla "Spedizione etnologica" in Lucania*, ed. Clara Gallini (Lecce: Argo, 1996), 41.

68 In a 1964 article published in *Culture and School*, he speaks of a "pathos of remorse and guilt in front of the separated brother and the unrelated (*irrelata*) dispersion of cultures." De Martino, "Etnologia e civiltà moderna," 10.

69 Ernesto De Martino, "Note lucane," *Società* 6, no. 4 (December 1950): 666.

70 Clifford Geertz, "The World in a Text: How to Read 'Tristes Tropiques,'" in *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 27.

71 Geertz, 21.

we would call its fictionality; a painting, its planarity; a dance, its comportment: its existence as a made thing."[72] Indeed, de Martino's ethnographic report represented a radical turn in his work as it is the first time that the ethnographer appears as one of the protagonists of his writings. He described his own subjective experience and his reactions to the encounters in the field, which were frequently emotional in nature. Thus, we learn not only that he felt guilt, but also experienced a series of other emotions: outrage and shock, humiliation and empathy, anger and fury. In his "Travel Notes," similarly, he described his own experiences as an ethnographer while encountering the ritual weeping practices, which would culminate in *Death and Ritual Weeping*, as follows:

> These women, who cry surrounding the coffin should, for me as historian, hold only the value of a document of quality, found in a dusty archive. As a historian, I should only look at the most favorable moment to register their metrical weeping. But here, I am also absorbed in these events of living history, I too have become a protagonist of the drama.[73]

As Amalia Signorelli recently claimed, it is this "narrating himself" as anthropologist, his "reenacting himself" (*mettersi in scena*), which is "probably the characteristic of these writings that most conditioned—both positively and negatively—the judgment of the readers."[74] De Martino emphasized that what he felt was not "a testimony of original sin" in the form of "*the* guilt" in a Christian or Western cultural sense. On the contrary, he explained that describing it in such a way would only be an attempt to liberate himself "from the weight of an uncomfortable analysis, transfiguring this entirely human responsibility into the heavens." Instead, so de Martino concludes, it is "*my* guilt."[75]

In their call for self-reflexivity, the works of Lévi-Strauss and de Martino anticipated another key trait of the cultural-discursive paradigm. Indeed, only five years after Said's piece, Johannes Fabian published *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (1983). Fabian's book further confirmed Said's intuition that anthropology constructed the "other" by "implying distance, difference, and opposition," in order to construct a world "for Western society to inhabit, rather than 'understanding other cultures,' its ostensible vocation."[76] Very similar to Fabian, the first principle of de Martino's critical ethnocentrism

72 Geertz, 28.

73 De Martino, "Note di viaggio."

74 Signorelli, *Ernesto de Martino*, 22.

75 De Martino, "Note lucane," 666.

76 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 111–12.

is that it uses the encounter with what is culturally other to reflect on the self. In the continuation of his "Lucanian Notes," we read:

> After my encounter with the Rabatani, I realized that there was not merely their problem, the problem of their emancipation, but there was also my problem, the problem of a Southern intellectual from a petit-bourgeois class. This intellectual, with a certain cultural tradition and a certain "civilization" absorbed during schooling, as a result of the encounter with these people, was forced to examine his conscience and to become, so to speak, an ethnographer of himself.[77]

For de Martino, anthropology and religious studies were no longer disciplines of investigation that limited their interest to what is "other," but rather tools for self-reflection and critical examination of one's own cultural-religious horizon. As Placido Cherchi put it, de Martino's paradigmatic shift might "be the first time in the field of anthropology that the journey towards the 'other from the self' is overturned into a journey inside of ourselves or that the observing subject finds itself being self-critically reduced to the rank of object of observation."[78] More recently, Forgacs offered the Anglophone readership a laudable description of de Martino's "ethnographic encounter [as a] kind of critical self-interrogation," in which "the 'remote' became familiar, as the 'irrational' behavior of the people observed became comprehensible and they started to be seen as agents in their own world and not just objects of a scientific gaze." As a consequence, the observers would be forced to look critically at their own processes of observation," asking "searching questions about the nature of their own science and the values of their own subculture in the very act of attempting to explain the other."[79] The second passage that de Martino cites from *Tristes Tropiques* in his own investigation on the exorcistic cults surrounding the spider-bitten women of the Italian South, is precisely intended to support this self-reflexivity in anthropology.

> It is a time, above all, of self-interrogation. Why did he come to such a place? With what hopes? And to what end? What *is*, in point of fact, an anthropological investigation? Is it the exercise of a profession like any other, differentiated only by the fact that home and office-laboratory are

77 De Martino, "Note lucane," 666.

78 Cherchi, *Il peso dell'ombra*, 35.

79 David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins: Social Exclusion and Nation Formation since 1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 141–42.

> several thousand miles apart? Or does it follow upon some more radical decision—one that calls into question the system within which one was born and has come to manhood?[80]

In his own analysis of this passage, de Martino concluded that "the ethnographic journey situates itself in the framework of modern humanism as the total revolution of the mythic journey into the beyond." Instead of this trip, which "magicians, shamans, initiates, and mystics [...] undertake to recover in this elective beyond the loss of the presence in critical moments of historical becoming," de Martino emphasized that anthropology is a means to "go beyond [...] one's own circumscribed humanity put into question by a certain historical conjuncture." The ethnographic exploration, so de Martino concluded, is a "gaining of awareness and a stimulus [...] to arrive at systems of cultural choices that are simply 'different' from ours, in which we were 'born and grew up.'"[81]

4.3 *Anticipating Smith's* Imagining Religion*: Anthropology as the Study of Culture and the Critical Questioning of Our Categories*

We have already seen to what extent *Tristes Tropiques* was a book about the science of anthropology, arguing against itself. Yet it was also a book about Western ethnocentrism and how anthropology could help us gain awareness of our own limitations. "If the West has produced anthropologists," Lévi-Strauss argued at one point in the book, "it is because it was so tormented by remorse that it had to compare its own image with that of other societies, in the hope that they would either display the same shortcomings or help the West to explain how these defects could have come into being." A few lines later, we read, "if anthropology cannot take a detached view of our civilization, or declare itself not responsible for that civilization's evils, it is because its very existence is unintelligible unless we regard it as an attempt to redeem it."[82]

For de Martino, the redemption of the science of culture revolved around the critique of categories, particularly the concept of "religion." It is no coincidence that the first time de Martino came across the term "ethnocentrism" was in a book by another French-trained thinker, whose work is uniquely sensitive to the use of Western categories in evaluating other cultures. It was Sergeĭ Mikhaĭlovich Shirokogoroff, who in his *The Psychomental Complex of Tungus*

80 Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 374; De Martino, *La terra del rimorso*, 40–41.
81 De Martino, *La terra del rimorso*, 41.
82 Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 388.

(1935), repeatedly used the term "ethnocentrism" in order to launch a critique of contemporary anthropologists and their failure to approach shamanism with the necessary theoretical openness.[83] Indeed, Shirokogoroff's *oeuvre* was not only innovative because of its revaluation of magic phenomena performed by the shamans—moving beyond the psychopathological assessment of earlier thinkers to appreciate the practices as culturally and psychologically productive—but also for its methodological intuitions.[84] Inspired by the Russian thinker's work, de Martino accused the "men of science," who consider the practices amongst extra-European peoples as "superstition" and "folklore," of holding an "ethnocentric" attitude.[85] These ethnocentric thinkers posit their own culture as the measuring stick for other cultures. In Shirokogoroff's work, the critique of positivist science, the revaluation of magic phenomena, and the turn to a critique of ethnocentrism went hand in hand.[86] As Andrei A. Znamenski recently reported, the Russian anthropologist insisted on "accept[ing] cultures strictly on their own terms."[87]

Interestingly, the questioning of Western concepts, such as "reason" or "science" was also an integral part of the thinking of Lévi-Strauss. Indeed, the French anthropologist, despite his structuralist approach to cultures, became increasingly critical of his own culture's tools of measurement. In his description of Lévi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind*, Georg Iggers rightly noted that it was marked by a "questioning of the possibility of conducting objective historical inquiry at all," as his "disillusionment with the quality of modern Western civilization brought about a profound reaction against the modern scientific outlook." Ultimately, so the historian insists, "Claude Lévi-Strauss denied that modern scientific rationality offered any advantage over 'savage' mythical thought in seeking to come to terms with life."[88]

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83 Using the formulation "ethnocentric," he adds in brackets: "to repeat an expression from Shirokogoroff." Ernesto De Martino, "Percezione extrasensoriale e magismo etnologico II," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 19–20 (1946): 31.

84 Ulla C. Johansen, "Sergei Michajlovich Shirokogoroff: Psychomental Complex of the Tungus," in *Hauptwerke der Ethnologie*, ed. Christian F. Feest and Karl-Heinz Kohl (Stuttgart: Kröner, 2001), 428; Andrei A. Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and the Western Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113.

85 Ernesto De Martino, "Percezione extrasensoriale e magismo etnologico I," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 18 (1942): 10.

86 Sergei Mikhailovich Shirokogoroff, "What Is Shamanism: Part 1," *China Journal of Science & Arts* 2, no. 3 (1924): 276.

87 Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 111.

88 Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 8.

De Martino's conception of anthropology found its most radical expression in ways that are reminiscent of his readings of both the Russian and the French anthropologists. In the last years of his life, the Italian thinker believed that the ethnographic encounter with other cultures forces us to drastically question and revise our own evaluative categories as "the ethnographic encounter constitutes an opportunity for the most radical examination of conscience possible to Western humanity." This "examination [...] brings with it a reform of anthropological knowledge and of its evaluative categories."[89] In so doing, de Martino set in motion important developments that continued within the Italian school of history of religions after his death. Particularly Dario Sabbatucci (1923–2002), who took the position as the second chair in history of religions at the Sapienza University in Rome as soon as it was established in 1971, carried forward de Martino's reservations about the ontological conception of categories. Specifically, Sabbatucci famously argued for the radical historicization of the term "religion," stating that it is an artificial category created within the Western cultural context.[90] Even more radically, Sabbatucci believed that a truly critical study of religion would ultimately lead to the "dissolution of the specifically religious in the generally cultural."[91] As international scholars have commented on this rare instance in which the Roman School's thinking outside of Pettazzoni moved beyond the awareness of the Italian peninsula, they have argued that Sabbatucci can be regarded as the Italian exponent of a comprehensive transformation within the international discipline of religious studies.[92] In fact, on the international scene, one of the first symptoms of the paradigm shift was a radical turn to culture in virtually every field of the humanities.

In religious studies, this trend is visible not only in the growth of interest in "religion and culture," or "cultural studies,"[93] but also in the debates surrounding the category of "religion," which frequently culminate in an attempt to

89 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 391.

90 Dario Sabbatucci, "Kultur und Religion," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, ed. Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, and Günter Kehrer, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988), 46.

91 Sabbatucci, 57.

92 Michael Stausberg, "Western Europe," in *Religious Studies: A Global View*, ed. Gregory D. Alles (London: Routledge, 2008), 17; Johann Figl, "Phénoménologie de la religion," in *Théories de la religion: diversité des pratiques de recherche, changements des contextes socio-culturels, requêtes réflexives*, ed. Pierre Gisel, Jean-Marc Tétaz, and Valérie Nicolet Anderson (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2002), 19; Burkhard Gladigow, *Religionswissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 34.

93 Randi R. Warne, "New Approaches to the Study of Religion in North America," in *New Approaches to the Study of Religion Volume 1: Regional, Critical, and Historical Approaches*,

dissolve it within the larger concept of "culture."[94] The first principle in this new paradigm for the investigation of religion was Jonathan Z. Smith, who in 1981 had argued that "there is no data for religion" and that "religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study," encouraging his peers to be "relentlessly self-conscious," as it is this quality that "constitutes his primary expertise [and] his foremost object of study."[95] Since then, we have seen a veritable explosion of research dedicated to the historical review of the discipline of religious studies most of it focused on the formation of the concept of religion. Scholars, amongst them Talal Asad, David Chidester, Michel Despland, Timothy Fitzgerald, Peter Harrison, Tomoko Masuzawa, Russell McCutcheon, Ernst Feil, Hans Kippenberg, Guy Stroumsa, Kocku Von Stuckrad, Wouter Hanegraaff, and Daniel Dubuisson, have joined Smith in arguing that the concept of "religion" is not a given but a created category that has its own history.

The growing field of cultural anthropology followed in the footsteps of postcolonial studies to not only perform a historicization of the concept of "religion," but also to demonstrate that its creation was not neutral, but rather a prescriptive and hegemonic process that was deeply embedded within politics and power dynamics.[96] These thinkers revealed that the crafting of "religion" was implicated in a larger process of "othering."[97] Taking place during the colonial encounter with a cultural alterity, the category "religion" turned out to be essential for the self-definition of the modern West.[98] Furthermore, they have noted that similar processes were implicated in the construction of other categories, such as "politics," "culture," the "East," "tradition," "economics," "law," "magic," and so forth.[99]

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ed. Peter Antes, Armin W. Geertz, and Randi R. Warne (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 31–32.

94 Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), xi.

95 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.

96 Smith, *Relating Religion*, 230, 274.

97 Michael Stausberg, ed., *Religionswissenschaft* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 442.

98 Styers, *Making Magic*, 20.

99 Said, *Orientalism*; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Styers, *Making Magic*; Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity a Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); William Sax, Johannes Quack, and Jan Weinhold, eds., *The Problem of Ritual Efficacy* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2010).

4.4 *Anticipating the Writing Culture Movement: Anthropology and the Language of the People*

The cultural-discursive tendency in de Martino's *oeuvre* took on even more expansive contours as he started to pay attention to symbolism and language during his ethnographic expeditions in the Italian South. Several other scholars have pointed to de Martino's charisma as a speaker, his originality in using creative language, and his flair for drama that gave his writings an almost theatrical tone.[100] Commentators like Clara Gallini and Alessandro Testa have made more specific claims. They rightly pointed to the fact that de Martino used anti-ontological conceptions of language that pay high tribute to symbols. Testa, for instance, compares de Martino's intuitions with the theses of Geertz, "according to which one should not study that what he calls 'the ontological status' of a cultural fact, but 'the thing to explore is its significance'."[101] Gallini, similarly, suggests that "the tarantula is a 'symbolic' animal and [that] the entire analysis of its ritual develops itself in terms and in a language through which the point at which de Martino was arriving in progressing with his theoretical research [...] shines."[102]

There is no doubt that de Martino was indeed attentive to the sundry facets of language and communication. However, rather than thinking within the disciplinary areas of linguistics and semiotics, his concern with language emerges from the ethnographic encounter itself. In fact, reflexivity, for de Martino, was a two-way street as it did not only involve the ethnographer and his categories, but it also had to address the culturally other and his modes of communication. During the Southern Period, in an attempt to break out of the ivory tower of the academy, he became particularly interested in alternative means to educate the common people.[103] This day-to-day aspect of his thinking manifests particularly in his consistent use of various media to communicate his scholarly insights. Thus, he not only collaborated with some of Italy's most prestigious publishers, but he also effectively used mass media. De Martino wrote for

100 Giovanni Jervis, "Ricordo di Ernesto de Martino," in *Ernesto De Martino nella cultura europea*, ed. Clara Gallini and Marcello Massenzio (Napoli: Liguori, 1997), 316; Clara Gallini, "La ricerca, la scrittura," in *Note di campo: spedizione in Lucania, 30 sett.–31 ott. 1952*, by Ernesto De Martino (Lecce: Argo, 1995), 46.

101 Alessandro Testa, "Le destin tylorien. Considérations inactuelles sur la 'réalité' de la magie," *ethnographiques.org* 21 (November 2010): 10.

102 Clara Gallini, "Presentazione," in *La terra del rimorso*, by Ernesto De Martino (Milano: Il saggiatore, 2013), 13–34.

103 Lanternari, *La mia alleanza con Ernesto de Martino e altri saggi post-demartiniani*, 30.

magazines and newspapers,[104] published special editions with photographs,[105] and prepared documentary programs for radio and television.[106]

In all of those ventures, he presented his research findings in more popular forms. Particularly the photographs of Franco Pinna and the musical recordings of Diego Carpitella represented intriguing and easily digested evidence from the forgotten world of Italy's South. De Martino not only tried to lend his voice through multiple media to reach the Italian people, but he further attempted to give a voice to the populace more properly speaking. De Martino skillfully blended high culture and low culture for political and intellectual purposes. Giordana Charuty noted that his ethnographic journey

> [...] becomes the instrument for the establishment of another figure of mediation—the organic intellectual—who has to break the isolation of the social class to whom he belongs. [...] In the same fashion, the inquiry is conceived as a tool to make the "subjects" happen by means of an implicit injunction, namely to narrate one's life. [All this serves] to transform a collection of objective facts into *speaking up* (*prise de parole*), in the written form of letters of grievances, which is association to a very important act: the signing with one's name.[107]

Although rarely written by the author's own hands—in a cultural context where illiteracy was common—the letters composed by the Southern peasants have an authentic and subjective feel to them. Instead of long questionnaires, where short answers and boxes with check-marks impose most of the structure upon the respondents, de Martino's use of letter-writing allowed the narrative subject to express himself more freely.[108] In two short articles written in the communist magazine *Vie Nuove* in July and August 1952—headlined with the title "Inquiry Into the Customs of Lucanian Farmers"—de Martino not only reported on some of the letters of the peasants he interviewed and attached a series of pictures revealing the life-circumstances amongst the marginalized strata of Italian society, but he also reiterated his motivation behind his

104 De Martino wrote for cultural magazines, such as *Società*, or *Nuovi Argomenti* and newspapers, such *Il Paese*, *Il Calendario del popolo*, or *Il Messaggero*.

105 See my discussion of the two articles published in *Vie Nuove* below.

106 The Radio transmissions have been edited by Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani and Letizia Bindi, De Martino, *Panorami e spedizioni. Le trasmissioni radiofoniche del 1953–54*.

107 Charuty, *Ernesto de Martino*, 320.

108 Despite the formal freedom, however, the letters still read rather dry, moving in between detailed descriptions of daily activities and complaints towards the government that read like copies of socialist political pamphlets. Archives De Martino, 6.15.

ethnographic journeys.[109] He noted that these explorations were "not born from the pedantic intention to inform a limited circle of specialists about customs, superstitions, and popular tradition that have not yet been inventoried" or "from a sort of romantic passion," but from an altogether different motivation:

> Leaving from Rome, we know that the fact of an expedition in Lucania—it's almost as if we were going to get to know the cultural life of the Bantu peoples, or of the Hottentots, whereas in reality we were simply dealing with our brothers and compatriots—would by its very virtue denounce ancient and recent guilts. Indeed, it was our task to not only collect their legacy but to also repair these guilts. But, most of all, we know one thing: the cultural problem of conducting an expedition of this type was not born in us as the fruit of our individual whim, or from an act of personal unjustified brilliance, but because the very Lucanian proletariat, as part of the national proletariat, was in movement, and had by now posed the question of its emancipation within its most advanced strata. In this way, they required also us, men of culture, to emancipate the Italian cultural life from this monstrous limit for whom the Lucanian farmer is only a poor boor, illiterate, ignorant, superstitious.[110]

In these popular publications, we not only note the coexistence of anthropological guilt and ethnographic disgust—manifest in a self-critical attitude in light of a blatant form of ethnocentrism—but also a great emphasis on doing anthropology from the bottom up. The goal of his inquiry was "to conscientiously reestablish the reality of things and to let them speak, as much as possible, in their own words."[111] On the international scene, the cultural turn's emphasis on the intricate association between knowledge, power, and political domination gradually led to a dual focus that reflects de Martino's discussions of the South. On the one hand, "the underdogs, the perceived 'victims';"[112] on the other hand, the role played by Western intellectuals. In the 1980s, this trend was continued by the so-called Subaltern Studies Group, whose

109 Ernesto De Martino, "Sonno, fame, e morte sotto le stelle," *Vie nuove* VII, no. 30 (July 27, 1952): 12–13; Ernesto De Martino, "Amore e morte nei canti dei braccianti lucani," *Vie nuove* VII, no. 31 (August 3, 1952): 12–13.

110 De Martino, "Sonno, fame, e morte sotto le stelle," 12.

111 De Martino, 13.

112 Roberts, *Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy*, 271.

best-known work, *Selected Subaltern Studies*, was published in 1988.[113] Around the same time, feminist and gendered approaches to history emerged, further contributing to the movement towards studies "from below."[114] Subsequently, in the wake of this narrativist philosophy of history, anthropologists also started to pay more attention to the relationship between ethnography and writing.[115] This increase in focus on the process of writing itself culminated in what is known as the *Writing Culture Movement*. The volume founding this movement, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, was edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus in 1986 and has been described as an attempt at "out-Geertzing Geertz."[116]

In the same year, George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer published *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, in which they argue that "anthropology is not the mindless collection of the exotic, but the use of cultural richness for self-reflection and self-growth."[117] "Anthropology," so they claim, is "to serve as a form of cultural critique for ourselves. In using portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways, anthropology disrupts common sense and

113 Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). See also, Vinayak Chaturvedi, *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (London: Verso, 2000).

114 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot, eds., *A History of Women in the West* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Gerda Lerner, *Frauen finden ihre Vergangenheit: Grundlagen der Frauengeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus-Verlag, 1995); Hans Medick, Anne-Charlott Trepp, and Karin Hausen, *Geschlechtergeschichte Und Allgemeine Geschichte: Herausforderungen Und Perspektiven* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998); Gisela Bock, *Frauen in der europäischen Geschichte: vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (München: C.H. Beck, 2000); Bonnie G. Smith, *Women's History in Global Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

115 Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); George E. Marcus and Dick Cushman, "Ethnographies as Texts," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982): 25–69; James A. Boon, *Other Tribes, Other Scribes: Symbolic Anthropology in the Comparative Study of Cultures, Histories, Religions, and Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

116 James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). Sydel Silverman, "The United States," in *One Discipline, Four Ways: British, German, French, and American Anthropology*, ed. Fredrik Barth et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 322.

117 Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, ix–x.

makes us reexamine our taken-for-granted assumptions."[118] Scholars have noted that the *Writing Culture Movement* is premised on a radical identification between ethnography, writing, and theory, so that the "ethnographic experience and its representation in writing are of a piece."[119] Applications of such self-reflexive, personal, and participatory forms of ethnographic writing have also been practiced by anthropologists of religion, with Karen Brown's *Mama Lola* (1991) being one of the most prominent examples.

George Saunders, who directly associated de Martino with the work of the *Writing Culture Movement*, rightly noted that he anticipated many of the traits of the cultural-discursive paradigm.[120] De Martino not only noted that the illiteracy of the Southern peasants is a result of his own society, which "condemns them to labor," but he also recognized that they "never inertly accepted this sentence" and continued to cultivate "their own cultural world." As a result, de Martino showed that they have their own language in the form of an oral tradition, which "has been the natural carrier of this work of cultural memories, the truly great school, which substituted the one that society denied them. It is to this tradition, to this school that we tried to come closer to during our journey."[121]

Although the four examples outlined in this chapter have shown that de Martino anticipated certain key traits of post-colonial anthropology, it would be a mistake to over-emphasize these communalities. In fact, even the "Lucanian Notes"—arguably the most cultural-discursive moment in de Martino's career—contain a response towards the loss of hope in light of the anthropologist's guilt; primarily in the form of what we could call a "combative" attitude. De Martino's sense of guilt for his complicity in colonialist domination of marginalized strata of his country is accompanied by a much more forceful feeling, namely anger (*collera*).

> I perceive that another mood is associated with this sense of guilt: Anger, the big historical anger that solemnly spreads out from the most authentic part of my very being. Here, I assess the distance that separates me from Christianity, which is essentially hatred of sin and sacramental salvation of history threatened by sin. My anger, by contrast, is entirely historical

118 Marcus and Fischer, 1.

119 Silverman, "The United States," 324.

120 Saunders, "'Critical Ethnocentrism' and the Ethnology of Ernesto De Martino," 878; George R. Saunders, "Un appuntamento mancato: Ernesto de Martino e l'antropologia statunitense," in *Ernesto de Martino nella cultura europea*, ed. Clara Gallini and Marcello Massenzio (Napoli: Liguori, 1997), 43.

121 De Martino, "Sonno, fame, e morte sotto le stelle," 12.

> because all of history is my own fault (just as it is the fault of the social group to which I belong). My anger cannot find any sacramental outlet, nor liturgical compensation. It is Christian love, but overturned, amputated of any theological extension, and ultimately constrained to walk on its own feet. Precisely because of its historical nature, my anger is that of the men who struggle to emerge from the darkness of the Rabatani district, and my fight is their fight. I thank the Rabatanian district and its people for having helped me better understand myself and my duty.[122]

While de Martino's gratefulness reminds us of *The Scope of Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss' inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, where the French anthropologist acknowledged that he will never be able to repay his debt to the people he studied—vowing to remain "their pupil, their witness"—there is an important difference between the two statements.[123] As we shall see in the following chapter, he not only understood the risks involved in the cultural-discursive paradigm—particularly a romantic longing for cultural alterity and a revival of religious sentiment—but he also repudiated any relativism relying on negative or deconstructive terms. Instead, he formulated his science on combative attitude best summed up in the "loyalty to the cultural homeland."

122 De Martino, "Note lucane," 667.

123 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Scope of Anthropology;* (London: Cape, 1967), 53.

CHAPTER 6

Loyalty to the Cultural Homeland (1960–1965): Critical Ethnocentrism as an Anticipatory Defense against Relativism and Interpretative Anthropology

1 A Critic of Interpretative Anthropology *Ante Litteram*: The Anthropologist of Guilt Becomes a Philosopher of the Apocalypse of Relativism

During the final years of his life, de Martino's bibliography boasts a variety of different writings, such as a collection of theoretical articles published as *Fury, Symbol, Value* (1962), interventions on the epic biography of Sigmund Freud by Ernest Jones, an article overviewing the history of anthropology, or an anthology of texts provocatively entitled *Magic and Civilization* (1962). This being said, there was one topic that dominated de Martino's final life-stage, namely the apocalypse.[1] While certain interests—particularly the Judeo-Christian conceptions of time, the repetition of mythic contents, moments of crisis and recovery in primitive cultures, or the phenomenology of psychopathological conditions—appear to correlate to virtually every earlier stage of his career, his fascination with the apocalypse in modernity is also a direct result of the historical context in which de Martino found himself during the 1960s. Indeed, like many of his contemporaries, de Martino was acutely aware of the division of the world into two hegemonic blocks during the Cold War and the accompanying terror of the atomic threat.[2] In "The Problem of the End of the World," a conference presentation held the year before his death, he explained:

> It is anything but improbable that the modern age's acute cultural consciousness of the ending of the world has also drawn nourishment from the possibility of the nuclear war or from the terrifying episodes of

1 Ernesto De Martino, *Furore simbolo valore* (Milano: Il saggiatore, 1962); De Martino, *Magia e civiltà*; Ernesto De Martino, "Etnologia e storiografia religiosa nell'opera di Freud," *Homo* 4, no. 1 (January 1963): 47–50; De Martino, "Etnologia e civiltà moderna."

2 Clara Gallini, "Introduzione," in *La fine de mondo*, by Ernesto De Martino (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), xlii; Cherchi, *Il signore del limite. Tre variazioni critiche su Ernesto de Martino*, 3–4; Giovanni Jervis, "Psicopatologia e apocalissi," in *Dell'apocalisse. Antropologia e psicopatologia in Ernesto de Martino*, ed. Bruna Baldacconi and Pierangela Di Lucchio (Napoli: Guida, 2005), 51.

> genocide in the Nazi death camps. But already the fact that we needed the two hundred thousand of Hiroshima or the six million Jews that perished in the extermination camps indicates to us how deep the roots of our crisis are. As a matter of fact, the image of just a single human face that carries the signs of violence and injury suffered on the hands of another human being should suffice to set in motion [...] the dramatic tension of the world that can but should not end. [...] There are other aspects of the modern world that have rendered our sensibility for the risk of the end more acute. The very fast transformations in lifestyles introduced by the diffusion of technical progress, the *migratori* currents from the countryside to the city, from underdeveloped to industrial regions, the sudden leap from more or less rudimentary economies or even tribal societies to economies and societies already integrated in the Western world have all led to the crisis of a great number of traditional cultural homelands. The rapid processes of transition, the lacerations and the voids that they entail, the loss of cultural models in a situation that can no longer use the familiar ones, bring about considerable crises and, in the most dramatic mode, propose anew the elementary problems of the relationship with the world.[3]

Staying true to the *topos* of the earthquake, de Martino collected a series of accounts from psychopathology that depict catastrophic visions, describing experiences of the "wholly other of the solid ground on which one walks: 'the ground that fails (*manca*) under the feet,' the earthquake, the collapsing of the ground."[4] In one passage, he discussed the case of a farmer from Bern, whose apocalyptic visions were protocolled by two German psychiatrists in 1950. In this account of the "apocalyptic delirium," de Martino noted that the Swiss patient "perceives the abyssal character of his world like an 'earthquake'."[5] In another passage, de Martino cited a similar account, this time protocolled by the psychiatrist Albrecht Wetzel:

> Darkness, stiffness, immobility, inertia, collapsing of the ground, earthquake: I thought an earthquake was about to happen. I read in the bible that there is division on earth and so I thought that God would have

3 Ernesto De Martino, "Il problema della fine del mondo," in *Il Mondo di domani*, ed. Pietro Prini (Roma: Edizioni Abete, 1964), 227.

4 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 84.

5 De Martino, 201. For the original account, see Alfred Storch and Caspar Kulenkampff, "Zum Verständnis Des Weltuntergangs Bei Den Schizophrenen," *Der Nervenarzt* 21, no. 3 (1950): 102–8.

> come down to earth to give them only one confession. I saw that it was dark, there was no cloud, and then everything was so calm, immobile, the leaves hung inert. Then, when they moved, I thought there was an earthquake somewhere … I did not hear the earthquake. Already a few days earlier I had told my husband that an earthquake was going to happen.[6]

In this depiction, we not only witness the importance of the earthquake as a means to express the fear of the apocalypse, but also the close association between the trembling of the earth and the religious, particularly Christian narratives surrounding the end. De Martino himself, repeatedly mentioned the Christian accounts of the events leading up to the end of the world, paying particular attention to Matthew 24,1–8, where earthquakes are named as one of the most important signs of the coming of apocalyptic times.[7] For de Martino, in fact, the material dimensions of the apocalypse were only a superficial epiphenomenon of a much deeper civilizational crisis. Dedicating the final years of his life to reflections of a moral and philosophical nature of the end of the world, de Martino believed that the socio-political upheavals of his age "evoke a much more secrete, profound, and invisible catastrophe," of which the "mushroom cloud of Hiroshima" is only the "real image,".[8]

The expression "crisis of traditional homelands" points to the true nature of this intellectual nature of the apocalypse, which is nothing else than a naked catastrophe of everything that is worldly, homely, and familiar. In the posthumously published notes of *The End of the World* (1977), de Martino speaks to the future generation about an apocalypse without *eschaton* and explained that it should be understood as the threat of disintegration of our cultural universe, of our system of socially and inter-subjectively shared values, which shapes our collective actions. In the crisis affecting their culture during the 1960s—and well into the following decades—Western intellectuals had lost the ability to transform the universe into a world that they could domesticate and populate with their own horizons of meaning. The most radical expression of this loss of meaning, so de Martino believed, was twofold and corresponded to the cultural-discursive paradigm: The crisis was cultural and found

6 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 35. For the original account, see Albrecht Wetzel, "Das weltuntergangserlebnis in der schizophrenie," *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie* 78, no. 1 (1922): 403–28.

7 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 336, 343. In another instance, he also cites Apocalypse, 6, 12–17, where the accounts starts with a great earthquake. He also references Matthew 27, 51 and Luke 23, 45, noting that they recount the time when Jesus was crucified as a moment when the earth was shaking. See, De Martino, 319, 338.

8 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 470.

its expression in cultural relativism (the subject of this chapter), and it was discursive and manifested in postmodernism's symbolization of reality (to be discussed in chapter 6).

Regarding the cultural and the discursive turns, de Martino offered both an analysis of the movement, pointing to their inherent risks, as well as an anticipatory answer to the crises they provoked. I am aware of the fact that I commit the sin of engaging in an anachronistic reading of de Martino's work that does not correspond to the principle of historical contextualization that marked the first chapters of this book. However, I felt it worth-while to speak of de Martino's relationship to relativism and postmodernism—even if only *ante litteram*—for two reasons: First, because he can offer us resources to understand and counteract certain intellectual trends that persist in contemporary academia. Second, because existing scholarship on de Martino celebrated him as a harbinger of postmodernism, thus warranting a more thorough discussion of his role within this trend.

In highlighting de Martino's critical stance towards the cultural-discursive paradigm, I decisively contradict Fabrizio Ferrari's statement that "de Martino's theories anticipated [...] post-modern discourses."[9] In this first introduction to de Martino's life for anglophone readership, an otherwise commendable effort, Ferrari uses the terms "post-modern" and "post-modernism," "post-structural" and "post-structuralism," and "post-colonial" and "post-colonialism" well over fifty times. In support of his line of reasoning, he cites expressions of these currents from a long list of illustrious figures: Derrida, Ricoeur, Levinas, Sartre, Geertz, Crapanzano, Taussig, Rosaldo, Clifford, Marcus, Said, Bhabha, and Spivak.[10] Of course, as I have shown in the previous chapter, Ferrari is right in

9 Fabrizio M. Ferrari, *Ernesto De Martino on Religion*, 105. While Ferrari cites Berrocal and Saunders repeatedly throughout his study (even using their translations of de Martino's texts), he seems unaware of the postmodern receptions of Hauschild, Lanternari, or Dei and Simonicca. Ferrari's claims are also significantly stronger and more definite than those of his predecessors. While Dei and Simonicca speak of a "prefiguration" and Saunders explicitly notes that de Martino should not be seen as a postmodern *ante litteram*, Ferrari reverses this tendency by speaking specifically of "his postmodernism *ante litteram*." Fabio Dei and Alessandro Simonicca, "'Il fittizio lume della magia': su de Martino e il relativismo antropologico," in *Ernesto de Martino nella cultura europea*, ed. Clara Gallini and Marcello Massenzio (Napoli: Liguori, 1997), 271; Saunders, "Un appuntamento mancato: Ernesto de Martino e l'antropologia statunitense," 57; Fabrizio M. Ferrari, *Ernesto De Martino on Religion*, viii.

10 Note the similarity of this list with the one produced by James Clifford in his *Writing Culture*, where he lists Emmanual Le Roy Ladurie, Natalie Davis, Carlo Ginzburg, Stephen Greenblatt, Hayden White, Edward Said, Fredric Jameson, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Raymond Williams, Tzvetan Todorov, and Louis Marin. James Clifford,

arguing that de Martino's thought anticipated ideas developed by these thinkers. On the whole, his science was one without clearly defined foundations, essences, or universals that defined much of his age. His thinking was deconstructive and open-ended. He participated in a global attempt to move beyond the dualisms that have defined the modern age and one could even argue that his thinking is dialogical, moving in the realm of thirds, rather than according to a binary logic. Finally, like many of the cultural-discursive paradigm's greats listed by Ferrari, he was acutely attuned to the shifting boundaries between secularization and political religion, science and religion, emic and etic approaches to religious phenomena, and so forth. This being said, as I will show, de Martino was not simply anticipating the postmodern, postcolonial, and post-structural thinkers, but also formulated a critical analysis of their premises and an anticipatory response to them.

2 Moving with and beyond Antonio Gramsci: From Progressive Folklore to a More Successful Colonialization

Before engaging in the intellectual afterlife of de Martino, however, it might be useful to look at another Italian thinker, whose work has been associated with postcolonial theory, namely Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Indeed, it seems clear that Gramsci played an important role in de Martino's development as an anthropologist and thinker of the South. If I have already shown how de Martino critiqued the divided nature of his discipline by critically engaging the international study of religion and magic, it is important to note that he also lamented the presence of a similar division in the treatment of the Italian South. In their attitudes, Marxists and Populists—the two camps engaged in the Southern Question—reflected what George Saunders called the dual function of "the alien" as something that "attracts and repels simultaneously."[11] De Martino himself caricatures the two attitudes as follows:

> On the one hand, these traditions are considered as simple relicts of a mediocre past, as a document of the backwardness of the Southern plebs, as a medley of oddities and superstitions that one hopes disappear as

"Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 3.

11 George R. Saunders, "The Magic of the South: Popular Religion and Elite Catholicism in Italian Ethnology," in *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in One Country*, ed. Jane Schneider (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 178.

> quickly as possible; on the other hand, one idolizes the cheerful and noisy splendor of the popular celebrations of the South, the archaic customs of Lucania and Sardinia, the charm of the songs from Gallura or from Lugodoro, and one almost regrets that this world is about to die out.[12]

Unlike de Martino's work, Gramsci's treatment of what Timothy Brennan calls "Southernism"[13] has received ample attention across the globe. There is no doubt that Antonio Gramsci fought the same battles as his much less famous colleague. On the one hand, although he has been called "the patron saint of the Italian Communist party,"[14] Antonio Gramsci relentlessly stood up for a more self-consciously critical orientation of Italian Marxism. Like de Martino, Gramsci spent much of his time "combating the dogmatic economism" of his Italian comrades.[15] On the other hand, in articles such as "Observations on Folklore" (1950), Gramsci was leery of any folkloric, picturesque, and romantic conception of the *mezzogiorno*, arguing that "however isolated and seemingly remote such communities may appear, they are in fact embedded in larger political and economic realities."[16]

Antonio Gramsci was born in 1891 on the island of Sardinia and lived through an exceptionally difficult childhood marked by marginalization due to familial neglect, economic poverty, and a particular physical deformity that made him hunch-backed. Despite leaving school at age eleven to support his family, he ended up studying at the University of Turin, where the bright and passionate youth found himself in an entirely different cultural context than in his native region. In what was then Italy's industrial capital, Gramsci benefitted not only from a thriving university, but also entered into contact with a self-conscious, organized, and combative working class.[17] Once the Italian Socialist Party split in January 1921 at Livorno, Gramsci was quick to establish himself as one of the leaders of the newly formed Italian Communist Party (PCI, *Partito Comunista Italiano*). Spending two years in Moscow, representing the party, he returned

12 Ernesto De Martino, "Amore e morte," *Meridione* 9, no. 1–2 (1956): 77.

13 Timothy Brennan, "Antonio Gramsci and Postcolonial Theory: 'Southernism,'" *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 143–87, https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.2011.0004.

14 Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 99.

15 Hughes, 102; Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 22, 72, 89.

16 Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, 5, 99; Carles Feixa, "Más allá de Éboli: Gramsci, de Martino y el debate sobre la cultura subalterna en Italia," in *El folclore progresivo y otros ensayos*, by Ernesto De Martino, ed. Carles Feixa (Barcelona: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2009), 18–19; Signorelli, *Ernesto de Martino*, 19.

17 Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 192.

to an Italy ruled by Mussolini and lived a clandestine existence before being arrested and sentenced to twenty years in prison in 1926. Released in 1934 due to ill health, he died three days later, at age forty-six.

Like de Martino, Gramsci has been described as the epitome of the "crisis-born hero," whose work was driven by the aspiration to transform a broken society.[18] While this activist orientation, the integration of action and theory was a hallmark of Marxist philosophy since its inception in the works of Marx and Engels, there is no doubt that these two attributes coalesced in Antonio Gramsci's *opus* more than in any other Marxist before him.[19] Kate Crehan, in one of the most stimulating studies on the Sardinian thinker, has noted that Gramsci's "analytical starting point was very different from that of academic anthropology" as he was "first and foremost a political activist whose primary concern was to bring about political change in Italy."[20] Gramsci used the term "organic intellectual" (*intellettuale organico*) to describe the ideal thinker, who is able to integrate political activism aimed at the practical transformation the world with intellectual engagement intent on generating knowledge.[21] Perhaps the greatest energy de Martino drew from Gramsci's work as an organic intellectual geared towards transforming culture, is the latter's insistence on the need to enable the Southern peasants to become historical actors of their own destiny, to remedy their poverty and misery, and to contribute to the unification of Italy. Gramsci believed that all previous movements of unification, including the *Risorgimento* led by Giuseppe Mazzini had failed to overcome the division in the Italian nation.[22] De Martino himself called for the "unification of the national culture as Gramsci conceived it," and defined the process as "the formation of a new cultural life of the nation that heals the fracture between high culture and the culture of the people."[23]

De Martino's attempts at unification can be divided into different expressions, which evolved throughout this period and ultimately led him beyond both Gramsci and the Southern Question. In a first phase during the late 1940s,

18 See, for example, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 234.

19 Joachim Ranke, *Marxismus und Historismus bei Antonio Gramsci: philosophische und sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1989); Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*.

20 Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, 5.

21 Hughes, *Consciousness and Society*, 102–3; Saunders, "The Magic of the South," 188; Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, 128–64; Mancini, "Postface," 288–89.

22 Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 195.

23 Ernesto De Martino, "Il folklore progressivo," in *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto de Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948–1955*, ed. Carla Pasquinelli (1951; repr., Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1977), 145.

he simply tried to augment the Marxist focus on the economic circumstances by complementing it with an increased attention to the real needs of the people. In "The Civilization of the Spirit" (1948), for example, he described the case of a day laborer from the town of Minervino, who expressed anguish in light of his weakening strength, his inability to work and provide, and his fears of becoming a burden to his family.[24] In his reflections on the peasant's experience, de Martino not only converted these anxieties into an existential fear of losing any type of spiritual value and human dignity in light of an "image [...] of life and world [...] as oppressive dependence on 'matter'," but he also called for a "real, revolutionary liberation of man from the servile moment of inevitable materialistic dependence."[25]

In the same vein, his "Lucanian Notes" (1950) considered the case of another day-laborer by the name of Rocco Tammone. After introducing his dire economic situation with a "naked list of numbers"—precisely outlining his hours of work, the size of the land he was working, the harvest of grain and wine, and the amounts of money he owes to different people in town—de Martino then proceeded to describe him as a "man full of humanity."[26] He reproduced a letter that Tammone sent to Rocco Scotellaro, the Socialist mayor of his hometown, in which he tells the story of a tragic accident of a four-year old child of his own family.[27] In his conclusion, de Martino comments:

> The humanity of Rocco Tammone poses the general question of the humanity and of the "civilization" of the people of Tricario. As much as the use of the word "civilization" in referring to the material conditions of existence of these people could sound atrociously derisive, it is a fact, that even such conditions nourish experiences and affection, customs and ideologies, which shape civilization and history. There is a basic form

24 Ernesto De Martino, "La civiltà dello spirito," in *Scritti minori su religione marxismo e psicoanalisi*, ed. Roberto Altamura and Patrizia Ferretti (1948; repr., Roma: Nuove edizioni romane, 1993), 115.

25 De Martino, 116–17.

26 De Martino, "Note lucane," 653.

27 De Martino, 652. Son of a farming family of Tricarico, a large village in the province of Matera, Scotellaro attended the liceo in the North of Italy only to return to Basilicata in his early twenties to emerge as one of the most important writers, researchers, and political activists of the *mezzogiorno*. Both of them being members in the Italian Socialist Party, Ernesto knew Rocco personally and the young man—who had become mayor of Tricarico by that time—invited him and Vittoria several times between 1949 and 1952 to stay in his family's home. The literary production of the peasant poet, published only after his early death in 1953, has not only been compared to that of his most influential mentor, Carlo Levi, but also to neorealism.

> of experience from which the people of Tricarico has to continuously defend itself in order to save its proper humanity, in order to ward off the savage temptation of things, without prospect, sordid, and deformed. In these houses, with this life, it is very difficult to preserve oneself as human, to at least sustain a weak shimmering of this complex of love and relationships that characterizes humanity.[28]

In this immensely influential article, de Martino also hints at his second strategy that could lead to the unification of Italy, namely "progressive folklore" (*folklore progressivo*). In this second stage, which is concomitant to his increased ethnographic expeditions and his new identity as a "militant ethnographer" starting around 1950, he argued that the portrayal of Southern reality in un-romanticized ways was no longer enough for unifying the country. Instead of images of the poor produced by the elite, de Martino focused on the revolutionary potential of the subaltern masses itself. In one of his *oeuvre's* most impactful passages, we read "men and women came out of their filthy hideouts and asked me to tell and to narrate, to render the history of their hardship and their trembling rebellion public."[29] The following year, in an article entitled "Progressive Folklore," de Martino noted that "if we want this to be a concrete and real unification, it also has to involve the admission of that progressive popular production to the cultural circle, which [...] ties itself to the process of political and social emancipation of the people themselves."[30] He defines "progressive folklore" as the "informed proposal of the people against their own socially subaltern condition" and as a position that "comments and expresses the struggles to emancipate from it in cultural terms."[31]

In a talk at the conference organized by the Gramsci Foundation (*Fondazione Gramsci*) to present the publication of the Fourth Volume of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, de Martino lauded "the multiplication of progressive elements in folklore itself, that is to say cultural elements that are born as protest by the people against their own subaltern condition, or that culturally comment and express the struggles to emancipate themselves from it."[32] He explained that he sees this combative force in various newly emergent traits of the Southern culture, such as the Resistance, the occupation of lands and factories, strikes

28 De Martino, 654.

29 De Martino, 660.

30 De Martino, "Il folklore progressivo," 145.

31 De Martino, 144.

32 Ernesto De Martino, "Gramsci e il folklore," in *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto de Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948–1955*, ed. Carla Pasquinelli (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1977), 156–57.

and political celebrations.[33] De Martino became particularly fascinated with one form of progressive folklore, namely popular songs. In another article from this period, he invited all his readers to send him any progressive popular songs, and elaborated their nature as follows:

> There exists today in Italy a whole prominent patrimony, a genuine solemn singing comment, which accompanies the laborer and peasant movement in its history. These are songs that sometimes express simple protest, other times open rebellion against the subaltern condition to which the people are condemned. These are satirical folk songs against the enemy of class, epic memories of ancient and recent struggles, lyric derelictions to passionate anticipation of the better world of tomorrow. [...] It is up to us to assemble this heritage, to conserve it, to put it back into circulation, and, most of all, to stimulate its increase: this is an aspect of the new humanism underway that cannot be neglected.[34]

Progressive folklore reveals an ambiguous dimension in de Martino's relationship with Gramsci. While every article he wrote about progressive folklore references his name, Gramsci appears to be serving primarily as a shadow, which allowed de Martino to define his own contours.[35] Passages that would actually support his argument are conspicuously absent in his treatises. Consider, for instance, the curious fact that de Martino completely ignored the previously mentioned "Observations on Folklore." Here, Gramsci distinguished between "various strata" of Southern culture, "the fossilized ones which reflect conditions of past life and are therefore conservative and reactionary, and those which consist of a series of innovations, often creative and progressive, determined spontaneously by forms and conditions of life which are in the process of developing and which are in contradiction to or simply different from the morality of the governing strata."[36] The reason for this neglect might lie in the fact that in Gramsci, the potential for progress that grows out of the oppositional

33 De Martino, 156–57.

34 Ernesto De Martino, "Il folklore," in *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto de Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948–1955*, ed. Carla Pasquinelli (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1977), 147.

35 For attempts to explain this strategy, see Angelini, *Ernesto de Martino*, 68–69; Pasquinelli, "Introduzione," 26.

36 Antonio Gramsci, *Letteratura e vita nazionale.* (Torino: Einaudi, 1950), 216–17; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 190. See also, Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, 108.

nature of subaltern culture is immediately relativized by his overall negative conception of Southern society, which is described as an implicit, incoherent, contradictory, and disintegrated worldview.[37] In her discussion of Gramsci's attitude, Jane Schneider rightly detects a "pessimism about the capacity of Southern peasants to act in history."[38]

De Martino himself would ultimately transcend Gramsci, particularly in the second half of the decade, which would culminate in the books of the Southern Trilogy, published between 1958 and 1961. It is at this moment that de Martino's project of unification of Italy gradually lost its militant and political undertones to become philosophical project concerned with the destiny of (post)-modern Western society. If the shifting boundaries between hegemonic and subaltern cultures remained a propelling energy, its nature is now explored in another way: The encounter with the uncivilized South becomes less a problem of the South, and more a problem of the limited civilizational power of the North—what Alessandro Testa called a "sort of unsuccessful colonialization."[39]

In the final years of the 1950s, the dying down of political activism, the gradual improvement of his health, and tentative indications of professional recognition in academia went hand in hand to transform de Martino's life radically. Although it is not clear whether he actively left the party or just chose not to renew his membership in 1957, there is no doubt that his socialist political ambitions took a severe blow as a consequence of two events demonstrating the culturally intolerant and authoritarian nature of socialist regimes.[40] Within a few months in 1956, the Poznań Uprising in Poland and the Hungarian Revolution against Stalinism posed the greatest threat to the Soviet control of these territories since WWII, leading to violent suppressions that ended up costing the lives of thousands and the displacement of hundreds of thousands. The same incidents in the East also reconfirmed his growing isolation within Marxist circles and his rising disappointment about the failure of Italian communism to truly emancipate the subaltern masses.[41]

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37 Gramsci, *Letteratura e vita nazionale.*, 215; Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, 189.

38 Jane Schneider, "Introduction: The Dynamics of Neo-Orientalism in Italy (1848–1995)," in *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in One Country*, ed. Jane Schneider (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 14.

39 Testa, "Estasi e crisi. Note su sciamanismo e pessimismo storico in Eliade, de Martino e Lévi-Strauss," 108.

40 Patrizia Ferretti, "Nota biobibliografica," in *Scritti minori su religione marxismo e psicoanalisi*, ed. Roberto Altamura and Patrizia Ferretti (Roma: Nuove edizioni romane, 1993), 162–63; Gallini, "Introduzione," LXXV–LXXVI; Angelini, *Ernesto de Martino*, 154.

41 Gallini, "Introduzione."

As he gradually distanced himself from Gramsci and from militant ethnography, de Martino made his first steps in the university system by becoming a lecturer (*libero docente*) in anthropology (1953–1955) and history of religions (1956–1958) at the Sapienza University in Rome. In the last years of his life, he finally received some much-deserved recognition from his contemporaries. In 1958, he published *Death and Ritual Weeping*, winning the prestigious Viareggio Literature Prize precisely eleven years after it was awarded to none other than Gramsci for his *Prison Notebooks*. A year later, he achieved another milestone in his career as he was appointed as full professor (*professore straordinario*) of religious studies; not in Rome, where his friend Angelo Brelich inherited the position of Raffaele Pettazzoni, but at the University of Cagliari on Sardinia.

Before leaving for the island in the summer of 1959, de Martino and his interdisciplinary team of researchers undertook one last expedition in the Italian South, where they documented the case of the *tarantate*, women possessed by the spirits of spiders whose richest ritualistic expression takes place during the yearly celebration of St. Paul on the 28th and 29th of June. The results of the research on tarantism in the small town of Galatina, in the heart of Salento, was handed over to Mondadori publisher the following year and published as *The Land of Remorse* in 1961. With that project, de Martino finally closed his Southern Period for good. Arrived at the zenith of his fame in Italy—endowed with a permanent position as the chair in religious studies at Cagliari—the foremost anthropologist of the Italian South added another remarkable twist to his intellectual itinerary. Abandoning the research of folklore, he decided to dedicate his new life to old passions centered on the destiny of Western civilization, once again articulated in between decline and rebirth. As he himself put it, he returned to research "born in the arena of contemporary history," circumscribing it as the "cognitive clarification of operative nodes in which our own age is caught up."[42]

3 Nostalgia for the Lost Homeland: An Anticipatory Analysis of the Cultural Turn and the Surprising Parallels between Cultural Relativism and the Insider-Phenomenological Approach

While I will not engage every thinker on Ferrari's list mentioned above, even a short glance at the priorities of the main protagonists of the shift in the intellectual climate during the cultural and linguistic turns makes it clear why historians of the discipline of religious studies tend to emphasize that the

42 Ernesto De Martino, "Prefazione," in *Furore simbolo valore* (Milano: Il saggiatore, 1962), 33.

insider-phenomenological current was replaced as the cultural-discursive paradigm came to the fore. Michael Stausberg, for example, maintains that "the 1970s marked the twilight of the phenomenology of religion, the rejection of which has now become the standard prologue to contemporary attempts at self-understanding within the field."[43] Gavin Flood, similarly, noted a "shift of emphasis from a philosophy of consciousness to a philosophy of the sign, from consciousness to language, culture and intersubjectivity around the same time."[44] Of course, my own account in chapter 5, in which I noted that the ontological paradigm was gradually superseded by the cultural-discursive model of thought, has certainly lent some credibility to this account. This, however, is far from the whole story. De Martino rightly intuited that the insider-phenomenological approach received a surprising afterlife in the emergent third model for the study of religion. The key to understanding the continuity between these two seemingly different currents of thought lies in their shared cultural relativism, which is driven by a nostalgia for cultural alterity.

From a historical point of view, so much is well-known, the continuous presence of relativism makes sense as American interpretative anthropology was ultimately nourished through the umbilical cord of a German matrix. Specifically, the concept of culture, in the American context, was primarily shaped by Franz Boas (1858–1942), who emigrated from Germany to New York at the age of twenty-nine. After growing up in Westphalia, Boas studied geography, which led him to a one-year fieldwork stay on Baffin Island (1883–1884). It was during this year of research amongst the indigenous Eskimo population that Boas stood up against the geographical determinism of his teacher Friedrich Ratzel and started to promote his appreciation of cultural phenomena as autonomous of geographic, racial, or biological conditioning. After returning to Germany, where he worked at the Royal Ethnological Museum in Berlin and attained his habilitation with Adolf Bastian in 1896, Boas settled in the United States to work at Columbia University and at the American Museum of Natural History.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Boas and his disciples collectively changed the face of American anthropology, leading it gradually from evolutionism to cultural relativism. Although the students of Boas were anything but a coherent and unified group, they all propagated their teacher's conception of culture as a bounded whole.[45] As one commentator put it, "the

43 Stausberg, "Western Europe," 32.

44 Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, 117.

45 Stocking includes Lowie, Leslie Spier, Herskovits, Wissler, Speck, Kroeber, Sapir, Radin, Benedict, and Mead in the list of Boasians. George Ward Stocking, "Introduction: The

Boasian paradigm, elaborated and reshaped by his students over three generations, dominated American anthropology until mid-century."[46] Particularly, Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) has exerted a tremendous influence on American anthropology, continuing to promote values of cultural relativism through its attempts to achieve a "deep penetration into the genius of the culture."[47]

The Boasian model persisted even into the final decades of the twentieth century. In fact, one of the most vital offshoots sprouting from the fertile ground of Boasian anthropology was Clifford Geertz (1926–2006). Born in California, serving in the U.S. Navy in WWII, and graduating from Harvard in Social Anthropology, the formative events in Geertz's career were the personal encounters with cultural alterity through his fieldwork on the Indonesian islands of Java and Bali, and in Morocco. Appointed as professor at the University of Chicago in 1960, he would become the first social scientist appointed at the prestigious think tank known as the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton ten years later. Throughout this period, he gradually moved towards what has been described as "extreme culturalist positions,"[48] which would ultimately culminate in the publication of the foundational book of the cultural turn, namely *The Interpretation of Culture* (1973).

A rather banal but nonetheless powerful indication for Geertz's underlying affinity with Boasian thinking about culture, comes from the title of his paradigm-shifting book. Indeed, by using the plural grammatical form, Geertz indicates that he, like Boas before him, was not searching for *culture* as a universal concept but rather *cultures* as particular and unique constructs. In "Religion as a Cultural System," which was published as part of his *magnum opus*, he famously defined culture as having "neither multiple referents, nor, so far as I can see, any unusual ambiguity." Instead, so he specified, "it denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life."[49] Similarly, in "Thick Description," the celebrated opening essay of his collection, he not only described "culture" as the concept "around which

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Basic Assumptions of Boasian Anthropology," in *The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883–1911: A Franz Boas Reader*, by Franz Boas (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 17.

46 Silverman, "The United States," 345.

47 Franz Boas, "Introduction," in *Patterns of Culture*, by Ruth Benedict (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), xv.

48 Silverman, "The United States," 287.

49 Clifford Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

the whole discipline of anthropology arose,"[50] but he also gave it a particularistic, one might even say nationalistic, valence. He argued that according to his anthropological method, "descriptions of Berber, Jewish, or French culture must be cast in terms of the constructions we imagine Berbers, Jews, or Frenchmen to place upon what they live through, the formulae they use to define what happens to them."[51]

As for de Martino, he not only understood that cultural relativism was "born out of the crisis of historicism in the first half of the twentieth century in Germany, constituting thus a typically Western phenomenon,"[52] but also recognized the long shadow of the fascination with alterity within the rising cultural-discursive paradigm. In *The End of the World*, reviving terminology that originated in the context of crisis and nostalgia for cultural rebirth during the interwar years, de Martino described the apocalyptic 1960s as an age marked by a state of "being-acted-upon" (*essere-agito-da*), "radical unfamiliarity," a sense of "strangeness (*estraneità*), *Unheimlichkeit*, and the *Ganz Andere*."[53] American anthropology and its celebration of the contingent, the incommensurable, the different, and the unique is ultimately a return to the earlier historicism debate.[54] In short, the crisis of 1965 was in many ways just another permutation of the crisis of 1918.

More recently, international scholarship has confirmed de Martino's intuitions, noting that Geertz inherited important characteristics from the German conception of culture as it rose in the American context under Franz Boas. Kate Crehan, for example, emphasized that for him too, "culture, like a nationality, tended [...] to be seen as referring to a specific people, often associated with a specific territory, and who were characterized by a particular world view, expressed through a common language."[55] Similarly, Daniel Pals notes that "interpretive anthropology [...] appreciates the particular self-defining character of every culture."[56] Finally, Silverman argues that Geertz's vision "pointed

50 Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 4.

51 Geertz, 15.

52 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 281.

53 De Martino, 16.

54 Wolfgang Kämmerer, *Friedrich Meinecke und das Problem des Historismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 296–99.

55 Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, 46. Crehan also used the example of James Clifford, another figure on Ferrari's list, to illustrate that "hybridity" is still underpinned by a "persistent assumption of the existence of distinct cultures, elements of which may intermingle in all kinds of ways but which nonetheless somehow remain rooted in that culture to which they 'belong.'" Crehan, 61.

56 Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 308.

to a highly particularistic, relativistic, and aesthetic program for anthropology, one that had much in common with earlier scholars' interest in ethos and was reminiscent of Benedict's notion of the patterning of distinctive, coherent cultural systems."[57]

By recalling Otto's "wholly other" in his analysis, de Martino also suggested that the cultural-discursive paradigm's relativism was closely associated to another core trait of the insider-phenomenological approach, namely the nostalgic longing for a traditional and non-modern world-view. Just like relativism, this religious nostalgia likely stems from the Boasian conception of *Kultur*, whose origins reach well beyond the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, the particularistic model of culture has its richest roots in German Romanticism, and, more specifically, in the thought of Johann Gottlieb Herder (1744–1803).[58] Opposing the Enlightenment belief in a teleological development of human civilization, Herder asserted the importance of a plurality of individual cultures.[59] Boas himself, acknowledged the influence of Herder on his own thinking and argued in favor of "the diversity of cultures." In fact, following in the footsteps of the German romantic tradition, he proposed "a stance of cultural relativism, the idea that it is necessary to grasp cultures in their own terms and their own historical contexts before attempting generalizations."[60] Importantly, the relativists' insistence on the autonomy of cultures and the rejection of evolution was frequently accompanied by a reverse form of ethnocentrism, which celebrated the non-modern or "primitive" cultures as purer and more authentic expressions of *Kultur*. The principle of the peculiarity of culture, its particularistic richness, led to an infatuation with what is alien and a critique of what is one's own. As Helen Carr put it in her *Inventing the American Primitive*, "the Boasian ethnographers, like primitivist poets, created through their writing a world which possesses the virtues lost by modernity."[61]

De Martino, always attuned to the risk of division in times of crisis, described the final years of his life as a period in which the Western world had to make a choice that it already faced in the earlier half of the twentieth

57 Silverman, "The United States," 288.

58 Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Finn Sivert Nielsen, *A History of Anthropology* (London: Pluto, 2001), 23; William Yewdale Adams, *The Philosophical Roots of Anthropology* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2001), 313.

59 Consider, for example, Herder's *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1984–91).

60 Silverman, "The United States," 262.

61 Helen Carr, *Inventing the American Primitive: Politics, Gender and the Representation of Native American Literary Traditions, 1789–1936* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 252.

century. Either, "one maintains faith in reason, as *telos* of humanity represented in distinguished fashion in the West, or one instead abdicates in front of the irrational and return to make it into the fundamental theme of life: This is the alternative called Europe, because we Europeans are living it in such a dramatic manner that has no equal in no other civilization of our planet."[62] As his description of Western or European exceptionalism already reveals, de Martino's choice was clearly on the opposite side of the spectrum from that of relativist anthropology.

In important ways, the interpretative approach to culture as it was practiced by Clifford Geertz is based on a revisitation of the *Methodenstreit* that ravaged the academy in the early twentieth-century. If the explanatory models of Marxism and structuralism started to gain dominance in the years after the Second World War, from the 1970s onward, anthropology took a turn towards hermeneutics. As one commentator put it, "it seemed fairer to understand (*verstehen*) the other than to explain (*erklären*) it."[63] Lawson and McCauley have pointed to the fact that "those cultural anthropologists who have abandoned explanatory theorizing in favor of hermeneutic explorations" became important allies of the proponents of the insider-phenomenological approach, who "jumped at the chance to enlist hermeneutically aligned cultural anthropologists. They are grateful for allies with a 'humanistic' rather than a 'theological' or 'scientific' orientation."[64] Geertz's work itself gives ample evidence of this attitude. In an interview from 2002, for example, he spoke of his analysis of the Balinese cockfight as follows: "You try to make sense of it, i.e., make sense that they make of it. Try to understand how they make sense of their world. In that way, it is phenomenological and hermeneutic. It is an attempt to understand things from the native's point of view."[65]

Both insider-phenomenological and cultural-discursive approaches value the stance of the religious practitioner more than the thinkers of the outsider-explanatory approach. Gavin Flood, in his description of the third approach in religious studies, admits that "the idea of 'empathy' is relevant here," while immediately commenting on the "problematic" nature of this term as it "has

62 De Martino, "Promesse e minacce dell'etnologia," 106–7.

63 Werner Schiffauer, "Grenzen des ethnologischen Verstehens," in *Grenzen des Verstehens: philosophische und humanwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, ed. Gudrun Kühne-Bertram and Gunter Scholtz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 237.

64 E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, "Crisis of Conscience, Riddle of Identity: Making Space for a Cognitive Approach to Religious Phenomena," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 2 (1993): 213.

65 Arun Micheelsen and Clifford Geertz, "'I Don't Do Systems': An Interview with Clifford Geertz," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 14, no. 1 (2002): 10.

unnecessary implications of a philosophy of consciousness which a dialogical model would wish to avoid."[66] Of course, part of Flood's embarrassment stems precisely from the fact that the emphasis on states of consciousness and experience is pervasive throughout the cultural-discursive paradigm. Let us consider another example from Geertz's work, namely his definition of religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting *moods* and motivations in men."[67] Unlike the objectivity of evolutionary or structuralist approaches, Geertz emphasized the primacy of subjective and intuitive experiences for apprehending religion. Georg Iggers, the historian of European intellectual history, noted that the Geertzian separation of the social reality from the web of symbolic significance ultimately "results in methodological irrationalism," as "the interpretation of symbols cannot be tested empirically." Even more importantly, Geertz's emphasis on culture as a web of meaningful symbols invited "the reintroduction of the anthropologist's subjectivity or imagination into his subject matter."[68] Since the individual historical facts do not refer to an underlying reality, they need to be reconstituted in a meaningful way through the subjective imagination of the "interpretative" anthropologist. This form of cognitive relativism, of course, is just as inherent in any approach that explores religion through insider experience as it is for those who argue for a hermeneutical conception of culture as a text. Texts, by their very nature, can be read in innumerable ways. As Burke put it: "A fundamental problem with the metaphor of reading is that it seems to license intuition. Who is in a position to arbitrate when two intuitive readers disagree? Is it possible to formulate rules of reading, or at least to identify misreadings?"[69]

4 Science Is Not for the Stateless: An Anticipatory Critique of the Cultural Turn Based on the Ethnocentric Imperative

Based on my discussion in the first few chapters, it is obvious that the young Ernesto already articulated a critique of relativist thinking in religious studies, primarily in response to Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. In his "Code for a Historicist Anthropology," written during the second half of the 1930s, de Martino's self-reflexivity took on an aspect that decisively contradicts the

66 Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, 148.
67 Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," 90. Emphasis is mine.
68 Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 125.
69 Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004), 116.

anthropology of guilt and self-critique found in relativism. Instead, the document culminates in a fierce defense of ethnocentrism: "Anthropology cannot be not Eurocentric." "That means," so de Martino continued, "it cannot be accompanied by the awareness that the Western civilization, maturing through Christianity, the reformation, the Enlightenment, and historicism, represents the highest level that humankind has successfully reached to this day."[70] In light of these youthfully brash words, Fabrizio Ferrari argues that de Martino was "misguided by the then totalitarian climate in Italy," thus falling "prey to Eurocentrism and Christian-centrism." Not only that, he also concludes that "such a discourse, imbued with the 'rational modernity' and racial prejudice of fascism, will be eventually reconsidered and surpassed, especially in the Southern trilogy."[71]

Upon closer analysis, however, this assessment is problematic as de Martino's thinking was, until the end of his life, marked by "unconditional confidence in European culture."[72] In an article dedicated to the folklore of Southern Italy, written in 1950, he brandished relativism as "philosophy of idiots (*filosofia degl'imbecilli*)" and explained that it was driven by the idea that "Western man should indeed get rid (*spogliarsi*) of his cultural heritage (*patrimonio culturale*)."[73] In the notes to *The End of the World*, he similarly concluded that as the relativist "ethnographer attempts to totally disregard his own proper cultural history under the pretense of 'making himself naked as a worm,'" he loses his own "specialistic vocation," and "exposes himself [...] to the risk of immediate ethnocentric analysis."[74] Put differently, while de Martino recognized the danger of cultural imperialism, he was clear on the fact that it is not remedied by cultural relativism or some sort of anti anti-relativism.

> We cannot place our own civilization next to the others and consider them all as equal perspectives, to be chosen at par as evaluating points of view. This is not how cultural "provincialism" is defeated. We need to engage in a dialogue with the world but we need to truly know our own part, otherwise we risk to fall into an enormous chatter (*pettegolezzo*), into an ambiguous and dumb gossiping, into an opportunism (*camaleontismo*)

70 De Martino, *Naturalismo e storicismo nell'etnologia*, 228.

71 Fabrizio M. Ferrari, *Ernesto De Martino on Religion*, 110.

72 Lanternari, *La mia alleanza con Ernesto de Martino e altri saggi post-demartiniani*, 125.

73 Ernesto De Martino, "Ancora sulla Storia del Mondo Popolare Subalterno," in *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto de Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948–1955*, ed. Carla Pasquinelli (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1977), 91–92.

74 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 391.

> that simulates openness and variety of interests while being only a mask for a limitless abdication.[75]

In "Promises and Dangers of Anthropology," an influential article published in *Fury, Symbol, Value* (1962), de Martino argued that cultural relativism makes us apprehend the ethnographic encounter as an opportunity to abandon our own culture to immerse ourselves so much in the other that we completely lose our own values. Of course, de Martino himself was not entirely immune to the "dangers" involved in this type of thinking. Anthropology, so he concluded, is intended to "generate a cultural awareness, which, in the very moment it opened itself up to the intuition of so-called primitive societies, also put into question the bourgeois determination of Western civilization by opening it up to scrutiny and measuring its internal limits of origin and development." However, the goal of "putting ourselves into question," so he insisted, is not to abandon our own cultural values, but rather to strengthen our identity by means of a renewed sense of "Westernness."

> All of this serves the intention to gain a greater loyalty to the character and destiny of Western civilization. [Its objective is] to avoid a false historical piety of the variously abdicating irrationalism, of the bewilderments of a relativism without perspective, and of the pseudo-objective suspensions of a neutralism that revealed the death of any capacity of choice and of the very will of history.[76]

Approvingly citing a passage of *Tristes Tropiques*, de Martino was also aware that he shared certain priorities with Lévi-Strauss as he too recognized that the confrontation with cultural alterity must invariably lead to self-reflection. In *Structural Anthropology*, for example, the French anthropologist described his endeavor in almost demartinoan terms, as characterized by "two apparently contradictory attitudes, namely, respect for societies very different from ours, and active participation in the transformation of our own society."[77] At the same time, however, de Martino would have argued that while the Frenchman's work stood for the dangers of anthropology, his own position exemplified its promises. Placido Cherchi takes the view that "contrary to what it might seem, the growing attention that de Martino would dedicate to the theme of critical ethnocentrism […] is not to be read as the consequence of an unconditional

75 De Martino, 281.

76 De Martino, "Promesse e minacce dell'etnologia," 87.

77 Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 335.

consensus to the perspective set down in the book of Lévi-Strauss, but as a need to exorcise its intimate riskiness."[78] An exemplum for why this assessment might very well hold true comes from *Race and History* (1952), where Lévi-Strauss argued that relativism stands for a leveling off of societies as all cultures are seen to be equally worthy. In this publication, part of a UNESCO series against racism, the French anthropologist harshly criticized the "false evolutionism," which manifests as "a great temptation to try to arrange cultures in the first category in an order representing a succession in time."[79] Instead, he suggested that all cultures should be seen on equal footing on a temporal horizon and be set apart in space.

De Martino could not possibly agree with the final consequences of this type of self-reflection as he feared that it would lead to an abdication of all the cultural values of the Western world. Many years after de Martino's death, scholarship on the French structuralist's work has confirmed that Lévi-Strauss himself had an important nostalgic streak. It was particularly Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who, for Lévi-Strauss, fulfilled this role of "a second strand or current in his thought."[80] In fact, Lévi-Strauss himself acknowledges as much when he states that "Marx and Freud make me think," whereas "Rousseau sets me aflame."[81] The French anthropologist himself was exposed to important—albeit frequently underestimated—influences from German speaking lands. More relevantly, perhaps, these German inspirations came to him indirectly through American anthropology. In fact, before being appointed as *maître de recherche* at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in 1948 and being elected to the Collège de France in 1959, Lévi-Strauss spent several years in the 1940s in exile in the United States, where he not only met Roman Jakobson at the New School for Social Research in New York, but also the anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber. It is through these encounters in New York, which included visits to Franz Boas' ethnographic collections—displayed in the American Museum of Natural History—that Lévi-Strauss got imbued with a German tradition of culture.

Returning to the concluding remarks of de Martino's "Promises and Dangers," we find clues to just how radically his position differed from that of his French counterpart. Here, he articulated his conception of the defining characteristic of the *ethnos* of Western culture as the idea of a goal or end,

78 Cherchi, *Il peso dell'ombra*, 47.

79 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952), 16.

80 Tremlett, *Lévi-Strauss on Religion*, 23.

81 Claude Lévi-Strauss and Didier Eribon, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 168.

a *telos*. "The initial scandal of the ethnographic encounter," so de Martino argued, forces the anthropologist not only to "suspend and put into question" his own culture, but also allows him "to retrace [its history] with his thought and to newly found the *telos* of the West stimulated by the relationship with the *ethnos*." Thus, the "highest promise of a reformed anthropology" lies precisely in this renewed sense of selfhood in light of the scandal of encounter.[82] In writing about anthropology, de Martino did not leave his science in the state of disintegration, rather the deconstruction advocated for by his insistence on self-reflexivity leads to a renewed energy and courage for construction. Put differently, relativism was never expressed in purely negative or deconstructive terms but rather in terms of combat and struggle to promote progress. De Martino's critical ethnocentrism, to use the words of Silvia Mancini, is premised on a "strong cognitive model."[83] Consider, for instance, the following passage from the same article, where we read:

> Certainly, a science of the ethnos understood in this way required necessarily a series of choices and compromises (*compromissioni*) [that stand] in radical opposition to the ideal of science as absolute neutrality. It required that we take sides (*prendere partito*). [...] In reality, the anthropologist that claims to approach the ethnos by excluding—for "scientific professionalism" and for "love for objectivity"—any methodic and explicit verification of the values of Western civilization, makes himself unconsciously into a prisoner [...] of all of his inherent folklore of political, religious, and philosophical clashes (*cozzanti*). [...] The truth is that, in general, science is not of the stateless (*apolidi*) and that, in particular, the science of the ethnos establishes itself as the deliberate putting into question (*messa in causa*) of one's own Western citizenship under the stimulus of the initial scandal of the ethnographic encounter.[84]

The political undertones of de Martino's critique of "stateless-ness" is hardly a coincidence. In fact, his decisive and courageous science was, since his youth, always accompanied by a call to political activism. In his typically dialectical style, he recognized that our belonging to a state is both conservatively limiting and innovatively freeing at the same time. Being loyal to our homeland means that we can never encounter the other free of our own presuppositions, on the one hand, and that every political action can be revolutionary in transforming

82 De Martino, "Promesse e minacce dell'etnologia," 116.

83 Mancini, "Postface," 452.

84 De Martino, "Promesse e minacce dell'etnologia," 91.

our own state, on the other. In response to cultural-discursive abdications of rootedness, de Martino suggested that we embrace a radical "loyalty" (*fedeltà*) to our "own cultural world" (*proprio mondo culturale*) in light of the steady rise of interest in cultural and religious alterities. De Martino's response to the crisis, thus, was as clear in the 1950s and 60s as it was decades earlier during his time as a student at the University of Naples: "I would not say that Europe can not abandon reason and embrace systems of choices that are foreign to its *telos*, but I say that it certainly should not. It should not do so because the cultural choices are not arbitrary, exchangeable at will, but form coherence and loyalty that also entail ultimate sacrifices."[85]

De Martino's awareness of relativism as a danger to his discipline grew stronger over time, with his judgment becoming more radical as the years passed. In *The End of the World*, de Martino responded to the nostalgia for alterity by introducing the idea of a "cultural homeland" (*patria culturale*). It is only through the *appaesamento*—a term that can be translated as "assimilation," "territorialisation" or "appropriation"—within one's own cultural horizon that humanity can function. In emphasizing the importance of one's own homeland, de Martino's position must be distinguished not only from that of Lévi-Strauss, but also from that of the cultural-discursive paradigm. In "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture," Geertz wrote that "cultural analysis is (or should be), guessing at meaning, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape."[86] If Geertz concluded his relativist manifesto by sarcastically stating that "if we wanted home truths, we should have stayed at home,"[87] de Martino invited anthropologists to do just that: "European civilization is an asset to defend, increase (*accrescere*), and expand (*dilatare*)."[88] In *Magic and Civilization*, de Martino discussed the positive aspects of one of the most ethnocentric elements of Western culture, namely the "anti-magical polemic."

> [...] in the West, the concept of magic also has weight as a protective measure against this different sickness, which is the radical unfaithfulness (*infedeltà*) to the anti-magical polemic of our civilization; with the abdication in front of the charismas of magic as consequence. Every

85 De Martino, 106–7.
86 Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture," 20.
87 Clifford Geertz, "Distinguished Lecture: Anti Anti-Relativism," *American Anthropologist* 86, no. 2 (1984): 276.
88 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 281.

> civilization chooses its own "loyalty" (*fedeltà*) and ours has chosen the loyalty to reason and history. In virtue of this choice, when the reason we possess appears too narrow in front of new problems of life and history, we are compelled to consciously choose a broader and more human reason. We should never disavow the type of loyalty in which we are culturally and historically inserted. Our civilization has chosen loyalty to reason and history: not in the dogmatic sense of a choice which took place once and for all in a given era, but in the sense of a choice, which is always called into questioned anew, tried and re-tried, modified and corrected, or even reinterpreted in new light as the particular historical situations gradually change.[89]

This dialectical conception of loyalty as something that is not a dogmatic choice that has been taken once and for all, but rather a continuous commitment to choose in light of changing circumstances ultimately culminates in the "ethos of transcendence," which de Martino developed in the final years and months of his life.

89 De Martino, *Magia e civiltà*, 9–10.

CHAPTER 7

The Ethos of Transcendence (1965–1977): Decision and the Moral Imperative as Anticipatory Response to Postmodernism

1 The Philosophical Afterlife of *The End of the World*: Enzo Paci's Existentialist Historicism and the Moral Imperative Grounded in the Contemporaneity of History

Since de Martino passed away in 1965, after a short but serious illness, he was never able to complete his ambitious project about the apocalypse that he envisioned since the beginning of the 1960s. Instead, his results were collected in the form of references, notes, and outlines, before being published by Angelo Brelich, his colleague at the University of Rome, and Clara Gallini, one of his last collaborators at the University of Cagliari. Initially, the posthumous publication of de Martino's notes in the form of *The End of the World* in 1977 gave rise to primarily critical voices that not only questioned the radical rupture with the Southern Period, but also reprimanded him for a lack of clarity during his final years. The best example of this tendency is Vittorio Lanternari's "Between Historicism and Ontology" (1978), in which he charged de Martino's final work of being marked by "ambiguities and internal contradictions."[1] Giovanni Jervis (1933–2009), one of the most important Italian psychiatrists and close associate during these last years, likewise noted that the extensive research on desks and in texts, rather than on the ground, were detrimental to his thinking due to the lack "of everyday cases, of forms of life, of the world of life, of human concreteness."[2]

More recently, however, the "crude (*incondite*) and medleyed (*zibaldoniche*)"[3] pages of de Martino's "fascinating laboratory of research"[4] have slowly but

1 Vittorio Lanternari, "Ernesto de Martino fra storicismo e ontologismo," *Studi storici* 19, no. 1 (1978): 191.

2 A personal email by Jervis is cited by his student. Massimo Marraffa, "Introduzione. Giovanni Jervis: la ricerca della concretezza," in *Contro il sentito dire: psicoanalisi, psichiatria e politica*, by Giovanni Jervis, ed. Massimo Marraffa (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2014), XXXIV.

3 Giuseppe Galasso, "Alcuni percorsi dello storicismo italiano del secolo XX," in *I percorsi dello storicismo italiano nel secondo Novecento*, ed. Maurizio Martirano and Edoardo Massimilla (Napoli: Liguori, 2002), 298.

4 Marcello Massenzio, "Senso della storia e domesticità del mondo," in *Ernesto De Martino: un'etnopsichiatria della crisi e del riscatto*, ed. Roberto Beneduce, Simona Taliani, and Giordana Charuty (Milano: Il saggiatore, 2015), 39.

steadily been recovered as a philosophical treasure trove with a broader scope than he himself would have imagined.[5] One of the most relevant aspects of *The End of the World*, which has since been republished in Italian (2002), and reedited in an entirely new version in French (2016),[6] is de Martino's intuition that postmodernism can be seen as a portent of the apocalypse of Western civilization. Specifically, his final reflections warn that the cultural-discursive paradigm is nothing less than "a mask for a limitless abdication,"[7] which brings with it the risk of an "apocalypse without *eschaton*." This "postmodern" sense of an ending, according to de Martino was the apocalypse "without *eschaton*" because it is a crisis that no longer gives way to a palingenetic opening towards a new future but leads instead to inevitable collapse, destruction, and destabilization. In this sense, it can be regarded as the most radical consequence of the modernization, secularization, and scientification that unfolded over the previous centuries. Whereas earlier civilizations operated along the lines of mythical and ritual conceptions of time, marked by cyclical temporality according to which the end of the world inaugurated a new beginning, in the Western world of the twentieth century a new type of apocalypse emerged on the horizon. De Martino was profoundly aware of both the immeasurable value and the tremendous risk involved in the Western *telos*. A culture that is premised on autonomous human actions and choices without metahistorical narratives knows no limits while simultaneously always being exposed to the possibility of its ending. In order to clarify what can be described as productive and unproductive forms of the apocalypse, de Martino introduces a distinction between the end of "*the* world," and the end of "*a* world."

> There is nothing pathological about the end of "a" world. On the contrary, it is a wholesome experience connected to the historicity of the human condition. The world of childhood ends and that of adolescence starts; the world of adolescence ends and that of maturity starts; the world of maturity ends and that of old age starts. With the nuptials, in our society, the newlyweds usually abandon their families and start a new life that

5 Galasso, *Croce, Gramsci e altri storici*; Andrea Binazzi, "Ernesto de Martino," *Belfagor* 6 (1969): 678–93; Cases, "Introduzione." However, it is noteworthy that the great historians of Italian philosophy have failed to mention the work of de Martino. Eugenio Garin, *Cronache di filosofia italiana* (Bari: Laterza, 1966); Antonio Santucci, *Esistenzialismo e filosofia italiana* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1967).

6 Ernesto De Martino, *La fin du monde: essai sur les apocalypses culturelles*, ed. Giordana Charuty, Daniel Fabre, and Marcello Massenzio (Paris: EHESS, 2016). This impression of de Martino as a philosopher has further been reinforced by Roberto Pàstina's publication of de Martino's most sophisticated notes in this realm, which appeared as *Philosophical Writings* in 2005. Ernesto De Martino, *Scritti filosofici*, ed. Roberto Pàstina (Bologna: Il mulino, 2005).

7 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 281.

> involves the birth of a new world. It is a mixed feeling of tenderness and melancholy that clouds the happiness during the celebration of the new bond and especially at the moment of the definitive detachment. When the people we loved, who were lively and vital parts of our world, are taken from us by death, [...] it seems not only that they vanish with their worlds, but also with ours. Sometimes, the strain is enormous to overcome the crisis of grief and to slowly start up again a new world without them. [In other instances], an age of freedom ends and a period of servitude starts. As much as the loss of the world, in which we were free, may be intolerable and we seek out death, the crisis is overcome (*superata*) as long as only a little margin of recovery (*ripresa*) remains—such as the little imperceptible margin that all those who were able to survive the German extermination camps could preserve. Thus, the end of "a" world is part of the order of human cultural history. It is the end of "the" world, inasmuch as the actual experience of the ending of any possible world, which constitutes the radical risk.[8]

In the final years of his life, as de Martino grappled with the apocalypse without *eschaton*, he sought solutions by growing his philosophy into new directions. He not only continued to draw on Croce's historicism, but also on the existentialist philosophy of Enzo Paci (1911–1976).[9] The two thinkers knew each other well and Paci wrote a review of de Martino's *The World of Magic* already shortly after its publication in 1948; inserting it within the fold of existentialist thinking.[10] Later, they formed part of the core writers involved in the early years of Alberto Mondadori's *Il Saggiatore* publishing house, before Paci came to be "de Martino's most important interlocutor" during the 1960s.[11] Unsurprisingly, when de Martino died in 1965, the philosopher was amongst the first voices of commemoration to be heard on the radio.[12] Just how deep de Martino's appreciation for existentialist thought had grown by that time is also

8 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 630.

9 Sasso, *Ernesto de Martino fra religione e filosofia*, 363. The most abundant reflections on Paci are to be found throughout de Martino's *Philosophical Writings*, but there are also some references in *The End of the World.* De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 444, 642ff.

10 Enzo Paci, *Il nulla e il problema dell'uomo* (Torino: Taylor, 1950).

11 Roberto Pàstina, "Introduzione," in *Scritti filosofici*, ed. Roberto Pàstina (Bologna: Il mulino, 2005), VIII.

12 The transmission took place in 1965, shortly after de Martino's death. Enzo Paci was the moderator and Carlo Levi, Diego Carpitella, and Giovanni Jervis the commentators. It has recently been published: Enzo Paci et al., "Dibattito su Emesto de Martino," in *Panorami e spedizioni. Le trasmissioni radiofoniche del 1953–54*, by Ernesto De Martino, ed. Luigi M. Lombardi Satriani and Letizia Bindi (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2002), 131–73.

demonstrated by Vittoria de Palma's emotional account of her partner's passing on the 6th of May, 1965 at the San Camillo hospital in Rome. There, so she tells us, Ernesto asked for the journal *Aut Aut* on his deathbed, unable to read, he lamented the lack of light in the hospital room shortly before expiring.[13] *Aut Aut*, invoking the existential question of "either/or," is the most famous Italian journal dedicated to existentialist philosophy and was founded by none other than Enzo Paci in 1951.

As for Paci, he was another one of those thinkers, who desired to integrate new philosophical influences—in his particular case existentialist philosophy—with the historicist thinking of Benedetto Croce.[14] Of course, the relationship between these giants of Italian philosophy was anything but harmonious. As Roberts puts it, existentialists like Paci criticized Croce for neglecting individual subjectivity in favor of a positive and optimistic "faith in the overarching rationality of history."[15] By contrast, Croce belittled the existentialists for "dwelling on anxiety," arguing that it leads to "morbid self-preoccupation as opposed to [...] responsible, history-making action."[16] This being said, Croce was not immune to crisis and may not have been as serene of a thinker as many commentators have made him out to be. Consider, for instance, *The History of Europe* (1932), in which he explicitly acknowledged the radical rupture brought about by modernity as it moved away from discerning "life as idyllic [...] and hedonistic" to embrace it in its "dramatic, [...] active, and creative" dimensions.[17] In this context, we could again draw on the trope of the earthquake in order to point to deeper layers of affinity between existentialists and Croce. Rizi and Moss, for example, have sensitively argued that the hours buried under the rubble, hearing the pleading cries of his dying father, only to be rescued with severe injuries and to find out that he was orphaned at the age of seventeen, left a lasting mark on Croce's thinking.[18] After emerging out of the ruins of the hotel in Casamìcciola, where he was spending his family summer vacation, Benedetto surfaced as an individual marked by personal crisis, consistent fascination with death, and depressive streaks.

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13 De Martino, *Vita di Gennaro Esposito, Napoletano*, 29.

14 Amedeo Vigorelli, *L'esistenzialismo Positivo Di Enzo Paci : Una Biografia Intellettuale (1929–1950)* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1987).

15 Roberts, *Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy*, 74–76.

16 Roberts, *Nothing but History*, 100.

17 Croce, *Storia d'Europa nel secolo decimonono*, 20.

18 Myra E. Moss, *Benedetto Croce Reconsidered: Truth and Error in Theories of Art, Literature, and History* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1987), 6–7; Fabio Fernando Rizi, *Benedetto Croce and Italian Fascism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 13–14. Croce's own account of the events are to be found in Benedetto Croce, *Contributo alla critica di me stesso* (Napoli: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1918).

From a socio-cultural perspective, as well, existentialism gradually became a force to be reckoned with. While existentialist thinkers initially started out marginalized on the edge of a philosophical spectrum, dominated by the towering figure of anti-fascist thought, they gained momentum after the Second Word War.[19] Paci was particularly popular because he succeeded at generating a dialogue between two opposed positions. On the one hand, he encouraged his readers to break out of the idealism of Croce by embracing some of the sensibilities of existentialism, a tradition that prides itself of courageously "looking into the face of the irrational, passion and hunger, the dangerous, the precarious, the uncertain, the bad and horror, the nothing and death."[20] On the other hand, Paci drew on Croce to critique the German existentialism of the likes of Martin Heidegger for its nihilistic orientation. He explicitly invited his students to follow a Crocean spirit in order to "liberally found one's own finiteness and actualize one's own essence," for man "is himself to the extent that he is faithful to himself: his existing (*esistere*) is his deciding (*decidersi*)."[21]

De Martino was deeply inspired by Paci's approach to Crocean philosophy. For him too, Croce was a "solid bastion,"[22] which allowed him to "conquer new intellectual territories,"[23] and to "bring the manifold that is otherwise hard to manage back to a unity, to reduce a plurality of languages into a discursive unity."[24] In the notes to *The End of the World*, de Martino acknowledged that it was "necessary to return to the old Croce, discerning the positive from the negative to reinterpret the theme of the distinction of that which is the most vital and true that it contains."

> Croce has taught us that the problem of being is the problem of the distinct operative powers and that outside of this distinction there was nothing else but disintegration. […] After Croce, it was without a doubt necessary to descend once again into the morass of disintegration. However, not to be swallowed up by it to glorify its threatening waters, but to pull ourselves out from it and to give back new force to a theme

19 Rocco Rubini, *The Other Renaissance: Italian Humanism between Hegel and Heidegger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 147–57; Romolo Runcini, "I cavalieri della paura," *Passato e presente. Rivista di storia contemporanea* 16/17 (1960): 2182–83.

20 Enzo Paci, *Esistenzialismo e storicismo* (Milano: Mondadori, 1950), 33.

21 Paci, *Il nulla e il problema dell'uomo*, 33.

22 Mancini, "Postface," 477–78.

23 Carlo Ginzburg, "Genèses de La fin du monde de de Martino," *Gradhiva*, no. 23 (2016): 201.

24 Carla Pasquinelli, "Quel nomade di de Martino," *La ricerca folklorica*, no. 13 (April 1, 1986): 57–58.

> that should not be lost: Being and valorization, existence and transcendence, crisis of the beyond and risk of the nothing, this is the theme.[25]

One of the most important impulses for de Martino's final contribution, a moralistic principle of decision-taking that he defined as the "ethos of transcendence," likely came from Croce's idea of the contemporaneity of history. For the idealist philosopher, already in *History: Its Theory and Practice* (1917), the contemporaneity of history manifested in an "interest in life," for the "development of culture. Only an interest of the present life," so Croce argued, "can make us investigate a past fact."[26] Demonstrating his relentless fidelity to this maxim, de Martino also repeatedly referenced Croce's *History As the Story of Liberty* (1938), arguing that every historical inquiry is always an exploration of the historical situation for better understanding the present moment.[27]

From Croce, de Martino adopted the principle of the contemporaneity of history, but also learned about the continued need to engage in the drama of human history through commitment, decision, and action. In the abovementioned book, published shortly before the outbreak of WWII, Croce discussed moral or ethical will at length. Describing it as a category that comprised the volition of a universal goal, he argued that it expresses itself in political liberty. As Myra Moss notes, "with his description of ethical will, Croce's inventory of the four fundamental activities of consciousness, their interrelations and representations became complete." Even though "intuitions [...] remained autonomous and pure concepts or categories included them in the concrete universality of their conceptual representations," Croce also insisted that "ethical volition, in turn, stimulates new intuitions, which, however, do not explicitly include the former in their expressions."[28] This being said, for the optimistic historicism of Croce, it was vital that the circle could be conceived as an ever-upward moving spiral. It is here that the moral will received its distinctive importance as it was to ensure that humans lived in ever greater degrees of political liberty. Liberty, so Moss summarizes, "had to be recognized, fought for, and won."[29] Croce argued that "moral activity" (*attività morale*) was not just one category amongst many others, but the "struggle against evil" (*la*

25 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 697–98.

26 Benedetto Croce, *Teoria e storia della storiografia* (Bari: Laterza, 1917), 14.

27 De Martino, *Sud e Magia*, 183; De Martino, *La terra del rimorso*, 17.

28 Myra E. Moss, "Benedetto Croce, Historian-Philosopher: Is History Autobiography?," *Bollettino Filosofico* 28 (2013): 256.

29 Moss, 256.

lotta contro il male), whose task it is to oppose the "fragmentation of the spiritual unity" (*fragmentatione dell'unità spirituale*).[30]

In the last ten years of his life, so Silvia Mancini noted, de Martino's ontological conception of humanity, which dominated his earlier writings like *The World of Magic*, was replaced with an ethical, formal, and spiritual model of thinking.[31] The overwhelming presence of terms such as "decision" (*decisione*), "transcendence" (*trascendimento*), "courage" (*corraggio*), or "ethos" (*ethos*) all point to this moralistic turn in de Martino's mature thought. As Giuseppe Galasso put it, despite the fact that "the existentialist thematic seems to assume [...] a greater resonance and that the danger of the existential dissolution seems to be amplified in terms of a collective drama," it would be an error to understand him as an "intellectual of crisis."[32] De Martino, in fact, was answering what Roberts called Croce's "call to action, a charge of responsibility," as the "ever 'richer' evils" that "come to be as the world grows," provoke consistently a "new ethical response."[33]

2 Impossible Nostalgia and the Anticipatory Analysis of the Discursive Turn

As I have argued in chapter 5, the path that led our civilization along the so-called "cultural turn" must be understood as a less curvy road than commonly assumed as there exists a clear continuity between cultural relativism and the earlier insider-phenomenological approach. Of course, it would be wrong to speak of a complete identity of the Geertzian cultural-discursive paradigm and the German or Boasian conception of culture. For instance, it is well known that while the early science of hermeneutics represented an apologetic attempt at interpreting biblical texts,[34] Geertzian interpretative anthropology moved beyond these theological origins. This type of thinking "no longer presupposes explicitly religious metaphors and concerns in its disquisitions."[35] Instead, so

30 Benedetto Croce, *La storia come pensiero e come azione* (Bari: Laterza, 1938), 50–52.

31 Mancini, "Postface," 536–42. A similar observation is to be found in Gambardella who calls him a "philosopher of ethics." Fabiana Gambardella, "Book Review: Ernesto de Martino. La fine del mondo.," *Scienza e Filosofia*, no. 8 (2012): 298.

32 Galasso, *Croce, Gramsci e altri storici*, 310.

33 Roberts, *Historicism and Fascism in Modern Italy*, 204.

34 Burkhard Gladigow, "Friedrich Schleiermarcher (1768–1834)," in *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft: von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade*, ed. Axel Michaels (München: Beck, 1997), 17–28.

35 Lawson and McCauley, "Crisis of Conscience, Riddle of Identity," 213.

it has been argued, "it has provided historians of religions with a new guiding metaphor, namely, 'The Text.'"[36] Nonetheless, it must be noted that the centrality of the term "Text," intentionally capitalized in the account of Lawson and McCauley, points to an important parallel between the object of study of the insider-phenomenological and the cultural-discursive scholars. Indeed, amongst latter, the text is oftentimes imbued with an almost religious dimension that strongly resembles the fascination with religious experience of the former current. Geertz, for example, not only identified culture with texts to be read, but also emphasized the essentially religious nature of culture. While religion was admittedly only one part of his cultural system, Geertz "took a keen interest in religion."[37] Every time he was setting out for his ethnographic explorations—whether this be in Indonesia or in Morocco—Geertz identified religious symbols and beliefs as *the* marking trait of his studies of their cultures. Unsurprisingly, the books resulting from these ethnographic encounters carry such titles as *The Religion of Java* (1960) or *Islam Observed* (1968).

Furthermore, it is hardly a coincidence that Geertz offered one of his most concise definitions of culture in an essay entitled "Religion as a Cultural System." It is here that he spoke of culture as a "pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."[38] Masuzawa, commenting on this very passage, has noted that one of Geertz's "implicit but obvious assumption here is that the term 'culture,' understood as a system of meaning, is more or less interchangeable with 'a tradition,' 'a religious tradition,' or simply, 'a religion.'"[39] Similarly, Marc Augé has pointed to the fact that such a conception of culture has much in common with the Romantic-nostalgic versions explored in earlier chapters of this study, as it seems to be "postulating a radical difference between societies characterized by 'meaning,' 'code,' 'territoriality,' and exchange, on the one hand, and societies (such as our own) of abstraction, of 'axiomatics,' of incommunicability, and accumulation, on the other."[40] The implicit nexus between culture, religion, and language has also been pointed out by Andrei Znamenski, who noted that amongst American anthropologists, the German model of autonomous cultures led to a consistent focus on

36 Lawson and McCauley, 213.

37 Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 341.

38 Geertz, "Religion As a Cultural System," 89.

39 Tomoko Masuzawa, "Culture," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 80.

40 Marc Augé, *The Anthropological Circle: Symbol, Function, History*, trans. Martin Thom (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 83.

"language and spirituality or, in other words, on the factors that made cultures distinct."[41] Finally, Talal Asad also noted that Geertz's program for religion and culture brought with it the danger of opening up a "logical space for defining the essence of religion," by speaking of "two separate levels."[42]

Upon final analysis, the creation of this extrinsic, stable, and independent realm of symbols allowed thinkers of the discursive turn to find "support for their convictions about the immunity of features of religious experience."[43] The turn to "discourse" and "text" brings with it a connotation that resembles strongly that of the "holy" and the "numinous," which we encountered in the insider-phenomenological approach. Like the realm of the *sui generis* sacred, the realm of the text is cut off from socio-political reality, autonomous, privileged over the historical world, and regarded to be the ultimate source of meaning. The radical alterity, which the insider-phenomenological approach located in cultures, religions, states of consciousness, and so forth, appears to have been transported into the domain of the text within the cultural-discursive paradigm.

Now, if the cultural-discursive paradigm's nostalgia for alterity is ultimately analogous to that of thinkers like Otto or Eliade, then why does de Martino argue that it inaugurates a radically new type of ending, an apocalypse without *eschaton*? The answer is simple: The irredeemable end of the world is marked by a combination of two traits, in which the second one is a postmodern invention whose outlines were only adumbrated by the time of de Martino's death. On the one hand, the aforementioned persistent nostalgia for alterity, which can be regarded as a constant throughout much of the twentieth century; on the other hand, a profound doubt in the very possibility of such a true encounter with this alterity.

This doubt in the possibility of encountering alterity is primarily a result of the linguistic turn, which organically grew in parallel with the preoccupation

41 Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive*, 60. Similar comments have been made by Georg Iggers, who, in his analysis of the famous essay on "The Balinese Cockfight," demonstrated that Geertz not only saw culture as a semiotic system but that this system is also remarkably "integrated and stable, forming a whole." Iggers reminds his readers that "Geertz does not see the culture within the framework of social processes taking place in Balinese society; nor does he consider social divisions and social conflicts." Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, 125.

42 Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category," in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, by Talal Asad (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 47.

43 Lawson and McCauley, "Crisis of Conscience, Riddle of Identity," 213.

with culture.[44] Geertz's landmark study, *The Interpretation of Culture*, consists of essays written primarily in the 1960s and proposes not only a relativistic conception of cultures, but also a symbolic approach, which might be best articulated in the famous definition of culture as "webs of significance [man] himself has spun."[45] In his theoretically most revolutionary work, Geertz argued that "the culture of people is an ensemble of texts," which should be studied by means of a semiotic and interpretative approach.[46] This method, which he called "thick description," would "aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them."[47] As Hinrich Seeba has recently argued, Geertz's textualization of culture is therefore also linked to more radical forms of "fictional symbolizations of reality," which came to prominence in the literary turn.[48]

In discussing the linguistic turn, it is not only commonplace to mention continental influences like Michel Foucault[49] and Mikhail Bakhtin,[50] but also another American book that belongs to its canon, namely Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973). White's work, like Geertz's *Interpretation of Cultures*, published in 1973, demonstrates how the cultural-discursive paradigm had almost universal appeal in the humanities. In fact, unlike Geertz, Said, Fabian, or the Subaltern Studies Group, White was a historian by profession. White made two arguments to explain why language is relevant to the humanities. First, he believed that science does not have a direct and unmediated access to objective reality. Instead,

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44 Gabrielle M. Spiegel, ed., *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn* (London: Routledge, 2005).

45 Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture," 5.

46 Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 452.

47 Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture," 24.

48 Hinrich C. Seeba, "New Historicism und Kulturanthropologie: Ansätze eines deutsch-amerikanischen Dialogs," in *Historismus am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts: eine internationale Diskussion*, ed. Gunter Scholtz (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1997), 54.

49 Foucault is famous for having called attention to knowledge as power, to systems of domination and resistance, and to the role played by discourse. Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966); Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969); Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

50 Bakhtin is famous for inspiring literary readings of ethnography as a multivocal conversation and dialogue. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965); Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, trans. Vadim Liapunov and Kenneth Brostrom (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

our conception of the world is always embedded within structures of language that shape reality. As a consequence, so one proponent of this approach put it, "all the human sciences" become "interpretive by [their] very nature."[51] Second, since language is structuring our interaction with reality, the neutrality of the researcher is just as illusory as the objectivity of reality. This brings us to the most radical form of thinking induced by the linguistic turn, namely the blurring of boundaries between science and literature, history and poetry, reality and fiction. These ideas are not only prominent in White's writings but also find expressions in the works of other French and American literary theorists during the 1960s and 70s, such as Roland Barthes,[52] Paul de Man, Paul Veyne,[53] Michel de Certeau,[54] and Jacques Derrida. The latter's famous axiom, which states that "there is nothing outside of the text" ("*il n'y a pas de hors texte*") might just be the most concise way to sum up the literary turn's convictions.[55]

De Martino saw the first indications of this type of thinking already during the final years of his life. He invoked the term "language" (*linguaggio*) to warn that communication can become impossible because it is premised on an "encoded language (*linguaggio cifrato*) of which we have lost the key."[56] In other passages contained in his posthumously published work, de Martino explicitly cautioned that language can incite the collapse of the world and our relationship to it:

> The apocalypse of the crisis is born from the progressive limiting of the horizons of the mundane workable (*operabile*) and provides testimony of a fall, a collapse, an estrangement (*estraniazione*), a chaoticization (*caoticizzazione*), an annihilation, or even an explosion of the real world. It is also a isolating (*isolarsi*), a closing (*chiudersi*), an intimizing (*intimizzarsi*) of the self. The language (*linguaggio*), in the broadest sense of an acoustic or visual sign of the relationship "I-world," tends to follow this collapse. Actually, language becomes itself collapsing (*crollante*) with the terminal perspective of silence and incommunicability (*incomunicabilità*)

51 Robert Darnton, "Preface to the Revised Edition of The Great Cat Massacre," in *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, by Robert Darnton (1984; repr., New York: Basic Books, 2009), xvii.

52 Roland Barthes, "Le Discours de l'histoire," *Information* (*International Social Science Council*) 6, no. 4 (August 1, 1967): 63–75.

53 Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1971).

54 Michel de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

55 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (1967; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.

56 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 73.

> and no longer an intersubjective invocation. The sickness of the objects, the absurd consciousness, the lack of sense in the world, nausea, and so forth.[57]

Because this new crisis was born in a society that had full awareness of its own ability and responsibility, its autonomy and independence, its freedom and potential, it was not only an apocalypse without *eschaton* but also a crisis that was largely self-destructive (*autodistruttiva*). De Martino found evidence for this type of self-sabotaging throughout twentieth-century culture and dedicated his final years to study the sense of an ending in various contexts of his own world.

> The "crisis" in the figurative arts, music, poetry, philosophy, and the ethical-political life of the West is a crisis to the extent that the rupture with a theological plan of history and with the sense which derived from it—the plan of providence, the plan of evolution, the dialectic plan of the idea—becomes no longer a stimulus for a new effort of descent into chaos and of *anabasis* towards order, but a fall into the hells without return.[58]

In order to bridge this chapter's anachronistic chasm, the inevitable gap between de Martino's analysis of the apocalypse in the early 1960s and the rise of postmodernism in the decades that follow, it might be useful to recall a distinction introduced by Jonathan Boyarin, a contemporary scholar of Jewish thought. Boyarin describes a strikingly similar difference between "the 'historical' ancient apocalypses," which "fundamentally include an aspect of judgment leading to reward and punishment," on the one hand, and an "apocalypse without apocalypse," on the other. More pertinently, Boyarin follows de Martino by associating this second type of crisis with "the postmodern turn," by describing it as "the ultimate evacuation of any hope in meaning."[59] Even though de Martino does not yet use the term postmodern, his description of the apocalypse without *eschaton* reads strikingly similar. Let us look at another example from his posthumously published notes:

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57 De Martino, 335.

58 De Martino, 471.

59 Jonathan Boyarin, "At Last, All the Goyim," in *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 43.

> In the religious life of humanity, the topic of the end of the world appears in various eschatological contexts, that is to say as a periodic cosmic palingenesis or as definitive redemption (*riscatto*) of the inherent evils of mundane existence. [...] In contrast to this religious reshaping (*riplasmazione*), the present cultural circumstance experiences the theme of the end outside of every religious horizon of salvation; as naked and desperate catastrophe of the mundane, the domestic, the territorialized (*appaesato*), the meaningful (*significante*), and the workable (*operabile*). [It does so] with a diabolic flavor for describing the dismantling (*disfarsi*) of that which is set up (*configurato*), the de-territorialization (*spaesarsi*) of the territorialized (*appaesato*), the loss of meaning of the meaningful (*significante*), the inoperability (*inoperabilità*) of the workable (*operabile*).[60]

As is well known, the literary turn received its most dominant expression in post-structuralist theory, which can be interpreted as a direct response to the binary oppositions that dominated the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the French theory of thinkers like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, or Gilles Deleuze emphasized aspects of play, hybridity, and ambiguity that have found no place in understandings of reality of the early twentieth century. Amongst the historians of religion, it was Russell T. McCutcheon, who tried to define postmodernism and its relationship to language in similar terms:

> Although one would be hard-pressed to offer one definitive definition of postmodernism, we can at least suggest that it is a way of looking at the world which emphasizes playfulness and differences over rules and sameness; it stresses the metaphoric and slippery nature of language over the modernist, objective, factual understandings of how communication proceeds; it addresses the manner in which meaning is not something possessed by a word, an action, or an object as much as it is the product of a series of relations which comprise the word or the object.[61]

Equipped with this understanding of the literary turn that marked postmodern thought, it is now possible to offer a more definitive rationale for de Martino's fears of the end. While both paradigms are marked by fragmentation and separation, the proponents of the insider-phenomenological approach remain

60 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 468.

61 McCutcheon, *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, 9.

convinced that they will find some sort of unity and an overarching model for reality, whereas the adherents of the cultural-discursive model have given up that belief and simply choose to embrace the chaos.[62] To say it in the words of Wolfgang Kämmerer, "while back then the relativization generally provoked worries and caused a loss of orientation (*Orientierungslosigkeit*) even amongst the explicit supporters of historical thinking, today many advocates of postmodernity downright celebrate relativization."[63] Evidence for this impossibility of ever fulfilling one's nostalgia and longing can also be found in later manifestations of the cultural-discursive paradigm, such as the *Writing Culture Movement*. Consider, for example, the following lines from the Prologue of Clifford's *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997).

> These essays are written under the sign of ambivalence, a permanently fraught hope. They discover, over and over, that the good news and the bad news presuppose each other. It is impossible to think of transnational possibilities without recognizing the violent disruptions that attend 'modernization,' with its expanding markets, armies, technologies, and media. Whatever improvements or alternatives may emerge do so against this grim backdrop. Moreover, unlike Marx, who saw that the possible good of socialism depended historically on the necessary evil of capitalism, I see no future resolution to the tension—no revolution or dialectical negation of the negation.[64]

De Martino, passing away more than three decades before these words were written, anticipated the cognitive impossibility inherent in the cultural-discursive paradigm with remarkable prescience. For him, the threat of the apocalypse was the result of a failure of communication, a logical consequence of "incommunicability" (*incomunicabilità*). As Carlo Ginzburg has recently noted, for de Martino, "the collapse of the world echoes the collapse of language."[65] Similarly, Paolo Virno, who apprises de Martino as "one of the few original philosophers twentieth-century Italy,"[66] concluded that his con-

62 Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 44.

63 Kämmerer, *Friedrich Meinecke und das Problem des Historismus*, 300.

64 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 10.

65 Ginzburg, "Genèses de La fin du monde de de Martino," 207.

66 Paolo Virno, "Natural-Historical Diagrams: The 'new Global' Movement and the Biological Invariant," in *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, ed. Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano (Melbourne: Re.press, 2009), 140.

ception of the apocalypse was ultimately linguistic and semantic in nature as one of its primary symptoms is "a progressive indetermination of speech."[67]

If de Martino was critical of the cultural turn, denouncing its abdication of our cultural homeland for a cultural alterity, he was much more severe in his condemnation of the linguistic turn. In order to actualize de Martino's distinctive reading of these two turns, it might be useful to recall the typology of modern nostalgia introduced by Svetlana Boym, who distinguishes between "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia. If the former is profoundly rooted in a conviction of promoting "truth and tradition"—rather than nostalgia—the latter "dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity."[68] Dennis Walder, in his *Postcolonial Nostalgias*, similarly notes that "restorative nostalgia focuses on *nostos*, and tries in spite of history to reconstruct the lost home, or homeland; whereas reflective nostalgia thrives on *algia*, the longing itself, but 'wistfully, ironically, desperately'."[69] This new type of nostalgia had dramatic consequences for our understanding of culture. In the French context, where the linguistic turn emerged with its greatest vigor, the German *Kultur* was no longer the locus of revitalizing escape into cultural alterity, but rather the relentless variation of permutating messages and endless discursive communication. Culture became signification without meaning, structure without content, language without history. Put differently, the key irregularity between the ontological and the cultural-discursive paradigms is one of self-awareness: Whereas the first hangs on to some model of ontological reality, albeit constructed by a constant struggle, the second paradigm distances itself from that realism by positioning itself on the level of the "linguistic event," as a deeper reality is not accessible anyway.[70]

If the "restorative" nostalgia of historicism gave birth to a whole series of—oftentimes problematic—palingenetic currents of thought that I summarized as the insider-phenomenological approach, the "impossible nostalgia" of the cultural-discursive paradigm has abandoned any hope for a new totalizing narrative. Thus, the crisis of 1965 was qualitatively different from that of 1918 as de Martino came to realize that the sense of belonging to a particular "village" or "country" (*paese*) was no longer an option. Put differently, the impossible nostalgia of postmodernism was so destructive because it committed two errors

67 Virno, 140.

68 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xviii.

69 Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation and Memory* (London: Routledge, 2011), 11.

70 Smith, *Relating Religion*, 274.

simultaneously: First, it abdicated our culture out of a nostalgic longing for another *ethnos*; second, it gave up any hope at the recovery of this cultural alterity that could reinvigorate our own culture. What was so radically new about the apocalypse without *eschaton* is a type of double bind: A longing for renewal of cultural energy that was ultimately irredeemable.

3 The Ethos of Transcendence of Life in Value as an Anticipatory Critique of the Discursive Turn

3.1 *Finding Value in Concreteness, Practice, and Morality Instead of Meaning, Interpretation, and Play*

De Martino's response to this most abysmal of all crises is the "transcendental ethos of transcendence of life in value" (*ethos trascendentale del trascendimento della vita nel valore*). As its name already indicates, his final writings form the silhouette of a type of moral philosophy, whose intention is to transcend the crisis of meaninglessness by creating new values. In light of recent interpretations of his work, it is imperative to repeat that the Italian thinker, despite his growing sensibility for language, perspective, and the voice of the ethnographer, stood far away from the cultural-discursive model of thinking, particularly its tendency to associate reality and texts. In an article entitled "Sleepiness, Hunger, and Death Under the Stars" (1952), de Martino wrote about the dramatic scenes during his ethnographic encounters in the Italian South in direct juxtaposition to what it means to work on texts: "All of our persuasions have been broadly confirmed and deepened in the course of our journey, acquiring, through the human contacts that resulted, this concreteness (*concretezza*), which no written text could ever provide us."[71] In a similar vein, Roberto Alciati recently suggested that "eating, drinking, or possessing clothes and a house cannot be if we do not presuppose a transcendence." "Unlike in the traditional Kantian meaning," so Alciati continues, "the Demartinian transcendental is not a gnoseological characteristic—that is the essential condition of possibility that allows for the attaining of necessary *a priori* knowledge—but rather a primordial impulse that allows the human being to detach itself from nature."[72]

Similarly, while pundits like Gallini are right in noting that the tarantula must be understood as a cultural or mythical-ritual symbol, rather than simply

71 De Martino, "Sonno, fame, e morte sotto le stelle," 12.

72 Alciati, Roberto. "La religione civile di Ernesto de Martino." Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni 85, no. 1 (2019): 285–317. p. 298.

a biological organism, de Martino would have hardly agreed that the festivals associated with the spider-symbolism should be seen as texts. *The Land of Remorse*, for instance, is not concerned with the realm of the symbolism of the spider, but rather with the destiny of the people living through these ritualistic practices of possession and exorcism. This becomes particularly obvious in moments when he focuses on specific destinies of particular young women, such as the case of Maria of Nardò,[73] whose father had died when she was a teenager. Raised in poverty by her aunt and uncle, she fell in love with a boy that the family did not approve of. Maria's life was a drama, which received a mythical and ritual expression in the following years when she was "bitten" by a tarantula spider and felt an impulse to dance. After having been married off to another man, the drama of her personal life received an outlet in her identity as a *tarantata*. She was re-bitten by the spider on a yearly basis, repeated the dance craze, which—accompanied by traditional tarantella music—would culminate in a public "performance" at the local Church. There, she would not only slowly be exorcised from the possessing spider spirit, but also celebrate a sacred marriage to St. Paul, a sort of patron saint of the spider-bitten women. This treatment of tarantism points to a key difference between the cultural-discursive paradigm and de Martino's approach that would only grow more prominent in the last years of his life, namely the move away from language into the realm of practice and action.

Fabrizio Ferrari's claim that, for de Martino, "meaning" and "value" are the same,[74] must be critically re-evaluated. Although it is true that he identified the apocalyptic lack of meaning in semantic terms, de Martino's response is never linguistic in nature. In other words, the "value" that de Martino pursues, does not reveal itself in some sort of "semanticity," or linguistic meaning, but must rather be generated in a realm that is ultimately unaffected by language. "There exists," so the Italian thinker put it in *The End of the World*, "a transcendental principle that renders use (*utilizzazione*) and other valorizations (*valorizzazioni*) intelligible." "This principle," so he elaborated, "is the transcendental ethos of transcendence of life in value," "activity," "ethos, duty-to-be-in-the-world (*dover-essere-nel-mondo*) for value," "the valorizing (*valorizzante*) activity that makes (*fa*) the world, establishes it, and sustains it."[75]

73 De Martino, *La terra del rimorso*, 75ff.

74 Fabrizio M. Ferrari, *Ernesto De Martino on Religion*, 103.

75 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 434. Ferrari's bias for a linguistic conception of de Martino's work is so pervasive that he not only translates *valore* with "meaning," but also uses the terms "signifying" for *valorizzante* and "define" for *fa*.

Armed with this philosophical commitment to the ethos of transcendence, de Martino elaborated an alternative to both the restorative nostalgia of the insider-phenomenological tradition and the impossible nostalgia of the postmodernists. In response to the first, he remained steadfast in his belief that any relativist "critique" of our own culture necessarily requires a profound rootedness within our own cultural identity and its ethnocentric biases. Instead of postmodernism's despair and pessimism in light of the impossibility of true communication, de Martino attributed a much more positive function to this burden of the anthropologist. In the posthumously published notes, we read:

> Without this quest for the challenge of the culturally foreign, without this pungent experience of the scandal raised by the encounter with ciphered humanities, and—most of all—without this guilt and this remorse towards the "separated brother" and the incoherent (*irrelata*) dispersion of cultures on our planet, the humanistic *ethos* of the ethnographic encounter is struck at its roots. It comes to lack the very fundamental condition that inaugurates the most striking task of anthropological research, namely the delicate and laborious interrogation and self-interrogation about the character and the reasons, about the origin, the structure, and the function of the cultural behavior of others.[76]

Borrowing a distinction introduced by Gianni Vattimo, we could contrast the "weak thought" of postmodernism with the "strong thought" of de Martino by basing it primarily on their differing attitudes towards reality and our interaction with it.[77] The Italian philosopher was reluctant to translate the binaries that dominated modernity into hybrids that play themselves out on a textual level. His anthropology did not stand under the banner of something that is symbolic or hermeneutic, but everything that is engaged, political, and practical. It is striking that while anthropologists of the cultural-discursive paradigm move away from politics in response to the guilt of the ethnographic encounter, de Martino continued to be propelled towards political engagement. Thinkers like Geertz see their scholarship as a play of interpreting cultures, with his landmark study promoting a semiotic view of culture, a textual conception of reality, and a hermeneuticist and interpretative outlook on the epistemological orientation of anthropology. The ethos of transcendence, by contrast, involved a transition from language and culture to morality and values.

76 De Martino, 392.

77 Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, *Il pensiero debole* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1983).

Even more radically, while every culture (*ethnos*) has its own particular model of morality (*ethos*), de Martino believed that the ethical imperative cultivated by Western civilization stands out amongst the rest. Accordingly, it is only in the modern West that humanity has gained full awareness of its own historicity and its fundamental role as the creator of reality. In *The End of the World*, de Martino spoke of his culture as the "moral and civil leader (*primato*)" and gave it the responsibility of "cultural *leadership*."[78] In his ethnocentric self-confidence and his emphasis on ethics, de Martino also stands in radical contradistinction to the paradigms of thinking about religion studied in this book. Wasserstrom, for example, notes how historians of religion were reluctant to focus attention on issues of morality. For Scholem, Corbin, and Eliade, he argues, "the *ontical* effectively replaced the *ethical* at the center of intellectual concern."[79] Similar comments have been made by Preus, who writes that the proponents of the insider-phenomenological approach, "in reaction to the eighteenth-century habit of reducing ('true') religion to morality, [...] fixed a theological notion of 'the sacred' that has been very durable and popular until now: essential religion (which strongly implies 'authentic' religion), rooted in an apprehension of 'the holy,' is utterly prior to either conceptual or moral formulation and elaboration."[80]

A different variety of the withdrawal from the territory of ethics can be found in the cultural-discursive paradigm. In this orientation, the recognition that the ethnographic encounter is coextensive with power, domination, and pollution is culminating in a belief that anthropology can never be ethically neutral. As Gavin Flood noted, in the cultural-discursive paradigm, "the question of method [...] merges into the broader philosophical questions of the values inherent within Western culture, of ethical relativism and universalism, and into political questions of dominance and occlusion, especially as articulated in feminist and postcolonial critiques."[81] If cultural relativism is an undeniable accomplishment inasmuch as the ethnographic encounter teaches us that our culture is not the only culture out there, it is problematic because it frequently turns into a philosophical position that can be summed up under the heading "anything goes." This type of position, so the philosopher and social anthropologist Ernest Gellner reminds us, claims that "knowledge or morality outside culture is [...] a chimera."[82]

78 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 397.

79 Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 225.

80 Preus, *Explaining Religion*, 200.

81 Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology*, 195.

82 Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), 73.

3.2 *The Ethos of Transcendence as Dialectical Process: Between Loyalty to the Past and New Valorization in the Present*

As "history to be made," de Martino's science operated both retrospectively and prospectively. Oriented towards our past, science means loyalty and stands for the fact that we can never forget where we belong, as this situational background will impact our perception of the present—whether we want it to or not. In its futural dimension, by contrast, science is the invitation to take a position, to decide, to break with the past, and to make history in the present. It is in this initiative to break with what is given that de Martino's reflections on ethics might actually reveal surprising affinities with one of the greatest exponents of the cultural-discursive paradigm, namely Jacques Derrida. Late in his career, Derrida became increasingly interested in ethical decision-taking as a process that decisively transcends predetermined knowledge. A few months before his death, in an interview with *L'Humanité*, a French daily newspaper with close links to the French Communist Party, Derrida explained:

> [...] if one understands ethics as a system of rules, of moral norms, then I am not proposing a morality. What I am interested in, in fact, are the *aporias* of ethics, its limits. [...] All of this implies a thinking of decision: responsible decision has to endure the experience of the undecidable rather than just crossing over or going over it. If I know what I must do, I do not make a decision, I apply a knowledge, I unfold a program. For there to be a decision, I must not know what to do. [...] The moment of decision, the ethical moment, if you will, is independent from knowledge. It is when "I do not know the right rule" that the ethical question arises.[83]

In terms that remind us of de Martino's imperative to "take sides" (*prendere partito*), Derrida highlighted the importance of the "un-ethical moment of ethics, the moment in which I do not know what to do, when no norms are available to me, when I do not have to have norms available, but when I have to act, take on my responsibilities, take sides (*prendre parti*)."[84] This being said, de Martino's thinking towards the end of his life, infused with a modernist and ethnocentric ethos that is foreign to Derrida's work, maintained a dialectical dynamic between the need to transcend and the maintaining of loyalty to our cultural homeland, which is always already available.

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83 Jérôme-Alexandre Niesberg, "'Jacques Derrida, penseur de l'évènement,'" interview in L'Humanité, January 28, 2004, www.humanit.fr.

84 Niesberg.

> The "world" is always given in its communal totality to be reclaimed in the specificity and the singularity of a valorization. It is always removed in habitual patterns and within this more or less anonymous and socialized experience, it is traced as an intimate and personal figure that emerges out of the one's own valorizing initiative. But the given, the habitual, the obviousness of the world are possible as immediate faithfulness to initiatives of past generations [...]. They are the ground and the homeland upon which the personal task of today is rising. [...] It is only through this anonymous domesticity of the world that it is possible to prepare oneself for its recovery, always reinventing itself in "my" original, singular choices. The individual can "start over" a certain aspect of the world—and he always restarts it as if he were the first man to begin, to be a man for the first time ever—only if all other aspects function momentarily as background. This background, in turn, implicitly includes human meaning, a work of humanization incurred in the obvious domesticity of the environment, a fundamental testimony of togetherness, of quiet workable collectivity extending in space and time.[85]

De Martino illuminates the dialectics of the ethos of transcendence—made up of an oscillation between faithfulness to the past one inherits, on the one hand, and the fresh valorization in the present moment, on the other—through his reflections on walking, which is part of what he described as the "domestication" (*domesticazione*) of the body. On the one hand, "walking in an upright position [...] does not require concentration of conscious attention" because "we are accompanied and sustained by this history and by the efforts, by the research, by the inventions, and by the learning that it entails."[86] On the other hand, walking is an individual practice that needs to be actualized in the present every time we start moving.

> In simply walking, the human body is not given but continuously and completely put into question (*messo in causa*) and reclaimed (*ripreso*)

85 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 648. For another translation see: Alfonso M. Di Nola, "How Critical Was de Martino's 'Critical Ethnocentrism' in Southern Italy?," in *Italy's "Southern Question": Orientalism in One Country*, ed. Jane Schneider (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 162. The idea of the dialectic is central to the argument of Amalia Signorelli, one of the few outspoken critics of the association between de Martino and postmodern thought. She notes that "while, amongst the contemporary neo-relativists, the encounter with the others is theorized in situational and semiotic-communicative terms, in de Martino the encounter is always existential and at the same time dialectic."

86 De Martino, *Scritti filosofici*, 127–28.

> for the purpose of this particular utilization that is the moving over the ground by letting the arms and hands swing freely for other useful (*utilizzatrici*) valorizations. Now, this very particular putting into question and reclaiming, putting in effort (*impegnarsi*) and leaving oneself available (*lasciarsi disponibile*) realizes itself in the upright position in walking. It constitutes a transcending (*trascendimento*) of the body. When one walks, one invokes a technique and readjusts it to the circumstance. The fact that walking is mostly executed "without thinking about it"—with the mind directed elsewhere [...]—does not mean that we are not gradually presentifying our walking-style. It only means that for us, the duty-to-be-there (*doverci essere*) has become a duty (*dovere*) so elementary, a transcending (*trascendimento*) of the body so easy, a discovery so inaugural, to make it possible to be there for other transcendences (*trascendimenti*) and for other discoveries even while we are walking [...]. For example, while we walk, we can also follow the thread of a poetic phantasm or of a thought. Walking is a labor based on value, a labor that—like any other work for value—liberates us from the givenness of the body, putting it into question and reclaiming it, and makes us emerge by virtue of this recovery (*ripresa*).[87]

Walking is thus both an "obvious" practice, grounded in a long implicit history that serves as cultural background and a history which is nonetheless always "picked up every time when humans walk."[88] Appropriately, de Martino also invoked the earthquake trope in these philosophical notes in the years before his death. Discussing the "characteristic gait" of shepherds and farmers, horse riders and men of arms, Maori women and prison inmates, he also remembered his own experiences with his greatest philosophical teacher, Benedetto Croce: "Amongst the personal styles of walking, every one of us remembers the old Croce, with his slow and solemn stride, slightly dragging the leg he fractured in the earthquake of Casamìcciola."[89] While the earthquake posed a great risk for Croce, he survived it and moved beyond it. Not only that, it is precisely because he transcended the catastrophe that he is marked by it for the rest of his life. Although the experience is over, its reverberation has left its imprints on a physical level.

Further, just as the initial crisis reverberated in Croce's physical existence with every step he took, the risk of the crisis of the presence remained a

87 De Martino, 127–28.
88 De Martino, 127–28.
89 De Martino, 130.

continued threat. In this sense, the earthquake and its continued resonance in Croce's gait is comparable to the cultural development, which moved from the crisis of the shaman in the world of magic—birth moment of the self—through Christianity, the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment and so forth. Ultimately, this procession leads into the time of de Martino, during which he regarded the promotion of the ethos of transcendence as the most important goal. However, even then, the presence is not in a safe haven from the crisis of loss as the original *vulnus* is existentially embedded within the fabric of the human psyche and culture. And so, the project of protecting the presence remains a contemporary mission. If the presence is "the first vital human good," de Martino observes in "Religious Phenomenology and Absolute Historicism," it can nonetheless "run the risk of being lost in certain historical conditions."[90] Based on more personal notes from late in his life, we can infer that de Martino also sought to relate religion to the ethos of transcendence. Using the example of a cripple walking on a crutch, he applied his dialectical thinking in such way so as to argue that religion is both something to be overcome and yet something universally necessary.

> If religious life is a technical system that protects from the risk of losing the capacity to be in any possible civil history and that opens up anew (*ridischiude*) the various workings (*vario operare*) that a crisis without horizon would compromise, [then] religious freedom proves to be firmly established in the society in which modern civilization articulates itself. Who would break the crutches of a cripple with the argument that a normal walk does not require crutches? What we need to do is to reduce, as much as possible, the accidents and diseases for which the number of cripples is so high that the request for and use of crutches becomes inevitable. In other words, the challenge could be to replace the means that are the crutches with a more effective orthopedic technique.[91]

The analogy of religion as a crutch that can be gradually replaced with a combination between social prophylaxes and a more sophisticated orthopedic treatment, shows that de Martino, during the 1960s, understood the ethos of transcendence as a post-religious response to the apocalypse. In *The End of the World*, we also encounter a more positive appreciation of our original "homeland" as the warmth of the maternal mother, which is a basic condition that

90 De Martino, "Fenomenologia religiosa e storicismo assoluto," 1995, 59.
91 De Martino, *Vita di Gennaro Esposito, Napoletano*, 25.

we will never forget. Yet even here, this most primordial homeland represents a state of being that can and should be transcended as we grow up.

> The warmth of the maternal mother was the first homeland we experienced and the world appeared for the first time within the confines marked by this contact. Beyond these confines, the possession of our body started to define itself and the affectionate operability of the maternal body extended itself. We conquered our mouth by sucking milk as our lips of nursing children were the first school of being-in-the-world. Then the feeling of the body in the world started to constitute itself through the caresses of a hand that measured its surface, through the reassuring breath, the kissing mouth, the smiling face, the coddling voice of the mother. From then on, our body was destined to become obviously ours and to preserve itself in this obviousness (*ovvietà*) to the extent in which it safeguarded (*custodiva*) the treasure buried by these elementary somatic and cosmogonic memories. From then on, [it also] continued to participate in the diverse and always renewed transcending (*transcendere*) to which the human destiny incessantly calls us.[92]

92 De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, 618.

Conclusion: Let the Earth Shake (Again) or Why Rebirth Must Lead to a New Crisis

In this book, we followed de Martino's life through the tumultuous history of the twentieth century. In so doing, we not only got to know him as a broad thinker with a sheer unbounded curiosity, but we also learned about the ways scholars of religion responded to crisis within Italy and beyond. The first three chapters of this study were concerned with the global crises of the two world wars, the birth of cultural pessimism, and the totalitarian movements intended to bring about political rebirth to a dying continent. Juxtaposing his work to that of Mircea Eliade's politics of nostalgia and Claude Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology, we saw that de Martino was sympathetic to both of these projects while simultaneously transcending them by articulating dialectical visions of civil religion as cultural palingenesis and of shamanic magic as de-historification. The following chapters further reinforced our impression of de Martino as a uniquely innovative thinker. By interpreting his role in the empowerment of the subaltern masses in the Italian South as an expression of the first stirrings of post-colonial anthropology during the 1950s, the study revisited the rise of the cultural-discursive approach in religious studies from an Italian perspective, arguing that de Martino anticipated not only Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques*, but also the work of Clifford Geertz. His ethnographic excursions to the Italian South, where he compassionately narrated the destinies of disenfranchised peasants and widowed women, revealed a sensitive, guilt-ridden, and self-reflexive anthropologist in search of a more respectful type of science, in which the "other" can make his or her voice heard.

At the same time, the final chapters of this book also made it unmistakably clear that de Martino was not simply an anticipator of the cultural-discursive paradigm. On the contrary, his work was more powerful because it anticipated a trenchant critique of post-modern thought. De Martino disparaged the cultural-discursive paradigm as an expression of what he would call the "apocalypse without *eschaton*," the most profound crisis that Western civilization ever faced. Unlike the crisis of the first half of the century, the predicament was no longer one of rupture—of two radically opposed forms of truth—but rather one of utter abdication, a crisis of meaninglessness. The ethnocentric principle of the loyalty to the cultural homeland and the moralistic imperative of the ethos of transcendence laid the foundations for a confident science of

religion that represents an alternative path to the one chosen by the proponents of the cultural-discursive paradigm.

Finally, for readers offended by what seems to be an almost contemptuous ethnocentrism, we should never forget that the ethos of transcendence—the principle allowing Western humanity to walk along its own development—is best envisioned as a dynamic process of thought and action that spirals upward in a circular movement. On the one hand, de Martino envisioned it as a principle that moves civilization forward and upward, an idea that is both grounded in and carries forward the *telos* of Western civilization. On the other hand, since this very *telos* is primed for a transcending and surpassing action, it can never be a linear and forward-facing arrow. The ethos, by encouraging choice, development, and change causes permutations. The ethos of transcendence, thus, carries the danger of crisis within its very core. Ultimately, crisis and decision are codependent as they mutually reinforce each other. Inspired by its original Greek meaning, de Martino recognized that *krisis* requires a "decision" (from *krinein* "decide," "separate"). At the same time, as the Latin etymology of this latter term indicates, any "decision" provokes a "cutting off" (from *de-* "off" + *caedere* "cut"), thus inevitably leading to a new type of crisis. In this sense, de Martino paradoxically suggested that science's most effective means to transcend a crisis is by invoking a new one. Unlike post-colonial, post-structuralist, and post-modern thinkers—whose approach tends to hover in a realm of discourse, hybridity, and third-ness—de Martino took a firm stance in arguing that critical thinking requires a strong cognitive and moral model of truth based on judgment. This decisive stance, so the Italian philosopher argued, represents both a step forward in civilizational development and the inception of a new—potentially productive—crisis.

In 1965, as he was refining his philosophy as moral impulse of transcendence to offer a saving push towards intersubjective values to a civilization that was staring into the abyss of the apocalypse, de Martino fell gravely ill. In the final days before dying of lung cancer in a hospital in the Italian capital of Rome, he offered his last official testimony on religion. In an interview with Cesare Cases, de Martino experimented with a new form of symbolism that corresponds to his ethical imperative, calling the quest for a "secular symbolism" the *Leitmotiv* of his work. According to such a model, crisis and decision are ultimately both "an end" inasmuch as they signify a "separation," and a "new beginning" in the sense that they are motors that work against stasis and stagnation by encouraging movement, development, and growth. At the same time, however, de Martino humbly closed his interview

with an acknowledgment of a deeper fear of "the end," the existential fear that haunts a human being in the face of his or her own mortality. It is in such statements that it becomes clear that de Martino's science, despite its ethnocentric, modernist, and teleological presuppositions remained a profoundly humble endeavor.

> In my opinion, the integration and the reintegration of humans into society don't stop being problematic and continue to require a symbolic solution. You know that I think that even in a socialist society, birth, marriage, death need to be adequately solemnified. I feel horror at the idea that all is reduced to an act of bureaucracy in front of an office window. And it is here that the dissatisfaction with the rationalization of these relationships reopens the path to religious temptation. Take death, ultimate and definite crisis of the presence of the individual, [as example]. How can you eliminate its dramatic character? Yes, of course, here too the limit can be moved, maybe there comes the day on which the heart gets tired of beating and you could send it, what do I know, to Einaudi, where they will arrange for it to be recharged so that you recover your efficiency. But the limit can only be moved, never abolished. And, you see, if someone knows he has cancer and that he is going to die, well, in that moment he may know that god does not exist as much as he wants [*ha un bel sapere*]. The temptation is great … and this, my dear, was not written in Marx.[1]

1 Cesare Cases, "Un colloquio con Ernesto de Martino," *Quaderni piacentini*, 1965, 24.

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