J·R·a·T

Interdisciplinary Journal
for Religion and Transformation
in Contemporary Society

Kurt Appel (Ed.)

In Praise of Mortality

Christianity and New Humanism

In Praise of Mortality

Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society – Supplementa

Editors

Kurt Appel (University of Vienna, Austria),
Jakob Deibl (University of Vienna, Austria)

Advisory Board

Vol. 1

Kurt Appel (Ed.)

In Praise of Mortality

Christianity and New Humanism

Translated by

Alex Skinner, Natalie Eder, Rachel Thomas, and Carl Raschke

BRILL

SCHÖNINGH

Contents

Introduction to "In Praise of Mortality"

Kurt Appel

The present volume is titled *In Praise of Mortality*. It relies on the ambiguity of the word *Preis* in German.[1] On the one hand, the word conveys the sense of a "price" as a tribute to be paid, that is, payment for our humanity. If nothing else, such payment consists in suffering, vulnerability, separation from loved ones, and the brokenness of meaning and language.

On the other hand, the word connotes the "praise" that human beings may offer for their mortality, whether that praise is explicitly addressed to God, or articulates a non-specific openness on our part, which grows out of our mortality.

For this mortality is neither to be thought of as a descent into a void of meaninglessness, nor as an eternal nothingness, nor it can be reduced to a mere pathway to some kind of existence beyond mortality itself, one that somehow fosters a firm self-assurance in the face of the hardships, dangers, injuries, and wounds of history. Rather, it signifies the inexhaustible openness of existence, from which love, mercy, compassion, and meaning emerge.

Such glorification of mortality is combined with a nuanced account of the fragility, vulnerability, sensitivity, and the inaccessibility of human existence in the form of a living, tangible body. This thesis is central to Christianity and can be considered a contribution to what may be termed "a new humanism". Its context is the universal and radical threat that humanity faces today. The conventional religious and secular enlightenment narratives are in crisis, because the overall ends of human history have been thrown into question.

Is humanity, as many of us suspect, merely a transient episode? Is human existence ultimately nothing more than meaninglessness and hopelessness? Are the religious and secular visions for a better humanity not refuted? Is there not a point at which ecological and social destruction can no longer be undone?

The new challenge lies in the fact that, for the first time in human memory, the existence of humankind as a whole has been profoundly placed in doubt without the vision of a "new earth" at our disposal. Accordingly, apocalyptic

---

1   The word *Preis* has a variety of meanings, some quite discrepant, in German. It can mean both "price" and "praise," a doubleentendre of which the authors of this volume make routine use. Other translations are "prize," "reward", "value", "penalty", or "glory". It can also be translated as "glorification", which in certain contexts works best for our translation.

visions of doom are ubiquitous today, in film as well as in literature, from Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* to Cormac McCarthy's great novel *The Road*.

Pop culture is dominated by figures such as cyborgs and zombies, which are characterized, to say the least, by the fact that they are immortal without being redeemable. They are unaware of their own death. Is the "last man"[2] therefore an unfeeling, disembodied machine, or an emotionless zombie? Is the last "reality" the fantasy of our anesthetic and inviolable virtual worlds? Is the increasing pervasiveness of virtual landscapes a last perverse "feast" in which the downfall of "re-ality" (*res aliter*, or the "other thing") is "celebrated" as a kind of death drive?

Needless to say, modernity, which has supplied us with the notion of the dignity and "maturity"[3] of the individual, has provided an abundance of resistance to such destructive scenarios. These scenarios must be creatively developed with new alliances with religious and secular forces that desire to remain faithful to life. However, the "eschatological" dimension of these destructive scenarios must not be trivialized by pigeonholing them into familiar crisis scripts of human history.

Christian theologies have become largely irrelevant at present, because they have immunized themselves against having to contend with issues of human mortality. They have attempted to construct their own kind of rarefied special worlds, in which social and cultural developments are ignored. When they have dealt with culture, it has been often out of the supposed superiority and imperturbability of the redeemed who had made themselves safe.

In such an airy-fairy setting, a cultural struggle had already commenced, a struggle which had already been lost from the outset, because the categories employed simply did not correspond to anything of a social nature, all the while giving voice precisely to those virtualizations which are indicative of an often-criticized postmodern culture. In the fight for trademarks, theology's own fragile heritage (liturgical, intellectual, aesthetic and ethical) was literally put on the marketplace by theology, often reduced to a caricature of its former significance.

In the following essays, we will attempt to counter such a sense of sequestered security-mindedness with praise for our mortal and vulnerable existence. Three interrelated concerns will be considered. First, there is the question of

---

2   The figure of the *letzter Mensch*, or "last man", can be found in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

3   The word the editor uses here is *Mündigkeit*, the antonym of the same term that Immanuel Kant employs in his famous definition of Aufklärung ("enlightenment") as "the release of humanity from its self-incurred immaturity" (*der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit*).

the human being as a vulnerable and temporal individual and social "body". Second, the search for traces of the biblical God which can be found in the open spaces and in the reference structures of human textures. And thirdly, we raise the question of the representation of time beyond its chronological and mechanistic reduction to a simple cause-and-effect set of relationships. The category of "Apocalypse" encountered in the Bible can offer a particularly penetrating understanding and view of these questions, not as an "end of the world" story line, but rather as a disclosure of the world's own solemn *deep structure*.

Our account of a *Preis* ("price"/"praise") of mortality in its theological, humanistic, temporal, and theoretical dimensions consists of four parts:

The first part, "*Christianity and a New Humanism: Historical-Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Bible, Hegel, and Musil*", which I composed on the occasion of my appointment to the professorship of Fundamental Theology at the University of Vienna, spans a wide historical-theoretical and theological arc, beginning with the biblical story of creation, through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to Robert Musil's novel *The Man without Qualities*. The selection of these writings is not random: The story of creation in Genesis serves as the *cantus firmus* that unfolds from the holy scripture of the Jews and Christians what the "price" of mortality truly is. Hegel's *Phenomenology* can be regarded as a reconstruction of the European project of modernism – based not least on biblical categories – along with the crises and challenges of modern thinking about freedom with a special sensitivity to the contingency and openness of history. Musil is ultimately cited as a symptom of a "post-apocalyptic" world at the end of history in the disintegration of our teleological narratives and certitudes regarding salvation. Despite this, or precisely because of it, the final passages of "Man Without Qualities" in particular pay tremendous homage to the divine moment of the fragile contingency and vulnerability of being.

As indicated in the idea of an inaugural lecture, the first part is intended to express a theological-philosophical program which aims to open up a conversation with interested parties and friends.

Jakob Deibl continues – in manifold twists and shifts – the historical-theoretical and theological considerations raised in the first part in his paper "*On the Name of God and the Opening of New Linguistic Horizons: Considerations Starting from the Bible, Hölderlin, and Rilke*". The focus of the explanations lies in demonstrating how in Hölderlin's work a *rupture* occurs between the human world and the world of the Divine as well as between language and referential reality. In the resulting extinction of immediate meanings, the sense of contingencies and thus of the unrelated, individual, opaque and "meaningless" is able to open up, in the register of which Rilke is able to invoke the name of the divine name itself.

In the third essay *Isabella Guanzini* writes about "*The Aesthetic Contingency of Life: An Account of the Finite in the Time of Images*". The essay examines the reflections of the French philosopher and psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and his diagnosis of a collapse of our symbolic orders, manifested as language, art, religion, and ethics and resulting in the loss of the father and paternal speech. The search for a new expression that is "anarchic", i.e., one that is capable of renouncing the pre-modern repression of singularity, but also resisting post-modern arbitrariness and the refusal of referentiality, while serving to re-create our language and modes of communication, is the gist of her article.

The fourth essay, "*The Price of Prayer*", although readable without any knowledge of the first part, follows from it, but also takes into account parts two and three. My main concern is to enter into a spiritual, philosophical, and theological debate on the subject of prayer. In the background is the conviction that the Christian narrative has always been a covert form of prayer, as evidenced not least in the Apocalypse of John. Furthermore, it introduces the idea that the language of prayer opens up a new approach for understanding the contingency and the tangibility of existence after the collapse of linguistic representations and symbolic expressions of human culture. Prayer, therefore, is still able to speak to us in situations where the great historical images, narratives, and forms of language are no longer meaningful. At the same time, it is crucial to take into account the fact that prayer requires multiple translations and transpositions in order to reach its addressee and HIS name expressing the glorification of contingency, vulnerability and mortality.

These writings are intended as an ongoing discussion which, together with my two co-authors Jakob Deibl and Isabella Guanzini, will hopefully open up a continuation through the many friends and fellow travellers who have helped to develop the thoughts in this volume. Among these I would like to mention Agnese, my mother Maria, Johann Reikerstorfer, Georg Braulik, Friedrich Kern, Rudolf Langthaler, Stefan Gugerel, Anthony Godzieba, Marcello Neri, Carl Raschke, Pierangelo Sequeri, Jan-Heiner Tück, Nicoletta Capozza, Marie-Theres Igrec, Sebastian Pittl, Mattia Coser, Lisa Achathaler, Marlene Deibl, Daniel Kuran, Marian Weingartshofer, Maurizio Rossi, Georg Rakowitz, Isabella Bruckner.

The Text as Subject

Methodological Reflections on the Present Volume In Praise of Mortality

Kurt Appel

In the run-up to the publication of *In Praise of Mortality*, it was suggested that a brief introduction to the methodological approaches to the topic should be added. In principle, the methodology expresses itself in the thought process of the volume; in this respect, this section can simply be skipped and the reading of the first part can begin directly. However, we will follow the suggestion and point to perspectives that resonate in the content of the book and that may offer an initial orientation for the addressees of the text. The resulting considerations touch on the methodology of a textual interpretation that sees itself under the banner of "in praise of mortality" and in search of the Christian contribution to a new humanism.

The contributions collected in this volume are not least interpretations of central texts of European intellectual history. They include a reading of the paradigmatic opening and closing sections of the Bible and other biblical writings, as well as an interpretation of the basic ideas of Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit", selected poems by Hölderlin and Rilke, Musil's "Man without Qualities" and sections of some of Lacan's seminars (and thus indirectly also of Freud's writings). In addition, texts by Leibniz, Kant, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Agamben, H.-D. Bahr, B. Liebrucks and others find resonance here. Basically, then, it should be noted that in its search for a new humanism, the present volume makes use of an interpretive as well as an enquiring reading of various significant texts of our tradition. They are used not least with the intention of rendering Western culture – and also Christianity, insofar as it accompanies this culture – at least momentarily "readable" under the register of the mortality of all living things. The authors of the volume take the view that "Europe" is not only essentially structured by texts, but even more represents a text(ure) that must constantly be created anew, and which especially brings itself forth anew in (re-)readings and interpretations.

A central question is which approach to these textures is required. The approach that is frequently encountered today consists, as Liebrucks succinctly puts it[1], in the creation of the "world of positivity"[2], i.e., the designation of the

---

1 Cf. B. Liebrucks, Sprache und Bewußtsein I–VII, Frankfurt/Main (et al.) 1964–1979.

2 Liebrucks understands "positivity" as the fixing and making accessible of an object for the sake of its controllability.

world as a collection of objects. This does not only refer to "material" objects, but also to units of information. These are demarcated, fixed and defined, and subsequently subjected to an increasingly differentiated determination or predication: A= x_1, x_2, x_3.... Scientificity is expressed in this methodology by the fact that a complete and gapless, i.e. total determination (positivisation) of the perceived object should take place, whereby individual determinations should be as unambiguous (to avoid the polemical term "simple-minded") as possible. In addition to the demand for general recognition of the validity of knowledge thus manifested, there is a further demand, namely that the investigating subject, i.e., the scientist, keeps a (value-free) distance from the object under consideration, i.e., releases it completely from his own sentiments and value judgements. This approach now also characterises the humanities, including philology, theology and philosophy. Biblical texts, for example, are to be approached "neutrally" by the interpreter (i.e., without preconceptions and without judgement), and their contents and contexts are to be reconstructed as clearly as possible, whereby this clarity is measured by objectifiable data (time of origin, place, addressee, linguistic form, etc.).

The noetic background of the model outlined consists in its strict separation of subject and object, whereby the former falls out of view or, at best, becomes the object of an objectifying analysis itself. In contrast, the question arises as to whether the methodological process outlined here does not arise from a very specific interpretation of the world, namely the self-interpretation of the human subject as a positivisable and manageable object, triggered by a reifying approach to the world for the purpose of controlling our environment. Apart from the fact that no reduction of the subject to an object-like thing can ever fully objectify this process of reduction – for man never becomes directly graspable as an object of himself, since "I" cannot be *simultaneously* both thinker and thought, observer and observed -, the shortcoming of this method is that it abstracts the human lifeworld from its intersubjective-linguistic mediation. Human objects are never pure objects, but are inserted into linguistic-historical-narrative (intersubjective) contexts, and thus they are interpreted objects or, to recall this linguistic-narrative mediation, *texts*.

These texts form a comprehensive context of references that expresses a constant interaction between (text) authors and (text) listeners, (text) authors and texts, ultimately also between texts themselves. Every objectifiable approach and every constructivist approach falls short, not least because there are no levels of meaning that have not already existed in an infinite number of contexts of meaning *beforehand*. They elude any conclusive reconstruction because the act of reconstructing can never ultimately control the references in which the text is embedded. In this sense, all objects of human encounter

with the world contain an excess of meaning in comparison to their unambiguous appropriation, so that one is never able to grasp them as *pure* objects.

It was mentioned above that the scientific ethos is not least determined by the fact that the scientist steps back from the object of his investigation. In this distance from one's own immediate interests (desire), i.e., the temptation to assimilate the texts for the purpose of narcissistic need-satisfaction, without any consideration of their independent existence, consists the moment of truth of the positivist approach. What is decisive, however, is not the ostensibly value-free analysis of the texts, but rather the awareness that the text to be interpreted does not belong to the interpreter. Rather, it is precisely because the text is not a dead object, because it points beyond itself in its references and memories, and because it was not the direct creation of an author, but rather opened itself up to him, that it has a subject-like dimension and thus the right to be respected. This respect for the text is expressed in the recognition of the impossibility of its ultimate decoding in the sense of an absolute accessibility of its levels of meaning. Such an approach would constitute a shameless appropriation and it would lead to the collapse of any claim to meaning. Ignoring this recognition in favor of an objectifying reduction of texts may also be the reason why today's scholarship is in danger of "producing" more and more information and simultaneously less and less meaning.

The subject-like dimension of the text, its existence in references, in the unspoken and in the inexpressible, in manifold levels and nuances of meaning, in its transitions and ruptures, has another consequence that needs to be considered. The subject's becoming a subject takes place through recognition of the Other, ultimately through amicable, compassionate and giving sympathy. In a sense, the emergence of the subject *as* subject is manifested in explicit and implicit invitations from the Other. It has been pointed out that the text does not belong to the interpreter – the same applies, according to what has just been said, to the author, who is not the absolute master of his text – but has its own dignity and freedom, one could also say its own inherent spirituality. The text develops through openness to interpretations and readings, whereby, in a sense, every reading is a transmission (tradition) of the invitation that a good text will have expressed. In this way, it has a universal dimension, since it not only does not yield to any ultimate claim of ownership, but also contains an inscribed openness of meanings that calls for unlimited, amicable reception and transmission. Therefore, the methodology of the humanities does not require a gapless determination of the text, but rather attentiveness to its references, ruptures, unspeakabilities, ultimately respect for its – as paradoxical as this may sound – vulnerability, whereby a violation of the spirituality of the text occurred through complete appropriation. The interpreter is able

to pass on the inviting gesture in the open levels of meaning of the text by preserving its strangeness, thus always acting in the dialectic of the opening and the defamiliarising of the text to be interpreted. In this sense, the opening of the book with a biblical pericope that addresses precisely this topic is not coincidental, nor is the turn to Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit", which – read unabridged, i.e., taking into account its transitions and shifts – does not lead to an "absolute", i.e., a totalitarian knowledge, but rather represents a school of detaching oneself from the claims to power and validity with which texts are often encountered.

These preliminary remarks regarding methodology should close with a word on the question of "neutrality". Specifically, if the body of the text is not an object, one will not simply approach it indifferently and without feeling (like sterile commercial products in their endless arbitrariness), but will try, as far as possible, to hear out the offer of friendship that may underlie the text, and to tune into this, to let oneself be touched by it in the sense of a mutual opening and sympathy of intellect and affection. In this sense, the attempt of all those involved in this volume is to face the encountering texts with sympathy and respect and to include others in their reading.

Christianity and a New Humanism

Historical-Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Bible, Hegel, and Musil

Kurt Appel

Preliminary Remarks

In the following essay I attempt to lay bare a certain perspective on the human condition, which must precede any approach to the question of humanism. The perspective I seek to develop here combines a highly specific understanding of the SACRED with a distinct conception of time and history. My aim is to unify the understanding of God, man, and time, and to this end I will cite excerpts and ideas from three of the most significant texts in human history – the Bible, Hegel's *Phenomenology*, and Robert Musil's *The Man without Qualities.*

This project not only involves the three disciplines that are intertwined with these texts and the necessary dialogue between them but also three temporal eras (linked with specific regions). First, time from its beginning to its end (connected with the cosmos and heaven), second, Europe's history insofar as it extends to the Enlightenment and its distorsions and thus the present day, and finally, Austria or Vienna for the first half of the twentieth century (Freud, Schönberg, Gödel, Schrödinger, Klimt, Wittgenstein, etc.) as, what we will discover to be, a paradigmatic epilogue to history. All three approaches will be woven together through a category which I will refer to as *transition*. Together with the theme of the body (or a sphere formed by the body[1]), and the question of time, this will provide the key to a greatly enhanced understanding of God, history, and the human condition.

---

1 M. Merleau-Ponty captures this sphere wonderfully in his grandiose "Phenomenology of Perception": "It is a nexus of living meanings, not the law for a certain number of covariant terms." See M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of perception, London 2005, 175.

First Transition – From World Time to the Feast and Death

A.   *The Seventh Day*

The first great story of the Bible, the so-called priestly creation story (Gen 1:1–2:3)[2], tells of seven days'work. This *cantus firmus* of the entire Bible thematizes time in the sense that salvific history is located within time and the understanding of who is God and who is man becomes clear with the correct understanding of time. This is evident in the simple fact that the topic of time frames the entire pericope. *Day One* as the beginning of time, bears witness to its basic structure:

> God called the light "day" and the darkness he called: "night". And there was evening, and there was morning – day one. (Gen 1:5)

Day One as the basic element of time begins with the evening. The structure of the day indicates a sequence that moves from the evening, in other words, a period that leads to death, through the nightly interruption of day as an expression of the sphere of death, and finally to morning as a new beginning, a symbol of the recreation of the earth (this three-part structure is also the background to the resurrection of Jesus on the third day, making it not just a chronological, but also a theological date).

As a result, human beings' path out of a time subject to death towards the (festive) recreation of the earth, which is coupled with a new political and humane dawn, becomes manifest here both as the content of this time and as the *cantus firmus* of the Bible. *The fourth day* as the center of the creation story symbolizes the period of festivity determined by sun, moon, and stars, a period that not only structures human life, but also makes it worth living. Finally, the *seventh day* ends the work of creation and highlights the eschatological dimension of time.

> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested/celebrated from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested/celebrated all the work of creating that he had done. (Gen. 2:2–3)

---

2   For a detailed interpretation see E. Zenger, Gottes Bogen in den Wolken. Studien zur Komposition und Theologie der priesterschriftlichen Urgeschichte (SBS 112), Stuttgart 1983. Furthermore: G. Borgonovo, L'inno del Creatorale per la bellezza della creazione (Gn 1,1–2,4a), in: G. Borgonovo (ea), Torah e storiografie dell'Antico Testamento, Torino 2012, 393–428.

The sixth day preceding the seventh contains God's final work of creation, namely the human being as man and woman. In their interrelatedness they are YHWH's image and representation, and their creation completes the earth as the home for all living things.[3] On the sixth day, then, the world appears as a festively adorned "good" and "completed" cosmos. In this sense, the *seventh day* is "superfluous". It brings neither new works nor any chronological extension and yet it is this day that concludes the work of creation and that paradoxically – in that it does so again and thus "superfluously" – completes the completed world. Its purpose lies in an open[4] transcending of the six days' work that prevents time from being a disposable totality that is to be filled by works and is under the control of man, and that time is exhausted in "world time".

The biblical conception of time also highlights the great shortcomings of many creationist and evolutionist understandings of time. These ignore the sphere of the seventh day by objectifying time and using it to construct an uninterrupted chronology, an unbroken sequence observed by God in the former and the scientist in the latter case. Time becomes the chronologically representable object and framework of our knowledge.

However, such a conception fails because the narrator and observer of this representation can never include himself in this picture. Unable to add himself to the equation, the narrator and observer must always leave himself out. Even if we could compose a perfectly causal chronology up to the moment of narration there would again be a distance between this moment and the narrator, a gap that could never be bridged.

In its philosophical dimension the "seventh day" is an addition, a space of opening, a leap and an elusive form of transcendence. To the extent that this day is not representable, it cannot be fully known by one particular discipline (is the relationship between Kant's "causality of freedom" and "causality of nature" not essentially the same as that between the seventh day and the six days' work?) The first six days seem to be representable, the seventh day eludes objectification, and thus creates the space for the subjectification of man and for all living things, which, without this addition, would exist as mere zombies or machines, as the living dead.

---

3   This idea represents a democratic revolution in the understanding of the human being and its significance can hardly be overstated. It is no longer the ruler who guarantees the order of creation as God's representative on earth, but rather the human being as such in the form of man and woman who is appointed to creatively continue God's creation, with responsibility for the order of society and world.

4   It is crucial that the final formula is missing. Compare Zenger, Gottes Bogen, 100.

The seventh day is therefore not a chronological appendix of the other six days. The verb *shavat* (to rest, cease) is sometimes translated as "celebrate" (by Buber for example), which expresses a profound truth because it is the festival in all its exuberance – whose spirit subverts every chronology and every form of feasibility – that brings time in its true sense into play and transforms *chronos* into free and human time (a feast envisioned and preplanned down to the last detail would be the opposite of a true feast, a mere charade). In the the six days' work, the whole world comes into view both temporally and locationally, but it acquires its meaning through the *transition* to the feast, when it is opened up to the festival.

Time (or world time) is thus fundamentally more than the accumulation of its moments. It becomes human only at the point where *chronos* is lifted in favor of the no longer representable feast. Preparations are certainly made for this feast in the time preceding it, often down to the tiniest detail, but it gets its force from an addition not amenable to projection or prediction, in other words a *contingent-chance* one. Perhaps at this point we might start to ask whether the way in which the "superfluous" (superbundant) chance *qua* chance expresses itself celebratorily is not in fact a key aspect of the feast.[5]

This addition of the seventh day finds a particularly clear expression in Sunday. In the liturgical understanding of Christianity, it has always been regarded as an "eighth day", which transcends time and reinforces the motif of the seventh day. The sabbath was inserted into a chronological framework as a day of rest, which was a cultural advance on everyday time as an uninterrupted flow but also a contradiction as this addition is *not* amenable to chronologization. So Sunday, as the eighth day, now signified the "exceeding" of the sabbath, returning it to its original meaning as the day that "crosscuts" all other days, that transcends and overrides them. In this way, Sunday is not simply a day work-free day, but signals the start of the feast, which can extend to every day, but can also be made to disappear at any time, because it is almost invisible and inaccessible in its superfluity. Insofar as the eighth day also coincides with the day one – the day of creation – it expresses another dimension of it, namely, the fact that the world is created in the feast, so the festival itself is not only the goal but also the origin of the world.

This interpretation of the "seventh day" (or the eighth day as its continuation and radicalization) as a messianic overflow and feast day is also important, so

---

5   The utterly sad thing about our world is that there is no more space allowed for this contingent moment. The ideal consists of complete plannability and describability, in the complete filling of time. Insofar as there are at least two elements in the living being that escape this "filling", namely, birth and death, they must also be brought to a standstill by replacing the living by the machine or by absorbing it into a seamless recycling process. This logic actually requires man's cemeteries to be replaced by compost heaps or district heating plants.

it seems to me, with regard to the sabbath debate between Jesus and his theological opponents. It was not only a question of interpreting the sabbath more or less liberally because even the Pharisees, Jesus's most frequently mentioned theological adversaries, were open to the need to heal and save on this day. Rather, the core issue is about the messianic claims made by Jesus. The Sabbath is that temporal and festive (but not ascertainable) gate, through which the Messiah enters and in which the world is newly created. Therefore, when Jesus heals on the Sabbath, he claims to regenerate the world through an act of pure creativity as the Messiah and "the finger of God" (in a comparable and striking way this is evident in the multiplication of the loaves, which we must interpret in light of what it means to be radically creative[6]).

As a definition of history, the seventh (or eight) day thus designates the transition to "superfluous" messianic time, more festive even than the wedding, which is assigned to the fourth day. But what is being celebrated remains an open question. An examination of key words in the biblical text suggests a connection with Ex. 39:32, 43[7] and thus connects the seventh day with the encounter of God at the sanctuary.

However, the question raised has not yet been adequately answered. While the encounter with God expresses his temporalization in the festival, this does not explain what is being celebrated. An interpretation of the seventh day requires a reading of the next biblical pericope (which in this sense is not to be thought of as a next pericope, but stands together with the first), that is, of Genesis 2:4–3:24, the so-called Yahwistic History of creation and the Fall.[8]

B. *The Gown of Grace and the Nakedness of Existence*
The interpretation of the so-called Fall still predominantly takes place in two perspectives, which are opposed to each other: the classical interpretation places an innocent human being in the garden of paradise, from which he falls by the infringement of a divine commandment. The consequences are sin, death, alienation, and the transition from God's eternity into time. In this interpretation, man before original sin is conceptualized virtually as an infant, which is still "beyond good and evil". This makes it difficult to understand how sinlessness could be thought of: as infantility?

---

6 See part IV: The Price of Prayer.
7 See Zenger, God's Arch, 171.
8 A more detailed exegesis of the pericope is provided by G. Borgonovo, La grammatica dell'esistenza alla luce della storia di Israele (Gn 2,4b-3,24), in: G. Borgonovo (Ea), Torah, 429–466. One of the key insights of Borgonovo's exegesis is the significance of the seven part structure to this section as well, for example, 2.7–15, where we are presented with a settenarium of perfection.

The interpretation of the Fall produced by German idealism operates largely in the same premises, but with the opposite consequence. Here the Fall is again associated with the transition from prehistory to history, but it is viewed positively as a departure from the twilight state of human existence. On this reading, history as a journey into time means that human beings take on guilt in order to attain freedom (*felix culpa*).

It seems to me that both perspectives fail to do full justice to the subtlety of the text, not least because they try to read the Yahwistic story of sin and paradise independently of the first creation text. Before going into possible connections between the two texts in more detail, I would like to focus on one particular aspect of the story of paradise and the Fall, namely the explicitly mentioned trees: The *tree in the middle* of the garden of Eden, the *tree of life*, and the *tree of knowledge of good and evil.*

> Now YHWH God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. YHWH God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food, and the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (Gen. 2:8–9)

This passage tells us about the layout of the garden of paradise, which could be said to be the location of the feast (anticipated in the first pericope), which takes the form of a planting of trees, two of which are explicitly mentioned: first the *tree of life* in the middle, and second, the *tree of knowledge of good and evil.*[9] It is to be emphasized that in the first setting the *tree of life* is at the center of this festive world, while the tree of knowledge as an additive is not clearly localized (this tree may be situated besides the tree of life but also beyond the rest of the garden). Here a parallel to the seventh day is suggested: This day was not chronologically definable and crossed the temporal horizon of the other days. It was just as well in the center as "outside" of the order of time (or rather, beyond the inside/outside dichotomy) as the tree of knowledge resists location in the garden. Let us consider the second passage in which the trees appear:

> YHWH God took man and set him in the Garden of Eden to work and to take care of it. And YHWH commanded the man, saying, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat it you will certainly die. (Gen 2:15–17)

---

9   The Septuagint interestingly speaks of a "tree of knowledge of what is good and evil", and gets in this epistemological emphasis probably a subtle point of the Hebrew text.

At this point man learns that his purpose is the creative planting and tending of this utopian place of paradise, which has an openness in the non-localizable tree of knowledge. It is not said that man should not eat from the *tree of Life*, which appears to radiate across the entire horizon of the garden. It should be noted, however, that the tree of knowledge is now more strongly centered. This is its first displacement from the "placeless place" to a (negative) place of prohibition. Still, the tree is not localized any further and thus remains apart from man.

The third passage to thematize the trees brings with it another shift:

> Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals YHWH God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die'" (Gen 3:3–4)

What is crucial here is that in this passage, the forbidden tree, the tree of knowledge, has moved center stage in place of the tree of life, and is thus placed at the heart of human desire. In this sense the snake is already the embodiment of desire, that is, the projection of desire, not just an external tempter. Projections also determine what happens next: We are told that the eyes will be opened through the fruit of the tree of knowledge, that the tree is "pleasing" to the human eye and "desirable for gaining wisdom".

In other words, the tree becomes the abode of the "self". The nature of the self-knowledge imparted through its fruit is also described. This is the knowledge of the "nakedness" that now catches the human being's eye. It could be argued that this means that the human being finds himself confronted with an almost inscrutable, all-absorbing emptiness (the "Evil"). The tree of knowledge (as well as the seventh day, when it is interpreted as a wearisome emptiness) transforms into the pure (self)-absence from which man is seeking to protect himself.[10]

Evidently, then, a crucial shift of perspective had taken place even before the eating of the fruit: the tree of knowledge was originally displaced from the human field of view and thus beyond the possibility of direct human projection. It thus had a status *between* belonging and non-belonging like the *sacred*, which touches the profane without being part of it. The tree of knowledge, whose "betweenness" makes it the guest – the guest being at the centre of the

---

10   Think of the phenomenon of the horror vacui!

home/the sphere of the "own" without belonging to it[11] – of the tree of life and of the human horizon, now moves to the centre of desire, triggering an attempt at appropriation.

Up to this point, in its very extraterritoriality (like the seventh day) as something that eludes the human conceptual world, the tree represented a protective layer through which the human being was in a sense reclothed. Man did not have to be ashamed of his nakedness because the *self-decentering* gap in his field of vision, bestowed by this tree, prevented him from creating an absolute projection for his self. That is to say this projection known as the "dress of grace"[12] in certain patristic traditions, represented nothing but a displacement of the human gaze from its total power of disposal over itself and others. The tree of knowledge then is the symbolization of a self-deprivation (a kind of permanent transition between the middle of life and its margins which transcends the self), which is crucial if we are to be opened up to the other.[13]

In the extent to which the tree now comes into the center and becomes part of man, in other words, at the moment when man begins to transform the open garden into a delimited horizon of his own desire, he begins to locate his self in the sense of a narcissistic projection. The projection of one's own desire (and self-oriented desire), as symbolized by the tree of knowledge placed in the center, then takes the form of the tempting snake before finally, at the moment of absolute assimilation, morphing into the terror of absolute nothingness, the knowledge of one's own nakedness, in other words of the void associated with unmediated presence and loss of detachment (we might compare this to the meaninglessness of pornographic presence). The "opening" eyes no longer experience the original self-withdrawal expressed by the non-integrable tree of knowledge (as the encounter-triggering negation of all projections and assimilations) as a "good" difference between man and God. Through the attempted appropriation of the self-withdrawal expressed through this difference, this experience is instead objectified as "naked nothingness" and perceived as evil.

In contrast to original nakedness, this nudity is no longer that inviting, non-projectable "companion", that "second body", which is never directly visible, which enwraps us and is capable of relationship (we might see this as

---

11   See H.D. Bahr, Die Sprache des Gastes. Eine Metaethik, Leipzig 1994. Bahr, Die Anwesenheit des Gastes. Entwurf einer Xenosophie, Nordhausen 2012.

12   Cf. Augustine, De civitate Dei, XIV, 14.

13   The Septuagint seems to be aware of the significance of this limitation when it calls the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" a "tree of knowledge of that which is knowable of good and evil." Augustine gives a profound interpretation of this structure when he speaks of the fact that the "good" first became visible as something that had been lost and that the tree bears a reminder of it (De civ. Dei XIV, 17). In this sense, the good would be precisely what is accessible to us only in memory, but not directly.

an expression of the divine itself), a transcendent companion or body that furnishes the human being with a protective second skin like a dress of light (though as we shall see its protective powers are limited). But this nakedness after the Fall is rather a consequence of an attempt at absolute self-presentation (accompanied by the desire for a presentable God) in the mirror of one's own immeasurable desire.

Just as the feast, which is fully inserted into a chronology of planning, becomes a mere charade, and just as the seventh day, when its particularity becomes objectified, can only function as meaningless time or deathly boredom, this nakedness, which originally clothed the self in its own deprivation as a reference to the divine, now becomes mere absence, an unbearable emptiness. The protective layer of its own unavailability is lost to man in the moment the layer is moved into the human horizon and becomes manageable ("eatable"). Hence the divine measures (distance from the tree of life and from paradise, imposing mortality over man) seem like restitution measures, simulacra of the original protection.[14] In a sense, the relocation out of paradise repeats the relocation of the tree of knowledge, because only in that relocation the tree of knowledge was allowed to enter into man's horizon.

A similar parallel exists between death and the "dress of grace". After the loss of the dress of light, death is the *second* clothing of man, that ambivalent mask which protects him from the annihilating emptiness of the totality of his desiring gaze, insofar as we are detached from ourselves and each other in death.

So death masks probably served *not* to ward off any sort of demons emanating from the dead, in other words to protect the living from the dead, but in fact to protect the dead themselves. Death thus simulates that original boundary of nameability, in which man was enveloped, a limit which when exceeded leads not to God or to a thing in itself, but to absolute nothingness. All further garments and forms of security, with which God gifts the human being, are elaborations and simulacra of this death mask (simulacra of the simulacrum), so that man has no need to be "like God". This also explains the significance of the separation of man from the tree of life. At the moment when man has acquired absolute penetrative power by partaking of the tree of knowledge, death becomes the last tragic safeguard separating the human subject from his own gaze, that is, from total self-objectification as his own double, in which we would face the ultimate horror.

---

14   It would be necessary to ask whether the expression "the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." (Gen. 3:22) that God himself knows the danger inherent in this all-controlling gaze. We might also wonder whether the enigmatic plural in the self-designation of God (beyond a pluralist majestatis) suggests a way out of this danger.

All of this may perhaps suggest an initial attempt to answer the question of what is actually celebrated on the seventh day: it's the encounter with God, which expresses a decentring of the human subject, a decentring that finds its expression temporally in the receiving of a non-instrumentalizable and indisposable time of celebration and locationally in the non-occupyability of the garden of paradise. On the seventh day, through his encounter with God, man celebrates his difference from God and from himself and his world as a projectable entity, a difference physically prefigured in both creation stories by the duality of the human being as man and woman. This is associated with an element of indisposability and contingency that renders the human being vulnerable. In this view the feast of the seventh day could be described as an anti-pharaonic (cf. the disempowerment of sun and moon on the fourth day) feast of contingency and vulnerable creatureliness, or as a feast of transition into the sphere of the unavailable, for which death functions as a tragic form of protection.

So death is at once protection and distortion; it is the replacement of an original difference of man with himself, a difference man wished to overcome. Perhaps the statement made by the snake, "You will not die if you eat from the tree of knowledge" (Gen. 3:4) is not simply a lie, but rather the central challenge of God on the part of man. Will man succeed in overcoming his mortality and thus attaining total power over himself and the other? As a result, man will try in various ways to either overcome death and conquer the tree of life or at least conceal his mortality and vulnerability in a series of new masks.

The first such attempt is genealogy, meaning the attempt to gain immortality through descendants. Cain, as the Bible tells us, is the descendant, the firstborn ("Eve said, 'with the help of YHWH I have brought forth a man'" (Gen. 4:1), while Abel is the superfluous breath of wind, that is, a symbol of mortality and impermanence whose side God will stand on by accepting his sacrifice.[15] In the following, Abel will assume a similar role as the tree of knowledge and the seventh day. Abel is killed, as the Bible portrays, but he finds a replacement[16] who is named Seth (Gen. 4:25).

Thus, the human line running through Seth, insofar replacement of Abel, will not live for itself, but has the function to represent the victims of the Cainite totalitarian will. Abel will no longer be directly present, but he will "accompany" Seth's line of humanity as a reference point and prevent it from

---

15   See also K. Butting, Abel steh auf!, in: BiKi 58 (2003), 16–20.

16   See, in particular, the second part, "From the Name of God and the Opening of New Linguistic Areas."

living for itself, thereby achieving its decisive *opening to the other* like the seventh day and the tree of knowledge.

I will now temporarily interrupt these biblical retellings and turn to a text that manages to develop and reflect upon the ruptures, projections and transitions alluded to in the first part, namely Hegel's first great work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Second Transition – From the Contingency of Existence to the Body of God

A.   *The World as Mirror of the Self and its Shattering – Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Reason and Spirit in Hegel's* Phenomenology of Spirit

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (hereafter *Phenomenology*)[17] is probably the last great philosophy-of-history project of our era. It is a text in which projections, masks and transitions – of the kind indicated in the first part of this article – are of paramount significance. If we consider this work's point of departure, we find that it picks up where the story of the paradise ends and other texts of fundamental importance to Europe (the story of Abraham, the Odyssey, the Aeneid) have all begun, namely at the way in to the unknown.

In the first instance the path of the *Phenomenology* is one of despair, and as we shall see it does not necessarily culminate in a "happy ending". Hegel's point of departure is the situation of the (modern) self, which attempts to locate itself and its reflection in the world it encounters in order to gain power over itself (and others). The fundamental theme of Hegel's early writings, or *Jugendschriften*, that the self expresses itself in its relations with others and its encounters in the world – and thus the self is fundamentally intersubjective and is always situated "between" the individual and the general self[18] – plays a particularly prominent role in the *Phenomenology*.

The self sees the world as a mirror in which it is to discover itself. Hegel identifies various stages on this journey of discovery, all of which share the same fate: the self is ultimately unable to find itself in them. The self experiences itself as

---

17   Quotes in what follows from G.W.F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit. Translated and edited by Terry Pinkard, Cambridge 2018.

18   In Hegel's work, the self is to be regarded neither in abstractly individual nor abstractly collective terms, but always as a transition between the individual and the general. Language is a good example of this as something prior to the individual that is also shaped by him.

detached, as negative in relation to the world it encounters. At the same time, however, the world of the self is not simply a static object; it changes shape every time the self approaches it in a new way.

One might say that in every approach of the self to the world, the latter expresses itself as the new experience of the loss of the former. "Self" and "world" (and "language") are correlative entities. The world is linguistically and mentally mediated as a world-encounter, the result of the perpetual withdrawal of the self, which cannot find itself in the world, while language echoes this experience of withdrawal. Within this experience the world and the self have a radically temporal structure. Thus "time" is not a collection of definable moments within a chronological series, nor a substratum of any kind of event-particles upon which it is based. Time is the detachment that the self experiences in its world-encounter in which it is trying to situate itself within the world.

Therefore, every view of the world is a temporal form of detachment. Fundamentally speaking: the *self* as that which remains location-less with respect to its world and experiences itself as separate, the *world* as a projection screen for the configurations of various experiences of loss, *time* as the process of this detachment, *negativity* as the perpetual transition of the self and of its constructions of the world and *death* as the most radical experience of self-detachment are interpenetrating spheres which in turn, as it will be shown later, lead to the idea of *God*.

At this point it should be emphasized once again that the self is neither an object nor a worldless subject, but rather a linguistically and intellectually[19] (culturally-intersubjectively) mediated encounter with the world (while the world is the linguistically and intellectually mediated encounter with the self). As indicated above, all of these encounters end in radical failure because the self finds no place in this world to which it might hold onto.

Let us focus on some selected stages of this process of (not) finding: The self attempts to locate itself in the unmediated singularity of *sensuous-certainty*, which, however, is subject to a process of constant disappearance. Then comes the attempt to locate itself (self-reflection) in the object-world of *perception*, which fails due to the dialectic of the unity of the object and the plurality of its qualities. Next, the attempt is made to locate itself in the law-based world of *understanding* in whose fixed and constant laws the *law of life* cannot be

---

19   Here, it must at least be pointed out that the phenomenon of language is not limited to the articulated language or sign language of the deaf, but occurs where beings give each other meaning. It should also be pointed out that the "spiritual" is not to be understood as a sum of subject relations. Rather, in Hegel the (general) mind and (singular) subject are in an interaction which transcends every cause-effect relationship. For this reason, intersubjectivity is to be thought of only in terms of the dialectic of the spirit and the subject.

represented in all its movement.[20] The self also attempts to locate itself in the *desire* of the living being, which can never be entirely satisfied because the ultimate desire is directed not towards a finite object but towards "aliveness" itself in all its detachment.

The next stage is locating the self in *work* as the desire that is "inhibited" by the object. However, the self is unable to find itself in the products of work. This is followed by the self then trying to locate itself by retreating into *stoic detachment* from the world, through which the self finds itself in an entirely abstract-relationless form, before attempting to locate itself in the *skeptical negation* of what it encounters. A particularly significant passage is the self's attempt to locate itself in the melancholic desire of unity with the elusive infinite *unchangeable* (as is especially manifest in today's pop music as a replacement for traditional mysticism, which marks a constant longing for unity with an unreachable vanishing point). The self then "earths" the alterity of this realm of the unchangeable infinite and searches for itself in the *unchangeable physical, chemical, and biological structures* of being.

This entire searching process ends with one of the *Phenomenology*'s key propositions, which has modern-day biologistic parallels (in light of the identification of the self with gene and protein sequences or neuronal processes): "The self is an object thing".[21] This proposition is important. On one level it indicates a total absurdity (a so-called "infinite judgment" in which the sphere of subject and predicate falls apart), inasmuch as the spirit cannot find itself in a materially conceptualized entity (the neuronal wave of the brain, for example, will refer to the colour "red" only when a linguistic act of translation is added by the "self"). Likewise, however, the proposition also holds together the "harshest" contradiction within such an "is" statement. This reflects the fact that the "self" becomes concrete only in the radical transition between "spirit" and "matter". In other words, the realm of spirit finds expression in the fully contingent material realm and conversely, the purely material world, insofar as it is abstracted from all its definite forms, is reflection respectively spirit.

---

20   From Hegel's point of view, life is not *only* the consequence, but *also* the cause of the anorganic law-world (and self-consciousness is the cause of both), since the simple difference of the law *as* a difference (and thus in its true meaning) is the self-distinction of life. This self-distinction, as difference from itself, signifies, in turn, self-consciousness, which, as a self, differs from its world and, as a difference, refers to it. This means a radical difference to today's evolutionary theories, in which self-consciousness is viewed only as an effect of life and life as an effect of inanimate nature. See also K. Appel, Zeit und Gott. Mythos und Logos der Zeit im Anschluss an Hegel und Schelling, Paderborn 2008, 264–269.

21   Specifically, the theorem is: "... and what in truth the foregoing has been saying may be expressed in this way: The *being of spirit is a bone*." (cf. Hegel, PhdG 201, par. 343).

Hegel's odyssey does not end here. The self, which does not experience any recognition as a subject in its object, now tries to locate itself in practical endeavours, for instance, in *eroticism* or *virtue*, through which it believes it can force the course of the world to run according with its will. One of the most interesting attempts at self-location occurs in the *spiritual kingdom of animal*. Its world is characterized by a self which no longer places itself in *certain* modes of dealing with the world and forms of being, but instead defines itself by its absolute flexibility. It is a self that concretes the difference inherent in self-consciousness through its ability to withdraw itself from any given determined world configuration and replace it with a new, opportune one. It finds its identity in this adaptation and ultimately in its "*work*", from which it has the ability to remain apart. This results in a world of entirely opportunistic adaptability with the consequence that the world loses all substantial content inasmuch as this content becomes a mere representation of the self, which is constantly distancing itself, a self that thus renders itself invulnerable.

This total "relativization" and "liquefaction" of what is encountered, as a mirror of the intangible self, is characteristic of the capitalist money economy, in which nothing has any intrinsic value and everything is subject to a constant re-evaluation (in this respect, every criticism of relativism as an expression of this way of dealing with the world must be accompanied by a critique of capitalism!). This is expressed figuratively in the city of Los Angeles, as a synonym of the modern city, which is pure periphery without a center, pure distance and non-relatedness. In order to somehow still represent itself in this system, the self assumes an arbitrarily changeable *brand identity*, whose only characteristic is its "non-content" and its pure formality as a brand. At the same time, it is a characteristic feature of this stage that everyone declares his or her own work or replaceable brand as if it were universally valid.

This abstract validity can no longer be filled with content, but it asserts its binding force on everyone, and in its formality it becomes a universal standard for all selves.

One example of this in recent times is the debate on a defining or guiding culture (*Leitkultur*), which is not content-able (no one knows what this culture ought to be). Its only purpose is to subject people to complete abstract-formal labels and demands (which Hegel has pointed out in the *law-testing reason*), that revolve solely around *the exclusion of the other* as the content by which the self gives itself identity.

The next stage in which the self strives to locate itself, is what Hegel calls "*spirit*."

Here the self appears to find itself in a sphere of a universal whose content is never entirely clear – a sphere that, as an expression of the universal

self, transcends any definition, in other words any characteristic (just as the individual "self" cannot ultimately be located in any kind of qualities). The singularity of the self and the universality of the *ethical community*, which is the setting the self finds itself in spirit, seem to completely coincide. According to Hegel, this community of the self and the universal is based on the genealogical *family* on the one hand, and on the other hand on the *polis*, both of which derive their self-understanding from a a shared (biological) origin (genealogy) of the subjects.

For Hegel, neither form means the arrival of the self to its long-sought identity, but rather the forms of death in which the self can only find itself as dead. In other words, both the polis-state as well as the genealogically oriented family as the basis of a community are forms of the recognition of the dead, not of the living – hence the supreme importance of war (polis) and burial of the dead (family) in these two forms of community. Both fail to do full justice to the living because the living self is distinguished by a contradiction, by an ultimate non-relatedness, which can not find any corresponding expression in these genealogically structured forms of dealing with the world. Therefore the self can not be recognized in its liveliness.

However, as the self "suffers" this non-reference, the dissolution of its embeddings as its truth, in the structures of the (biological) family and the polis, it finds itself only as an absolutely unrelated, isolated "point", in complete discontinuity with the world and every relationship to it.

Today, many "pre-modern" cultures seem to suffer these experiences – insofar as they understand themselves as genealogical and draw their self-understanding from this "natural" community but are undermined by the individuality of the modern self and its ability to distance itself from anything and everything. The only way they can defend themselves is by demonstrating their ethical substance – whose characteristics are in fact entirely resistant to identification, since they are prior to all predication – with various abstract themes (headscarf, veal sausages, etc.)[22] that they then defend as their own unique identity. This triggers a regression to the virtual brand logic addressed earlier, only with the difference that these cultures cannot distance themselves from these themes whenever they like.

Thrown back on itself, the self's next attempts to locate itself consists in its own completely abstract and contentless *claim of validity*. The first form of this is *property*, which, as indicated above, is based on an act of exclusion

---

22   There seems to be in fact a complete arbitrariness of such themes, which are presumably derived from traditions, but without having a living relationship with the culture that supports these traditions.

and is secured by the *law* (specifically, property law). In this way, however, the self experiences more and more its opposition to others and to the world, an antithesis, which it finally creates within itself in the second form of the claim to validity, namely in the *cultural formation*. The hallmark of cultural formation is the inherently contradictory or *alienated* world which the self experiences through an impenetrable subject-object opposition, which has become such a prominent feature of our own thinking.

On the one hand, this dichotomy is radicalized to the extent of a completely transcendent deistic God detached from the world, together with a world-independent (Cartesian) subject, and on the other the subjectless and godless object-world of our present day. The self is set against the world as "negativity", that is, as the nothingness of the object-world, and in this way replaces it with a virtual, thought-based world. Hence, the self finds itself reflected in its own thought process, in its intellectuality.

Hegel calls this state "*insight*". Here we find the second fundamental theorem of the P*henomenology* – "the object is self", which must be read in addition to the aforementioned notion that "the self is an object", in order to understand self (subject, spirit) and object (substance, matter) as pure transition into one another, as we shall see. In any case, in this stage, the entire world is taken back into the conception of the self and loses all intrinsic value and "aura":

First, the world is viewed from the perspective of its *utility* for the self, and finally morphs into a pure projection screen for the self's semantic emptiness, one which has destroyed all reality. The culmination of this corrosion of the world is "*absolute freedom and terror*". According to Hegel, the European project ends at this stage, which is why the *Phenomenology* marks an end to all philosophies and theologies of history (which is also how Hegel saw his book): the world as an autonomous entity has retreated fully into the projection of unrelated self-emptiness, which we have already come across in the Fall, a self-emptiness that in the Hegelian version reflects its unrelatedness as absolute nothingness. One could again use an image for this figure – the *perpetuum mobile*, the fully self-contained machine that expresses the secularized metaphysical God, a machine in which *nothing* can penetrate from the outside and that is completely intangible in the truest sense of the word.

At this stage, alienation is taken to an extreme and what remains is death as predicate-less absolute, as an absolute nothing (*nihil negativum*) into which everything returns. It is important to note that at this point the death presented here has nothing in common with human death (nor with animal death), which as seen at the end of the story of paradise, signifies withdrawal as a mask that protects against absolute emptiness of the human will to totality. This death, on the other hand, is the pure, meaningless emptiness, freed

from every aura. At most this emptiness clings to our finger in the form of a diamond ring as the last echo of the life burned in the crematoria or is manifest in the form of the preserved corpses that give us a bit of a thrill in exhibitions. Politically this stage corresponds, for example, to the absolute nihilism of National Socialism.[23] And it differs in this pure nullity from fascisms whose content derives from the virtual return into family-genealogical structures of an ethos that has become fictitious in the post-Enlightenment era.

This form of nothingness, entirely devoid of meaning, not only destroys all content, but also its history (absolute freedom, which as negative freedom is no longer related to any object, also detaches itself from all historical-genetic ties). This means that Europe can no longer fall back on the (immediate) heritage of a Christian-Jewish or antiquity-based character but is in the first instance the product of the terror inherent in the obliteration of all content. Alongside the terror manifested in the French Revolution and again on a far more massive scale in National Socialism, there is the second "form" of this absolute nothingness, namely *virtualization* as the expression of pure reflection, which no longer knows any "outside", in other words any reality. It seems fair to say that *the European spirit has found itself in virtual nothingness*. We encounter this phenomenon in academic discourse, where topics discussed amount to "nothing" (substantial); in the economy, in which human beings are merely floating around as a mere abstract phantasm within a virtual array of figurations (what are the young unemployed other than number-ghosts, superfluous, virtual); in the transformation of the earth's natural resources into fuel ("biofuel"); and in anthropological discourse, where human beings wander around as strange, heteronomous zombies (the jubilation of various journals every time they "discover" that the human being is a mere function of neuronal or physical mechanism or another is almost sinister).

This virtual world manifests itself through the total interchangeability of temporal trajectories and the arbitrary repeatability of temporal moments (for example, when the video recording replaces the event, as in many modern weddings). This obliteration of any temporal trajectory leaves no place for the new, because in this machine every place has become superfluous as a result of its random interchangeability. Young people, as those who are "not yet" and "future", are thus completely deprived of their place and remain, at best, as a virtual and ghostly ideal of a society which has become timeless.

---

23   National socialism, in its peculiarity and viciousness, can not be deduced simply from the course of development outlined here. It is, however, also to be understood as a phenomenon of a radically nihilistic "possibility", as it has developed in modern times.

The final blow wielded by this machinery is to replace life with the cybernetic control circuit. In this manner the tragic, but at least protective, mask of human death falls away, to be replaced not by life, but the pure mirror of virtual nothingness. The question remains as to whether this turn of events brings to an end the European project, or perhaps the human project itself.

Hegel, however, adds an epilogue to this "nothingness", namely (Kantian) "*morality*" and the "*conscience*". According to Hegel, "morality", as contentless abstraction and alterable imperative, is inhibited terror (just as work is inhibited desire). But it also has the tremendous attribute of having found a form of universality – everyone is equally subjected to moral law – that does not need to be defined as a genealogical or utilitarian project (as, for example, in the nepotism so prevalent in many parts of the world, which is a travesty of the genealogical-familial community).

However, according to Hegel the terroristic element of this morality consists in the fact that the contingency of nature cannot be "freed"; it remains a projection of the self, which finds itself in the validity claim of the abstract moral judgement. As the final stage in the development of spirit, conscience is addressed by Hegel as an internalized moral judgment, that is, internalized terror.

According to Hegel, at the end of the chapter on conscience, the self-righteous judgment "collapses", because the self has now found itself as a result of being thrown into a (not fully derivable) further epistemic level; it learns that the secure site of its judgement, from which it has condemned the (contingent) other, was a projection. That is, despite all its impregnability and intangibility, its location was merely virtual. The self "sees" that that which it condemned in the other, namely its finitude and contingency, is in reality the withdrawn, non-controllable place of its own self, or, as Hegel puts it in the *Science of Logic*, at the transition from essence to conceptual logic, expresses the fact that "being-in-and-for-itself" is "positedness"[24].

Through this insight, the contingency of the other is *forgiven* and the self begins to give up its validity claim. This happens precisely at the moment when it leaves behind its own virtual and secure place of judgement, to which it had withdrawn. From this vantage point, we can define the nature of forgiveness. It is not the activity of the self vis-à-vis another (I forgive you), in which the self occupies an absolute location (and finds itself again in self-righteousness). Forgiveness arises from the insight that the contingent place of the other is

---

24   G.W.F. Hegel, The Science of Logic, translated and edited by George di Giovanni, Cambridge / New York 2010, 516.

also my contingent place and that what the self means to forgive has already been forgiven.

In other words, through an act of recognition, by "becoming other to itself", the self does something which, speculatively speaking, has already occurred. Crucially, through this displacement out of its fictitious location, out of its judgment, which was the reflection of its own validity claim, the self actually loses itself and thus also loses the world as a projection screen. Through this experience of "becoming other to itself" the self is no longer able to project itself into the other and it must therefore abandon the attempt to find itself in the world.

So according to Hegel, the pure virtuality characteristic of our tendency to distance ourselves from everything entails the possibility of a different perception, one that does not regard the world as a mirror of itself. But the question remains, how this step of relocation should be understood. If it is to be deduced theoretically, it would be another self-projection and not due to a relocationary transition. In this respect, we cannot simply identify "causes". However, according to Hegel, there is a deeper way of looking at this transition.

B.   *Religion as Loss of the Self – on the Significance of Religion in Hegel's* **Phenomenology of Spirit**

In Hegel's work religion is thought to be the loss of the self, insofar as the self seeks to find its reflection in its world. This view is the exact opposite of Feuerbach's. For Feuerbach, religion was a human projection. However, in Hegel's work all religious forms become metaphors of a loss of projections and thus of the self-conception of the self. Religion's way of configuring things are necessary because they ensure that the self still has some way of expressing the gap it finds between itself and any form of objectivity (projection).

The first way – reminiscent of Kant's remarks on the sublime[25] – in which the self's relocation and loss of self is given religious form, is the experience of the emergence of a *luminous essence* (*Lichtwesen*). The light symbolizes the pure movement, the pure transition, as which the self experiences itself when it ceases to maintain itself. The self will subsequently manifest its downfall as a representable entity (what Hegel calls negativity) in ever more radical form.

When the numinous is portrayed metaphorically as God in *animal form* it is the disconcerting character of the creature that represents the self's

---

25   Kant's analysis of the sublime highlights the fact that through the experience of the ascent of the forces of nature the self is irrevocably cut off from the possibility of peacefully inhabiting the natural world. The sense of the sublime then sets in the moment the self internalizes this loss of belonging to nature and begins to transcend natural phenomena through its reason. The form of human reason is thus rooted in human reality of not belonging, which is experienced in the forces of nature in an eerily beautiful way.

detachment from itself (its relocation out of itself), and it is this estranging character that makes such an image a worthy "bearer of God". In more abstract symbolism the self encounters its own strangeness in the edges of the *pyramid*, which symbolically express the self's boundaries and its finitude as marked by death. In other words, the edges of the pyramid represent the barriers that stand in the self's way within its self-conception.

The pyramid is also constructed to conceal death. Hence it is the enigma of death through which the self suffers its radical self-detachment and which it affirms in a further transformation as the impenetrability of the sign, as in the *hieroglyph*. In subsequent religious forms the element of the negative and the contingent, or death as absolute separation of the self from all forms of self-projection, move to the fore. We might say that the metaphor of death represents the self's passage or transition to "becoming other to itself" as the end of all projection.

The gods as expressed in statues should not be understood as unmediated forms of a general self in the sense of idolatry. Instead these representations "freeze" the moment immediately before the onset of the numinous, they are thus the ossified run-up (like the terror of God) that occurs *before* the event. H.D. Bahr remarks that this is the moment before the possible onset of the gods' laughter, this laughter being the bearer of an alienating meaning that humans are unable to cope with.[26]

So rather than depicting the self, they depict its alienation. Another distinctive location within the framework of religious figurations is *language* or song, as expressed in the *hymnos*. As Hegel remarks in his *System of Ethical Life*,[27] language maintains the power of the negative, that which withdraws, and is in a sense the creature's scanned death-cry. So if religion represents the self's *transition* into its no longer projectable other – literally, in as much as religion seeks to cling to this very moment of transition that it undergoes as it breaks with itself (that is, with its projections) – it experiences another expression of this transitionality in language.

Language not only stands at the junction of organic sound and meaning, but is on a deeper level itself an expression of the rupture of the human self. In language the self does not depict a nonlinguistic reality, that is, language is not the *symbolon* of this reality. Rather, language symbolizes the rupture that self and reality undergo at each other's hands. The human being is never in

---

26　See H.D. Bahr, Sätze ins Nichts. Versuch über den Schrecken, Tübingen 1985, 327.

27　See Hegel, System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit, Albany 1988. See also G. Agamben, Language and Death, Minneapolis 1991.

reality in any unmediated sense, nor is it ever immediately present with its self. Instead the human being is internally fractured (it is one with neither world nor itself) and the speech sound manifests the self's detachment from any unmediated unity with the world or itself. This means that language, whether it takes the form of articulated words or the sounds of an instrument as simulacrum of the voice (or the articulated movement of sign language), is a superb medium for representing the rupture that the self undergoes as it is detached from its own images, a rupture that is, so to speak, absolutized through death.

Another form through which the religious sphere is symbolized is *corporeality* as expressed in the movement, for example, of the game (it is the Olympic Games that Hegel initially has in mind). In playful movement, the body becomes a reference to a second habitual body, and one could view the mastery in dance and of the body as a mastery of the transition between the two bodies, the "real" and the "referenced" (the deepest motive for medieval representations of the dance of death may lie in the intuition that the first body consists of eventually being seized by the second body, that is, to make the final transition!).

Before turning to Hegel's interpretation of Christianity I would like to conclude this selection of religious images with two forms, namely *tragedy* and the *comedic consciousness*. The most striking feature of the former is the necessity of fate, whose mask conceals death in all its inexorability. Death swallows up gods and human beings and thus emerges as the nothingness of all previous mask-like symbolizations. It thus expresses the truth of the ethos itself (as manifest in the ethical community and family). Above all, however, the self now experiences its complete contingency and its rupture with the world and with itself as it faces the final mask, the death mask, which reflects back no positive self-understanding.

The question that now arises is whether there is still "something" behind this mask. And it is at precisely this point that the comedy begins: the masks fall away as all previous forms and even death is laughed out of existence, (so perhaps Nietzsche is the great comedian of our times). What remains is the *naked*[28] self. In contrast to the self-related *insight*, which in Hegel's interpretation places itself behind its intellectualist validity claim, the naked self has obliterated every mask and (self-)projection protecting it. Because it has shed,

---

28   While in the case of the fall nakedness reflects the emptiness of the totalitarian gaze and the self-projection that corresponds to it, the nakedness of the comedic self signifies the end of all (self-)projections and thus goes hand-in-hand with a radical knowledge of the contingency and vulnerability of Dasein. Shame, meanwhile, begins with the knowledge of (self-)projections – which separate the self from its own contingency. In this sense we might say that comedy is shameless because it operates at the end of all projections.

in other words worked through, every mask, the comedic consciousness can say of itself: "*The self is the absolute essence*".[29] This detached and naked self is marked by total contingency and singularity and one might ask whether it is not in fact laughter that simulates[30] an original crack in every mask-like reality.

In any case, an element of contingency seems to be in the offing in this comedic laughter, an element capable, without warning, of taking off the masks of our existence, perhaps even those that make up present day virtual reality. So does God laugh? But why, we might ask, is the Christian God not depicted laughing? Why do we never hear that Jesus laughed (however convinced we may be that this "glutton" and "drunkard" was a source of amusement)?

In the story of the Fall, death cloaked the unfathomable nothingness that concealed the infinite desire for the (re-)presentability of God, while this nothingness in turn obliterated the original clothes of grace, that is, the decentering of one's own power of disposal. In its anarchical attitude towards all projections, laughter now signifies such decentering. But – at least in Hegel's interpretation of the comedy – laughter remains ambivalent, since there is no way to determine whether it offers the self an ultimate refuge and, so to speak, replaces death as a form of clothing, or whether it ultimately has the potential to jeopardize itself by making itself tangible to the other. In this sense, according to Hegel, the self (or all its projections and objectifications) must be sacrificed in a more radical way, namely on the *cross*, which emerges as necessary for salvation.

Laughter, with its an-archic significance, becomes the springboard for a re-locationary step to a place of radical exposure and tangibility. In Hegel's work, *unhappy consciousness*, as the "birthplace of the absolute", referred to the attempt – which we encounter through the Fall – to unite the finite human being with the immutable, in other words with God. The unhappiness resulted from the fact that this attempt failed because God remained, so to speak, transcendent of human desire and the union was only ever with one's own desire. Through *revealed religion*, in other words through the revelation of the cross of Christ, this union now paradoxically occurs through a contingency that is radically exposed to the temporal world.

The pain of the self is no longer the pain of unfulfilled longing but stems from the vulnerability, openness and exposure of one's own existence, in which God becomes present. It is crucially important that the event of the cross is a

---

29   Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 430, par. 748.

30   Perhaps the canned laughter of present-day sitcoms, as a medium of the virtuality described earlier, serves to simulate the genuine occurrence of anarchical laughter to the point where this laughter is no longer audible.

singular, absolute event. This is because there is no valid (reflexive) image of it that might serve as a reference point for any kind of repetition that would allow us to tone down the contingent element and bring it under our control.[31] It goes so far that the singularity of immediate sensibility and objectivity, that is, *body*, comes to the fore on the cross as paradoxically the (reflective) language itself is overridden in this place, and thus this event is described as an absolute one, detached from all dispositions, attributions, masks, and garments.[32]

No symbolization, then, can do justice to the absoluteness of this event of the most radical externalization. The subject is deprived of the option of constructing in the other a new projection screen to save itself from this externalization, to once again elude the contingency of being, to evade contact with the other. What vanishes in this instance is an objectifiable God of any kind into which the self might project itself in order to distance itself from its own *corpus* of tangibility.

Jesus thus is neither an unmediated manifestation of the transcendent God in a modalistic sense, nor the second entity in a heaven of three gods, as tritheism would suggest. Instead he points the way to a relocation out of oneself, a shift that indicates not an external "other" (the world-transcending God) as a mirror of one's own distancing from the other, but to a *sphere of absolute tangibility and vulnerability that becomes the only "abode" of God,* as the skin of the absolute, so to speak.[33] This observation brings us back to the story of the Fall and endows the tree of life with a deeper significance. It is the place of absolute tangibility, vulnerability and exposure (in this sense, the old iconography was brilliantly intuitive in depicting the tree as a cross) in the middle of pure, affective communication with the rest of the world.[34] The tree of life is the bare body, the divine garment of a "second" skin that clothed the human being "before" the Fall.

Paradoxically, the "death of God" also involves a re-evaluation of death, the "death of death" in a sense. Death was conceptualized either as the annihilation

---

31 In this sense Kant is right to state that all doctrinal theodicies are doomed to fail.

32 Hegel makes the remarkable statement that religion still dresses reality in the garment of our representational thought (Phenomenology, 392, par. 678). Only the cross-event would constitute a final radical divestment, though the churches rush to create a distance from this by placing it in a past or future.

33 The cross of Jesus, therefore, is the affective transition from the actual and the habitual body, insofar as Jesus' body is entirely the reference of God. For a thought of the body as the transition of these two spheres, see also the statements of M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 107.

34 On the affectivity of God, see P. Sequeri, "'Nur einer ist der Gute' (Mt 19,17). Theologie der Affektion als Umkehr der Ontologie", in: E. Arens, Ästhetik trifft Theologie (QD 246), Freiburg 2012, 46–72.

of the self (as expressed in the *Phenomenology* in paradigmatic form in the chapter "*absolute freedom and terror*") as in our culture, in which a hopeless nothingness that destroys all meaning (*nihil negativum*) takes the place of the deceased[35] (where the deceased becomes "nothing"), or in the more "favorable" case, as an ambivalent mask intended to limit human beings' infinite desire (from a divine perspective). On the cross death no longer means the absence of "something", but both the absence of all images and projections (of self-concepts and concepts of the other) and the ultimate sealing of this absence.

The ancient gods and religious forms as death-figurations disappear in this absence as do all mundane attempts at self-locating. *As a result, Europe stands in the field of tension between two figures of dis-apparition, namely the deadly terror of one's own self-projection and the life-giving cross* which means the absolute openness to otherness.

In John 20.11–18 Mary experiences a "reversal" at the grave, at the place of emptiness of all images. She turns away from the horror of the empty tomb that she has expressed to the two messengers of God ("They have taken away my Lord"), a horror into which the world has retreated and that makes it impossible to sustain any imagery. Instead she embraces her determination, conveyed to the "gardener" (does the impossibility of recognizing Jesus in the form of the gardener not indicate this loss of the image?), to retrieve her *kyrios* from the place of mere absence ("tell me where you have put him, and I will get him"), in other words she is willing to descend into hell, or make the journey into the void. She receives her name spoken by a voice, whereby she recognizes her *kyrios*, in a second turn, in which the final certainty, namely death as absolutely different non-place, disappears. Jesus' tangibility ("Do not hold on to me") requires postponement, inasmuch as the sphere of the second body must first develop also as a sphere of absolute tangibility.

According to Hegel, the lack of *revealed religion*, that is, of historical Christianity, consists in the fact that it places the transition of the cross as a paradigmatic transition between the body and the sphere of its absolute tangibility into a past or future event, and thus, once again, strives to shield itself from contingency which is devalued as evil and from the associated vulnerability. In the latter case the liturgical event, which celebrates this transition, is not taken seriously.

C.   *Absolute Knowledge and the Body of God*

At the end of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, in the chapter on absolute knowledge emerges as a key category that of transition. In theological terms it is here that the *Holy Spirit* manifests itself. Even a thinker such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty,

---

35   34 Cf. H.D. Bahr, Den Tod Denken, München 2002.

who no one would suspect of practising theology, emphasizes the importance of the category of transition – beyond its reduction to a mere shift of location – when he highlights that we "must conceive a world that is not made up of only things, but also has pure transitions."[36] In Hegels *Phenomenology* the transition is found in the beginning of Religion itself, inasmuch as its forms symbolized the transition as re-locationary steps by the self out from its projections (that is out of itself).

The most radical point in which the transition occurs can be seen and witnessed as the divine event in itself, on the cross of Jesus. In this event HIS crucified body is seen as an absolute reference to a zone of pure tangibility, one in which the transition as such is opened up between Christ and the Father, contingency and the absolute, man and God, the singular and the universal, matter (thing) and spirit (self), the physical body and the second body that Mary beheld and that was prefigured in the Olympic Games. It is crucial here that in this transitionality every causal trajectory is ruptured and the act of beginning is simultaneously the beginning of another: to touch means to be touched and to give yourself to touching, to recognize means to be recognized and to give yourself to recognizing, speaking is to be spoken and to give yourself to language, telling is to be told and to give yourself to telling, to temporalize is to be temporalized and to give yourself as a temporal form, and so on (it must be added here that both self and time find their essence in transition).[37]

It is particularly important to address the transition between the absolute and the contingent: As demonstrated in revealed religion, the absolute has divested itself completely, it has relinquished in what is given as a separate sphere, and showed up in the sensory tangibility of the contingent self. The transition, which is addressed in absolute knowledge, is that of a self which previously wanted to locate itself in the stages of its projections, or tried to cope with its loss of self, still employing forms or masks, into the total *exposure* that serves as a "second skin" or second body, *which is the body and the tangibility of the absolute itself.* Concretely, this has the vexing consequence that God reveals himself in the randomness of a tangible, that is, suffering exposure and existence.

To put it another way: who the human being is in the deepest sense is particularly manifest when he is affected by entirely contingent events. This means that the world and our lives are not, as normally regarded, a reserve of possibilities, most of which are not realized and ever fewer of which remain as life

36   M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, 320.

37   In Hegel's work time is the unity of subject and object, namely the Concept in its reality (der daseiende Begriff), while Merleau-Ponty states that we must "understand time as the subject, and the subject as time". See M. Merleau-Ponty, Perception, 490.

proceeds, so we can only hope that God in paradise enables all those things that were denied during our lives.[38] Instead they manifest themselves in contingent and in completely unpredictable instances in which we are touched, wherein the absolute itself strives to be with us, to the point that we either accept it, or shield ourselves against it. When Hegel speaks of a reason of history, his point is not to turn history into an abstract necessity. What is at issue here is the paradoxical reason of the contingent moment, which we cannot cope with or integrate into our own desire, but whose randomness and exposure are the wellspring of spiritual events. I have no wish to deny that, as the Bible knows, these encounters (with God) can be profoundly hurtful and even life-threatening (see for example Ex. 4:24), such that they are inscribed deeply and for ever in our existence as scars and fissures and there is no ultimate certainty that they will not shatter us. But it must be understood that this is not a matter of any ultimate uncertainty either, since general-theoretical statements no longer work at this point and insight passes over into practice and knowledge into hope.

One more element is to be underlined in this final part. I have pointed out that body of pure tangibility, the tree of life into which time is inscribed, not least as the scars of our existence. From the Christian standpoint, this body or the scripture engraved into it, has a particular shape, namely that of a text, which preserves the memory of who are touched or injured, called *the Bible*.[39] The Bible is skin/body become word and signifies the transition between flesh and word.

(Post-)Apocalyptic Epilogue: Musil's "Moonbeams by Sunlight"

A.   *The Forms of Time and their Transition to Scripture – the Book of Revelation*

This brings us to the provisional end of our reflections: God becomes manifest in a scripture that embodies those moments in our lives when we are touched

---

38   Also E. Jüngel, God as the mystery of the world. On the theology of the Crucified in the Controversy of Theism and Atheism, London: Bloomsbury 2014, 215 seems to go in this direction when he speaks of the fact that a "Christian eschatology would thus think of eternal life as the revelation of life is lived with all of the possibilities which surround it, that is, not merely as the eternalizing of the possibility out of which our life became possible, but rather as the revelation and implementation of all those possibilities into which our life constantly moves without ever having realized them.".

39   On this aspect, see M. Neri, Il corpo di Dio. Dire Gesù nella cultura contemporanea (EDB 85), Bologna 2010.

by contingency. This scripture takes the form both of a universal canon of narratives of tangibility as "sublated history" and the infinite variety of particular and personal forms of perpetuation. Today, it seems, people have lost the sense of the ideational body that this denotes in which our injuries, celebrations, and stories are inscribed (no one would dare to suggest that, in the deepest sense, this may in fact be the most genuine form of the church; words such as "body of Christ", incarnation, and so on threaten to degenerate into farce) and therefore these inscriptions are made in a different way, for example in the omnipresent tattoos. It seems to me that these express an infinite longing for real experience of one's own individuality, in other words for a moving encounter with the other, though the other is barely able to penetrate the thick layer of our virtualities.

I would now like to steer the ideas presented above in a philosophy-of-history direction by looking at the final text (scar, engraving) of the Bible, the Book of Revelation.

1. Through its last book the Bible is given a framework that is both spatially and temporally universal. Spatially, the Book of Revelation extends, starting with the island of Patmos and the seven churches of Asia Minor, over the entire globe and beyond to heaven and hell, to the sphere of the dead, the surviving, and the heavenly court. Temporally, this scripture, which completes the canon, extends the Bible to all of history, from its beginnings or even from the period before its beginnings (as in the first chapters of Genesis) to its end and even beyond. Christians' holy scripture is thus the transformation of all of history into text or, in light of the ideas presented here, the insertion of history into that second body of total tangibility and exposure in which the scars of creaturely existence are engraved.

It might help us to reflect on the relationship of this text to "chronological" history if we turn to the closing reflections in Hegel's *Phenomology*. Also Hegel's text indirectly structures human, or at least European history, in accordance with certain figures of knowledge. According to Hegel, time is the sublation of mere now-moments; it is not simply a physical phenomenon. Time is the expression of spiritual conscious-being (Bewusst-Sein), in other words of a world that cannot be regarded merely as an object but is located at the point of transition between subject and object or immanence and transcendence. In the transitionality of these forms of conscious-being time in turn takes shape in certain epistemic and religious figures, or we might also say in specific eras, in which a particular form of conscious-being predominates.

The focus of these eras are the transitions that take place, which is why they never represent a sequence that might be apprehended in a positivist sense. The decisive transition was the one between the absolute and the contingent,

which the community saw in Jesus Christ, towards whom "chronological" history retrieves without exhausting itself.

The associated perception of this transition as the tree of life in its total tangibility, vulnerability and exposure – when the self begins to relocate itself, relinquishing its shields, masks and projections – thus offers a kind of texture or second skin or second body or, in patristic terms, "clothes of grace" for the human being. This finds paradigmatic expression in the structure of the Bible as an embodiment of this "tree of life." If we look at its relationship to the *Phenomenology*, the tree of life represents both its end point as well as its reference point.

2. A second important consideration is the position of the Book of Revelation within the canon, which it completes. In point one above I drew attention to the way this scripture embeds the canon in a universal temporal framework in which the entire cosmos (in a Hegelian sense) is sublated. In addition, Revelation also is distinguished by the fact that it recapitulates the entire canon. It provides a kind of textual collage of every part of the preceding scriptures, which are never quoted verbatim, but now are re-read at the end of the entire story (or must be). The canon is translated or, in fact, revoked into images and this translation creates a collage-like historical retrospective featuring multifarious ruptures that extend all the way into grammar.[40]

We thus find in this work elaborate rhetorical figures alongside – from a superficial standpoint – the most simple grammatical errors.[41] So one of the book's messages is that God can no longer be detected linguistically or grammatically, or that we can only get a sense of God through a ruptured language and displaced images. My colleague Jacob Deibl drew my attention to the fact that the Christian's canon begins with stories, but concludes in the form of letters. The Book of Revelation, addressed both to the seven churches and their angels and to Jesus Christ (!) (Rev. see. 1:5b), is no exception. So the canon ends with a personal, amicable mode of address, which is amplified by a proclamation of seven beatitudes (the number of fullness), the last of which refers back to the tree of life. So the last dimension is the transformation of speech into prayer (see Part IV "The Price of Prayer").

3. The book of Revelation provides not only a great historical arc and recapitulates the Scripture, it also comprises its epilogue, a postscript to history,

40   See also G. Biguzzi, Apocalisse, Milano 2005, esp. 60. See also T. Paulsen, On the Language and Style of the Apocalypse of John (manuscript not yet published, kindly provided by T. Nicklas).

41   See G. Biguzzi, Apocalisse, Milan 2005, esp. 60.

already evident in its transmission on the eighth day, Sunday, the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). For this purpose it is in its main parts retrospective, which also includes the future. In this context it should be taken into account that *from a Christian perspective, our existence represents such an epilogue*. It is (in sacramental terms) not life, but death that Christians leave behind: their life thus represents a transition between life and death as do the lives of all human beings, then a transition between death and life in baptism, eventually becoming a transition between death and death and thus a radical splitting of this enigmatic event. Christian time is threshold time, and in the literal sense completed, that means it is "full-ended" (voll-endet) (located between two ends).

The structure of the Book of Revelation conveys the significance of this epilogue. The great arch extends from the letter to the seven churches, the seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls, and finally back to seven visions in which the suffering and violence of human history is described retrospectively in a staccato of images. Once this history of violence has come to an end to the point where previous sites of action (heaven, earth) have vanished entirely, a vision is invoked that first involves a description of the new, hospitable Jerusalem, before passing over in a voice that blesses those who participate in the tree of life, those who are affected by the stories of suffering in the world (a counter-image can be found in Revelation 18:7, where Babylon declares that she doesn't know any grief). This auditory account finally disappears in favor of a testimony of the book, into which the tree of life is transformed. This ultimately culminates in a liturgy that includes prayer for the coming of the Lord Jesus and concludes with a blessing for all ("The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all!").

Thus Revelation, construed as epilogue to the Scripture, successively dismisses all images in which it had recalled and reconfigured the entirety of history, including the final utopian vision, before *transitioning* into a blessing that signifies the peroration of time, the tree of life, the Book and the second skin / the second body as manifestation of the kyrios.

B.   *Moonbeams by Sunlight*

The epilogue of history recapitulates this history in order to dismiss it, that is, the dominance of certain forms, and thus allows it to relate freely to the individual forms, without having to dissociate itself from them in abstract fashion. According to the Revelation, this epilogue opens into a feast, and finally into a blessing. It seems now that the initial question asked can be answered – what is celebrated on the seventh (or eighth) day? It is the transformation of the external event, of the chronological, seemingly meaningless world, of history into a space of encounter where the human being, in affirmation of its contingency,

becomes nothing but sensitivity, that is, a second body of tangibility at the intersection of the human being and God. In a sense, the festive encounter and the vitality and creativity contained in it, far from being the repression of death and the oblivion of contingency – that would be their farce – turns out to be the most profound expression of that corpus.

In an exceptionally profound way, one of the great works of world literature, namely Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*[42] bears witness to this. Its chronological framework already gives us something to think about. The whole work takes place immediately before the outbreak of World War I, before Europe's great apocalypse. This framework has an asymmetrical parallel in the age of the protagonist, Ulrich, who is 32 years old, right at the threshold of the age of Christ when he (at least according to tradition) was crucified. At the same time, however, the work points beyond the Apocalypse, which unfolds – true to Austrian style – as a farce.

The plot is centered around the so-called "Parallel Campaign", which is to "bring to bear the full weight of a seventy- year reign, so rich in blessings and sorrows, against the jubilee of a mere thirty years".[43] This is a reference to the government anniversaries of the two emperors Franz Joseph I of Austria and Wilhelm II of Germany. We know that this anniversary of Franz Joseph never took place, because he had already died in 1916 (that is, after 68 years of reign). In this sense, the parallel action is something doubly absurd because first it will be the anniversary of a dead person, and second because it also coincides with the fall of the Austrian Empire.

Despite its impending collapse, the Parallel Campaign is centered around a motto which expresses Austria's status as the "true location of the world spirit".[44] Ultimately, the Parallel Campaign turns out to be an immense series of meetings, intrigues, discussions, and full participation polls that are only missing one thing – content or, if you will, a global idea that could cover everything. In this sense, the main protagonist, Ulrich, is the ideal secretary for this activity because he is a "man without qualities", a person with no guiding idea, who has lost the "elementary, narrative mode of thought to which private life still clings, even though everything in public life has already ceased to be narrative and no longer follows a thread, but instead spreads out as an infinitely interwoven surface".[45]

---

42   Quotations in what follows from *The Man Without Qualities*, vols 1 and 2, translated by Sophie Wilkins, New York 1996.

43   Musil, The Man Without Qualities, 87.

44   Musil, 185 (translation modified).

45   Ibid., 709.

Taking an overall view of this profoundly Austrian work, one can say that it has an apocalyptic dimension (if we take the word "apocalyptic" to imply doomsday, not a new beginning): it plays out towards the end of the old Austria, but far beyond this it deals with a world in which the Messiah does not come to full age. It takes place in a world that exceeds its own demise as farce (as indicated by the seventy-year anniversary for Emperor Franz Joseph I that never took place). It is a world that seems to know, above all, no hope for the future. When one gives an inaugural lecture at the University of Vienna in a humanities context, the (post-)apocalyptic nexus of the city should be mentioned.

Vienna is not only the city, which is the source of key global intellectual achievements of the 20th century – one should only think of Freud's psychoanalysis, twelve-tone music of Schönberg, Gödel's incompleteness theorem, Schrödinger's quantum physics, the philosophy of language by Wittgenstein and the art of Schiele and Klimt – but also the city with a pronounced apocalyptic literature – that of Musil, Kraus, Horváth and later Bernhard or Bachmann. This is shaped by the fact that it has lost faith in the validity of the old world without being able to confront the world with a new utopian project. It is a world of the vanishing present and the lost future. As such, it is a world that goes far beyond "Austria" and is now affecting more and more regions of world culture. One might say that this is a world that has history *behind* it, so in a sense, *a post-mortem* world.

What can appear theologically particularly fascinating in this novel by Musil is the fact that this "post mortem", which, as we have seen, is central to a Christian understanding of time, is discussed in its religious dimensions. In Christian terms we can say that this "post mortem" time can be understood as the time between baptism, where the old man dies, and in which there is a transition from the world of the living dead to life, and the parousia of Christ. It is thus a time that indicates a transition between death and death, in which death no longer means the enigmatic and nullifying nothingness, but a radical relocationary step out of one's own projections and thus into a new capacity to be touched by and absorb life.

Furthermore, it should be stressed that in this "between" of death and death this death itself is splitted. *Christians have death, and the goal of history, namely the resurrection of Christ as messianic event, ahead of and behind them* and thus find themselves at the thresholds of times and of life, that is on the threshold of the future and the past.

These thresholds constantly merge into one another and thus do not express any unilateral passage of time with an increasing accumulation of pasts. The Christian path thus leads not only from the past to the future, but also from the future into the past. The world in which we live is both a "past" and

a "future" world or a world of the "between" of future and past. Our "arrival" in the present takes place in this way "too late" or "too early", but in any case "a-present". The *futur antérieur* that this implies and the a-*presence* of Christian existence means that *Christian existence signifies an arrival* ("after the fact", *post festum*) *in that which is already prepared, in order to* (in view of the *parousia*) *take leave of it*. Seen in this light Christianity is neither a utopian project geared towards a future yet to come, nor a retrospective project, which remains rooted in the past. It is also not self-fixing in the various abodes and images of a firmly grasped present. Rather it crosses the times and is deeply anachronistic. Musil's protagonist Ulrich gets to the heart of the matter: "God is profoundly un-modern: we simply cannot imagine him in tails, clean-shaven, with neatly parted hair; our image of him is still patriarchal".[46]

Musil could be seen as the supreme guide for anyone wanting to explore the terrain of this anachronism. His work features a transition from an apocalyptic – in the conventional sense, i.e. a hopeless scenario of dissolution – towards an "anachronistic search for God".

The first part of *The Man Without Qualities* provides a lucid portrayal of this dissolution of all ideas and hopeful scenarios. The grand projects and narratives are exhausted and no longer credible. The world, following the "principle of insufficient cause"[47], lacks a guiding idea and – just like the man without qualities, who is unequal to the epic task of producing a coherent narrative – disintegrates into a multiplicity of moments, into particles of thought and time.

One aspect of this process of disintegration is expressed in the fact that for Ulrich the world increasingly disappears as the mirror surface of his own desire and the site of the realization of his action, prompting him to take "holiday from life". In this scenario, a re-locationary step begins to manifest itself within him, analogous to the transition of spirit and religion in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. This re-locationary step, for which the ground has already been laid in a man who can no longer locate his "self" in the world, who is "qualities without a man"[48], finds its embodiment in the re-encounter of the protagonist with his sister Agathe, from whom Ulrich was separated in early childhood. The two worlds that can be found in Ulrich (but also in Agathe), namely the world of rational-critical insights and the affective world of a so-called "faith", which is nothing less than a condition of not-knowing or a doubling of knowledge, enter into a fruitful tension through Ulrich's relationship with Agathe who, like Ulrich, is also a critical spirit, but who also possesses high emotional intelligence.

---

46   Ibid., 211.
47   Ibid., 139.
48   Ibid., 156.

In a perilous and passionate love that risks crossing the borderline into physical love (incest), both enter the "thousand-year empire", "where life grows in a magical silence like a flower"[49] and whose transitions bring heaven and earth to meet. Ulrich and Agathe are in a "garden" of "day-bright mysticism" of contingent and sensuous realms whose certainty – as in Hegel's turn back from absolute knowledge to sensuous certainty – they experience in a new way because the old images and self-reflections have been shattered. Invisible and yet uniquely real "moonbeams by sunlight"[50] shine down into this day-bright mysticism of everyday perception of the world.

They represent a kind of "splendor" of the Absolute and refer to that "second skin" of pure tangibility and vulnerability at the sight of which the world can arise, at least momentarily, in a new festive way. And in the permanent loss and the painful devaluation of all images and conceptions of the world, that is in the contingency and transience of temporal forms that provide no final foothold, all at once the "face of time" becomes "deceptively beautiful, and radiant, by a single thought! For what if it were God Himself who was devaluing the world? Would it not then again suddenly acquire meaning and desire? And would He not be forced to devalue it, if He were to come closer to it by the tiniest step? And would not perceiving even the anticipatory shadow of this already be the one real adventure?!"[51]

Perhaps this is Christianity's contribution to a new humanism in our time. Now that the great utopias have faded away and the world faces unprecedented threats, veiled by an impenetrable mirror of media-based and intellectual self-reflection that refers to "nothing", a Christian perspective can help us break away from the media-generated and abstract images (to "devalue" them). It can help us move on from the large but now empty words produced by theology and the churches (along with politics and the academy), which dangle before us too much love and alterity and salvation but not enough contingency and gestures of mercy. This shift is linked to the adoption of a culture of tangibility and a perception of the vulnerability of being (what would be the churches' present-day purpose if not this: to function as the network or structure of such tangibility, to be a universal "second skin"), whose (visible and ideational) body is celebrated on the seventh day as the epilogue to creation, in a feast given by HIM.

I will close with a quote from Musil, "human activities might be graded by the quantity of words required: the more words, the worse their character."[52]

---

49   Musil, The Man Without Qualities II, 1118.
50   Musil, II 1182.
51   Ibid., II, 1189.
52   Musil, The Man Without Qualities, 264.

On the Name of God and the Opening of New Linguistic Horizons

Considerations Starting from the Bible, Hölderlin, and Rilke

Jakob Helmut Deibl

Dear Kurt!   Summer 2013

Thank you very much for the invitation to write a reply to your inaugural lecture "Christianity as a New Humanism"[1] I was very happy about it and would like to accept your invitation in form of a letter.

Preliminary Note

The basic scheme of the lecture is a distinctive three-part structure based on three reference texts: the *biblical primeval history* (Gen 1–11), Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Musil's *Man without Qualities*.

At the beginning there is an interpretation of the two inextricably entangled *biblical stories of creation* (Gen 1–3). Both texts refer to an element of pure excess that cannot be located, to an open space whose indisposability [*Unverfügbarkeit*] represents a barrier to a totalizing, appropriating view and thus the opening of a spiritual element, namely the seventh day and the tree of knowledge. However, the accounts describe the failure in dealing with this elusive element, which disappears in the face of an attitude shaped by a boundless desire to possess. The dislocation from paradise, which constitutes God's answer to this, represents the restoration of distance and the "decentration" of the ego's desire for a total view. The ambivalent gift of mortality that accompanies this can be equated to man's protection from the phantasm of having himself, as well as the Other, entirely at his disposal.

At this point the lecture proceeds to its second reference text, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and presents a sequence of different attempts by the ego to achieve the aforementioned total view by projecting itself into the world it encounters, which involves particular conceptions of history. Each of

---

1   Inaugural lecture at the University of Vienna on June 21, 2012, slightly modified in this volume under the title "Christianity and a New Humanism: Historical-Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Bible, Hegel, and Musil".

the ego's attempts to find itself completely in the world, however, must fail and ends, so to speak, with the figure of a farewell, just as at the end of the paradise story. What takes place in connection with this is the dissolution of the corresponding conceptions of history. The driving force of these conceptions is the desire to overcome the contingency of history and, consequently, represents a bounded, non-free way of dealing with it. This (ambivalent) *path of desperation* (Hegel) ultimately leads to a new perspective on religion. Instead of fixed regulations, it allows the category of *transition* (*Übergang*) to increasingly emerge. Instead of the constant attempts of the ego to find itself in certain projections and to hide its own finitude, a new form of human tangibility is found, a *second body of pure tangibility and exposure*. The category of transition does not imply a transition from one fixed determination to another, but rather indicates an event (*Ereignis*), in which relationships and their meaning are constituted in the first place. This again opens up a spiritual view, which had been prevented previously by the appropriating desire in the paradise story. Which representation of history could correspond to this newly arisen perspective?

The third section of the lecture is dedicated to the *Book of Revelation* and Musil's *Man without Qualities* and seeks to interpret the time after the end of certain conceptions of history as the "epilogue to history"[2]. The epilogue does not represent an arbitrary, self-contained conception of history but is merely an afterword that has ceased to take possession of reopened time after the rupture of all systems of history. Moreover, the epilogue could also be interpreted as the temporal form par excellence of Christianity, for from its viewpoint the decisive event of the Incarnation has already taken place, and the subsequent story can be read and fashioned as its epilogue. The time of the epilogue could also be thought of as the temporal form corresponding to a *new humanism*, especially since it challenges us with a perception in which the human is no longer protected and distorted by the masks of hitherto valid systems of meaning.

This hints at the concern of the inaugural lecture, which is expressed programmatically in its first sentence: to "lay bare a certain perspective on the human condition, which must precede any approach to the question of humanism"[3]. The most important logical category that is developed is that of *transition*; the most important temporal and linguistic category is that of the *epilogue*, and the motif that guides the question regarding a new humanism is the *tangibility of man in contingent encounters*.

---

2   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, Preliminary Remarks, 1.

3   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, Preliminary Remarks, 1.

To the path you have taken, which is summarized here in brief, I would like to add a parallel line that leads from the story of *Cain and Abel* via Hölderlin's elegy *Heimkunft* (*Homecoming*) on to Rilke's *Stundenbuch* (*Book of Hours*). One could also speak of three transitions: The first leads from the paradise story to the tale of Cain and Abel and continues the contemplation of the biblical text at the precise point where you leave it, on the basis of the categories that you developed. It thus results from *continued* reading. The second leads from Hegel's philosophy to Hölderlin's poetry and refers to a *friendship* in thought, while simultaneously undergoing a transformation of linguistic expression. The third leads from Musil to Rilke and alludes to a *contemporaneity* that can never be intentionally constructed, but rather arises from a shared horizon, a generality that always already precedes us. It seems to me that Musil and Rilke share the concern of expressing this enigma through language.

As far as the form of my text is concerned, one could speak of a further transition leading from the *lecture* to a *letter*. From a Christian point of view, the letter form has permanently oriented all subsequent writing, since it not only represents the most frequently applied literary genre of the *New Testament* in *quantitative* terms, but also defines its temporal boundaries: It is the oldest form of Christian writing (*First Letter to the Thessalonians*) and also marks the end of the development of the texts considered canonical (*Second Letter of Peter*).[4]

I would like to add to your concern, which is of great importance for me, the question of whether a certain *opening towards a new language* should not go hand in hand with that perspective on the human which must precede any approach to humanism. This is what I am trying to show by accentuating the fragile line of poetry that runs alongside and presupposes the philosophical one you have elucidated. Whilst your remarks are pervaded by the effort to fuse together "the understanding of God, man, and time"[5], I will try to make the question of language audible in the texture that you explicate. At the beginning of the section of your lecture focusing on Hegel, we read that "'Self' and

---

4   The epistolary form of this text is not intended to imply an explicit discussion of Heidegger's famous *Letter on Humanism*. References could, however, be established on the basis of the opening to a new language, as well as Heidegger's reference to Hölderlin: "Hölderlin, on the other hand, does not belong to 'humanism'" – one must keep in mind that in this text Heidegger equates humanism with a dispositive understanding of man, in contrast to which he would like to suggest an original thinking of man – "precisely because he thought the destiny of man's essence in a more original way than 'humanism' could." (M. Heidegger, Basic Writings, New York 2008, 225.)

5   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, Preliminary Remarks, 1.

'world' (and 'language') are correlative entities".[6] Whilst your considerations focus above all on the conceptions of self and world which change together, I would like to dedicate my supplementary remarks on your lecture to the parenthetically referenced *language*: How does language arise from the forming of self and world?

From the Gift of Mortality to the Name of God

The inaugural lecture showed that the First Creation Story (*Priestly source*) and the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall (Gen 1–3) can be read as *one* pericope. On this basis, the dislocation from the garden, as well as the gift of mortality, can be seen as "restitution measures, simulacra of the original protection"[7] that the deprivation of the tree of knowledge (as well as of the seventh day) represents. The story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4) – which begins precisely where the considerations of the inaugural lecture leave the biblical text – builds on this and presents two opposing tendencies in dealing with the protection granted by God: on the one hand, the continuation of the desire for a total view, which is perennial and appears in ever new disguises, and, on the other hand, the dawning perception of an elusive element in encounters, ruptures, transitions and shifts. As will be shown, two different forms of understanding history are connected to these tendencies. From the inaugural lecture I would like to draw attention to the change of perspective in the dynamics of these stories.

The first motif to pay attention to in the story of Cain and Abel is the presentation of the two brothers. One first looks at Cain: "He is the main character, the first-born son, the future head of the family, the new patriarch,"[8] and is presented by Eve as a man: "I have gotten a man from YHWH" (Gen 4:1). Abel, on the other hand, is not specifically brought into focus but receives his identity through Cain, as his brother: "And she again bare his brother Abel"

---

6 K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, A. The world as Mirror of the Self and its Shattering – Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Reason and Spirit in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 12.

7 K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, B. The Gown of Grace and the Nakedness of Existence, 9.

8 K. Butting, Abel steh auf! Die Geschichte von Kain und Abel – und Schet (Gen 4,1–26), in: BiKi 58 (2003), 16. The following considerations take their starting point from this article. See also G. Fischer, Die Anfänge der Bibel. Studien zu Genesis und Exodus (Stuttgarter Biblische Aufsatzbände 49), Stuttgart 2011, 42 et seq. I would like to thank Rita Perintfalvi for numerous references.

(Gen 4:2). While God was the inaccessible reference point at Cain's birth, Cain moves over to this position at Abel's birth. A certain concept of strength and genealogical continuity, as represented by the first-born, takes over God's position, which initially represents the open center of the event of the passing on of life. The names are also telling: "Cain" can be connected with *to acquire* and *possession*[9], while "Abel" means *breeze*:

> Everything suggests that the name is to denote the breeze-like nature of the fleeting life of the slain and generally 'the evanescence or nothingness of man also as a possibility of being human together' (Westermann …)[10].

With his name Abel thus assumes the gift of mortality. While Cain is subsequently portrayed as acting and speaking, Abel appears merely as an imitator; thus, like Cain, he offers his sacrifice (Gen 4:3). Cain is God's interlocutor, whereas Abel remains silent.

The view presented here replaces the open space associated with God with a perspective that is captured by the history of the strong and whose center of reference regarding relationships, orientations and desires resides in this history. This initial situation reiterates the perspective that arises in the story of the Garden of Eden, when its open space becomes occupied by the displaced tree of knowledge, which at first could not be localized but now has "moved [to] center stage in place of the tree of life, and is thus placed at the heart of human desire"[11]. As a counter-movement to this, God invites Cain to a change of perspective which takes the brother in need into consideration and shows responsibility towards him: God looks at the sacrificed Abel and helps Cain by indicating the direction in which he too should look. Cain, however, lowers his gaze to the ground and in doing so refuses to look in the same direction as God. God addresses this misguided gaze by saying: "Why are you angry? Why is your countenance fallen? If you do well, shall you not be accepted?" (Gen 4:6) Cain does not accept this invitation – the only scene in which he turns to Abel ends with the latter's murder. Abel as a mortal being, who carries mortality in his very name, is not protected by Cain; rather, Cain wants to pin him down with his mortality. This is the first death that is mentioned in the Bible.

Why did Cain, a powerful man who lacked nothing, murder Abel? Cain does not adopt God's perspective, but instead strives to secure for himself the only

---

9   Cf. K. Butting, Abel steh auf!, 16.

10   K. Seybold, הֶבֶל, Art., in: Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament II, Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln/Mainz 1977, 334–343, here: 337.

11   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, B. The Gown of Grace and the Nakedness of Existence, 7.

thing that seems to be unavailable, namely God's gaze on the sacrifice offered
to him. By having to see how God looks at the sacrificed Abel, it becomes
clear to him that God's gaze represents something that eludes him. In it he
encounters once again the open space that had appeared in connection with
the seventh day and in the non-locatableness of the tree of knowledge. Cain
recognizes that even the power of primogeniture, which is based on geneal-
ogy, i.e., on the "attempt to gain immortality through descendants,"[12] cannot
get hold of this moment and *take possession* of it.[13] Hence, a gap appears in his
own name, too. The elimination of Abel was intended to erase every reminder
that the very genealogy in which Cain stands and the very right of primogeni-
ture which he possesses are limited by God's inaccessible gaze, as well as by
mortality itself. By murdering Abel, he wanted to make himself master of life
and death, which the displacement away from the tree of life had intended to
prevent, on the one hand, and on the other hand, to draw to himself God's gaze,
in which God himself had invited him to participate (Gen 4:4–7). However, he
cannot withstand its immediacy: "from Thy face shall I be hid" (Gen 4:14). Yet,
whoever looks in the same direction as God (i.e., turns his gaze to those in need
of attention) escapes his consuming gaze and maintains the boundary against
deadly immediacy with God (Ex 33:18–23).[14]

Cain receives a protective mark (Gen 4:15) and does not fall prey to revenge.
His genealogy subsequently develops very successfully. Beginning with Cain,
seven generations are described, which allow the entire cultural world of man-
kind to come into being in triumph, as it were: the foundation of cities as cen-
ters of cultural development, livestock farming as domestication of nature, the
invention of handcraft for the production of tools and weapons and the found-
ing of the arts. From the perspective of the Bible, however, this cultural develop-
ment is no guarantee for increasing humanization, but instead carries with it the
shadow of rampant violence, as the figure of Lamech shows (Gen 4:23 et seq.).
Cain's genealogy culminates in Lamech's heroic song glorifying violence:

> While (as opposed to the behavior of the first humans) the defiance of Cain's
> response to God is striking (4:9), Lamech's will to self-assert with respect to men,
> but also with respect to God, has become boundless.[15]

---

12   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, B. The Gown of Grace and the Nakedness of
      Existence, 10.

13   Cf. the meaning for the name Cain!

14   This call for a certain perspective is probably also the reason behind Jesus' urgent admo-
      nition to Peter: "Get thee behind Me, Satan" (Mk 8:33).

15   E. Drewermann, Strukturen des Bösen. Teil 1. Die jahwistische Urgeschichte in exegetis-
      cher Sicht, Paderborn/München/Wien/Zürich 1988, 156; cf. 155–161, 164–170.

The figure of Lamech thus follows the approach of making one's own desire an all-encompassing point of reference, beginning with the tree of knowledge becoming more and more clearly localizable. Starting with Cain, this point of reference is inevitably passed on to the following generations, in genealogical necessity.

At this point, however, a change of perspective takes place, which both allows us to see the peculiarity of the biblical story and also prevents the Cain/Lamech line from becoming our universal understanding of history. In order to work out the characteristics of the story of Cain and Abel, let us now ask about its parallels to and differences from the founding history of Rome, namely Romulus' fratricide of Remus. The basic structure seems similar: Urban cultural development is preceded by fratricide; the victory of the stronger one of the two is followed by a story of success. However, the theme of taking sides with the weaker one, which is central to the biblical narrative from the beginning, does not appear. The Roman narrative remains spellbound by the success story, and every mention of the city's name from now on refers to its victorious founder. All it knows of Remus is that he is buried on the Aventine. The biblical narrative is different; it is interested in Abel's being mentioned. He who remained mute until his murder, whose muteness was to be sealed by his murder, is given language. His blood cries out from the soil to God, who hears his cry (Gen 4:10): "Cain wanted to be done with Abel. But he is not to be done with; the life that has been spilled cries out."[16] The brief description of Cain's success story, for which the Bible spares merely eight verses (Gen 4:17–24), is followed by a look back at Abel. Eve "bore a son and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew." (Gen 4:25) Seth, whose name means *substitute*, takes the place of Abel and has the duty of carrying on the memory of his brother's discontinued genealogy. Whereas Cain refused to care for Abel, and Lamech's relationship with the Other is one of threats and boastfulness, Seth himself becomes the embodiment of someone who keeps an eye out for his brother. He is a complete substitute; his identity does not consist in the attempt to put himself at the center and to claim a totalizing gaze for himself, but rather it consists in reference to the Other – namely to the one who has neither a history nor a voice of his own.

When the Gospel of Luke enumerates Joseph's ancestors – and thus, before one can get to know him from his ministry, introduces Jesus starting from the history of Israel's covenant –, not only the famous biblical figures of David, Jacob, Joseph, Isaac, Abraham, Noah, Methuselah and Enoch are mentioned, but among many others also Seth and Adam (Lk 3:23–38). This person-oriented

---

16   Cf. C. Westermann, Genesis 1–11. A Commentary, Minneapolis 1984, 305.

depiction of salvation history does not refer to the victorious history of Cain but builds on Seth, the substitute for Abel. Biblical salvation history breaks away from the context of natural genealogy and continues a fragile story, which does not derive its logic from genealogical necessity but is an expression of covenant. It is not regulated by the natural, compulsive unambiguity following the scheme that A generates B, B generates C ..., but instead it proceeds via numerous breaks and requires a narrative in which it finds coherence. In this way, it no longer represents the strong success story that continues by itself, but rather challenges us to a change of perspective that may occasionally occur. This change of perspective corresponds to the perspective with which God also tasked Cain.

From a Christian point of view, Jesus as the Messiah is the hermeneutical key that opens up a view of the Bible in its entirety. He is rooted in the fragile history of the covenant, which proceeds via Abel/Seth. Thus, it ensues that the entire Bible must be read from the perspective of this "tradition" of Abel/Seth. However, it is not a strong counter-history to Cain's victorious history, but rather an invitation to a shift in perspective. It unfolds as Abel's surprising *posthistory*, which begins where his story should have ended. It is the *epilogue* of the mute Abel who could never raise his voice. It is an *echo* of the cry of Abel's blood that reaches heaven. We come thus to the moment the die is cast for how to understand history from a biblical perspective: Is it a victorious story (with its various forms of substitution, all of which understand themselves as self-legitimizing concepts), or does the Bible represent an *epilogical* narrative that becomes a narrative of the rejection of arbitrary, self-contained conceptions and an invitation to a reversal of perspective? At the transition from Abel to Seth, where all attempts at appropriating history are shattered, biblical history reveals itself as an epilogical narrative. In a fragile way, the Bible, in adopting this approach, repeatedly tells of such transitions which epilogically continue history where it should have ended, and ultimately becomes an invitation to continue it in various ways in later times. Christianity can thus be understood as faithfulness to this epilogical narrative and the resulting shift in perspective.

But the history of Abel/Seth has another point. Whereas Cain's victorious story leads to Lamech's heroic song glorifying violence (Gen 4:23–24), the story of Abel/Seth leads towards the naming of the name of God: "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of YHWH." (Gen 4:26) Not only is the name of YHWH thus opposed to any justification of violence, the gift of the name of God also renders audible again that open space which had shown itself in the seventh day, the tree of knowledge and the indisposability of the acceptance of the sacrifice.

In other words, in the "indisposable time of celebration"[17] of the seventh day, time refers to an *open space*; in the "non-occupyability of the garden of paradise"[18], space refers to such a place, and in the name of God, ultimately, so does language. This openness is characterized by an exposure and vulnerability that makes the name of God disappear when it is used as a means of arbitrary control. Its meaning can never be directly expressed, which is why it marks a rift that runs through language and inserts an emptiness into it, a silence that prevents language from becoming self-contained. The invocation of the name YHWH, contrary to the series of cultural achievements on Cain's side, is the only *development* connected with the line Abel/Seth. The name of God thus stands for the openness that can appear at the points of rupture where genealogies and thus necessities and systematizations of any kind – remember that the genealogy is the archetypical principle of representation of necessity and systematization[19] – break off. The Bible as a whole is not only the epilogue of Abel's history, but is also carried forth in all the stories of people who guard the vulnerable openness associated with the name of God.

The naming of the name of God also goes hand in hand with a new name for man: "Enosh" means human and evokes meanings such as "to be weak" and "mortal".[20] The descendant of Seth, whose name is a reference to the Other, becomes the bearer of a new conception of humanity, which – unlike the Cain/Lamech line – does not express itself through genealogically imparted strength nor the attempt to disguise one's own mortality through heroism or cultural achievements. The naming of the name of God is connected with the gift of mortality and raises the question of what it means to be human, of what the human could be. In contrast to Cain and Lamech, who turn their gaze away from their brother and who inoculate themselves completely against the Other, Enosh and all those who continue his story will have to learn a new form of *tangibility* – which might be what resonates in Enoch's name in the sense of "being weak".

---

17   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, B. The Gown of Grace and the Nakedness of Existence, 10.

18   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, B. The Gown of Grace and the Nakedness of Existence, 10.

19   Cf. K. Heinrich, Parmenides und Jona. Vier Studien über das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Mythologie, Frankfurt a. M. 1966; idem, Gesellschaftlich vermitteltes Naturverhältnis. Begriff der Aufklärung in den Religionen und der Religionswissenschaft (Dahlemer Vorlesungen 8), Frankfurt a. M./Basel 2007.

20   Cf. F. Maass, אֱנוֹשׁ Art., in: Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament I, Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln/Mainz 1973, 374 et seq.

Unlike Adam, Enosh as a term for man "occurs almost solely in poetic texts"[21] and is thus situated at the transition between poetry and prayer, where the latter is understood as the place of invocation of the name of God. Both of these forms of language are sustained by a dimension of inaccessibility and keep language open in the face of the danger of it exhausting itself through the closedness of functionality. Can poetry and prayer thus also be forms of language that express, in a condensed fashion, man's tangibility?

Reflection on the theology of the name of God in the Bible could take its starting point here. However, this will not be the subject of the following considerations. Rather, I will now turn to two important poets, first Hölderlin and then Rilke, who, in modern times, aligned themselves with the fragile tradition of invoking the name of God and express the danger of its falling silent in poetry itself.

From the Category of Transition (Hegel) to the Opening of Language (Hölderlin)

In Hölderlin's poetry, the invocation of the name of God appears in a variety of ways, and the question arises again and again as to whether language is still capable of this invocation. This is most clearly expressed in the poem *Heimkunft* (*Homecoming*) in the turn of phrase "holy names are lacking" (v. 101)[22]. This expresses a fundamental crisis, which envisages the end of the possibility of naming the name of God – and thus the entire line of Seth/Enosh. According to Hölderlin, this crisis, in which language is no longer able to relate the sphere of God to that of man, has dramatic consequences both for man, who is threatened with becoming an uninterpretable sign, and for language, which is pushed to the verge of disintegration.[23] We could therefore speak of a crisis affecting the interlaced elements of humanism, language and religion. The concern of the poet and singer must not avoid this problem, as Hölderlin says in *Homecoming* only a few verses after the mention of the lack

---

21   Ibid., 374.

22   In the following, quoted passages from the poem *Heimkunft* (*Homecoming*) will be indicated by verse number in brackets; other poems by Hölderlin, when they are first quoted, will be indicated by title and verse number, and subsequent references by verse number only.

23   "A sign we are, without interpretation / Without pain we are and have almost / Lost language in the foreign land. (*Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos / Schmerzlos sind wir und haben fast / Die Sprache in der Fremde verloren.*)" (*Mnemosyne, Entwurf*, v. 1–3, in: Friedrich Hölderlin, Hymns and Fragments, trans. Richard Sieburth, Princeton 1984, 117).

of holy names: "Cares like these, whether he likes it or not, a singer / Must bear in his soul, and often, … (*Sorgen, wie diese, muß, gern oder nicht, in der Seele Tragen / Ein Sänger und oft, …*)". (v. 107 et seq.)

The following considerations attempt to approach this topic by referring to texts from three different stages of Hölderlin's oeuvre. First, we will examine poems from his youth, because they show essential motifs that remain characteristic of Hölderlin's poetry. They are closely related to a religious experience, which it is important to note in order to be able to sense the dramatic dimension of the later crisis of religion, language and humanism. Following this we will reflect on Hölderlin's student days and the years that followed, which will detail his amicable contact with Hegel and show how the development of a position on the question of religion took place in a similar manner and with great motivic proximity in both of them. In Hölderlin's case, this period corresponds to the shattering of all his certainties, at the heart of which is the crisis of religion. I will then discuss how he deals with this question by referring to *Homecoming*.

A.   *Poems of Hölderlin's Youth (1784–1788) – the Name of God and the Question of Man*

As the poems of his youth show,[24] Hölderlin's poetry grew out of a religious experience. At the age of 14 he wrote a poem entitled *M. G.*, which probably stands for "Meinem Gott [To my God]"[25]. This figure of a *dedication* expressed through the abbreviation in the title will be repeated in a similar way in the youth poems *An M. B.*[26] and *An Meinen B.*[27] Moreover, dedications remain a characteristic feature of Hölderlin's poetry, which are not merely an external act and ultimately insignificant for the interpretation of the poem, but rather reach into the innermost part of language.[28] Language – as poetry and prayer show in particular – is never an anonymous process, but rather requires the fragile space which unfolds when addressing another.

---

24   See B. Liebrucks, "Und". Die Sprache Hölderlins in der Spannweite von Mythos und Logos. Realität und Wirklichkeit (Sprache und Bewusstsein 7), Bern/ Frankfurt a. M./Las Vegas 1979, 251–258.

25   Cf. Hölderlin. Sämtliche Gedichte, ed. by J. Schmidt (Deutscher Klassikerverlag Volume 4), Frankfurt a. M. 2005, 519.

26   As D.E. Sattler showed, this abbreviation probably stands for Hölderlin's brother: "An meinen Bruder" [To my brother]. Cf. F. Hölderlin, 1770–1788. Nürtingen/Denkendorf/ Maulbronn. Erste Gedichte, Homer, in: ders., Sämtliche Werke, Briefe und Dokumente in zeitlicher Folge, ed. by D.E. Sattler (Bremer Ausgabe Band 1), München 2004, 104.

27   The dedication refers to Hölderlin's childhood friend Bilfinger: "An meinen Bilfinger" [To my Bilfinger]. Cf. F. Hölderlin, Erste Gedichte. Homer (Bremer Ausgabe Band 1), 127.

28   Cf. R. Zuberbühler, Hölderlin: 'Heimkunft', in: Hölderlin-Jahrbuch 19/20 (1975–1977), 61.

M. G.
Herr! was bist du, was Menschenkinder?
Jehova du, wir schwache Sünder,
Und Engel sinds, die, Herr, dir dienen,
Wo ewger Lohn, wo Seligkeiten krönen.

⁵Wir aber sind es, die gefallen,
Die sträflich deiner Güte Strahlen
In Grimm verwandelt, Heil verscherzet,
Durch das der Hölle Tod nicht schmerzet.

Und doch, o Herr! erlaubst du Sündern,
¹⁰Dein Heil zu sehn, wie Väter Kindern,
Erteilst du deine Himmelsgaben,
Die uns, nach Gnade dürstend, laben.

Ruft dein Kind Abba, ruft es Vater,
So bist du Helfer, du Berater,
¹⁵Wann Tod und Hölle tobend krachen,
So eilst als Vater du zu wachen.

M. G.
Lord! what are you, what children of men?
You Jehovah, us weak sinners,
And angels are those, Lord, who serve you,
Where eternal reward, where bliss crowns.

⁵But we are the ones who, fallen,
The rays of your goodness
Transformed wantonly into wrath, salvation forfeited,
Through which hell's death does not hurt.

And yet, O Lord! you allow sinners
¹⁰To see your salvation, as fathers do with children,
You grant your gifts from heaven,
Which give refreshment to us, who thirst for grace.

When your child calls Abba, it calls Father,
So you are a helper, you are an adviser,
¹⁵When death and hell roar raging,
So as a father you hasten to watch over him.

The first point that has to be noted in order to interpret Hölderlin's later texts is the indistinguishability of poem and prayer. The poem begins by addressing God ("Lord!" *M. G.*, v. 1), which is repeated throughout the entire text ("You Jehovah", v. 2; "Lord", vv. 3.9; "When your child calls Abba, it calls Father", v. 13). The second significant motif lies in the close connection and

parallel configuration of the question of God and man, which directly follows God's being addressed: "Lord! what are you, what children of men? (*Herr! was bist du, was Menschenkinder?*)" (v. 1). The connection goes so far that in the second part of the question, which deals with man, the repetition of the verb is not considered necessary, which in German is actually grammatically incorrect, and the article for "children of men" is also omitted. The complete sentence should read: "Lord! what are you, what *are the* children of men? (*Herr! was bist du, was* sind die *Menschenkinder?*)". In German, unlike in English, the second person singular of "sein [to be]" is not identical with the third person plural: *du bist/sie sind – you are/they are*. The answer begins in verse 2 with a renewed invocation of God ("You Jehovah"), and subsequently with a reference to man, whose position is determined by the Fall and who is set apart from the angels who serve God (v. 3 et seq.). The third stanza (v. 9–12) brings a reversal in which God is addressed as a forgiving Father and the one who brings about good. The last stanza (v. 13–16) dynamizes the still rather static relationship between God and man of the third stanza and finds its pivotal point in the call to God: "When your child calls Abba, it calls Father / So you are a helper, you are an adviser (*Ruft dein Kind Abba, ruft es Vater, / So bist du Helfer, du Berater*)" (v. 13 et seq.). The invocation of the name of God is able to save fallen man from death and hell (v. 15) and indicates that God watches over man (v. 16). The third decisive point of this early poem can be perceived in the fact that the invocation of the name of God itself is made the subject of the poem and that the poem/prayer thus takes on a reflexive structure. This self-reflexive form remains characteristic of Hölderlin, inasmuch as poetry itself is ever newly thematized in his poems. Yet another motif seems to be significant for Hölderlin's subsequent evolution: The word "watch (*wachen*)" that concludes the poem in the German version ("So as a father you hasten to watch over him (*So eilst als Vater du zu wachen.*)", v. 16) becomes Hölderlin's imperative par excellence, in which his thinking reaches an important point of crystallization. This watching spans the night – guiding the way through that night without chasing it away with a phantasm of all-encompassing illumination or with a total view – and is the deepest expression of God's fidelity. Later on, Hölderlin's designation of the poet as the watcher represents the aspect in which the poet has a share in the divine.[29]

---

29   "… Meanwhile, it often seems to me / To sleep better than to be so without comrades, / To wait and do something while saying, / Don't I know, and why poets in a poor time? / But they are, you say, like priests holy to the god of wine, / Who went from country to country in holy night." (*Bread and wine*, v. 119–124).

Motifs very similar to those in *M. G.* can be found in another poem from his youth, in *Die Meinige*. The title again represents a dedication. "Die Meinige" stands for "Die Meinigen", which equals "Those close to me". The poem again begins by addressing God ("Lord of the Worlds", *Die Meinige*, v. 1): "It is to be regarded as a prayer in which the relatives are included."[30] Several verses are dedicated to the members of Hölderlin's family. In the section on his brother Carl, Hölderlin describes *in prayer the path toward prayer*; it prepares the ground from which prayer can emerge. This preparatory reflection is characterized by retrospection: "I think myself back to that time" (v. 115). The lyrical speaker tells how the flow of his playing next to the Neckar is interrupted by the experience of *Tremendum et Fascinans*:

> [125]Endlich sah ich auf. Im Abendschimmer
> Stand der Strom. Ein heiliges Gefühl
> Bebte mir durchs Herz; und plötzlich scherzt ich nimmer,
> Plötzlich stand ich ernster auf vom Knabenspiel.
>
> Bebend lispelt ich: wir wollen beten!
> [130]Schüchtern knieten wir in dem Gebüsche hin.
> Einfalt, Unschuld wars, was unsre Knabenherzen redten –
> Lieber Gott! die Stunde war so schön.
> Wie der leise Laut dich Abba! nannte!
> Wie die Knaben sich umarmten! himmelwärts
> [135]Ihre Hände streckten! wie es brannte –
> Im Gelübde, oft zu beten – beeder Herz!
>
> [125]Finally I looked up. In the evening glow
> Stood the torrent. A sacred feeling
> Trembled through my heart; and suddenly I no longer joked,
> Suddenly I stood up from the boys' game, more serious.
>
> Trembling I lisped: let us pray!
> [130]Shyly we knelt down in the bushes.
> It was innocence and simplicity that spoke in our boyish hearts –
> Dear God! the hour was so beautiful.
> How the soft sound called you Abba!
> How the boys embraced each other! skyward
> [135]Their hands stretched out! how it burned –
> The vow to pray often – in both their hearts![31]

The first form of language that reopens itself to the poet, following silence in the face of the experience of nature's stillness ("In the evening glow / Stood the torrent", v. 126 et seq.), is prayer. When *in* prayer the prayer's becoming [das

---

30   B. Liebrucks, "Und", 251.
31   Translated by Natalie Eder.

Entstehen des Gebets] and emerging into linguistic form is recounted, this again represents a reflexive structure. At its center we encounter God's being named as "Abba", and the memory of this is introduced once again through his being addressed as "Dear God! the hour was so beautiful. / How the soft sound called you Abba!" (v. 132 et seq.) This "soft sound (*der leise Laut*)" does not merely refer to soft speech. In German the noun "Laut" (meaning "sound" in English) is homophonous with the adjective "laut", which means "loud". Thus, the "soft sound (*der leise Laut*)" suggests a paradox, pointing to a form of simplicity and inseperableness that has not yet split into opposites ("soft" and "loud").

Ever since his early poems Hölderlin tried to express this simplicity when he used the word "silence". Its appearance in the text always requires a certain amount of preparation; poetry, though emerging from it, can never begin with it. In a similar way, one could say that in Hölderlin's early poetry the scattered references to silence were necessary before he could – after this preparation – finally make it a theme in its own right in the poem *Die Stille*. While initially it was not autonomous – i.e., it appeared adjectivally in phrases such as "You silent Moon (*Du stiller Mond*)" (*Die Nacht* v. 3) or "the silent shadows (*die stillen Schatten*)" (*Die Unsterblichkeit der Seele*, v. 8), or as a genitive construction in "the silence of the grave (*des Grabes Stille*)" (*Das menschliche Leben* v. 48) – in *Die Stille* the attempt to present it in its simplicity appears for the first time: "Noble silence! Lovely joygiver! (*Hehre Stille! holde Freudengeberin!*)" (*Die Stille*, v. 16) Let us note at this point that from the very beginning Hölderlin struggles to find a way to express silence as the simplicity and the resonant space from which any form of language emerges in the first place. Understood in this way, silence is the opposite of falling silent, i.e., silence and falling silent are the outermost poles that span our linguistic existence.

B.   Hegel and Hölderlin (1788–1800) – the Disintegration of the World of Gods and Men

In Hölderlin's early poems God is often addressed directly, namely as "Lord", "Jehovah You", "oh Lord", "Father" and "Abba" (*M. G.*), "O, great Judge", "Father of mercy" (*Das Erinnern*), "Lord of the worlds", "Good one", "Father! loving Father" (*Die Meinige*), "Father, Father", "God in heaven", "my God" (*Klagen. An Stella*), "God" (*Die Stille, Schwärmerei*), "Gods" (*Hero*), "Dear God" (*Die Meinige, Der Lorbeer, Schwärmerei*). The beginning of Hölderlin's poetry knows no strict separation between poetry and prayer and is rooted in the long tradition of invoking the name of God. However, it is precisely this affiliation that becomes increasingly open to question, starting from the time of his studies at the *Tübinger Stift*.

In the poem *M. G.* a form of security in the face of the disintegrating forces, which are addressed as sin, death and hell, can still be found in the invocation of the name of God. Subsequently, in the following years, experiences of alienation and the decay of the motifs which up till then had a guiding function but which no longer lead to a sense of security, become apparent in an ever more urgent way: The fulfillment of the present moment can no longer be affirmed; the future and utopia are shattered by the ambivalence of the French Revolution; the past of the Greek world can no longer be brought to life in memory; nature and freedom fall apart. In Hölderlin's poetry, these experiences of rupture remain present from here on and cannot be pacified by the reappropriation of a secure foundation, be it religion, the fatherland, etc. This represents a parallel to the development of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is a path of despair and "does not necessarily culminate in a 'happy ending'"[32]. Even though Hölderlin's poems continue to address God as "Father", "Father Ether", "Prince of the Feast (*Fürst des Festes*)", etc., the question arises as to what else these references might mean, since religion no longer represents a final guarantee. Can it still have a unifying dimension or represent a figure of connection and reconciliation in the face of those tendencies towards disintegration?

The *development* of the question as to the *liveliness of religion* can be observed in both Hölderlin and Hegel, who were in close contact in the last decade of the 18th century.[33] Their correspondence, as well as the poem *Eleusis* (1796), written by Hegel and dedicated to Hölderlin, bear witness to this and also reveal a close friendship.[34] In 1794 Hölderlin wrote to Hegel:

---

32   K. Appel, Christianity and a new Humanism, A. The World as Mirror of the Self and its Shattering – Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Reason and Spirit in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 11.

33   On Hegel cf. K. Appel, Entsprechung im Wider-Spruch. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Offenbarungsbegriff der politischen Theologie des jungen Hegel (Religion – Geschichte – Gesellschaft. Fundamentaltheologische Studien 31), Münster/Hamburg/London 2003. On Hölderlin: V.L. Waibel, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, in: J. Kreuzer (eds.), Hölderlin-Jahrbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung, Stuttgart 2002/2011, 90–106; Dies., Wechselbestimmung. Zum Verhältnis von Hölderlin, Schiller und Fichte in Jena, in: Fichte und die Romantik. Hölderlin, Schelling, Hegel und die späte Wissenschaftslehre. 200 Jahre Wissenschaftslehre – Die Philosophie Johann Gottlieb Fichtes. Tagung der Internationalen J.G. Fichte-Gesellschaft (26. September – 1. Oktober 1994) in Jena. Fichte-Studien Bd. 12, Amsterdam 1997, 43–69.

34   Hegel and Hölderlin were obviously connected by a very cordial friendship, which becomes apparent in the letters they wrote to each other in October and November 1796, when Hölderlin was able to arrange for Hegel to become house tutor for the Gogel family: "Dearest Hölderlin! / So I will once again have the joy of hearing something from you; from every line of your letter speaks your unchanging friendship to me; I cannot tell you how

> Dear brother, I am sure that you have thought of me at times since we parted from each other with the motto – Kingdom of God! I believe that with this motto we would still recognize each other after each metamorphosis.[35]

Hölderlin probably took a keen interest in Hegel's ideas on religion, which were later compiled in what is known today as his *Early Theological Writings*. Since these were unpublished and Hegel lived at a great distance from Hölderlin by this time, Hölderlin had to be informed of them through letters from Hegel, some of which have either not been preserved or have not yet been found. In a letter that Hölderlin wrote in Jena in 1795, he refers to Hegel's preoccupation with religion:

> It is certainly good in certain respects that you are working on religious concepts. [...] I have long been concerned with the ideal of a people's education, and, because you are occupied with the part of it that concerns religion, I may choose your image and your friendship as the conductor of thoughts into the outer world of the senses, and write what I might have written later, in good time, in letters to you, which you are to judge and correct.[36]

In 1796 Hegel dedicated the poem *Eleusis*[37] to Hölderlin. The beginning of the poem seems to evoke motifs from Hölderlin's poetry (*Eleusis*, v. 1–11). It is followed by a section of 15 lines (v. 11–25), which express how much Hegel looked forward to a reunion with Hölderlin and wanted to strengthen their shared convictions. Hegel then turns to the subject of religion and describes the disintegration of the world of the ancient Greek gods and men:

---

much joy it gave me, and even more the hope of soon seeing and embracing you myself." Cf. the letters of October 24, 1796 from Frankfurt (to Hegel), of November 1796 from Tschugg near Erlach (to Hölderlin) and of November 20, 1796 from Frankfurt (to Hegel).

35   Letter dated July 10, 1794, from Waltershausen. In German: "Lieber Bruder! / Ich bin gewiss, dass Du indessen zuweilen meiner gedachtest, seit wir mit der Loosung – Reich Gottes! Von einander schieden. An dieser Loosung würden wir uns nach jeder Metamorphose, wie ich glaube, wiedererkennen."

36   Letter of January 26, 1795, from Jena. In German: "Daß Du Dich an die Religionsbegriffe machst, ist gewis in mancher Rüksicht gut und wichtig. [...] Ich gehe schon lange mit dem Ideal einer Volkserziehung um, u. weil Du Dich gerade mit einem Teile derselben der Religion beschäftigest, so wähl ich mir vieleicht Dein Bild und Deine Freundschaft zum conductor der Gedanken in die äußere Sinnenwelt, und schreibe, was ich vieleicht später geschrieben hätte, bei guter Zeit in Briefen an Dich, die Du beurteilen und berichtigen sollst." Cf. also the letter of November 25, 1795, from Stuttgart.

37   Hegel, Frühe Schriften (Werke 1), 230–233; see also H. Anton, 'Eleusis'. Hegel an Hölderlin, in: Hölderlin Yearbook 19/20 (1975–1977), Tübingen 1977, 285–302.

Doch deine Hallen sind verstummt, o Göttin!
Geflohen ist der Götter Kreis zurück in den Olymp
Von den geheiligten Altären,
Geflohn von der entweihten Menschheit Grab,
[55]Der Unschuld Genius, der her sie zauberte! –
Die Weisheit deiner Priester schweigt; kein Ton der heil'gen Weihen
Hat sich zu uns gerettet – und vergebens sucht
Des Forschers Neugier mehr als Liebe
Zur Weisheit ...[38]

Even your halls have ceased to echo, Goddess!
The circle of the gods has fled back to Olympus
From the consecrated altars;
Fled from the tomb of profaned humanity,
[55]The innocent genius who enchanted them here! –
The wisdom of your priests is silent, not one note of the sacred
Initiations preserved for us – and in vain strive
The scholars, their curiosity greater than their love
Of wisdom ...[39]

A fundamental fissure runs through the ancient world. Hegel does not, however, aim primarily at a historical depiction, but rather has *our* (modern) epoch in mind, which he understands as suffering an irrevocable separation from Greek antiquity and the loss of that way of life which, for Hegel and Hölderlin, is paradigmatic for a living relationship between the divine and the human spheres. He uses images that Hölderlin himself takes up in a similar way in later poems (Cf. *Brod und Wein*, v. 59–64), and also Hegel employs in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* when he addresses the loss of all religion at the beginning of the chapter on *The Revealed Religion*.[40] *Eleusis* describes the breaking apart of the living relationship of the world of the gods and men in a doubly expressed motion of flight: The gods have fled from the altars (*Eleusis*, v. 52 et seq.) and have withdrawn from a desecrated humanity that now lies in the grave (v. 54). The gods' movement of flight is accompanied by the falling silent which surrounds the retreat of the gods (v. 51, 56 et seq.) and must be considered the opposite of *silence*. Similar formulations can be found in Hölderlin. Hegel's phrase "Even your halls have ceased to echo, Goddess! (*Doch deine*

---

38   G.W.F. Hegel, Frühe Schriften, in: ders., Werke 1–20 (stw 601–620), ed. by E. Moldenhauer und K.M. Michel, Frankfurt a. M. ⁴1999.

39   The English translation of the poem is taken from: Agamben, Giorgio: Language and Death: The Place of Negativity. Translated by Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt, Minnesota 2006.

40   Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, Phänomenologie des Geistes, in: ders., Werke 1–20, ed. by E. Moldenhauer and K.M. Michel, Frankfurt a. M. 1986, Volume 3, 547 et seq.

Hallen sind verstummt, o Göttin!)" (v. 51) can be compared with Hölderlin's verse "Sound … has long since fallen silent in the hall (*Klanglos … ists in der Halle längst*)" (*An die Deutschen*, v. 53). In *Eleusis* it says: "The wisdom of your priests is silent (*Die Weisheit deiner Priester schweigt*)" (*Eleusis*, v. 56); no sound of the holy acts can get through to us any more. This is expressed by a falling silent like that which is voiced by Hölderlin in *Archipelagus*: "and for a long time they have not spoken / words of solace to the needy, the prophetic groves of Dodona, / The Delphic God is mute (*und lang schon reden sie nimmer / Trost den Bedürftigen zu, die prophetischen Haine Dodonas, / Stumm ist der delphische Gott*)" (*Der Archipelagus*, v. 226–228). At first, all that remains in Hegel's poem is the futility of a curiosity that has nothing in common with philosophy, since it seeks something other than "love / of wisdom (*Liebe / Zur Weisheit*)" (v. 58 et seq.). Hölderlin summarizes this loss in *Der Archipelagus*, when he says: "It walks in the night, it dwells, as in the Orcus, / Without the divine our race (*es wandelt in Nacht, es wohnt, wie im Orkus, / Ohne Göttliches unser Geschlecht*)" (*Der Archipelagus*, v. 241 et seq.), and in *Der Abschied* he pronounces this disintegration of the human and the divine sphere in the harsh phrase "[…] Since the rooted / all-dividing hatred separates gods and men ([…] *Seit der gewurzelte / Allentzweiende Hass Götter und Menschen trennt*)" (*Der Abschied, Erste Fassung*, v. 13 et seq.). This separation is an expression of all the experiences of alienation and disintegration that Hölderlin had previously described in his poems[41], and being *all-encompassing divide* it takes on the characteristics of an apocalyptic divorce. No area seems to be able to elude its disintegrating forces.

Hölderlin's *epistolary* novel *Hyperion*, also written at this time, shows vividly how this "flight" of the gods is an expression of the decay of all humanity:

> You see artisans, but no men, thinkers, but no men, priests, but no men, masters and servants, but no men, minors and adults, but no men – is this not like a battlefield on which hacked-off hands and arms and every other member are scattered about, while the life-blood flows from them to vanish in the sand?[42]

Towards the end of this letter, the decomposition of society is summarized through the motif of the flight of the gods:

> But where divine Nature and her artists are so insulted, ah! there life's greatest joy is gone, and any other star is better than earth. There men grow ever more sterile, ever more empty, who yet were all born beautiful; servility increases and with its

---

41   See J. Deibl, Vorbemerkungen zur Gottesfrage in Hölderlin's early poetry, in: IKaZ Communio 42 (2013), 520–534.

42   Friedrich Hölderlin, Hyperion and Selected Poems, ed. by Eric L. Santer, New York 1994, 128. Hyperion translated by Willard R. Trask, adapted by David Schwarz.

insolence, intoxication grows with troubles and, with luxury, hunger and dread of starvation; the blessing of each year becomes a curse, and all gods flee.[43]

In Hyperion's subsequent last letter, the disintegrating forces again recede behind the power of nature:

> 'O you,' so I thought, 'with your gods, Nature! I have dreamed it out, the dream of human things, and I say, Only you live, and what they who know no peace have attempted and conceived melts away from your flame like beads of wax![44]

With his destructive conduct, man will not be able to triumph over nature; however, this does not automatically lead to a rethinking of what it means to be human. It should be noted that Hölderlin addresses nature through the image of the tree of life when he asks to participate in its becoming green anew:

> Men fall from you like rotten fruits, oh, let them perish, for thus they return to your root; so may I, too, O tree of life, that I may grow green again with you and breathe your crown about me with all your budding twigs! peacefully and devoutly, for we are all sprung from the same golden seed![45]

Becoming green again means participating in the tree of life, as is expressed in the last Beatitude of the *Book of Revelation* (Rev 22:14). At the end of his epistolary novel, Hölderlin takes up an image from the last book of the Bible, which is also written in the form of a letter, and attempts to use this image to grasp the relationship between man and the divine nature. Here the rise of nature [*Aufgang der Natur*] and the revelation of the text meet – or, in other words, *physis* and *apokalypsis* interpenetrate each other at this important point in Hölderlin's work.

Both Hölderlin's poetry and *Hyperion* record a disintegration of all of the epoch's guiding motifs, which can be recapitulated as the emptying of religion; but this does not lead to nihilism or to a cynical observation of decline, nor to falling silent. In an analogous way, Hegel does not allow *Eleusis* to end with the decay of religion or with a definitive judgment having been pronounced against it. After the passage quoted above about the loss of the sacred, he returns to it again and again and even speaks of the "holy night (*heil'ger Nacht*)" (*Eleusis*, v. 80), which is a conscious reference to Hölderlin's poetry,

---

43   Friedrich Hölderlin, Hyperion and Selected Poems, 130.
44   Friedrich Hölderlin, Hyperion and Selected Poems, 133.
45   Friedrich Hölderlin, Hyperion and Selected Poems, 133.

especially since the word "holy" hardly ever appears in Hegel's work, whereas for Hölderlin "holy" and especially "holy night"[46] are key words.

This leads to the point of departure for Hölderlin's late poems (starting from around 1800): Hölderlin's poetry deals with the loss of the divine; however, this thought is not merely proclaimed but is developed in ever new ways in his poems. As an all-dividing separation of the world of the gods and the world of men, it is an apocalyptic expression of the disjunction that alienates man from society, nature, memory and the future. Beyond this, however, Hölderlin will inquire as to what extent religion itself although caught in the movement of this loss, can nevertheless once again open a new linguistic horizon. In this respect, Hölderlin becomes almost emblematic for Hegel, because to Hegel Hölderlin seems to embody precisely this question. This can be seen in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where at the beginning of *The Revealed Religion* – as already mentioned – Hegel describes the loss of religion in very similar words as in *Eleusis*, and in doing so comes close – this is probably the only time in the entire *Phenomenology* – to poetic language. He then uses the word "However", initiating a reversal which is able to give new meaning to all those expressions of religion that are no longer alive, which he describes as *plucked fruits*.[47]

> However, the young girl who presents us the plucked fruits as a gift is more than the nature that immediately provided them, more than the nature that unfurls into their conditions and elements, into the trees, air, light, etc., while in a higher way she gathers all this together into the gleam of her self-conscious eye and her offertory gesture; just as she is more than that nature, so too the spirit of the fate that provides us with those works of art is more than the ethical life and actuality of that people, for it is the *inwardizing-recollecting* of the spirit in them that was still *alienated* […].[48]

It is no longer nature in its immediacy that gives us these fruits, but a person. Hegel seems to be thinking of Hölderlin as summarizing this loss through the "gleam" or the ray of the self-conscious eye and the gesture of giving and, what is more, as offering a language that can become the impetus for a new view of religion characterized by openness.[49]

---

46   Cf. for instance: "But they are, you say, like priests holy to the god of wine, who went from country to country on holy night. (*Bread and wine*, v. 123 et seq.)

47   It is only after this passage that the conceptual unfolding of *The Revealed Religion* begins in the *Phenomenology*.

48   G.F.W. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit. Translated and edited by Terry Pinkard, Cambridge 2018, 432.

49   I thank Friedrich Kern for this reference. Cf. K. Appel/J. Deibl, Hegel, Hölderlin e l'apertura della "Gottesfrage", in: estetica. studi e richerche 10 (2/2020), 439–478.

C.   *Hölderlin's late Poems – the Absence of Holy Names*

Hölderlin's late poems no longer have a secure starting point from which to unfold their subject matter – all that remains is the experience of the loss of the divine, which can be seen as an emblem for all the forms of decay described. But what does this mean regarding the beginning of these poems? The great hymns and elegies such as *Heimkunft, Wie wenn am Feiertage …, Brod und Wein, Patmos*, etc., address this loss and begin (regarding their motifs, not regarding their chronology) where Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* ends, namely with the category of *transition* – which no longer seeks to attach/affix objective or positive meaning to the ego, the world, God and language, but instead thinks of them as negativity due to their characteristic withdrawal.[50] In the *Science of Logic* Hegel will continue this transition as the reversal of being and nothingness, Hölderlin, however, as a *vibrating openness*,[51] which he believes he can express through poetic language. Poetry, for which all certainties and "natural" representations have fallen apart, can no longer take its starting point from objects or themes, but must seek to tell, in small steps, how its objects, relationships, directions and meanings are constituted out of this vibrating openness. Each poem is thus also a process of the origination of language.

The poem *Heimkunft* (*Homecoming*), written in 1801, can be seen as paradigmatic in this regard. The mention of the absence of holy names expresses the loss of the divine (v. 101) and embeds this loss in the framework of an extensive poem. The end of the long tradition, beginning with Enosh, of naming the name of God, i.e., *the* holy name, seems to be stated here, even before modern criticism of religion begins to unmask the name of God as a projection, a medium for concealing social power relationships, an exaggerated hypothesis, a meaningless word, etc. But this does not mean that the last word of the poem has been spoken. It ends with the motif of a worry that is peculiar to the poet (or singer), which he cannot disclaim: "Cares like these, whether he likes it or not, a singer / Must bear in his soul, and often, but the others not. (*Sorgen, wie diese, muss, gern oder nicht, in der Seele / Tragen ein Sänger und oft, aber die anderen nicht.*)" (v. 107 et seq.) In what does this care specifically of the *poet* consist, as one who lives from a creative relationship with language?[52]

---

50   Cf. K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, especially: C. Absolute Knowledge and the Body of God, 24–26.

51   I wish to thank Friedrich Kern for this expression.

52   These two final verses are probably crucial to the interpretation of the entire poem. They have remained unchanged in both versions of *Heimkunft*, the published first version and the revised second version, and were already part of that preliminary stage of the poem, comprised of only its last four verses (v. 105–108). Cf. F. Hölderlin, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe (Münchener Ausgabe Band 1), München/Wien 1992, 319–323, 368–371 und F. Hölderlin, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe (Münchener Ausgabe Band 3), München/Wien 1993, 177 et seq.

Heimkunft[53] is Hölderlin's last elegy and is addressed "To kindred ones". Apart from *M. G.*, this is Hölderlin's most comprehensive dedication: It no longer refers to individual persons but includes all those who are related to the poet. These are not the people who are part of the same genealogy as he is or who live in his homeland, but rather those who share his poetic concern, who are related to the *profession* of the poet. A homeland comes about where people are connected to one another, inasmuch as they share the poet's unique concern. Consequently, although the title is probably connected with Hölderlin's two experiences of returning home, from Hauptwil in Switzerland in 1801 and from Bordeaux in 1802, it should not merely be understood as referring to the return to the place of one's childhood. What may be meant by homecoming is to be kept open for the time being. The following considerations offer an overview of the six stanzas of the poem.[54]

I
Drin in den Alpen ists noch helle Nacht und die Wolke,
    Freudiges dichtend, sie deckt drinnen das gähnende Tal.
Dahin, dorthin toset und stürzt die scherzende Bergluft,
    Schroff durch Tannen herab glänzet und schwindet ein Strahl.
[5]Langsam eilt und kämpft das freudigschauernde Chaos,
    Jung an Gestalt, doch stark, feiert es liebenden Streit
Unter den Felsen, [...]

I
Within the Alps it is still bright night and the cloud,
    Composing poems full of joy, covers the yawning valley within.
This way, that way, roars and rushes the playful mountain breeze,
    Steep down through the fir trees a ray of light gleams and vanishes.
[5]Chaos, trembling with joy, slowly hurries and struggles,
    Young in form, yet strong, it celebrates loving strife
Amidst the rocks, [...]

---

53   Cf. F. Hölderlin, Sämtliche Gedichte (Deutscher Klassikerverlag Band 4), 749–752; R. Zuberbühler, Hölderlin: 'Heimkunft', 56–75; M. Heidegger, "Heimkunft / An die Verwandten", in: idem, Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung (GA 4), Frankfurt a. M. ⁶1996, 9–31; idem, Der Fehl heiliger Namen, in: idem, Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens. 1910–1976, 22002, 231–235; B. Liebrucks, "Und", 558–576; W. Groddek, Heimkunft, in: Hölderlin-Jahrbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirken, ed. by J. Kreuzer, Stuttgart/Weimar 2011, 325–327, 335; F. Hölderlin, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe (Münchener Ausgabe Band 3), 177 et seq.; S. Lübcke, Erfüllungspoetiken. Nachleben des ewigen Lebens bei Klopstock, Hölderlin, Rückert, George und den Surrealisten, Berlin 2019, 399–435.

54   All six stanzas consist of 18 verses, "whereby this number is usually clearly divided into 3 × 3 distiches", F. Hölderlin, Sämtliche Gedichte (Deutscher Klassikerverlag Band 4), 710. I use the translation by Keith Holler, cf. M. Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry. Translated with an Introduction by Keith Hoeller, New York 2000, 24–31.

In its first two verses the poem takes us into a valley surrounded by mountains. This is to be noted as pure movement of being drawn in, beginning with "Within (*Drin in*)" (v. 1) and leading into a "within (*drinnen*)" (v. 2). As one can see, in the German version there is a slight modification within the movement from "Drin in" to "drinnen", while in English both words can be translated as "within". The adverbs "this way, that way (*dahin, dorthin*)" (v. 3), which are placed next to each other and separated only by a comma, do not offer any caesura but only a still undetermined oscillation of approaching and moving away. In this pure movement of an aimless roar (v. 3), no places or points of view can yet be established from which the poet could proceed to a description of the surrounding scenery. We enter the poem completely disoriented, taking in the mere indication of *movement*. We have no choice – especially since here, as in the entire first stanza, there is no one to whose gaze we could entrust ourselves – but to surrender to any movement that the poem offers, which forces us to observe the smallest changes and shifts that occur in the process.

Above the gaping valley a cloud is spread out in the bright night (v. 1 et seq.), which is probably to be seen as an allusion to the description of primordial chaos in Gen 1, where it says: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Gen 1:2). Following Greek mythology, the yawning valley that gapes open in the Alps symbolizes "chaos" (v. 5): The Greek word "chaínein", from which "chaos" is derived, means both "to yawn" and "to gape". Above this chaos hovers the joyfully poetizing, i.e., linguistic cloud, without which the poem could not be written, because at this point there are not yet any speakers in the poem. Language represents a space that precedes the subject and into which it is placed, without language being "producible". The joyfully poetizing cloud stands for this linguisticality unavailable to us, which allows us to access language in the first place. Behind the almost mythical beginning of the poem is the experience of loss (of the self, the world, God), which Hölderlin described in the preceding poems and which does not allow him to begin the poem with a specific subject, but instead makes necessary a description of how we can access language.

The first caesura occurs after the mention of the roar (v. 3); the "and" with which the sentence is continued does not add anything new but can now, in the mere motion into which we were taken, indicate the outline of a direction: "and rushes (*und stürzt*)" (v. 3). It is not the motion of elevation that occurs at the beginning – who is there that could rise? – but rather the primary movement is that of rushing or falling, a motion indebted to the basic force of gravity and which requires no effort of its own. But it is not falling in the sense of the "(sinful) Fall", which for Hölderlin stands at the beginning and serves to

characterize man morally. This falling is not yet to be understood anthropologically but is first to be understood as elementary ("steep down (*schroff*)", v. 4) in two respects: as the movement par excellence that requires no activity of its own, and as a descent from above down to earth, which is depicted as a ray shining down (v. 4). This ray stands for the divine, but this can in no way yet be expressed in human terms; instead, it is something vanishing that cannot be retained. But this is exactly that in which its healing nature consists: There are as yet no forms that are able to catch it, as they would be destroyed in the attempt. The pure motion of roaring has now given way to a first orientation, namely to the motion of rushing or falling. Even though it is still entirely concealed, this introduces referentiality for the first time – the movement of falling becomes a reference to the descent of the divine.

The *withdrawal of* the divine (the dwindling ray) passes into a first form of *temporalization*, as the beginning of the following verse shows: "slowly (*langsam*)" (v. 5) is already to be understood as a temporal determination – in contrast to "still (*noch*)" (v. 1), which indicates a representation of the primordial origin preceding any temporality (v. 1 et seq.). It can also be stated, based on the inaugural lecture, that the motif of withdrawal is deeply connected with the question of temporality:

> Within this experience the world and the self have a radically temporal structure. Thus "time" is not a collection of definable moments within a chronological series, nor a substratum of any event-particles upon which it is based. Time is the detachment that the self experiences in its world-encounter in which it is trying to situate itself within the world. Therefore, every view of the world is a temporal form of detachment.[55]

The word "slowly" introduces a calming effect into the roaring and rushing, which will open the possibility that something durable might also emerge in this joyfully trembling chaos (v. 5). "Slowly" determines the entire fifth verse, which can be seen even more clearly in the German version, where the verse begins with this word: "Chaos, trembling with joy, slowly hurries and struggles (*Langsam eilt und kämpft das freudigschauernde Chaos*)". The translation by Michael Hamburger preserves the word order here more precisely: "Slowly it hurries and wars, this Chaos trembling with pleasure".[56] This hurrying is an extension of the motion of falling and gives it a more definite orientation,

---

55   K. Appel, Christianity and a new Humanism, A. The World as Mirror of the Self and its Shattering – Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Reason and Spirit in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 12.

56   Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin: Poems and Fragments. Translated by Michael Hamburger. Fourth Bilingual Edition with a Preface, Introduction and Notes, London ⁴2004.

which for the first time suggests a form of intentionality. The struggling, which is said to be slow, is no longer the blind rush of chaos, but rather describes chaos as already on the cusp of generating something that will not immediately be swallowed up again.

"Chaos" (v. 5) designates the determining force of the first verses. These hint at a state that has not yet passed into a form of differentiation and clear distinction, which the paradoxical expressions "bright night (*helle Nacht*)" (v. 1), "slowly hurries (*langsam eilt*)" (v. 5) and "trembling with joy (*freudigschaudernd*)" (v. 5) show. The poem is a depiction which, within the undifferentiatedness of the opposites and the hurry of chaos, describes the first emergence of direction ("rushing (*stürzen*)", "hurrying (*eilen*)") and finally of "form (*Gestalt*)". The goal of the first six verses is pronounced in the phrase "young in form (*jung an Gestalt*)" (v. 6). Even more than the falling and hurrying, the *form* allows a first lasting formation to become discernible. Therefore, the roar of chaos can afterwards be addressed as a celebration of "loving strife (*liebenden Streites*)". Now this strife is no longer linked to the destructiveness of being born and devoured, but instead constitutes the joyous quarrel that binds form and matter into one entity. In the entire roaring space of the yawning valley, the first slow, quiet enclaves of formation emerge "Amidst the Rocks (*Unter den Felsen*)" (v. 7). There chaos is turned into loving strife.

The following verses are characterized by an incipient differentiation of time:

> [...] es gärt und wankt in den ewigen Schranken,
>   Denn bacchantischer zieht drinnen der Morgen herauf.
> Denn es wächst unendlicher dort das Jahr und die heilgen
>   ¹⁰Stunden, die Tage, sie sind kühner geordnet, gemischt.
> Dennoch merket die Zeit der Gewittervogel und zwischen
>   Bergen, hoch in der Luft weilt er und rufet den Tag.

> [...] it seethes and shakes in its eternal bounds,
>   For more bacchantically morning rises within.
> For the year grows more endlessly there and the holy
>   ¹⁰Hours, the days, are more boldly ordered and mingled.
> Yet the bird of the thunderstorm notes the time and between
>   Mountains, high in the air he hovers and calls out the day.

We are still far from the pacific state that would allow for more differentiated forms, but our first glance into the yawning valley grants us the realization that the fomenting and seething chaos is itself caught in "eternal bounds (*ewigen Schranken*)" (v. 7). Being eternal, these elude human control; at this point no self or subjectivity is present which could set these bounds as such. We rather encounter them amidst the chaos itself, if we attentively observe the

development presented in the poem. We cannot yet do anything other than merely absorb the language of the poem, especially since no categories of order (such as causation) have yet been established. The fundamental statement about there being limits to chaos, however, enables us to understand how, amidst the apeiron of this chaos presented as a mountainous world, determined limits first emerge; these limits are hinted at by the phrase "young in form (*jung an Gestalt*)" (v. 6). This process can now be addressed more concretely through the expression "more bacchantically (*bacchantischer*)" (v. 8) and be linked to a mythological tradition. The bacchanalian is the first cultic response to the ecstatic–chaotic and thus constitutes a continuation of the celebration of the loving strife (v. 6). "For (*Denn*)" (v. 8) at the beginning of this verse is the first conjunction that introduces a form of cause, effect and explanation. But this is not yet about certain ritual acts ("more bacchantically") and compelling logical deductions ("For", *Denn*); all these are rather only intuitions, which are merely supposed to make the described event in some way comprehensible.

What is decisive is the mention of the coming of the morning (v. 8). This is the rising of light, which represents the first form of the experience of the divine. As the inaugural lecture explains, for Hegel, too, this is the first configuration of religion.[57] Hölderlin expresses the primordial differentiation of night and day (Gen 1,3–5), which fundamentally divides the "bright night (*helle Nacht*)" (v. 1). This will be the starting point for an abundance of temporal determinations, the implementation of which is initiated by the conjunction "For" (v. 9). The latter "For" appears like a joyful continuation of the "For" of the previous verse. It is able to grow infinitely ("For the year grows more endlessly there", v. 9), rising out of the seething and shaking – and preserving the elusive alternation of night and day, without which there would be no growth. We encounter the year (according to which the growth of nature orients itself), the day (which gives man his basic measure of time) and finally the holy hour (as the time of celebration). The days "are more boldly ordered and mingled (*sind kühner geordnet, gemischt*)" (v. 10), i.e., they are not placed in an abstract, lifeless order. At the end of this section, the "bird of the thunderstorm (*Gewittervogel*)" – is it the bird of Zeus or the eagle symbolizing the Gospel of John? – is able to lift itself into the air and fly around between the mountain peaks. The bird "notes" (v. 11) the time and "calls out" (v. 12) the day. In front of him a mountain range, a landscape of time with its peaks and abysses in between, spreads out. Where at the beginning of the stanza our gaze was drawn into an alpine valley, now

---

57   Cf. K. Appel, Christianity and a new Humanism, B. Religion as Loss of the Self – on the Significance of Religion in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 19.

a view of the mountains as a landscape opens for the first time. The motif of calling out the day concludes the passage: It has become day. It is precisely at this point that the third section of the first stanza begins, and with "now (jetzt)" (v. 13) it seeks to fix a point from which observations can take their further course:

> Jetzt auch wachet und schaut in der Tiefe drinnen das Dörflein
>   Furchtlos, Hohem vertraut, unter den Gipfeln hinauf.
> ¹⁵Wachstum ahnend, denn schon, wie Blitze, fallen die alten
>   Wasserquellen, der Grund unter den Stürzenden dampft,
> Echo tönet umher, und die unermeßliche Werkstatt
>   Reget bei Tag und Nacht, Gaben versendend, den Arm.

> Now in the depths within, the little village also awakens and
>   Fearless, familiar with the high, looks up from under the peaks.
> ¹⁵Divining growth, for already, like lightning flashes, the ancient
>   Waterfalls crash, the ground steaming beneath the falls,
> Echo resounds all about, and the immeasurable workshop,
>   Dispensing gifts, actively moves its arm by day and night.

Starting from this "now" (v. 13), space is configured, following the differentiation of time in the previous section. The first movement goes down into the depths to a village, from which the perspective, like the "growth" (v. 15) it senses ("Divining growth", v. 15), moves upwards again in a first reversal. In the second reversal, lightning and water come down again from above, but they are no longer immediately reflected through a reversal of their movement (as occurred twice before). For the first time the "ground (*Grund*)" (v. 16) appears, although still steaming and not solid. But its discovery makes the landscape become the *sound space* for a reverberating echo (v. 17). There is as yet no one speaking to make the echo the echo of a voice; prior to this, the landscape becomes a *sound body* in which later words, voices and language can sound and resound in manifold ways. The seething and shaking chaos has become the demiurgical "workshop (*Werkstatt*)" (v. 17) of nature, inserted into the initial order of "day and night" (v. 18), its immensity removed from man: "The first stanza has not yet spoken of man. It offers the great picture of a nature that is experienced as *immeasurable workshop* when it is still demiurgical."[58] The elementary dimensions of space – vertically from above and from below and horizontally as the "ground" (v. 16) – having been constituted, now begins the motion of sending "gifts (*Gaben*)" (v. 18), the recipients of which are constituted in the second stanza.

---

58   B. Liebrucks, "Und", 565.

II
Ruhig glänzen indes die silbernen Höhen darüber,
  [20]Voll mit Rosen ist schon droben der leuchtende Schnee.
Und noch höher hinauf wohnt über dem Lichte der reine
  Selige Gott vom Spiel heiliger Strahlen erfreut.
Stille wohnt er allein und hell erscheinet sein Antlitz,
  Der ätherische scheint Leben zu geben geneigt,
[25]Freude zu schaffen, mit uns, wie oft, wenn, kundig des Maßes,
  Kundig der Atmenden auch zögernd und schonend der Gott
Wohlgediegenes Glück den Städten und Häusern und milde
  Regen, zu öffnen das Land, brütende Wolken, und euch,
Trauteste Lüfte dann, euch, sanfte Frühlinge, sendet,
  [30]Und mit langsamer Hand Traurige wieder erfreut,
Wenn er die Zeiten erneut, der Schöpferische, die stillen
  Herzen der alternden Menschen erfrischt und ergreift,
Und hinab in die Tiefe wirkt, und öffnet und aufhellt,
  Wie ers liebet, und jetzt wieder ein Leben beginnt,
[35]Anmut blühet, wie einst, und gegenwärtiger Geist kömmt,
  Und ein freudiger Mut wieder die Fittige schwellt.

II
Meanwhile the silvery heights gleam peacefully above,
  [20]Up there the luminous snow is already full of roses.
And still higher up, above the light, dwells the pure
  Blissful god rejoicing in the play of holy rays.
Silently he dwells alone, and brightly shines his countenance,
  The aetherial one seems inclined to give life
[25]To create joy, with us, as often, when, knowing the measure,
  Also knowing those who breathe, hesitant and sparing, the god
Sends true good fortune to towns and houses and gentle
  Rain to open the land, brooding clouds, and then you,
Dearest breezes, you gentle springtimes,
  [30]And with patient hand brings joy again to those who mourn,
When he renews the seasons, the creative one, refreshes
  And seizes the silent hearts of aging men,
And works down to the depths, and opens and brightens up,
  As he loves to do, and now once again a life begins,
[35]Grace blooms, as once, and present spirit comes,
  And a joyous courage spreads its wings once more.

The second stanza describes a calm mountainous world. The word "peace-fully (*ruhig*)" (v. 19) summarizes the entire previous movement in one term. Again here, Michael Hamburger closely follows the word order of the original German: "Quiet, meanwhile, above, the silvery peaks lie aglitter" (v. 19).

At the beginning of the stanza, the view is directed to the heights of the mountains, which at dawn are messengers of the approaching day (v. 19).[59] That

_____

59   Cf. J. Schmidt (ed.), Hölderlin, 750.

which in the first stanza had to struggle to wrest itself away from the roaring, seething and shaking of chaotic forces is now calmly displayed by the peaks. The glittering heights to which our gaze wanders become the reference to an elevation that transcends them, leading beyond the "light" (v. 21) to reach a pure, blessed God (v. 21 et seq.). His *dwelling* above the light is taken up again in the next verse in the phrase "Silently he dwells alone" (v. 23). The first of the two phrases that speak of God's dwelling (v. 21 et seq.) is still part of a great soaring movement. This movement begins in the first stanza with the fall and leads from hurry to the village's unhurried gaze, which first wanders upwards and, after a reversal with lightning and springs of water, comes down again to reach ground for the first time. Starting from there and transcending the shining mountain heights, in the second stanza it reaches the God above the light.

With the word "silently (*stille*)" (v. 23), which opens the next verse and thus the second phrase on the dwelling of God, this movement has now concentrated itself in one word and become calm. God is no longer the *transcendens* of an elevating movement towards an ever greater beyond, but rather stands as a figure ("form (*Gestalt*)", v. 6) before the observer. With God's appearing as a figure, man will now also be able to enter the poem.

It is the "countenance (*Antlitz*)" (v. 23) of God which appears. This revelation goes beyond the first configuration of a *form* in the sixth verse ("young in form (*jung an Gestalt*)") and brings into focus the possibility of encounter. Like the entire subsequent development, such an encounter depends on the gifts of this God who seems inclined to "give life" (v. 24). The gift-giving impulse of demiurgical nature, pictured as an immeasurable workshop (v. 18), culminates in the gift of life; the description and development of this motif extends through the 36th verse, i.e., to the end of the stanza. In God's movement of gifting, man too comes into being – as a breathing creature (v. 26). God, on the other hand, appears "knowing the measure (*kundig des Maases*)" (v. 25). This characterization does not appear unheralded; chaos had already shown itself to be caught in "eternal bounds" (v. 7) and had allowed a first living order in time to arise ("ordered and mingled (*geordnet, gemischt*)", v. 10). This order now becomes a measure which has nothing to do with a technical scale of measurement, but instead indicates ratios, i.e., corresponding quantities. The phrase "knowing the measure", which appears at the end of verse 25 and refers to God, is taken up again in a similar way at the beginning of the next verse, where it says "knowing those who breathe (*kundig der Athmenden*)" (v. 26). The breath of life, which is given to man, finds its measure in divine measure; it is in harmony with the divine breath, the Spirit. Man is thus the embodiment of a fragile measure which has arisen out of roaring chaos. Nature and man can indeed be described in parallel (concerning their passing and rising), but man can no longer be embodied by nature. Thus, the poem complements the sending

of gentle springtimes (v. 29) as an image of nature's repeated renewal with the slowly rejoicing mournfulness (v. 30) and the "silent / hearts of aging men (*stillen / Herzen der alternden Menschen*)" being refreshed and seized (v. 31 et seq.). As men age they fall out of nature's cyclical process of renewal. Their mortality is not veiled; rather, man who begins aging from birth is to be led into joy[60] and openness (v. 33), and "Grace (*Anmuth*)" is to blossom over him (v. 35). This grace is rooted in the indisposability of the mortal human essence, which finds no equivalence in nature's renewing process of generation. Rather, it is the embodiment of a fragile measure into which the movement of nature has been concentrated and which – inaccessible to any form of self-production – can only be understood as spiritual (v. 35).

The guiding concept of the second stanza is the *silence* that is expressed relative to the dwelling of God and to the hearts of men (v. 31 et seq.), which are dependent on him. The silent hearts' dependence on God is indicated by the adjectival (and thus not independent) use ("silent hearts"), which does not let that silence stand freely – unlike the adverb "silently", which characterizes the dwelling of God. Moreover, "silent" and "hearts", although united by an enjambment, are joined through rupture: "silent / hearts of aging men" (v. 31 et seq.). If one examines silence in Hölderlin's poetry, starting from its first appearances, it becomes clear that, as the antithesis to falling silent, it is that from which words emerge in the first place. Thus, after introducing man as silently participating in God's silence, the third stanza will now look at man's initial linguisticality:

III
Vieles sprach ich zu ihm, denn, was auch Dichtende sinnen
    Oder singen, es gilt meistens den Engeln und ihm;
Vieles bat ich, zu lieb dem Vaterlande, damit nicht
    40Ungebeten uns einst plötzlich befiele der Geist;
Vieles für euch auch, die im Vaterlande besorgt sind,
    Denen der heilige Dank lächelnd die Flüchtlinge bringt,
Landesleute! für euch, [...]

III
Much I spoke to him, for whatever poets meditate
    Or sing, it mostly concerns the angels and him;
Much I asked for, for love of the fatherland, lest
    40Unbidden one day the spirit might suddenly fall upon us;
Much also for you, who have cares in the fatherland,
    To whom holy thanks, smiling, brings the fugitives,
Countrymen! for you, [...]

---

60   For Heidegger, joy or "the joyful" is the central word of the poem. See M. Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, 34.

At the end of the first stanza, the mountainous landscape had developed into a sound space (v. 17) that was ready to hear the silence of God, before whose face the breathing men appeared with silent hearts. God as "the creative one (*der Schöpferische*)" (v. 31) had caused men to open up (v. 33) and allowed life to begin (v. 34). The sphere of the living, which had developed in the course of the second stanza, is now filled with the coming of the present spirit (v. 35). Man's linguisticality corresponds to this spiritual dimension. This is the starting point of the third stanza, which begins with the words "Much I spoke to him" (v. 37). In these words – for the first time in this poem – we encounter a self. This self is not presented in its self-sufficiency, but instead in its relation to God. As the first form of language, prayer and poem appear as indistinguishable: "whatever poets meditate / Or sing (*was auch Dichtende sinnen / Oder singen*)" is "mostly" (v. 37 et seq.) addressed to God ("him", v. 38) and the angels.

The first section of the stanza is marked by multiplicity. The first three distichs each begin with "Much" (v. 37, 39, 41), which distinguishes them from the pure unity of silence of the second stanza. As soon as language appears as human language, it is caught in the ambivalence of a multiplicity. On the one hand, this multiplicity represents its openness and its inexhaustibly referential nature, but, on the other hand, also indicates a form of distraction, which can no longer be concentrated in a word like "silently" (v. 23) or "peacefully" (v. 19). The ego lacks the necessary means of expression for this when language first appears. The conjunction "whatever" steps into this deficiency with the recapitulatory force of logical reflection: "for whatever poets meditate / Or sing, it mostly concerns the angels and him" (v. 37 et seq.).[61] At this point we again encounter the self-reflexive nature of poetry, which is evident from Hölderlin's first poems, and it is once more accompanied by the indistinguishability of poetry and prayer. On this basis we have to consider three motifs:

1) The structure described is reminiscent of the biblical story of Abel/ Seth/Enosh, which *in* the Holy Scriptures reflects the coming-to-language of the name of God: While Cain is immediately presented as speaking and this linguisticality leads into Lamech's boastful and deterrent heroic song, the coming-to-language of Enosh, who is the first to mention the name of God, is connected to a long history of experiences that go even as far as violent death. Abel himself is still mute; only his blood will cry out to God after his death. Eve is able to express that Seth will become a substitute for Abel, and through the mention of the name of God the figure of Enosh passes into prayer.

---

61   Bruno Liebrucks says about this: "The words that follow 'for [*denn*]' give an explanation of poetry itself within poetry, which is to be read as a second reflection, since this is how its poetic conception is expressed." B. Liebrucks, "Und", 566.

2) We encounter three basic linguistic forms of poetry and prayer after the first occurrence of language in the following three distichs (v. 39–45): plea (v. 39), thanks (v. 42) and praise (v. 44). The first of these is the *plea* for the capacity to endure the revelation of God: "lest / Unbidden one day the spirit might suddenly fall upon us" (v. 39 et seq.). It thus represents a connection between the shining and fading of the ray from the first stanza (v. 4) and the adjectives "hesitant and sparing (*zögernd und schonend*)", which in the second stanza immediately precede the appearance of God (v. 26), as well as the adverb "gentle (*mild*)" (v. 27) – all these phrases revolving around the fact that the divine can reveal itself only in its withdrawal. In poetry, therefore, the question arises as to how the appearance of God can be grasped, and yet how his absence, which cannot be ignored but requires verbalization, can also be grasped.[62] The poet's concern becomes discernible for the first time.

3) While in the first two stanzas of the poem we were still observers who were granted an insight into the roar of chaos and who were briefly allowed to participate in the eagle's view of the temporal landscape of the mountains and the rising gaze of the village (v. 13), from now on, as the first two verses of the third stanza show, the lyric self appears as reflective self. The poem, which hitherto was written in the present tense, changes now to the preterite tense, indicating a distance with regards to the immediate presence and thus to a loss: "spoke" (v. 37), "asked" (v. 39), "rocked" (v. 43), "sat" and "praised" (v. 44). The self no longer has a homeland, but instead finds itself *en route* into the unknown.[63] Heidegger says of this new movement of searching that it cannot be brought to rest by finding anything.[64] "Homecoming", let this be said in advance, will not mean a return to a definite place of arrival established in the course of the text.

> [...] indessen wiegte der See mich,
>   Und der Ruderer saß ruhig und lobte die Fahrt.
> ⁴⁵Weit in des Sees Ebene wars Ein freudiges Wallen
>   Unter den Segeln und jetzt blühet und hellet die Stadt

---

62 Cf. the last verse of Hölderlin's poem *Dichterberuf*: "Furchtlos bleibt aber, so er es muß, der Mann / Einsam vor Gott, es schützet die Einfalt ihn, / Und keiner Waffen brauchts und keiner / Listen, so lange, bis Gottes Fehl hilft." "Fearless yet, if he must, man stands, and lonely / Before God, simplicity protects him, no / Weapon he needs, nor subterfuge / Till God's being not there helps him." (v. 61–64), translated by Christopher Middleton, in: Friedrich Hölderlin, Hyperion and Selected Poems, ed. by Eric L. Santer, New York 1994, 152–157.

63 Cf. K. Appel, Christianity and a new Humanism, A. The World as Mirror of the Self and its Shattering – Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Reason and Spirit in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 11–19.

64 Cf. M. Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, 33.

Dort in der Frühe sich auf, wohl her von schattigen Alpen
    Kommt geleitet und ruht nun in dem Hafen das Schiff.
Warm ist das Ufer hier und freundlich offene Tale,
    [50]Schön von Pfaden erhellt grünen und schimmern mich an.
Gärten stehen gesellt und die glänzende Knospe beginnt schon,
    Und des Vogels Gesang ladet den Wanderer ein.
Alles scheinet vertraut, der vorübereilende Gruß auch
    Scheint von Freunden, es scheint jegliche Miene verwandt.

[…] meanwhile the lake rocked me,
    And the boatman sat calmly and praised the journey.
[45]Far out on the surface of the lake was One joyous swell
    Beneath the sails, and now the town blooms and brightens
There in the dawn, and the boat is safely guided
    From the shady Alps and now rests in the harbor.
Warm is the shore here and friendly the open valleys,
    [50]Beautifully lit up with paths, gleam verdantly toward me.
Gardens stand together and already the glistening bud is beginning,
    And the bird's song invites the wanderer.
All seems familiar, even the hurried greetings
    Seem those of friends, every face seems a kindred one.

"Meanwhile" (v. 43) introduces a break. At this point the lyric self appears "pictorially in the song"[65], becomes part of the landscape described and moves within it. When this self first appears, it does not reside in a tranquil dwelling but is on a journey between the Alps and the city of Lindau.[66] Since in the first stanza (cf. v. 1), the Alps have represented the divine realm, the journey from the shady mountains to the bright city must also be understood as a journey between the divine and the human realm:

> The journey across Lake Constance is the journey from the divine realm of the Alps to the human realm of the city of Lindau, the gateway to the homeland. As the *connection*, it is uninjured *being*, which is both divine realm and human homeland.[67]

But how can the connection between the geographic and metaphysical-religious topos of the journey be understood? We are confronted with a new approach, for which Hölderlin opted in his poetry from around 1800 onwards.

---

65   B. Liebrucks, "Und", 566.

66   As the inaugural lecture points out, all "texts of fundamental importance to Europe (the story of Abraham, the Odyssey, the Aeneid)" are shaped by this primacy of the journey (K. Appel, Christianity and a new Humanism, A. The World as Mirror of the Self and its Shattering – Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Reason and Spirit in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 11).

67   B. Liebrucks, "Und", 566 et seq.

He repeatedly takes real places, mountains, rivers, cities and islands as the starting points of his poems (*Heidelberg, Am Quell der Donau, Der Ister, Stuttgart, Patmos ...*) and unfolds his poetry from these locations. The background to this shift is the experience, described in the previous chapter, that the immediate meanings of all basic words and guiding ideas have disintegrated and that poetry can no longer presuppose them or build upon them. Every poem is now faced with the task of forming a new sphere, in which relationships, directions and structures of meaning slowly begin to reemerge. Each poem can thus also be seen as a journey into language. Of course, it would be a mere abstraction to think that a poem could start from scratch and reinvent language. In the first two verses of *Homecoming*, Hölderlin says that "the cloud, / Composing poems full of joy, covers the yawning valley within" (v. 1 et seq.). From the very beginning, we partake in the journey into language, but we do not have complete control and sovereignty over it. So what does Hölderlin do? He now chooses factually pre-given entities – real geographical locations – as his starting point and begins to depict these. In the context of this depiction, it is important to comprehend how the smallest changes in the landscape or shifts in perspective provoke a corresponding increase in the complexity of linguistic expression.

Geographically, the journey represents a spatial approach to the homeland, which passes from the lake (v. 43–48) to the land (v. 49–54) and is characterized by a welcoming gesture regarding the hiker: "friendly the open valleys" crossed by paths (v. 49 et seq.), the inviting song of the birds (v. 52), a feeling of familiarity and kinship welcoming the hiker (v. 52–54). The landscape itself becomes a welcoming salutation – modeled on the gift-giving gesture of the blessed God who had constituted man as a linguistic being in the first place. However, this initial linguisticality had not yet become apparent in any concrete situation. The question will arise as to whether the journey described here and the region presenting itself amicably, in which the poet himself becomes a part of the picture (starting v. 43), will also be able to open for him a new linguistic horizon.

The fourth stanza can be divided into three sections of equal length: the first section (v. 55–60) addressing the question of opening a new linguistic horizon, the second (v. 61–66) and the third (v. 67–72) each indicating a certain direction.

> IV
> ⁵⁵Freilich wohl! das Geburtsland ists, der Boden der Heimat,
>   Was du suchest, es ist nahe, begegnet dir schon.
> Und umsonst nicht steht, wie ein Sohn, am wellenumrauschten
>   Tor' und siehet und sucht liebende Namen für dich,
> Mit Gesang ein wandernder Mann, glückseliges Lindau!
>   ⁶⁰Eine der gastlichen Pforten des Landes ist dies,

IV
⁵⁵But of course! It is the land of your birth, the soil of your homeland,
    What you seek, it is near, already comes to meet you.
And not in vain does he stand, like a son, at the wave-washed
    Gate, and sees and seeks loving names for you,
With his song, a wandering man, blessed Lindau!
    ⁶⁰This is one of the land's hospitable portals,

The first two verses seem self-contained. The ground "steaming beneath the falls" (v. 16) has solidified into the "soil of your homeland" (v. 55). It seems that the land of birth and the soil of the homeland are what is sought in the following verse: "What you seek, it is near, already comes to meet you" (v. 56) But how do the following verses bring about this encounter? Someone stands at the gate of home "like a son" (v. 57) and is overwhelmed by the hospitable welcome (v. 60). However, he is not the son who has found his way back to his own, to his homeland, but he is like a son and thus remains the guest, a man who seeks (v. 58) and wanders (v. 59). In the second mention of a search ("and seeks loving names for you", v. 58), it becomes clear that its deeper motivation is not directed at the soil of the homeland but at naming, language and song. What previously looked like the happy arrival in the homeland reveals itself rather as the inauguration of an even more fundamental search for names for the native places that can correspond to the experience of the joy of the reception. It is the search for a "song" (v. 59) that can rise on the newly acquired ground.

Reizend hinauszugehn in die vielversprechende Ferne,
    Dort, wo die Wunder sind, dort, wo das göttliche Wild
Hoch in die Ebnen herab der Rhein die verwegene Bahn bricht,
    Und aus Felsen hervor ziehet das jauchzende Tal,
⁶⁵Dort hinein, durchs helle Gebirg, nach Komo zu wandern,
    Oder hinab, wie der Tag wandelt, den offenen See;
Aber reizender mir bist du, geweihete Pforte!
    Heimzugehn, wo bekannt blühende Wege mir sind,
Dort zu besuchen das Land und die schönen Tale des Neckars,
    ⁷⁰Und die Wälder, das Grün heiliger Bäume, wo gern
Sich die Eiche gesellt mit stillen Birken und Buchen,
    Und in Bergen ein Ort freundlich gefangen mich nimmt.

Enticing us to go out into the much-promising distance,
    There, where the wonders are, there, where the divine wild game,
High up the Rhine breaks his daring path down to the plains,
    And forth from the rocks the jubilant valley emerges,
⁶⁵In there, through bright mountains, to wander to Como,
    Or down, as the day changes, to the open lake;
But you are more enticing to me, you consecrated portal!
    To go home, where the blossoming paths are known to me,

There to visit the land and the beautiful valleys of the Neckar,
   [70]And the forests, the green of holy trees, where the oak
Likes to stand amidst silent birches and beeches,
   And in the mountains a place, friendly, takes me captive.

The arrival in the "land of your birth" (v. 55) immediately passes into a movement spanning two directions, that of going out (v. 61) and that of going home (v. 68), and brings with it a further structuring of the landscape. Their parallel structure ("Enticing to go out …", v. 61 – "But … more enticing … / To go home", v. 67 et seq.) makes it clear that they are not to be considered as isolated and separate from each other. If one takes the fourth stanza as a whole, it becomes apparent that the stanza, which explicitly addresses the topic of the homeland for the first time, carries at its center the idea of leaving. The passages on the homeland (v. 55–60 and v. 67–72) frame the part that deals with going out into the "much-promising distance" (v. 61). But what is it that the distance promises?

The motif of the valley, which is crucial to the poem, allows one to guess in which direction the movement connected to this going out into the distance could proceed. The yawning valley (v. 2) was that which swallows up while generating chaotically. Having been calmed, it became a friendly open valley (v. 49), from whose openness the "jubilant valley" (v. 64) could develop, having become language and poetry (the valley "jubilates"). It was transformed from a mythological valley into a valley as a geographical entity and, ultimately, into a linguistic-poetic valley. In the poetry emerging from this movement, an echo of the initially seething forces of chaos ("yawning valley"), as well as of the actual geographical localization ("friendly open valley"), thus resounds.[68] The river is addressed as "divine wild game" (v. 62 et seq.), which indicates that we are no longer dealing solely with geographical entities, but also with poetic ones. Plain, river, rock, valley, mountain and lake, however, are not images that stand for other entities which reveal their true meaning. What is decisive is rather the transition taking place here: As elements of the landscape merge into poetry, an oscillation of space and language, place and word, landscape and poetry, arises. In this *vibrating openness* a new linguistic horizon can unfold, which corresponds to this going out into the promising distance, "where the wonders are" (v. 61 et seq.). Conversely, it is only in this opening of language that a homeland exists.

---

68   Bruno Liebrucks himself summarizes going out into the distance as the path of poetry: "But beyond that, it is not a matter of the journey of a man but of poetry, in which the Rhine is *the divine game* (verse 62)." B. Liebrucks, "Und", 568.

V

Dort empfangen sie mich. O Stimme der Stadt, der Mutter!
    O du triffest, du regst Langegelerntes mir auf!
75Dennoch sind sie es noch! noch blühet die Sonn' und die Freud' euch,
    O ihr Liebsten! und fast heller im Auge, wie sonst.
Ja! das Alte noch ists! Es gedeihet und reifet, doch keines
    Was da lebet und liebt, lässet die Treue zurück.
Aber das Beste, der Fund, der unter des heiligen Friedens
    80Bogen lieget, er ist Jungen und Alten gespart.
Törig red ich. Es ist die Freude. Doch morgen und künftig
    Wenn wir gehen und schaun draußen das lebende Feld
Unter den Blüten des Baums, in den Feiertagen des Frühlings
    Red' und hoff' ich mit euch vieles, ihr Lieben! Davon.

V

There they welcome me. O voice of the town, of my mother!
    O you touch me, you stir up what I learned long ago!
75Yet they are still the same! Still the sun and joy blossom for you,
    O you dearest ones! And almost more brightly in your eyes than before.
Yes! Old things are still the same! They thrive and ripen, yet nothing
    Which lives and loves there abandons its faithfulness.
But the best, the real find, which lies beneath the rainbow
    80Of holy peace, is reserved for young and old.
I talk like a fool. It is joy. Yet tomorrow and in the future
    When we go outside and look at the living fields,
Beneath the tree's blossoms, in the holidays of spring,
    Much shall I talk and hope with you about this, dear ones!

The fifth and sixth stanzas represent the climax of the poem. On the one hand, this shows in the salutatory address of the "dearest" (v. 76), which now explicitly addresses those already addressed in the dedication (the "kindred ones"), among whom the wanderer has now arrived. Thus, the poem has now caught up with those to whom it is dedicated: "There they welcome me." (v. 73) On the other hand, the only enjambement (v. 90 et seq.) that ties two stanzas together also points to the culmination of the poem.

The final part begins with a pause, in which we encounter the erratic sentence: "There they welcome me." (v. 73) It denotes the short period of uncertainty *before* the joyous embrace of reunion. The poet is now welcomed home and, as the first section of the stanza (v. 73–78) suggests, he can grasp this through images of his childhood and thus of the past. The city's motherly reception (v. 73) is the first voice that once opened his ear and now opens it to his homeland. Finally he is able to say: "Yes! Old things are still the same! (*Ja! das Alte noch ists!*)" (v. 77) This has just as little to do with pathos or regression as the poem has anything to do with homeliness; it rather reminds us of the miracle (and this is not to be understood merely in a figurative sense) of how

the landscape in which we grew up and the people who cared for us brought us to language. This is what the poet, returning home and warmly received, remembers; but after the first section of the stanza, this memory immediately leads to a far-reaching *question*: Can returning to the place of one's own coming-to-language once again lead to the opening of language horizons? Or more generally: What allows language to emerge anew and prevents us, who have long since encountered language, from falling silent?

Hölderlin introduces this turnaround with a "But" (v. 79): "But the best, the real find, which lies beneath the rainbow / Of holy peace, is reserved for young and old. (*Aber das Beste, der Fund, der unter des heiligen Friedens | Bogen lieget, er ist Jungen und Alten gespart.*)" (v. 79 et seq.) The searching movement of the fourth stanza (v. 56, 58), mentioned twice and which does not end with the arrival in the homeland but represents a search for language, is now answered by a "find", which as "the best" (v. 79) is capable of even exceeding the joy of the return to the native world. Even though the place of this "find" (v. 79) can be named – it is located under the sacred rainbow, the connective function of the bow being expressed through the enjambment (v. 79 et seq.) – it is saved for young and old, i.e., it cannot be taken possession of, it remains stored and thereby withdrawn and inexhaustible. Heidegger particularly emphasizes this in his interpretation and reads "the best" and the "find" (v. 79) as the secret of "becom[ing] at home within a nearness to the origin"[69]:

> The nearness to the origin is a nearness which still holds something back in reserve. It withholds the most joyful. It preserves and saves it for those who are coming; but this nearness does not take away the most joyful, it only lets it appear precisely as saved.[70]

Poetry, which itself is never immediate descriptive language, has the task of protecting its origin from any attempt at appropriation:

> In order therefore that the reserving nearness to the most joyful may remain protected, the poetic word must take care not to hasten by or to lose that which sends its greeting out of the joyful, which sends its greeting as the self-reserving.[71]

The rainbow of peace (des *Friedens Bogen*) seems to be a reference to the biblical story of God's covenant with creation, which was saved from the flood, the waters of chaos (cf. Gen 9:8–17). Hölderlin takes up this image of a connection between heaven and earth again in *Patmos*, where he says: "Under

---

69   M. Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, 43.
70   Ibid.
71   Ibid., 44.

a thundering sky / His sign is silent. (*Still ist sein Zeichen / Am donnernden Himmel.*)" (*Patmos*, v. 203 et seq.). Moreover, the image pays homage to the Peace of Lunéville between France and Austria in 1801, which, for Hölderlin, was associated with great hope.[72]

In the homeland, which is connected to return and arrival, a "find", an act of finding, actually takes place, but it encounters an empty place that cannot be (re)appropriated (v. 79 et seq.). Let us now look at the dynamics emanating from this: The mood of the stanza remains joyful (v. 81), but what changes is the perspective: Introduced with a "Yet (*Doch*)" (v. 81), the view turns from the past (v. 73–78) to the future of tomorrow and beyond ("Yet tomorrow and in the future", v. 81). Again, the movement of walking (v. 82) commences, and with it the new capacity to see with a *living perception* ("When we go outside and look at the living fields, / Beneath the tree's blossoms", v. 82 et seq.). The holidays in spring (v. 83) – are they nature-related festivals, is it Easter? – draw our gaze into the distance and go hand in hand with the hope that the poet might also find a new way to speak and express himself through the richness of multiplicity ("in the holidays of spring, / Much shall I talk and hope with you about this, dear ones!", v. 83 et seq.). It is not nature alone that sets language into motion; the poet hopes that the community of "dear ones" (v. 84) can also become a new linguistic community, as the dedication of the poem to "kindred ones" suggests. "Much" (v. 84), describing what the poet has to say and also the object of his hope, leads on to the third section of the fifth stanza, which likewise begins with "Much" (v. 85) and then merges into the sixth stanza:

> ⁸⁵Vieles hab' ich gehört vom großen Vater und habe
>   Lange geschwiegen von ihm, welcher die wandernde Zeit
> Droben in Höhen erfrischt, und waltet über Gebirgen
>   Der gewähret uns bald himmlische Gaben und ruft
> Hellern Gesang und schickt viel gute Geister. O säumt nicht,
>   ⁹⁰Kommt, Erhaltenden ihr! Engel des Jahres! und ihr,
>
> VI
> Engel des Hauses, kommt! in die Adern alle des Lebens,
>   Alle freuend zugleich, teile das Himmlische sich!
> Adle! verjünge! damit nichts Menschlichgutes, damit nicht
>   Eine Stunde des Tags ohne die Frohen und auch
> ⁹⁵Solche Freude, wie jetzt, wenn Liebende wieder sich finden,
>   Wie es gehört für sie, schicklich geheiliget sei.

---

72   Cf. J. Schmidt (ed.), Hölderlin, 751.

[85]Much have I heard about the great father and have
    Long kept silent about him, who refreshes wandering time
In the heights above, and reigns over mountain ranges,
    Who will soon grant us heavenly gifts and call
For brighter song and send many good spirits. O do not delay,
    [90]Come, you preservers! Angels of the year, and you,

VI
Angels of the house, come! Into all the veins of life,
    Rejoicing all at once, let the heavenly share itself!
Ennoble! Renew! So that nothing that's humanly good, so that not a
    Single hour of the day may be without the joyful ones and that also
[95]Such joy, as now, when lovers are reunited,
    As it should be, may be fittingly hallowed.

"Much" (v. 85) occurs again at the beginning of a verse analogous to the third stanza, where language first appeared. In both places, there is reference to language and to God:

Much I spoke to him (v. 37)
Much shall I talk and hope with you about this, dear ones (v. 84).

In contrast to the third stanza, however, the poet does not begin by addressing God; rather, where just a moment ago there was talk of the hope of returning to language (v. 83 et seq.), now there is listening and long silence (v. 85 et seq.). The poet has heard much of God and has remained silent about him for a long time. Here, the ambivalence of "much", which was already present in the word's first appearance, must be noted. It might indicate the abundance of the many witnesses whose life and word tell of God, but it might also be the scattered multiplicity of church traditions, theologies and art that can no longer find a focal point and that no longer speak from silence.

At this point, we must consider two analogies and the resulting shifts within the poem. Firstly: Listening and silence lead to a relative clause ("have / Long kept silent about him, *who refreshes wandering time …*", v. 85 et seq.), which then speaks broadly and hymnically about God and passes into a call to praise. This call to praise is even addressed to the angels, who bridge the transition from the fifth to the sixth stanza (v. 90 et seq.). As in the second stanza, God is spoken of as a giver who grants "heavenly gifts" (v. 88), calls for "brighter song" (v. 88 et seq.) and sends "many good spirits" (v. 89). Once again there is talk of angels ("angels of the year", "angels of the house", v. 90 et seq.). However, this hymnic *talk about God* remains inserted within a relative clause and within an imperative, but without – as was still the case at the beginning of the third

stanza – passing into prayer. It does not change into an invocation of the name of God but leads (starting from v. 97) into radical questioning. Secondly, similar to the immediate return of a joyful mood after the "find" (v. 79) that was saved for young and old and did not lead to possession (v. 79 et seq.), the poem continues in a joyful manner after the mention of the long silence concerning God. However, it is almost concealed that this silence no longer leads to an invocation of God. This joy has now become ambivalent.

Speaking about the works of God and about what he sends mankind might also be part of something learned long ago that now reawakens in the homeland (v. 74). It ends with the image of the sanctification of the joy of the lovers' reunion (v. 94–96), which in the poem, however, does not remain a yearning but takes place "now" (v. 95). The community of "kindred ones" from the dedication, which turns out to be the hoped-for new linguistic community (v. 84), is now completed in the loved ones' finding each other. This is an image of a perfect relationship in the homeland, of comprehensive relationality and integration, in which nothing remains unrelated. But where this unity is most closely knit together, a fundamental question is voiced:

> Wenn wir segnen das Mahl, wen darf ich nennen, und wenn wir
>   Ruhn vom Leben des Tags, saget, wie bring ich den Dank?
> Nenn ich den Hohen dabei? Unschickliches liebet ein Gott nicht,
>   [100]Ihn zu fassen, ist fast unsere Freude zu klein.
> Schweigen müssen wir oft; es fehlen heilige Namen,
>   Herzen schlagen und doch bleibet die Rede zurück?

> When we bless the meal, whom shall I name and when we
>   Rest from the life of day, tell me, how shall I give thanks?
> Shall I name the high one then? A god does not love what is unfitting,
>   [100]To grasp him, our joy is almost too small.
> Often we must be silent; holy names are lacking,
>   Hearts beat and yet talk holds back?

The hymnic enumeration of the gifts and works of God, which are described in the fifth and sixth stanzas and which make order (v. 96) and fellowship possible, cannot guarantee that God himself can still be *addressed*. The poem then turns to the question about him that manifests itself as a question concerning the name ("Whom shall I name", v. 97, and even more emphatically "Shall I call the high one then?", v. 99) and language ("How shall I give thanks?", v. 98, and "And yet talk holds back? (*und doch bleibet die Rede zurück?*)", v. 102). The difficulty of such a search for names and language does not arise unheralded (v. 58 et seq.). While it already smoldered in the poem but was still obscured by the joy of the prevailing mood, it breaks through at this point and expresses

itself clearly and soberly in just a few sentences. The search for names and language obviously fails at its point of culmination, i.e., the naming of the name of God: Sacred names are lacking and speech lags behind (v. 101 et seq.). It would however be premature to declare this absence the irrevocable end of the invocation of the name of God and to seal the silence of speech, for in the word "almost" ("To grasp him, our joy is almost [*fast*] too small", v. 100) a small gap opens up which may render further development possible. It is the same "almost" that occurs at the beginning of *Mnemosyne*, where it says: "A sign we are, without interpretation / Without pain we are and have almost / Lost language in the foreign land." (*Mnemosyne, Entwurf*, v. 1–3) At this point we must counter two reductive interpretations of Hölderlin's poem: On the one hand, the poem can no longer be understood as embedded in a religious "homeland"; but, on the other hand, it cannot simply be understood as a journey into atheism either, since *both* variants are unable to endure the dynamics this poem draws into play between joy and interrogation, homeland and foreign land, prayer and loss of the name of God. Both religion and atheism would dismiss as already solved that question whose essence Hölderlin tries to approach.

This also has ramifications regarding the theme of the purpose of man, which is emphasized by the change from "I" to "we" (starting from v. 97) that takes place precisely at this point. This theme permeates the entire poem, beginning with the attempt of the first two stanzas to express the origin of the self from chaos. From the perspective of the poem, the human is caught in the tension of no longer being able to call the highest thought God with a sense of ultimate certainty, but also of not falling into ultimate uncertainty, "since general-theoretical statements no longer work at this point and insight passes over into practice and knowledge into hope"[73]. In this same vein and as will be shown at the end of the poem, cognition turns into "care (*Sorge*)" (v. 105–108).

The talk of that joy which is almost too small (v. 100) to still be able to grasp God is again to be considered as an *act of reflection on poetry within the poem* in that it turns back to the poem, which is, after all, characterized by a repeatedly appearing joyful mood. All this joy about the homeland and the community of loved ones, described and prepared by a slow approach, was ultimately unable to lead back to the invocation of the name of God. Language, which in the fifth stanza was able to rise again due to the friendly reception in the homeland, did not lead to prayer – as it did when it first appeared in the third stanza – but

---

73   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism, C. Absolute Knowledge and the Body of God, 26.

rather to the recognition of silence and the utterance of an absence: "Often we must be silent; holy names are lacking" (v. 101). Joy appears strangely ambivalent: Admittedly, it is the fundamental reason why the poem speaks and without which it would be unable to say anything, which already became clear in the first two verses based on the "cloud, / Composing poems full of joy (*Wolke / Freudiges dichtend*)" (v. 1 et seq.). The poem nevertheless leads to a point where it is no longer able to disclose language and risks covering up this rift or covering up silence itself. Hölderlin's poem oscillates between the linguistic opening brought about by joy and the concealment of the necessity of different means of access that the divine and the human demand. It is, however, decisive that this movement leads to silence but not to falling silent. It becomes the articulation of an absence.

While at the beginning of the third stanza prayer and poem had shown themselves to be indistinguishable, the poem now becomes the articulation of the rupture of this cohesion. Even though there is much talk of God in the last two stanzas, it conveys that it is no longer able to name him. This had already been indicated at the first mention of the silence of God (v. 86), where language had not passed over into an invocation of God, and it is now addressed directly in the middle section of the sixth stanza. The heart may still beat and long for the invocation of God, but language no longer seems able to measure up to this: "Hearts beat and yet talk holds back? (*Herzen schlagen und doch bleibet die Rede zurük?*)" (v. 102) This designates a rupture in language, which can no longer name God *and* man. While the first two stanzas had made it possible for man to speak, based on the gifts granted by God, it now becomes apparent that man is about to lose the ability to name God.

We must ask whether Hölderlin gives any indication as to how this tension that runs through man may be expressed, or whether the poem tends to assume that the (modern) self is no longer able to place itself in the fragile tradition that began with Enosh and which associated the name of God with a new name for man, i.e., a new form of humanity. Or, in other words: Does the poem still give an outlook on the aforementioned "almost" (v. 100)? A final, *epilogical* section follows, which begins with "but":

> Aber ein Saitenspiel leiht jeder Stunde die Töne,
> Und erfreuet vielleicht Himmlische, welche sich nahn.
> [105]Das bereitet und so ist auch beinahe die Sorge
> Schon befriediget, die unter das Freudige kam.
> Sorgen, wie diese, muß, gern oder nicht, in der Seele
> Tragen ein Sänger und oft, aber die anderen nicht.

> But string-music lends its tones to every hour,

> And perhaps brings joy to the heavenly who draw near.
> [105]This makes ready, and care too will almost be
> Appeased, which came into our joy.
> Cares like these, whether he likes it or not, a singer
> Must bear in his soul, and often, but the others not.

After the mention of the silence and the lagging behind of speech, the "but" (v. 103) leads to "string-music," which lends its tones to every hour (v. 103). The term *hour*, however, does not designate an abstract measure of time but the time in which the indisposability of language could become an invocation of the name of God ("And perhaps brings joy to the heavenly who draw near.", v. 104). Thus, we already encountered the hour without mediation in the poem *Die Meinige* ("Dear God! the hour was so beautiful / As the quiet voice called you Abba!" *Die Meinige, v.* 133); in *Homecoming* it had to develop: It appears for the first time in the first stanza in the context of the constitution of time, namely as that time which expresses the rise of the sacred ("and the holy / Hours", v. 9 et seq.). Later it appears as the time that may not remain "without the joyful ones (*ohne die Frohen*)" (v. 94) and refers to the sanctification of joy (v. 95 et seq.), namely in the constitution of community. Finally, as *wordless song* (Heidegger), it is saved by the string-music from becoming soundless and from falling back into a merely chronological order, which could be filled with arbitrary content. In this way it is to be kept open for the naming of the holy names.

Heidegger's interpretation of the passage also points in this direction:

> To say who He himself is who dwells in the holy, and in saying this to let him appear as himself – for this the naming word is lacking. This is why poetic 'singing,' because it lacks the genuine, naming word, still remains a song without words – 'lyre-music.'[74]

The wordless song does not become a substitute for the holy names but keeps the absence in language open against possible forms of substitution and keeps their memory alive:

> Thus for the poet's care there is only one possibility: without fear of appearing godless, he must remain near to the god's absence, and wait long enough in this prepared nearness to the absence till out of the nearness to the absent god there is granted an originative word to name the high one.[75]

---

74   M. Heidegger, Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry, 45 et seq.

75   Ibid., 46 et seq.

Heidegger does not speak of a renewed arrival or of a new immediacy of God, but rather of remaining close to his absence, which could grant the *originative word* that is able to call upon the high one again. The concern of poetic singing is for *language*, lest it be reduced to mere functionality when it lacks the name of God as *the* element of indisposability. For Heidegger, wordless song must turn into waiting and preparing and thus remain close to the absence of God. This means, first of all, acknowledging that poetry itself is not ultimate or absolute, nor can it adopt an absolute position; rather, it is a testimony to the indisposability of such a position. Indisposability must be made visible *in the language* of the poem. If merely asserted, it would remain in the realm of intentionality. In this way, poetry would have to remain open, so that in the interstices and transitions, in the steps of its development, in the slightest awareness of a vibrating openness that is no longer intentional, an *originative word* could appear. This would not simply be the name of God but the word that comes from silence, i.e., from an area of indisposability. And this word could become an opening of new horizons of language (an opening of *much*, v. 37) – and could "perhaps" (v. 104) also lead to the high one being called upon. But for this possibility, poetry cannot provide any ultimate certainty. The concern of poetry is to make that testimony of indisposability appear anew in language. Around that a form of kinship (which is no longer understood genealogically or ideologically) can be constituted.

In this last section we have reached the *epilogue* of the poem. While the poem has risen from a pre-reflexive sphere that did not yet know a speaking self, at the end it leads back into a sphere where reflection and intentional assertion break off. Speech, having already passed into silence, has no control over this sphere and can no longer moderate it. Delayed, speech remains behind ("yet talk holds back (*doch bleibet die Rede zurük*)", v. 102), i.e., a *distance* opens which the self can no longer close. Thus, an *underivable shifting step* [*unableitbarer Versetzungsschritt*] has taken place, by which the self must recognize that its language has always lived from the presupposition of an indisposability that has the characteristics of a gift and cannot be reached from any standpoint accessible to the self. This can be explained by a phrase from Hegel, taken up from the inaugural lecture, which can be expressed as the experience that "'being-in-and-for-itself' is 'positedness'"[76]. Hölderlin hopes that (as was the case with the chaos and the pre-reflexive beginning rising out of it) this sphere will stand under the joyfully dense cloud (v. 1 et seq.) and that the *postponement* (the leaving behind of speech, v. 18) could show itself

---

76   K. Appel, Christianity and a new Humanism, A. The World as Mirror of the Self and its Shattering – Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, Reason and Spirit in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 18). In German: dass "das Anundfürsichsein Gesetztsein ist".

as a release of language into its indisposability. This postponement is about the underivable construction of a sound body from which language can once again become audible, or – expressed in Hölderlin's terms – about the return to that silence and that stillness from which the word of poetry first emerges.

With the passing of the name of God, poetry also passes: "Often we must be silent." (v. 101) The becoming and passing of poetry are expressed in the poem itself, indicating a radicalization of the self-reflexive dimension of Hölderlin's poetry, which had previously articulated the conditions of poetry's existence but now also addresses its ending. This marks a farewell to any attempt to linguistically cope with reality, where the notion of God could still function as the ultimate symbol used to bring the world under an abstract principle. And yet this passing must not be sealed by the silence of a nothingness that would pass definite judgment on contingent reality. The paradoxical task of poetry is now make its ending audible and thus to create an open sound body from which language and poetry can rise again. Perhaps, where linguistic control and noetic attempts at coping break down, a new perception of shifts, nuances and slight developments can lead to an uncontrollable abundance – and with this perception a new form of human tangibility. The poet's concern is to be faithful to the initial linguistic quality that made poetry possible in the first place, against the danger of its falling silent. It must rise anew, admittedly no longer smooth and perfect but with a fragility that can no longer be veiled, and always on the verge of failure. In his poetry Hölderlin has, as it were, outlined a path to the fragility of contemporary poetry.

In *Homecoming*, there is no immediate return to the name of God, since the motif of returning home in the poem itself proved to be deeply ambivalent and led precisely not to the name of God. Rather, HIS name can – perhaps – be found at the fractures, shifts and transitions, if these are not hidden, and can give expression to the threatened existence of man (the whole poem was not least concerned with the fragile constitution of man out of devouring chaos). The title of the poem would then acquire the new tone of a *homecoming* of the gods and of *the* God in song, which would be connected with a new language for the human. This new attention to language would be a prerequisite for any attempt at a coming humanism.

Epilogue: From an Anachronistic Search for God (Musil) to Prayer (Rilke)

During his student days and in the years that followed, all of Hölderlin's guiding ideas were shattered, and neither utopia, nor memory, nor the "now" of the present moment, nor timelessness held true as a place for the divine to reveal

itself. It has become clear, however, that for Hölderlin this does not mean that the name of God simply disappears, but rather that it can find new ways of expression at the fractures, in the displacements and shifts, and that it must thus be linked to the opening of a new linguistic horizon. In this way, it is neither to be seen as utopian in the sense of being pending nor retrospective in the sense of a linguistic relic that needs to be revitalized, nor can it be fixed in contemporary images. Rather, to use a word from the inaugural lecture, it is *anachronistic*[77]. This brings us, via Hölderlin, to the exact point where the *epilogue* of the inaugural lecture takes us into the anachronistic search for God in Musil's novel *The Man without Qualities* (*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*).

In *contemporaneity* with Musil, Rilke takes a similar track in his anachronistic search for God. Many of the motifs that I took up from the inaugural lecture and to which I would like to juxtapose similar motifs are bundled together in Rilke's poetry.

If, in the context of these reflections, Rilke's poetry finds its place in this *epilogue*, it is because it is poetry *after* Hölderlin: There the reflection on the loss of the name of God and thus of poetry revealed itself, and from this silence a new linguistic horizon emerged, one which was able to retrieve the name of God at the fractures of language. In my opinion, a possible approach to contemporary poetry could consist in understanding it as inhabiting precisely that space which Hölderlin reopened. This interpretation is supported by the fact that, since the beginning of the 20th century, there are a large number of poems that address Friedrich Hölderlin – not least those that reflect on poetry itself. In the introduction to the anthology *An Friedrich Hölderlin. Gedichte aus 180 Jahren deutsch- und fremdsprachiger Autoren*, Dierk Rodewald says that the compilation of the poems "to and about Hölderlin" is guided by the assumption that

> in the productive confrontation of the poets with the oeuvre of Friedrich Hölderlin, who is usually regarded as an exemplary figure of the poet, something like a lyrical reflection of the respective author on poetic speech as such can be detected[78].

---

77   Cf. K. Appel, Christianity and a new Humanism, B. Moonbeams by Daylight, 32.

78   D. Rodewald, An Friedrich Hölderlin. Gedichte aus 180 Jahren deutsch- und fremd-
       sprachiger Autoren, Frankfurt a. M. 1969, 7. An even more recent work, *Scardanelli* by
       Friederike Mayröcker (F. Mayröcker, Scardanelli, Frankfurt a. M. 2009), should be added
       to the extensive collection. Scardanelli is the name that Hölderlin used to sign many of
       the poems that he wrote in his tower.

He sees Rilke as the main impetus for this perception of Hölderlin, since Rilke had been intensively occupied with Hölderlin since 1911 and wrote the poem *An Hölderlin* in 1914[79], which "set a point from which [...] it then became possible to productively take up Hölderlin's achievements concerning the lyrical poem"[80].

In the following I would like to ask whether these considerations can reveal a perspective on Rilke's anachronistic search for God.[81] I refer in particular to the first part of Rilke's *Book of Hours*, the *Book of Monastic Life* written in 1899.[82] In the Christian tradition, a "book of hours" is the prayer book that contains the psalms in a certain order, so that they can be prayed at certain hours of the day – thus structuring it. Rilke's *Book of Hours* is a collection of poems in which God is addressed directly again and again, or else resonates unnamed as a dark keynote. As in Hölderlin, we again meet a poet in whom prayer and poem are indistinguishable, and the question about the name of God in all its fragility arises again: "You have this imperceptible way with you. / And those who would consecrate a blare of divine names / are already alienated from your environs. (*Du hast so eine leise Art zu sein. / Und jene, die dir laute Namen weihn, / sind schon vergessen deiner Nachbarschaft.*)" (50) In order to remain in the vicinity of this fragile context, let us first turn to Musil, who a few weeks after Rilke's death dedicated a commemorative speech to the poet in the Berlin Renaissance Theater, at the end of which he emphasized the anachronistic religious dimension in Rilke's work:

---

79   See R.M. Rilke, Die Gedichte, Frankfurt a. M./Leipzig 2006, 626 et seq.; 854.

80   D. Rodewald, An Friedrich Hölderlin, 11.

81   There are numerous examples of how Hölderlin and Rilke are associated with each other, which I cannot go into here: Cf. R.M. Rilke/N. v. Hellingrath, Briefe und Dokumente, ed. by von K.E. Bohnenkamp (Castrum Peregrini, Neue Folge, Bd 1), Göttingen 2008; M. Heidegger, Wozu Dichter?, in: idem, Holzwege, Frankfurt a. M. 82003, 269–320; F. Heckerling, Rilke und das Christentum. Vom Erlebnis Spaniens zu den "Duineser Elegien", in: Wort und Wahrheit 12/1947 (2. Jg.), 755–759; R. Musil, Rainer Maria Rilke. Rede, gehalten am 16. Jänner 1927 im Renaissance-Theater Berlin, in: Robert Musil. Prosa und Stücke, Kleine Prosa, Aphorismen, Autobiographisches, Essays und Reden, Kritik, ed. by A. Frise, Reindek beim Hamburg 2000, 1229–1242; G. Agamben, Herrschaft und Herrlichkeit. Zur theologischen Genealogie von Ökonomie und Regierung (Homo Sacer II.2), Berlin 2010, 281–285; W. Binder, Hölderlin-Aufsätze, Frankfurt a. M. 1970, 397 et seq.

82   Cf. R.M. Rilke: The Book of Hours. A New Translation with Commentary. Translated by Susan Ranson. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Ben Hutchinson. Columbia MD 2012. The numbers in brackets after the poems refer to the page numbers in the book, which always gives the German version first and then the English translation. Many of the reflections on Rilke's *Book of Hours* arose in joint reading with Simone Pesendorfer, whom I would like to thank warmly.

> When he says God, he means it, and when he speaks of a flamingo, he also means it; *therefore*, all things and events in his poems are related to each other and change places like the stars that move without being seen. He was in some sense the most religious poet since Novalis, but I'm not sure if he had a religion at all. He saw differently. In a new, inner way.[83]

Musil considers the religious dimension in Rilke's work less as religion appearing explicitly than as a form of a new, interior view, which approaches the "firebrand" of things (*"Brand" der Dinge*; 78 et seq.), or, to use Hegel's words, their negativity. This perception is opposed to a commanding grip upon or a mechanistic-positivist understanding of things, the world, man, God and language, and it requires an *exercitium*. The *Book of Hours* is the breviary that – when it is read (and prayed?) repeatedly – is intended to allow this perspective to be put into practice. Its first poem begins with the chime of the bell, which is an invitation to pray at a certain hour: "Bright with metallic strike, the hour / tilts, and touches me (*Da neigt sich die Stunde und rührt mich an / mit klarem, metallenem Schlag*)" (2 et seq.). And it ends with the dedication to those who learn to read the poet's (or the praying person's) images, so that their soul is released from fixed and frozen things and opens itself to a new perception: "Who is to say / in whom it will free the soul? ... (*und ich weiß nicht wem / löst es die Seele los ...*)" (2 et seq.). Later, a transformation of language into prayer takes place: "Ultimately, prayer is the only end (*Es gibt im Grunde nur Gebete*)" (50 et seq.).

After the first poem, which appears like an entrance gate to the *Book of Hours*, six poems follow, which, as it were, unfold a dialogue between God and the darkness and which attempt to lead to a heightened awareness which can only reveal itself in the dark. The second poem calls God the "aged tower (*uralter Turm*)" (2 et seq.), around which the poet has been circling for a long time, his own being remaining dark: Is the poet (the one praying) a falcon, a storm, or does he himself entirely become song? In contrast to the desire to capture God in a malleable image, the third poem then focuses on God's darkness: "my God is dark, roots of secret weave / in hundreds that I cannot hear, drinking. / Simply, his warmth grows me. / I divine no more (*Mein Gott ist dunkel und wie ein Gewebe / von hundert Wurzeln, welche schweigsam trinken. / Nur, dass ich mich aus seiner Wärme hebe, / mehr weiß ich nicht*)" (4 et seq.) If, on the other hand, one wished to see God (or man) in the light and sought to depict him, one would only arrive at a flat surface or a devastating, devouring sight that man is not able to bear. And so the next poem begins with the words: "So

---

83   R. Musil, Rainer Maria Rilke, 1240.

arbitrarily we may not paint you, / you who are dawn, from whom the morning rose. (*Wir dürfen dich nicht eigenmächtig malen, / du Dämmernde, aus der der Morgen stieg.*)" (4 et seq.) This caution and increased attention, which can only be learned and maintained in darkness and twilight, also becomes discernible at the beginning of the next poem: "I cherish my mind's hours of the dark, / in which the extended senses sink and deepen (*Ich liebe meines Wesens Dunkelstunden, / in welchen meine Sinne sich vertiefen*)" (6 et seq.). In the dark hours of the night, a special closeness to God can present itself to the poet:

> Du, Nachbar Gott, wenn ich dich manchesmal
> in langer Nacht mit hartem Klopfen störe, –
> so ists, weil ich dich selten atmen höre
> und weiß: Du bist allein im Saal.
> Und wenn du etwas brauchst, ist keiner da,
> um deinem Tasten einen Trank zu reichen:
> Ich horche immer. Gib ein kleines Zeichen.
> Ich bin ganz nah.
>
> Nur eine schmale Wand ist zwischen uns,
> durch Zufall; denn es könnte sein:
> ein Rufen deines oder meines Munds –
> und sie bricht ein ganz ohne Lärm und Laut.
> (6)
>
> My neighbour God, do I disturb your peace
> by knocking for you in the night? If so,
> it's that I scarcely hear you breathe, and know
> you are alone in all that space.
> If you should need our help, no one is there
> to offer water to your unseeing hand.
> I still listen for you. Give me a sign.
> For I am near.
>
> Between us only an insubstantial wall
> chances – barely, I think – to stand;
> for perhaps from your lips or from mine one call
> could break it through
> without a sigh or a sound.
> (7)

The knocking expresses concern for God. Does it arise from the ambivalence of wanting to speak of a God whose withdrawal alone can be named? Between God and men there is an "insubstantial wall (*schmale Wand*)" (6 et seq.), of which it is said:

Aus deinen Bildern ist sie aufgebaut.

Und deine Bilder stehn vor dir wie Namen.
Und wenn einmal das Licht in mir entbrennt,
mit welchem meine Tiefe dich erkennt,
vergeudet sichs als Glanz auf ihren Rahmen.
(6)

Your own images have built it round you.

They stand in front of you, ranged like names,
and if there flames up in me that flare
igniting your recognition in my heart
it spends itself, brilliant, on their frames.
(7)

The pictures we paint of God and the names by which we call him are the wall that separates man and God. Deeper realization ("your recognition in my heart"), when it erupts in the poet (in the praying person), does not lead to the collapse of this wall, nor the destruction of the images. Rather, the perspective is drawn away from the pictures to their frames. That the images are no longer directly in view is what allows them to survive. Is this the recognition that the immediacy of God would consume us? What does it mean that brilliance and limitation ("frames") coincide ("it spends itself, brilliant, on their frames")? The poem fails to answer this question, since it ends with the image of homelessness and separation from God: "So that unstrung my senses lose their rare / haven in you, and I am set apart. (*Und meine Sinne, welche schnell erlahmen, / sind ohne Heimat und von dir getrennt.*)" (6 et seq.) God's vicinity ("For I am near.") has turned into homelessness, which is determined precisely by separation and by the fact that no one is a neighbor ("My neighbour God") anymore.

After another poem expressing the desire for silence, the first section on the question of God in the *Book of Hours* comes to an end. A first sensitization of perception has taken place, but it has led to a separation from God. While God was initially mentioned almost as a matter of course, the first section leads to the difficulty of remaining in his vicinity.

As a transition to a second series of closely related poems, a reflection on the poet's point of view follows, placing him on the fragile site of the threshold of disintegrating time and an uncertain future:

Ich lebe grad, da das Jahrhundert geht.
Man fühlt den Wind von einem großen Blatt,
das Gott und du und ich beschrieben hat
und das sich hoch in fremden Händen dreht.

Man fühlt den Glanz von einer neuen Seite,
auf der noch Alles werden kann.

Die stillen Kräfte prüfen ihre Breite
und sehn einander dunkel an.
(8)

I am here just as the century goes. I feel
the wind start and lift as a great page fans,
written by God and you and me and turned
high above us, by an unknown hand.

We feel the new leaf as a sheen, on which
all possibilities arise.

The quiet forces test its height and breadth,
looking each other darkly in the eyes.
(9)

If the poet is able to express this transition without wistfully wanting to fix the old images or to paint new ones arbitrarily, perhaps an *underivable* openness can unfold: "We feel the new leaf as a sheen, on which / all possibilities arise." (8 et seq.) Poetry now requires a new approach, which can no longer be found arbitrarily. The poet thus becomes a reader ("I read it as it rises in your Word (*Ich lese es heraus aus deinem Wort*)", 10 et seq.), and a second section of seven poems begins, which unfolds like a re-figuration of images from biblical primeval history (Cain and Abel, the Ark, the Fall, the building of the Tower). This section begins with the story of Cain and Abel ("However, before death, murder came (*Doch vor dem ersten Tode kam der Mord*)", 10 et seq.) and immediately brings up the fragile tradition of naming the name of God which unfolds after Abel:

Da ging ein Riß durch deine reifen Kreise
und ging ein Schrein
und riß die Stimmen fort,
die eben erst sich sammelten
um dich zu sagen,
um dich zu tragen
alles Abgrunds Brücke –

Und was sie seither stammelten,
sind Stücke
deines alten Namens.
(10)

rending the circles of your sureties.
There rose a crying
that tore aside the voices
about to chorus in a manner
that they could phrase you,
carry you,
bridge over our abysses –

And since that instant they have stammered
only pieces
of your old name.
(11)

According to Rilke, the fragmentary naming of the name of God, which is connected with the fragile line Abel/Seth/Enosh, does not emerge from the assemblage of voices that, united and risen to a high point (of metaphysics), lead to the notion of God. This fragmentary naming of God can also be considered an echo of Abel's cry. Like a note to the reader, before the next poem it reads: "*The voice of the young Abel* (*Der blasse Abelknabe spricht*)" (10 et seq.), whereupon the silenced Abel speaks. He sees that humanity stands in his tradition and is lost in the face of the wrathful judgment of the brother: "Should others tread my path, not one / can hope to escape his anger; / to him, simply, they are no longer. (*Es gingen alle meine Bahn, / kommen alle vor seinen Zorn, / gehen alle an ihm verloren.*)" (10 et seq.) The text ends with an apocalyptic separation:

Ich glaube, mein großer Bruder wacht
wie ein Gericht.
An mich hat die Nacht gedacht;
an ihn nicht.
(10)

And my elder brother watches as if he
sits there in judgement.
But night has remembered
not him: me.
(11)

Two lines separate at this point: One is the view that considers the world to be faced with doom and thus guilty and lost. This perspective erupts again at various points in the *Book of Hours*, such as: "What is Rome? / All but scattered. / What is the world? / It will be shattered (*Was ist Rom? / Es zerfällt. / Was ist die Welt? / Sie wird zerschlagen*)" (18 et seq.). Rilke contrasts this with the darkness of night, which presents itself as a protection against the all-identifying,

all-naming, all-illuminating and all-limiting light of judgment and condemnation: "But night has remembered /[...] me (*An mich hat die Nacht gedacht*)" (10 et seq.). This word is taken up again in the following poem, which starts with: "Darkness of night, out of which I came, / I love you more than the flame / that circumscribes the world (*Du Dunkelheit, aus der ich stamme, / ich liebe dich mehr als die Flamme, / welche die Welt begrenzt*)" (12 et seq.), and ends with the confession: "I believe in the night. (*Ich glaube an Nächte.*)" (12 et seq.). A new place has opened up for poets and those who pray, a place that can no longer be occupied high-handedly but lives by adherence to the tradition of Abel. Twice more a poem will address itself "To the same young monk (*An den jungen Bruder*)", which probably not least means Abel. From now on, the voice of the pale boy Abel continues to speak in poetry, which has now found a new ground where new language spaces can unfold, as the next poem – a continuation of "I believe in the night. (*Ich glaube an Nächte.*)" (12 et seq.) – expresses: "I believe in all that is not yet said (*Ich glaube an Alles noch nie Gesagte*)" (12 et seq.)

After the seven poems which re-figure motifs from biblical primeval history, a remark follows – again as a threshold to a new, large series of poems – that probably refers to Christ and his relationship to God: "Because, once, He desired you, we too / know we are granted the right to seek you. (*Daraus, dass Einer dich einmal gewollt hat, / weiß ich, dass wir dich wollen dürfen.*)" (18 et seq.) In contrast to the first series, which ended with the separation from God and the request for silence, this poem, and thus the second course of reflection, leads to the words: "Desire him or not, God forgathers. (*Auch wenn wir nicht wollen: / Gott reift.*)" (18 et seq.)

The third series of poems that now follows and which constitutes the main part of the *Book of Hours*, seems to be devoted to the effort to protect that which is not said ("all that is not yet said", 12 et seq.). This concern finds expression in the phrase: "Some hymns I have that are my silence. (*Ich habe Hymnen, die ich schweige.*)" (48 et seq.). I would like to refer to a poem from this section, which summarizes the apocalyptic drama already mentioned in connection with Abel, and quote it in its entirety:

> Dein allererstes Wort war: Licht:
> da ward die Zeit. Dann schwiegst du lange.
> Dein zweites Wort ward Mensch und bange
> (wir dunkeln noch in seinem Klange)
> und wieder sinnt dein Angesicht.
>
> Ich aber will dein drittes nicht.

Ich bete nachts oft: Sei der Stumme,
der wachsend in Gebärden bleibt
und den der Geist im Traume treibt,
daß er des Schweigens schwere Summe
in Stirnen und Gebirge schreibt.

Sei du die Zuflucht vor dem Zorne,
der das Unsagbare verstieß.
Es wurde Nacht im Paradies:
sei du der Hüter mit dem Horne,
und man erzählt nur, daß er blies.
(52)

Your first word: Light – and time became.
Then you were silent. And from your second
(we still darken at its ring)
the human race took form – feared –
and now your face broods again.

However, I would not hear your third.

By night I plead into your ear:
be just the mute, grounded here,
growing in gestures, driven in dreams
to write the heavy sum of silence
on mountain face and countenance.

Be for us refuge from the wrath
that cast out what shall not be borne.
Night descended in Paradise.
Be you the guard, of whom one says
just that he blew the horn.
(53)

Poem and prayer have once again become indistinguishable, and yet it seems
that the weak tradition of the naming of the name of God has reached its out-
ermost point of negation: It began with Enosh and led to the realization of the
absence of the holy names with Hölderlin but had not fallen into silence. Here
it leads to the plea that God may no longer speak and thus himself close the
space that Hölderlin had once again tried to tear open. Let us now take a closer
look at the four stanzas of the poem, three of which have the same number of
verses, whereas the second consists of only one verse:

   1) Summarized in two words ("Your first word", "your second", 35) the bibli-
cal story of creation appears at the beginning of the poem: The first word of
God brought about light and led into a silence that implies the idea of resting

in God. With the second word man appears; the poem however ingeniously leaves open whether it is the man of the sixth day of creation or the incarnate Word of the prologue of John's Gospel. Our life, which in the fourth verse appears only quietly in brackets, lives off the sound of the second word, even though Rilke here uses the word "dunkeln (*darken*)" for "leben (*live*)", as darkness dynamically turned into a verb, from which the boy Abel and the poet originate: "Darkness of night, out of which I came (*Du Dunkelheit, aus der ich stamme*), 12 et seq.)". In the word "bange (*feared*)" – which rhymes with the word used to describe God's silence ("lange (*long*)") and, through the minimal shift of only one letter, expresses the opposite of the silence that had previously occurred – the danger in which humanity is caught is revealed. Once again what becomes apparent is an apocalyptic alternative. The word "bange (*feared*)" refers to doom through judgment,[84] whereas the alternative is a poetry that comes out of the night and is able to preserve the inexpressible: "Be for us refuge from the wrath / that cast out what shall not be borne. (*Sei du die Zuflucht vor dem Zorne, / der das Unsagbare verstieß.*)" (52 et seq.) In the English translation, the "inexpressible" has been lost. It should read: "that casts out the inexpressible". This apocalyptic alternative is introduced through the depiction of God's pondering face, behind which the poet suspects a third word: "However, I would not hear your third. (*Ich aber will dein drittes nicht.*)" (52 et seq.)

2) A Marian poem and an anti-Marian poem from the *Book of Hours* can help us understand this third word. In a poem starting with "In those days (*Da ward auch die zur Frucht erweckte*)" (36 et seq.), we read that Mary was "filled by the imparted, / sufficing for a thousand souls, / by all the world illuminated, / our vineyard for the Vine (*so erfüllt von jenem Einen / und so für Tausende genug, / daß alles schien, sie zu bescheinen, / die wie ein Weinberg war und trug*)" (36 et seq.). In apocalyptic descriptions of the decay of the buildings and the "song chanted for centuries long (*Abgesang der Gesänge*)" (36 et seq.), the following poem develops this image further to a counter-image of Mary, an anti-Mary, so to speak. If Mary stands for the birth of the Redeemer, then the anti-Mary stands for a scenario of disaster. She has turned, "undelivered of a burden more solemn, / turns to the pains to come (*wie von Größerem noch unentbunden, / kommenden Wunden / zugekehrt*)" (36 et seq.). But the poem is

---

84   Cf. "Today perforce / a history of the world is pressed / down on that brow before a severe court, / weighing it down under the sentence passed. (*heut drängt / auf ihr sich eine Weltgeschichte / vor einem unerbittlichen Gerichte, / und sie versinkt in seinem Urteilsspruch.*)" (28 et seq.).

unable to imagine what it is that is coming, that is greater – it warns of it with a cry of woe: "Woe – the greatest is not yet born of her. (*Wehe, sie gebar noch nicht den Größten.*)" (36 et seq.) It addresses the arbitrary turning (anti-Maria has turned *herself* …) towards that which is greater than the Incarnate Word, greater than the One who preserves in himself fullness for thousands and thus an unlimitable openness. To seek what is greater than the One must thus, through the denial of this openness, mean pronouncing a final judgement on the world. It would represent the striving of man, who is the second word, for a total view, which would constitute the third word and bring about "Night descended in Paradise (*Nacht im Paradies*)" (52 et seq.). It would be the third word, which would be spoken arbitrarily beyond the incarnation of the Word, in whose sound we darken. The poet asks God himself not to pronounce this third word, thereby expressing that the threat that accompanies it exceeds everything humanly imaginable. This request can no longer be addressed to humans, because human space has already been abandoned.

3) This request is then carried out in the last two stanzas and is designated as prayer: "By night I plead (*Ich bete nachts oft*)" (52 et seq.). In this poem, which is also a prayer, a reflection on prayer itself is thus once again evident, as was the case with Hölderlin. The poem asks God to be mute, because beyond his incarnate Word there is no conceivable greater word. But may this muteness *remain*, lest God cease to conceal himself from us. May God's faithfulness grow in gestures, i.e., in contingent gestures of humanity, which are preserved from the madness and excess of the third word.

4) And finally, may the mute God be the "refuge from the wrath / that cast out what shall not be borne (*Zuflucht vor dem Zorne, / der das Unsagbare verstieß*)" (52 et seq.). If the inexpressible were destroyed, e.g., by complete control of language (this would be the third word), there would no longer be any space from which new horizons of human language could arise. May God himself be the guardian of the inexpressible and not let the poet fail in his task of protecting the garden/text/language/name: "Cares like these, whether he likes it or not, a singer / Must bear in his soul" (*Homecoming*, v. 107 et seq.).

It is said that God, the guardian, has sounded his horn – is this an expression of the seriousness of the threat, or is it the sign of the night watchman who calls the hours and thus guides us through the night, in which everything would otherwise sink into disorientation?

With this poem, we have returned to where the inaugural lecture started, to *day one* of the First Creation Story (*Priestly source*), where it says, "And God called the light Day" (Gen 1:5). Rilke paraphrases this with the words: "Your first word: Light – and time became." Parallel to the line that went from the *creation*

narrative, passing through Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, on to Musil's *Man without Qualities*, I wanted to follow a path from the story of *Cain and Abel*, passing through Hölderlin's poem *Homecoming*, to Rilke's *Book of Hours*, a path which addresses the question of the name of God, which is closely related to the gift of mortality. The *Christian narrative* or the *narrative of Christianity* in all its dimensions – from biblical revelation to its extrapolations and respective renditions – cannot be separated from the history of the name of God. Thus, in the present reflections the question has arisen repeatedly as to what forces are connected with its naming and falling silent. Theoretical answers, however, do not go far enough at this point; the die is cast on the question of whether the name of God is associated with the opening of new language horizons or not. If it is the task of Christianity to save the name of God, to which Jesus referred through his person and history, from falling silent, then part of this task is asking where Christianity itself can become a new opening of language horizons in the face of the all-threatening danger of the name's falling silent[85]. *Christianity's contribution to a New Humanism* would be to become a network of places where people can speak and begin to tell their individual stories. Moreover, it would have to open spaces and open doors to promote the becoming of poetry. Today, the Church is perhaps only conceivable as universal if it becomes a sound body that makes the silence of a whole generation – I mean young people – audible.[86]

When I think of the closing words of your inaugural lecture, which – quoting Musil – speak of the fact that the character of human activities should be measured by the number of words they require[87], my text is worse off than your lecture. I conclude my *long letter* with a poem by Rilke, which can also be read as a prayer. As hardly any other text, it poetizes the transitory aspect of the times by lifting the threshold between *summer* and its epilogue, *autumn*, into the word:

---

85   Cf. K. Heinrich, Versuch über die Schwierigkeit nein zu sagen, Frankfurt a. M./Basel ²1982, 97–119.

86   Cf. J. Deibl, Hölderlin, Heidegger e il grido non udito della gioventù, in: Ma di' soltanto una parola ... economia, ecologia, speranza per i nostri giorni, Milano 2013, 359–371.

87   The concluding paragraph of K. Appel's inaugural lecture reads: "I will close with a quote from Musil, 'human activities might be graded by the quantity of words required: the more words, the worse their character.'" (K. Appel, Christianity andf a new Humanism, B. Moonbeams by Daylight 33; R. Musil, The Man Without Qualities, 264).

Herbsttag

Herr, es ist Zeit. Der Sommer war sehr groß.
Leg deinen Schatten auf die Sonnenuhren,
und auf den Fluren lass die Winde los.

Befiehl den letzten Früchten, voll zu sein;
gib ihnen noch zwei südlichere Tage,
dränge sie zur Vollendung hin, und jage
die letzte Süße in den schweren Wein.

Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr.
Wer jetzt allein ist, wird es lange bleiben,
wird wachen, lesen, lange Briefe schreiben
und wird in den Alleen hin und her
unruhig wandern, wenn die Blätter treiben.

Day in Autumn[88]

After the summer's yield, Lord, it is time
to let your shadow lengthen on the sundials
and in the pastures let the rough winds fly.

As for the final fruits, coax them to roundness.
Direct on them two days of warmer light
to hale them golden toward their term, and harry
the last few drops of sweetness through the wine.

Whoever's homeless now, will build no shelter;
who lives alone will live indefinitely so,
waking up to read a little, draft long letters,
and, along the city's avenues,
fitfully wander, when the wild leaves loosen.

---

88   Translation by Mary Kinzie, cf. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/
poems/50937/day-in-autumn (last access: 7 December, 2020).

The Aesthetic Contingency of Life

An Account of the Finite in the Time of Images

Isabella Guanzini

The Gaze of the Other

In the painting "The Ambassadors" (1533) the artist Hans Holbein the Younger makes a conscious use of anamorphosis, and testifies through his perfect technique that it is not always the direct, frontal, and sovereign perspective on things that encompasses significant details.

Sometimes it is necessary to change one's perspective and to decenter one's gaze in order to perceive what transcends what one sees, but is nevertheless what is essential. The portrait of the two young ambassadors, a politician and a churchman, depicted at the height of their power, highlights their pompous clothing in a symbolic manner. Offered a view from the side at a certain distance, the observer suddenly experiences a *memento mori* materializing in a skull. The skull, when viewed from the front, initially appeared as a deformed object that disturbs the elegant scenery. If one moves to the side, it does not fail to surprise by presenting itself as an identifiable shape.

Because of a sophisticated optical distortion, the anamorphic stain reveals a profiled symbology of *vanitas*, a call to death awaiting everyone.[1] In this painting, as well as in the works of Alfred Kubin and Edward Munch, there is a snare that captivates the observer, forcing him in a way to look down. The anamorphic skull initially appears as an undifferentiated and uncanny "thing" that stains the majestic representation of temporal and spiritual power over the world. By means of a displacement, a change in the visual field, death appears as that which deactivates every rule and pales every sovereign attitude, by disrupting the illusion of worldly self-fulfillment. In this displacement, it is the image itself that "observes", and the observer suddenly finds himself *observed*.

In *Seminar XI* (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*) Jacques Lacan makes reference to anamorphosis as an exemplary structure that indicates a shift in the gaze necessary in psychoanalysis for an apprehension of the desire of the subject.[2] Lacan shows that the "thing," or that which is at the

---

1 See. J. Baltrušaitis, Anamorphoses, ou Magic artificielle des effets merveilleux, Paris 1969, 146.
2 J. Lacan, The Seminar. Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, New York/London 2009, 85–90.

center of desire, always presents itself in an anamorphic form, because it does not tolerate a direct encounter.

"The Ambassadors" designates a picture in which the painted object seems to observe the viewer. It dominates the scene with its mystery, giving the subject a sign of what is both hidden and visible. In his analysis, Lacan illuminates the fact that the meaning of reality can never be totalized and that there never is an all-encompassing gaze. There is always a remainder, a necessary shift that shields the ideal from any kind of direct access:

> All this shows that at the very heart of the period in which the subject emerged and geometral optics was an object of research, Holbein makes visible for us here something that is simply the subject as annihilated – annihilated in the form that is, strictly speaking, the imaged embodiment of the *minus-phi* $[(-\varphi)]$ of castration, which for us, centers the whole organization of the desires through the framework of the fundamental drives.[3]

The anamorphosis thus reveals that the subject is missing, displaced, obstructed, always permeated by the field of the Other. One can state that the gaze is the place of the Other. It is the lost object that is always displaced with respect to the perspective that sees him. It affords an understanding without ever being caught – like the oracle of Delphi in the definition of Heraclitus: "The Lord Apollo at Delphi neither reveals nor conceals, but it gives a sign."[4] The gaze, in fact, is never reflective, but it is that which is always absent in the contemplation of that for which it is impossible to form an image[5]:

> The gaze is presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety. The eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field.[6]

---

3   Ibid., 88 et seq [English translation, New York/London 2009]. According to Lacan, life is humanized only by the law of castration, which imposes the loss of part of jouissance (weaning, intrusion of the third – the father). The humanization of life happens only in the encounter with symbolic law, insofar as this law, by denying incestuous jouissance as impossible, introduces into the subject a defect that first forms the subject as subject. The power of Oedipus concerns the separation of the subject from its merging enjoyment, marked by a destructive pursuit of totality. With *minus-phi* (-f), Lacan refers to the fact that the image of one's own body never appears as a totality or always with a defect.

4   H. Diels, The Fragments of the Presocratics, 3 volumes, Hildesheim 2004, 1, DK 93.

5   Because of this motif Lacan adds to the Freudian instincts also the show scopic and the invocation invocatory drive, respectively the view gaze and the voice.

6   Lacan, The Seminar. Book XI, 72 et seq.

According to Gérard Wajcman, the medieval man remained inscribed in the Other's field of vision, namely in the creation and in the protection of the eyes of God. *Before one saw, one was seen*, one was the object of the Other's gaze.[7] The "Big Other" is this symbolic dimension that can be personified or reified, as God or as the idea to which I am attached (freedom, law, peace, communism, nation). It is the symbolic substance of our lives, not only of the explicit symbolic rules that regulate our social coexistence, but also the complex web of unwritten implicit rules that determines our speech and action.

Despite its fundamental power, the Big Other is fragile, insubstantial, virtual in the sense that its status is that of a subjective subordination. In his seminar on *The Purloined Letter*[8], Lacan claims that a letter always reaches its destination, even if it is not sent. It can even be said that it is only the letter that is not sent that reaches its destination entirely. The true addressee is not a real person, but the Big Other Himself.

The same applies to the symptom. The addressee of my symptom is not another human being but the virtual Big Other. Social life is characterized by various unlettered rules and prohibitions, even if these rules are not explicitly stated. Nonetheless, the impact of the Big Other on everyday action and thinking is strong. When the subjects interact, they not only relate to one other, but always also to the virtual Big Other as well.

Modernity breaks across this medieval horizon by disclosing an ever more intimate private living space. The subject secures itself as subject through an unequivocal gaze that dominates the world, which it perceives from a safe distance, starting from a hidden place that lies beyond the gaze of the Other. *It is not seen; it sees.* The *cogito ergo sum* means that I exist to the extent that I am not seen, namely, to the extent that the center of gravity of my being is withdrawn into a private space that I feel is beyond the public gaze of the

---

7   G. Wajcman, The Birth of Intimacy, in: Lacanian Ink 23, New York 2004. "This is the gaze for which the ancient Romans carved the details in the reliefs at the top of their viaducts, details invisible to the eye of any human standing below; the gaze for which the ancient Incas made their gigantic drawings out of stones who- se form could be perceived only from high up in the air; the gaze for which the Stalinists organized their gigantic public spectacles. To specify this gaze as 'divine' is already to 'gentrify' its status, to obfuscate the fact that it is the gaze of no one, a gaze freely floating around, with no bearer … we are originally not observers of the play-stage of reality, but part of the tableau staged for the void of a nonexisting gaze, and it is only in a secondary time that we can assume the position of those who look at the stage. The unbearable 'impossible' position is not that of the actor, but that of the observer, of the public" (Cfr: S. Žižek, Neighbors and Other Monsters, in: S. Žižek / E.L. Santner / K. Reinhard [ed.], The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology, Chicago 2005, 178).

8   J. Lacan, Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English, New York/London 2005, 6–48.

Other. The "birth of intimacy" increasingly closes the "third gaze" onto the individual and the collective.

The symbolic order, the structure of being in communion and having respect for the relationships that determine our common life together, as well as for the social project as a whole, is finally exhausted. As Weber said, we are now living in an epoch of disenchantment.[9] The fragmentation and evaporation of transcendence has generated pluralities and differences while multiplying forms of knowledge, so that today collective subjectivity no longer entails meaningful co-living with one another.

Common belief in a transcendent reality had the power to structure reality by means of a unifying code, to enliven the social body and to regulate social exchange. Subjectivities of the twentieth century are driven by what the French philosopher Alain Badiou defines as the "Passion of the Real" (*passion du réel*), that is, the will to directly stabilize one's relationship with the world without mediation and protection.[10] In contrast with nineteenth century visions of utopia, ideologies, and anticipations of the future, "the twentieth century aimed at delivering the thing itself, at directly realizing the longed-for New Order".[11]

That is a decisive change in the gaze and in the direction of action. The "tree of life", already dislocated in its origins and reachable only in an "anamorphic" way, is now placed at the center of the garden. It was initially unattainable to the human gaze and thus the possibility of becoming an "available object" was foreclosed. That distance served as a protective shell, sheltering the human race.[12] In the time of disenchantment, this "gown of grace" is removed so that reality becomes available to the will to control and the power of the acting

---

9   "Thus, increasing intellectualization and rationalization does not mean increasing general knowledge of the conditions under which we live our lives. It means something else. It means the knowledge or belief that if we only wanted to we could learn at any time that there are, in principle, no mysterious unpredictable forces in play, but that all things – in principle – can be controlled through calculation. This, however, means the disenchantment of the world. No longer, like the savage, who believed that such forces existed, do we have to re-sort to magical means to gain control over or pray to the spirits. Technical means and calculation work for us instead. This, above all, is what intellectualization actually means." (M. Weber, Science as a Vocation, in: J. Dreijmanis (ed.), Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations, New York 2008, 35).

10   See A. Badiou, The Century, Cambridge 2007.

11   S. Žižek, The Puppet and the Dwarf. The Perverse Core of Christianity, Cambridge (MA) 2003, 63.

12   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism. Historical-Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Bible, Hegel, and Musil. First Transition – From World Time to the Feast and Death, B. The Gown of Grace and the Nakedness of Existence, 5–11.

subject. In this way it becomes a surface of projections and an expansion of the ego:

> In the extent to which the tree now comes into the center and becomes part of man, in other words, at the moment when man begins to transform the open garden into a delimited horizon of his own desire, he begins to locate his self in the sense of a narcissistic projection.[13]

Slowly, the modern and postmodern subject evolves into a direct observer, a beneficiary and consumer of a world of available things. While the first was associated with a sense of guilt, in the second, the post-political subject of consumer society is exposed to a chronic sense of inadequacy that defines the psychology of our meritocracy.

In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) Freud uncovered the tension between the individual and civilization, which lies in the excess of inhibition and sublimation of impulses in the name of order and the security of society. Such a limitation of instinctual life, necessary for a dignified human life together, necessarily produced neurotic tendencies to the extent that the subject, in the name of the reality principle, was massively called upon to sublimate the pleasure principle.

In the present set-up, the psychic situation of individuals is reversed. If the previous century was characterized by the setting of boundaries (Gödel, Freud, Marx, etc.), then the new century is that of eliminating them. In the name of the right of infinite enjoyment, there seems to be nothing left that is impossible. With this conception of progression, we open ourselves to the dimension of the post-human, where the ultimate fulfillment of the individual, thanks to science, does not take place in a social, but in a purely biological realm (no suffering, no aging and no dying thanks to the technology and the different hybridization of our organism, seeing their own needs met regardless of gender, age, social status).

In the footsteps of Jacques Lacan, Massimo Recalcati says that in our *hypermodern contemporaneity* the "discourse of the capitalist" has played a dominant role, promoting a continuous and creeping delusion exposing the individual to the greatest risk of its subjectivity, namely the eradication of the subject of the unconscious.[14] Today's omnipresent exhibition of intimacy, along with the search for the "true" ego, has supplanted the site of the unconscious, leaving the subject to the arbitrariness of its inclinations.

---

13   Ibid., 8.
14   M. Recalcati, L'uomo senza inconscio. Figure della nuova clinica psicoanalitica, Milano 2010.

The celebration of the intimacy of the "self" is claimed to be a genuine site of truth. In *the Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, Hegel states that the plant is an animal that has its innards outside its body in the form of roots or flowers.[15] By analogy, one could say that the decentralized symbolic order make up the mental innards of the human animal. The symbolic substance of my being, the roots from which the ego draws its spiritual nourishment, are external to the ego. The impossible dream of the New Age is precisely the transformation of humanity into a spiritual animal, which, detached from its body, wavers in an immaterial space, without needing substantial roots or alterity.

The Dialectic of Desire

Right from the beginning, the illusion of narcissistic independence and an uprooted solipsistic identity is the center of Lacan's thinking, also as a reaction and resistance to the psychology and psychoanalysis of his time. His return to Freud, especially in his first seminars, is to be understood as a resumption of the agenda of Freud's essay *On Narcissism*.[16]

As Recalcati writes, Lacan's teaching opens as "a profound reflection on the gesture of Narcissus".[17] Lacan interpreted the psychoanalysis subsequent to Freud as a history of decline, because the genuine intentions of its founder were buried or misunderstood. Lacan considers ego-psychology[18] with its theory of the autonomous ego as a kind of constriction and disparagement[19], which aims at the development of the potentials of the subject and sees itself as an orthopedics and self-realization of the ego. According to Lacan, however, it can never be the goal of psychoanalysis to "strengthen the ego."

In his opinion, the ego is rather a construction of the imaginary, a crystallization or internalization of self-images as well as of images of one's own body, which are projected back by others on an individual. These imaginary relationships produce identifications (love) and rivalries (hate, envy) insofar

---

15   G.W.F. Hegel, Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences in Fundamentals, § 348.
16   See S. Freud, On Narcissism. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works, 67–102, London 1957.
17   M. Recalcati, Jacques Lacan. Desiderio, godimento e soggettivazione, Milano 2012, 10.
18   Ego-psychology is a psychological theory that complements classical Freudian psychoanalysis with aspects of ego development, defense mechanisms, and the functions of the ego. The founders of first-person psychology often named are A. Freud (The Self and the Defense Mechanisms, Vienna 1936) and in particular H. Hartmann (Ego psychology and adaptation problem, New York 1958).
19   See J. Lacan, On the Names-of-the-Father, Cambridge 2005, 6–8.

as they are relationships between comparables. There are two subjects – on the one hand, the ego, the individual ego, which following Freud and Sartre[20], is actually an imaginary and mirrored form[21], and on the other hand, the subject whom Freud called the "core of our being." The ego is a narcissistic mask, a psychologistical illusion, a fiction, a harlequin, offering an alienated and imaginary firmness.

Lacan situates the second subject, which he also calls the "true subject" (*le sujet véritable*), in the unconscious. In *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* of 1953 and in *Seminar 1: Freud's Technical Writings* (1953/54) he describes the self-conscious subject by employing the French reflexive pronoun *moi / mihi*, in contrast with the true subject of the unconscious that he designates as *je/ego*.

The singularity of the subject must inscribe itself into a horizon of the general, because the "je" is absolutely irreducible to the individual. "*C'est moi*" – *This is I* is a type of reflexive sentence. However, for Lacan, *reflection* is a metaphorical expression that means nothing but "to mirror". The recognition in the mirror is an imaginary misunderstanding and leads to the division of the subject into *moi* (ideal ego, the "imaginary subject") and *je*, the subject of speech or of the unconscious. From this observation follows the paradox that sounds paradoxical: "The I is not the I" (*le je n'est pas le moi*).

The origin of psychic suffering is therefore not grounded in a weakening of the ego, but in its exaggerated reinforcement, which corresponds to the paranoid structure of the alienated *ego* and extreme madness.[22] The unconscious, according to Lacan (as for Freud), is first of all to be distinguished from the conscious, but it is not irrational, because it is the revelation of a truth and not of any primal instincts.

This truth is *the truth of desire*. The word "desire" is a fundamental term in psychoanalysis and Lacan also claims a centrality of desire, at least until the publication of his *Écrits*. Lacan also translates desire with the word *vœu* – vow, vocation, endowment, "inasmuch as desire is the most intense of what the subject can reach at the stage of consciousness in its realization as a subject".[23]

Desire is not a chaotic, fickle element but rather an element that orders existence as a vocation that guides, structures, and gives orientation to existence. When Lacan speaks of desire as a vocation, he wants to emphasize, on the one

20   J.-P. Sartre, The Transcendence of the Ego: Philosophical Essays 1931–1939, Reinbek near Hamburg 1982.

21   J. Lacan, The Seminar. Book I. Freud's Technical Writings (1953–1954), Berlin 1990, 212.

22   See Recalcati, Jacques Lacan. Desiderio, godimento e soggettivazione, Milano 2011, 34–41.

23   Lacan, On the Names-of-the-Father, 69.

hand, that desire is not something that is directed toward mere objects in order to satisfy itself; on the other hand, he means that desire "is not the reservoir of wild drives that has to be conquered by the ego, but the site where a traumatic truth speaks."[24]

The Lacanian version of Freud's motto "where id was, shall I be" is that the I should *not* conquer the id in order for its enlightenment and the control of its instincts to progress. Rather, it means that the I should refer to the place of the id. The I should dare to approach the place of its truth, to make contact with the desire to listen to the call and the movement of desire.

Lacan thinks with Hegel (and with Hegel's interpretation of Alexandre Kojève) that desire is not one-sided, confined to negating or destroying the object. Rather, desire addresses another desire, namely the desire of the Other. It does not look for itself in the mirror, but in the Other. It is not a need that is directed at an object, but always lives in an intersubjective dialectic. Therefore, the subject always aims at a relationship that transcends the merely objective world, opening the existence to the possibility of desire (of the Other). Kojève expresses this with great power:

> Human Desire, or better still, anthropogenetic Desire, produces a free and his-torical individual, conscious of his individuality, his freedom, his history, and finally, his historicity. Hence, anthropogenetic Desire is different from animal Desire (which produces a natural being, merely living and having only a senti-ment of its life) in that it is directed, not toward a real, "positive," given object, but toward another Desire.[25]

Because of this structure, from the perspective of symbolic order, desire con-figures itself as a question of recognition. As Recalcati points out, "the human world cannot confine itself to the merely paranoid drama of narcissistic reflec-tion: the subject is not exhausted in being alienated in its ideal image and therefore trapped in its double, but above all, it is part of the world of the sym-bolic, of that world which is guided by the law of the word".[26]

The mirrored nudity that mesmerizes the gaze of the I is not the symbolic "light garb" that protects the mystery of the subject, it "is rather a consequence of an attempt at absolute self-presentation (accompanied by the desire for a presentable God) in the mirror of one's own immeasurable desire".[27] Lacan is

---

24   S. Žižek, How to read Lacan, New York 2007, 2.

25   A. Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit, Ithaca and London 1969, 6.

26   Recalcati, Jacques Lacan, 68.

27   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism. Historical-Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Bible, Hegel, and Musil. First Transition – From World Time to the Feast and Death, 9.

convinced that the narcissistic circularity of desire can only be interrupted by *the law of the word.*

The word, i.e. language, however, does not have a merely denotative function and must not be reduced to mere communication. The word transcends this schema, because it is an appeal, the call and invocation of the Other. It allows desire to be detached from the physiologically instinctive dimension of the needs in order to inscribe it in the human realm of symbolic gratification which is tied to the recognition between subjects.

While the "full" word is carried out by the Other, the "empty" word is full of the "I" and empty of the desire of the Other. If one is only an I, there is no room for desire, which is always the desire of the Other, so that, when the I is in the middle, there are only imaginary images of an empty desire. This means that the subject, as Lacan sees it, is always represented by a "signifier for another signifier." It is never the patron of its own being, nor can it be fixed in any identity, it can never consist of one single signifier.

The subject is always inscribed in the field of the Other. It is dependent on the latter's syntax, but at the same time it is always excluded from the Other's system insofar as there is no signifier that can completely determine subjective contingency. Here lies the power and vulnerability of subjectivity, which is characterized by a nomadic and unstable identity, subjected to infinite variations, open to possibilities of ever more recent subjectivations, and constitutively "gripped" by the field of the Other.

The crucial point in Lacan is the relationship between the symbolic law of the word and the law of desire. The subject of the unconscious is enlivened by desire; it is regulated by the symbolic order and by the *function of the Father*. With this figure, Lacan refers to the Big Other, i.e. to a *third function* whose decline we perceive today in the culture and processes of social transformation.[28]

The figure of the third breaks the symmetrical, imaginary and narcissistic reciprocity between I and other.[29] The *Big Other* is eccentric to the mirrored other and not reducible to its reflection. It frees from the hypnotizing

---

28   J.-P. Lebrun / E. Volckrick (éd.), Avons-nous encore besoin d'un tiers?, Toulouse 2005.

29   Lacan's doctrine can be understood as a great meditation on the topic of narcissism. The theory of the mirror stage (J. Lacan, The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience, in: ders., Écrits, 75–81) is one of Lacan's most famous concepts. According to Lacan, the I comes into the world between the sixth and the eighteenth month, when one holds it in front of a mirror. The child first recognizes itself as something different (as a reflected object in the mirror). It sees its unity, its whole corporeality only in its duplication in the mirror, before that it was only a fragmented (corps morcelé) body: the child responds to the knowledge and identification of itself in the mirror with a "jubilant gesture". However, at the same time, it is also depressed because it immediately understands that the image in the mirror is just an ideal image, a perfect idea of its identity to which the child will never adapt. This shows the dimension

captivity in the mirror. The father as a third breaks down the "two-person rela-
tionships" internal to family or the mother-child unit and "intervenes as a third
term, which is often experienced as alien or even unwanted".[30] It is not only
about the complex of weaning but also about the intrusion, the penetration of
the Father into that enjoyment founded on the imaginary duality, the reflec-
tion "I and the Other".

Characteristics of these mirror relations are the "greedy separation" and the
"jealous ambivalence" in relation to the other, whereas paternal sublimation
makes it possible to triangulate this aggressive and erotic duality. Lacan calls
this third term "name-of-the-father" or "name of the father", which is to be
understood as a metaphor for a paternal function which does not necessarily
have to be a biological or real one.

The instance of the Great Other indicates that there is a *structural asym-
metry* in the human world that prevents a mere repetition of the same thing.
What is needed is the positioning of the subject in relation to the other, or in
relation to language, inscribing the subject itself in a tripartite relation and
replacing the paralyzing fixations of the imaginary, i.e. the mirror relations:

> In order for a relationship to take on its symbolic value, the mediation of a third
> personage is necessary who, in relation to the subject, th realizes the transcen-
> dent element thanks to which his relation to the object can be sustained at a
> certain distance.[31]

Human life is humanized through the intrusion of the paternal function, which
implies the demand to be recognized by the Other. In the law of the word,
namely in the place of the symbolic, the *helplessness* of the subject finds the
possibility of becoming humanized. Every demand for the self-sufficiency of the
I shows its constitutive inadequacy against this background. Already in Freud,
the paternal function disrupts incestuous desire. As Freud points out in *Totem
and Taboo*, an initial loss of limitless *jouissance* (the killing of the prime father,
the father of the horde, who wants to possess all women) is the condition for a
humanization of life and the possibility of *desire* (of the Other).

The humanizing power of fatherhood is also of fundamental importance in
the Bible. Lacan's epigrammatic and enigmatic allusions to religion are scat-
tered throughout his work. His concept of the "name of the father" and the
epistemological triad of real, symbolic and imaginary, which is reminiscent of
the Trinity, clearly refer to fundamental motifs of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

---

of helplessness that characterizes human life and the division that will shape the subject
throughout its life.

30   B. Fink, The Lacanian Subject. Between Language and Jouissance, Vienna 2011, 85.

31   J. Lacan, On the Names-of-the-Father, 28.

This raises the question of the connection between the Jewish-Christian frame of reference and the father metaphor, or between the Lacanian version and the Jewish-Christian version of the father. It could even be said that the notion of "name-of-the-father" is itself biblical, insofar as the relationship with the father founds all other possible relationships and the dimension of subjectivity includes the possibility of recognizing oneself as a son. *Jouissance* is fundamentally characterized by the fact that it knows no moderation and no delay, because the drive to enjoy aims to have everything, be everything, and know everything. It is the denial *of the human experience of limit and transcendence.*

The symbol of the tree of knowledge points to the need for a postponement, as Appel writes, that is, an indeterminacy that opens up a space unreachable to human beings, "'outside' the order of time (or to be more precise, beyond the inside/outside dichotomy)."[32] The tree of knowledge is therefore not to be interpreted simply as part of the negative register of prohibition but rather as a representation of the positive aspect of the gift of desire. The name of the paternal functions as a signifier by introducing the experience of the impossible into what is human. Biblically one could also call it the "seventh day."[33]

This represents the possibility of abandoning immediate, sensual and total *jouissance*, an enjoyment that is "enjoyed" without gaps or openings, in order that we may arrive at an understanding of language as the very condition for the possibility of desire. For Lacan, the "law of castration" is not simply the limitation of *jouissance*, the prohibition of the incestuous drive, the interruption of symbiotic and destructive fusion. It is, on the contrary, the very gift of language allied with desire. It means that when we enter the field of language, we lose direct contact with our libidinal body.

Thus, when we are subjected to the Big Other, we sacrifice our direct access to our own corporeality and can only have an access to it that is mediated by language. As the Lacanian psychoanalyst Charles Melman states, the act of inscribing the word implies that desire is organized on the basis of the absence of the object. Language sublates the "thing" and desire turns into a form of distance, lack, loss of the thing that is to be enjoyed, which places an aura of disappointment on every object.

Lacan presents the abstract subject "before language" with an S and considers it pathological. After the subject has accessed language (in the symbolic order), Lacan assigns the sign $ to the subject ("split subject" or "locked

32   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism. Historical-Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Bible, Hegel, and Musil. First Transition – From World Time to the Feast and Death, B. The Gown of Grace and the Nakedness of Existence, 5-11.

33   "Its purpose lies in an open transcending of the six days' work that prevents time from being a disposable totality that is to be filled by works and is under the control of man, and that time is exhausted in "world time". (3).

subject"). What is barred or divided or separated here is the subject of *jouissance*, of the body, which stands in opposition to the symbolic order. The "Real of *jouissance*", namely, the One (and not the Other) as the center of the dimension of a libidinal, self-generated body which does not need the Other, is to be castrated so that the subject can enter the symbolic order.

The beginning of the symbolic implies the sublation of the thing, even if the symbolic order cannot extinguish the whole thing. Due to the impossibility of complete annihilation, the Big Other, as the ultimate instance of this order, harbors a remnant of inconsistency. In other words, it is structured around a defect, which is the lack of *jouissance*. There is always something left over that the symbolic order cannot grasp. This remainder is generated by language but represents something that language cannot symbolize.

Lacan calls this remainder, this surplus of the symbolic operation object *petit a*, or "small a". This indicates that the symbolic order cannot capture the whole of the real in its web. The subject's desire revolves around the object *petit a*, because it is precisely that which sets desire in motion, not as a material cause, but as a causative emptiness, a split in the subject, which causes its entry into language. Like the "seventh day", the object *petit a* is "an addition, a space of opening, a leap and an elusive form of transcendence. To the extent that this day is not representable, it cannot be fully known by one particular discipline".[34]

One could say following Appel, that imaginary desire, that is, the desire of objects and the search for one's own satisfaction, seems to be reproducible and belongs to the first six days. The seventh day as the "object-ground" of desire "eludes objectification, and thus creates the space for the subjectification of man and for all living things, which, without this addition, would exist as mere zombies or machines, as the living dead."[35] This addition is at the same time a lack of *jouissance* and an excess in desire.

The law of castration as an effect of language introduces this unimaginable dimension into life. For Lacan, is not merely the threat of emasculation but a symbolic interdict that simultaneously represents and effects the introduction of the subject to the experience of the limit and the impossible. The law of the Father introduces the impossible and thus corresponds to the traumatic but also healing power of the law.

It is traumatic insofar as it deprives us of the object of *jouissance*, but at the same time it is wholesome, because the existence of the law has the purpose of making desire possible. In this sense, the experience of the impossible first

---

34   Ibid.
35   Ibid.

enables the possibility of desire. Lacan's designating the father metaphor the "name of the father" clearly addresses the question of prohibition and the law through the French homonymy of *nom / non*. The father is the substitute, the mediator of the law, and in this function enables the child to be separated from the mother and thus the constitution of the subject.

In *The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious* (1960), Lacan writes that the Father can reconcile the law and desire with one other, although this only happens in an unsatisfactory way because the will to enjoy impedes this pact of law and desire. Lacan even speaks of a "kind of co-conformity between them"[36] and thinks that no one understood the dialectic between desire and law better than Saint Paul.[37]

As Paul has already noted, law and desire arise essentially simultaneously (Rom. 7:7), although this origin is to be understood beyond any literal interpretation of the law. This means that it is necessary to avoid the trap of a law that nourishes its own transgression in order to assert itself exactly as a law. When law separates from desire (and thus perverts it), it becomes either the bureaucratic law of society or the family and small order without desire, or the deadly and inhuman law of the concentration camp.

Therefore, according to Lacan, it is necessary to transcend the idea of a superego law as the humiliation and sacrifice of desire. It is an inhuman and succinct law that generates resentment and aggressiveness. In the scene of the meeting of Jesus and the adulteress (Jh 7:53–8:11), this literal automatism of the law comes into play in an exemplary manner. While the scribes want to stone the woman in the name of the law of Moses, Jesus puts the situation on another level, namely forgiveness and love. "And when they heard this, they went out one by one, beginning with the elders" (John 8:9). The superego is indeed not an heir of the law but its usurper unable to speak a saving word. It knows only one judgmental and deadly word that transforms us into living dead. As Paul writes: "For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life" (2 Cor 3:6). In a similar way, Lacan claims:

---

36   J. Lacan, On the Names-of-the-Father, 84.

37   "I believe that for a little while now some of you at least have begun to suspect that it is no longer I who have been speaking. In fact, with one small change, namely, 'Thing' for 'sin,' this is the speech of Saint Paul on the subject of the relations between the law and sin in the Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 7, paragraph 7. [...] The relationship between the Thing and the Law could not be better defined than in these terms." (Lacan, The Seminar, Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, W.W. Norton & Company, New York / London 1997, 83).

> We will have to explore that which, over the centuries, human beings have succeeded in elaborating that transgresses the Law, puts them in a relationship to desire that transgresses interdiction, and introduces an erotics that is above morality.[38]

In the same vein, Slavoj Žižek asks whether in a Pauline perspective it would not be possible to think "love *within the confines of the Law*, love as the struggle to suppress the excess of sin generated by the Law".[39] According to Paul, love is not merely a transgression or annulment of the law, but rather its abrogation, in which alone the law can find its fulfillment.[40] In fact, a desire encounters an opposite risk when it breaks the law. When desire emancipates itself from the law, when it breaks away from castration, it becomes *jouissance mortelle*, namely, the will to enjoy until death.

Here, in fact, the dimension of love opens up, which is the only real possibility for Lacan, as he writes in *Seminar XX*,[41] of reconciling life as *jouissance* and life as desire.

The Father of the Covenant and the Master of Power

This alliance of desire and law, desire and word is at present threatened, inasmuch as the desire becomes *jouissance*, i.e. the desire without castration, without limit, without word. What is needed is the biblical Father of the covenant, who makes possible the humanization of life. Opposite him stands the *Father of Power*, the *Father of the Federation*, the forefather of the Freudian *Totem and Taboo*. The Father as a figure of sublimation can be understood as the answer of Lacan to the Father as leader, as *Duce* – whom the masses worship.

Lacan sees the return of the totemic Father and the longing for his absolute protection without fail as closely connected with the social downfall and the

---

38   J. Lacan, The Seminar. Book VII, 104.

39   S. Žižek, The Fragile Absolute: Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting for?, London / New York 2000, 100.

40   With regard to the dialectics of law and love in Paul and in the young Hegel, I would like to refer to I. Guanzini, Il giovane Hegel e Paolo. L'amore fra politica e messianismo, Milano 2013 and, from the same author, Katargein and Aufheben: Paulinian Origins of Hegelian Dialectic?, in: Annali di Scienze Religiose 7/2014.

41   "A subject, as such, doesn't have much to do with jouissance. But, on the other hand, his sign is capable of arousing desire. Therein lies the mainspring of love. The course I will try to continue to steer in our next classes will show you where love and sexual jouissance meet up. "See J. Lacan, The Seminar. Book XX. Encore (1972–1973), New York / London 1998, 50.

epochal evaporation of the Father. The great totalitarian ideologies are, according to Lacan, an attempt to nostalgically reclaim a more archaic matrix. They represent a perverted form of the Mother as a metaphysical illusion of universal harmony. The father-leader appears at the same time as a dramatic compensation for the impotence of the Father.[42] This description of the Father can be found in *The Seminar. Book III* (1955–1956). *The Psychoses*, which deals with the treatment of psychoses and contains important considerations of Lacan's paternal function.[43]

Lacan's psychoanalysis, as we have seen, is not free from theological undertones. This is also shown by the fact that psychosis develops its own form of theology, which can be grasped in a similar way to Christian theology. In contrast to the biblical figure of the Father as word and covenant, Lacan shows that in the psychotic subject, a theological delirium unfolds, in which the other is the place of subjugation and abuse that oscillates between an excessive presence and an unmotivated withdrawal. For Lacan, this degradation of the symbolic covenant down to arbitrary power means the negation of the possibility of a humanization of life through the generation of subjective desire.

The "Schreber Case", which is a classic case in psychoanalysis and is at the center of this Lacanian seminar, represents nothing but the embodiment of the lack of the symbolic, i.e. the rejection of the paternal function. In his book *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness, a Complex and Comprehensive Report on His Paranoia and Delusions*, analyzed by Carl G. Jung, Sigmund Freud, Elias Canetti, William G. Netherland, and Jacques Lacan Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber (1842–1911), President of the Senate at the Dresden Higher Regional Court writes:

> In any case, the whole idea of morality can arise only within the Order of the World, that is to say within the natural bond which holds God and mankind together; wherever the Order of the World is broken, power alone counts, and the right of the stronger is decisive. In my case, moral obliquity lay in God placing Himself outside the Order of the World by which He Himself must be guided.[44]

While the figure of the Father in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the place of the *logos*, the law, and the order of the world, in psychosis the Father is the place of fundamental disorder and dysfunction – i.e., the place of chaos and lack of law. Psychosis comes along with the absence of the paternal signifier,

42   See Recalcati, Jacques Lacan 145–147; M. Recalcati (ed.), Forme contemporanee del totalitarismo, Torino 2007.

43   J. Lacan, The Seminar. Book III. The Psychoses, W.W. Norton & Company, New York / London 1997.

44   D.P. Schreber, Memoirs of My Nervous Illness, New York 2000, 66.

which Lacan calls "*forclusion*" and in which the symbolic paternal function is overridden. God, for Schreber, remains indifferent to his creation, which becomes completely passive. This God does not understand human needs and only wants to enjoy his creatures. He is a radical and sadistic version of the *jouissance* of the Other that does not guarantee the world order and nor protects his creation. His existence is the fundamental perturbation of the universal order and his characteristics consists in the fact that he always speaks:

> So, here is this God, then. We already know it's he who is always talking, who is forever talking without saying anything. This is so much so that Schreber dedicates many pages to considering what it might mean, that there is this God who talks without saying anything and who nevertheless never stops talking.[45]

The function of language is completely destroyed in psychosis insofar as that which speaks is not the subject but rather language itself. The language of the Other speaks the subject, so that the subjective word is abolished through its being spoken by the Other. Bruce Fink writes:

> Psychosis, according to Lacan, results from a child's failure to *assimilate* a "primordial" signifier which would otherwise structure the child's symbolic universe, that failure leaving the child *unanchored in language*, without a compass reading on the basis of which to adopt an orientation. A psychotic child may very well assimilate language, but cannot come to be in language in the same way as a neurotic child. Lacking that fundamental anchoring point, the remainder of the signifiers assimilated are condemned to drift.[46]

All imaginary disturbances and cataclysms of the psychotic subject are due to a dysfunction of the Other, that is language, in a hole in the symbolic order, in a rejection of the paternal signifier, which Lacan also calls master signifier.[47] The psychotic subject has not assimilated the master signifier or the name of the father, so that the symbolic inactivity of the paternal function leads life into absurdity – such as in melancholy – or allows life to be flooded with meaning and words. In this case, the subject experiences (linguistic) paranoia.

---

45   Lacan, The Seminar. Book III, 126.
46   B. Fink, The Lacanian Subject. Between Language and Jouissance, Princeton 1995, 55.
47   The symbolic order consists of a "chain of signifiers" (*chaîne de signifiants*), which is assigned, structured and guaranteed by the existence of a "master signifier" (name-of-the-father). The master signifier enables the subject to take a firm place in the symbolic. See E. Laquièze-Waniek, "Lord Significant": discourse, symbolic order and change of power in Jacques Lacan, in: I. Gurschler / S. Ivády / A. Wald (ed.), Lacan 4 D. The Four Discourses in Lacan's Seminar XVII, Vienna / Berlin 2013, 165–195.

The comprehensive extension of meaning in which the transitive nature of things is over-determined, however, removes meaning.[48] This wavering between a meaningless life and a flood, an unlimited expansion of meaning corresponds to the wavering of the psychotic subject. Either life does not make sense, or all nonsense dissolves.[49]

Life is a question of meaning, and the Father should be the one who brings life and meaning together, though this does not mean that the Father should have the last word on the meaning or nonsense of life, but a word of recognition and a word of lack. The paternal function has the task of showing the limit of symbolization by referring to the dimension of the real, that is, to something that defies the process of symbolization but is indispensably dependent on representation.

The paternal answer cannot simply protect against the burning, treacherous, and contingent encounter with nonsense. This would be the characteristic of the neurosis, which is a "passion for justification" that cannot endure any shortage. For Lacan, therefore, it is necessary to distinguish the speech of the Father from the speech of the master, because the Father has to be the one who can give the word and therefore the one who is able to lose the word and to remain silent.

The dialectic of silence and speech, of desire and law, of paternal function and individuation, of *jouissance* and castration is overridden in

---

48   This tendency towards over-interpretation, which leads the world perception to the brink of breaking, finds an explicit representation in The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick by Peter Handke. Jakob Deibl mentioned a passage of this book in order to illustrate the abundance of meanings and metaphors: "Bloch, who had already observed a lightning rod at school, immediately took this repetition to be intentional; it could not be a coincidence that he hit a lightning rod twice in a row.' Here the referential nature of things in the world, which can never be viewed as isolated from each other, is increased up to the limit of the collapse of a meaningfully interpretable world. The relational structure in which all things stand is overstretched, almost endlessly extended, everything is a metaphor for something else and can stand for everything else. Things and events are constantly questionable and relevant regarding their meaning, because there always has to be something else to be found behind them. "(J. Deibl, Narration and Transformation by Peter Handke, Hölderlin Metamorphoses in the "Repetition", in: J.-H. Tück / A. Bieringer [Hg.], Transforming by counting only. Peter Handke in the area of conflict between theology and literary studies, Freiburg i. Br. 2014, 159f.)

49   "This discourse which is presented to the subject Schreber at the period of the illness he's describing has a dominant characteristic of Unsinn. But this Unsinn is not entirely simple. The subject who is writing and confiding in us depicts himself as undergoing this discourse, but the subject who speaks -and the two are not unrelated, otherwise we wouldn't be characterizing him as mad – says some things very clearly, such as what I've already quoted to you, Aller Unsinn hebt sich auf! All nonsense is annulled, rises, is transposed!" (Lacan, The Seminar, Book III, 122).

psychosis. The absence of the paternal function leads to the destruction of any articulation of the relation between message and code, and therefore into a catastrophe of signification. The place of the Other transforms from being the condition of language into a place of persecution. The singular word (*parole*) no longer finds its structure and its condition of possibility in language (*langue*), but language speaks the subject and makes it idle.[50]

Therefore, it seems necessary to consider the subject as surplus and resistance rather than passive dependence on the signifier. Without the inscription into the symbolic, the singular dissolves into an inconsistent individualism, while the universal, unrelated to the singular, evaporates into general emptiness. We are not mere machines or fictions of the symbolic order, which, because only language (*langue*) speaks, cannot pronounce a word (*parole*).

Like the replicants in *Blade Runner*, who have false, programmed, and fictional memories, we can recount, subjectivize our memories so that they can become one story. What is at stake here is the responsibility of subjects in terms of the possible variations and unfoldings of the symbolic order. The process of subjectivation is realized through the imprints and contingent inscriptions in the field of the Other which singularize the universality of the structure. Subjective life can be understood as a complex arc of this daily rewriting of a collective text, within a space of resistance and exposure, of acceptance and closure, of enthusiasm and disappointment.

The crucial question, which is both ontological as well as ethical and anthropological, concerns the possibility of such a form of subjectivation. It is always an actual "resurrection" of "being a subject" within the symbolic order, and this as a singular, vulnerable, and contingent vocation to move with intensity and *parrhesia* within the discourse of the Other, i.e. without indulging in one's own desire.[51] The subject is always subjected to the Other, but it is also the constant possibility to subjectivize this submission. *How can one subjectivize one's subjection to desire?* is thus the guiding question.

---

50   See Recalcati, Jacques Lacan, 159–162.

51   The only fault that recognizes Lacan is "giving up on one's desire" (Seminar VII). "Ne pas céder sur son désir" is the basic principle of the ethics of psychoanalysis for Lacan. It is about an infinite responsibility that leads the subject to understand that there are no signifiers, no one else who can take that responsibility in my place. When psychoanalytic ethics asks about the problem of human satisfaction, it is first about the call to have one's own desire received in a singular way. Did we absorb the urge of our own desire or did we betray it? The betrayal of this urge is what Freud called "repression." Repression can also be interpreted as a betrayal, an avoidance of the ethical task of absorbing desire in a singular way. Repression means not wanting to know about it, it is ignorance of desire. Lacan claims that the ethics of psychoanalysis leads to the acceptance of one's own desire, which as a sign of faithfulness to this desire has to constantly be repeated.

The Ruse of Capitalist Reason

When Lacan emphasizes that the Big Other no longer exists, he also intends to say that the symbolic order, namely the law of language, is no longer able to orient life. Therefore, human enjoyment aims to go beyond boundaries and refuse the experience of the impossible. We live in the age of the "evaporation of the Father". This announces a society without third and especially without the big third, which prohibits the actual possibility of desire.

Massimo Recalcati and Charles Melman diagnose *a tremendous transformation* that has incalculable anthropological consequences.[52] They notice the direct link between a liberal, unleashed economy and a subject that is free from past and future generations and therefore without future nor past.

Charles Melman speaks of people without gravity, quasi-mutants who have processed, internalized, assimilated the market model and filter their relationship with reality through the paradigm of positivist scientism. Within a human landscape in which the objects of consumption multiply again and again and new possibilities of existence are constantly produced, desire is repressed or even annihilated.

For Lacan, the discourse of the capitalist is a discourse of the dissolution of all relationships. The subject is led to establish itself in the immediate satisfaction of its objective needs, in a continuously exalted enjoyment of all attachments.[53] Therefore, it is a discourse at the limits of discourse, starting from the moment in which it transcends the law of the word, to affirm the domination of the object and the enjoyment of the *One* without difference, instead of asserting the desire of the *Other*.

In the present epoch, the occidental ego tends to settle in the field of the One, where everything seems to demand to be grasped and consumed, and where ultimately consumption itself is consumed. It could be said that the subject even consumes nothingness by successively abstaining from anything substantial. It is emptied of any content containing history, hope or injury and encounters its actual nudity. Appel states, "that the human being finds himself confronted with an almost inscrutable, all-absorbing emptiness (the "Evil")".[54]

---

52   See M. Recalcati, L'uomo senza inconscio. Figure della nuova clinica psicoanalitica, Milano 2010; Ch. Melman, La nouvelle économie psychique. La façon de penser et de jouir aujourd'hui, Toulouse 2009; J.-P. Lebrun, Un monde sans limite. Essai pour une clinique psychanalytique du social, Toulouse 2007.

53   Cf. P. Bruckner, L'Euphorie perpétuelle. Essais sur le devoir du bonheur, Paris 2001.

54   K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism. Historical-Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Bible, Hegel, and Musil. First Transition – From World Time to the Feast and Death, 7.

Gilles Lipovetski has referred to our time as the "era of emptiness"[55] to designate the post-revolutionary and post-traditional, permissive and individualistic stance of the postmodern era, in which absolute presence dominates. This means that any relationship with the "eschatology of desire" and therefore with the dialectic of attraction and repulsion of the *object a* must yield to the immediate consumption of the ever-available goods, within the nihilistic circularity of a timeless flux.

Within this scenario, the current atmosphere feeds on what Badiou calls a "generalized desire for atonality".[56] In this, social atomism and the emptiness of references produce the general illusion of a self-construction of the ego without limits, orientations and prohibitions. The subject becomes the plaything of the inescapable abyss of *jouissance*, i.e. an expansion of what one considers one's own in every possible direction. Fredric Jameson speaks of a decay of affectivity: it is not that the postmodern era is without feeling, but it fluctuates freely, impersonally, and tends to be dominated by a specific "kind of euphoria"[57] which lacks the intensity of memory and intimate temporality in order to focus instead on the synchrony of a present "without gravity".

The enthusiasm of this unleashing, initially perceived as a liberating detachment from the inanimate bonds of our conditioning and the imperatives of a society defined by discipline, gives free rein to the process of psychologizing meaning, in which relationships without commitment feign to be able to stay alive outside the fertile soil of a collective *humus*. The hypermodern state of our society is characterized by an emptying of the symbolic order, i.e. by the emptying of the figure of the Father and of the law of the word.

Although Lacan's entire psychoanalytic perspective is, as it were, circling around the question of the "name of the father," Lacanian psychoanalysis by no means seeks to rehabilitate the traditional paternal function but to discuss the question of the consequences of its dissolution. Lacan seeks to designate not only an epoch of liberation from the firm and despotic ideals of tradition but also a time of chaotic drift and destabilization, in which, paradoxically, the subjects, following their liberation, flee into authoritarian and despotic identities and dissolve within the individual cult of the object.

The border(s) and the frictional resistance that promote the desire and vitality of the subject are pulverized. Thus, an existence that seemed capable of finally being considered to be liberated and emancipated becomes

---

55   G. Lipovetsky, L'ère du vide. Essais sur l'individualisme contemporain, Paris 1989.

56   A. Badiou, Logiques des mondes, Paris 2006, 443.

57   F. Jameson, Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, in: New Left Review 146 (1984), 64.

extremely susceptible to whispers. A *double bind* between the narcissistic search for absolute and individual freedom and *indirect forms of control and manipulation* ultimately proves unmanageable to the subject, sliding between rushed *jouissance* and the absence of the law.

This leads to a weakening and an erosion of identity. The Italian philosopher Fulvio Carmagnola states that we are currently living in a context "where oversight turns into blindness, into potential cynicism".[58] We are immersed in constant insecurity, between amazement and terror, trust and cynicism, passivity and omnipotence. Today's subject, like Eric Packer, the protagonist of Don DeLillo's novel *Cosmopolis*, feels "overly cautious, lethargic and incorporeal".[59] This 28-year-old billionaire in his limousine, which spasmodically compresses all space and time, represents the incarnation of finance capitalism, giving shape to a new contemporary eloquence of alphabets and numerical systems moving in the binary grammar of the new digital world.

> I put out my hand and what do I feel? I know there's a thousand things you analyze every ten minutes. Patterns, ratios, indexes, whole maps of information. I love information. This is our sweetness and light. It's a fuckall wonder. And we have meaning in the world. People eat and sleep in the shadow of what we do. But at the same time, what?[60]

The *ruse of capitalist reason* and its discourse is the ability to systematically exploit the constant excitement and widespread disorientation and install it as a kind of system. Today spontaneity, individual expression and self-realization are imperatives in a society of universal consumption, in which enjoyment, in a cunning and all-pervading way replaces traditional duties and is directly subordinated to the capitalist circulation of goods.

Capitalism is thus in some ways more compromising and suppressive than the antique commandment. Pasolini put it this way: the subjects have become consumers.[61] In a famous lecture held in Milan in 1972, Lacan speaks of the

---

58   F. Carmagnola, Il consumo delle immagini. Estetica e beni simbolici nella fiction economy, Milano 2006, 95.

59   D. DeLillo, Cosmopolis, New York 2003, 6.

60   Ibid., 7.

61   In the introduction to The Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau describes this condition with a certain harshness: "The purpose of this work is to make explicit the systems of operational combination (les combinatoires d'operations) which also compose a "culture," and to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean that they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term "consumers." Everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others." (M. De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, Berkeley 1984, xi et seq.)

"discourse of the capitalist," which is an extension of the "discourse of the master," which emerged from the historical affirmation of capitalism.[62] Market society globalizes the necessity of "unrepentant consumers", namely, consumers who do not feel shame in their enjoyment and who do not conceive limits for themselves. The discourse of the capitalist operates in a circularity without interruptions, as a *perpetuum mobile* of continuous production and distribution.

In order to gain a key to the understanding of the so-called post-modern epoch, it seems helpful to turn to some Spinozistic concepts such as possible affects and the intensity of existence. Today, we are confronted with an expansion of "sad emotions"[63] that suppress social aliveness and lead to a decline of the *vis existendi* and the *potentia agendi* of the subjects and of the entire Western society. These are affects that bring about unexpressed moods within the social body, nourish sinister and sad feelings.

Spinoza's philosophy represents the first attempt by occidental modernism to de-traumatize or aestheticize the contingency of being.

This is accomplished by assigning a fundamental ontological value to the sensitive inner structure of enjoyment (happiness) as the sole meaning of desire. One could speak of an *ex-timity*,[64] i.e. a subjective-objective space in which the shape of the world finds its rationality and convenience in the unfoldings of the enjoyable joy of the individual. Joy, then, becomes the image of the rational fulfillment of being, not just the sentimental reflex of pleasing. In this sense, the model of Spinoza perfectly illustrates the postmodern attempt of a comprehensive aestheticization of *life's contingency* as such, that is the ideal of a perfect overlap of the principle of reality and the principle of the enjoyment of life.

In Part V of his *Ethics* Spinoza elaborates a theory of affects that plays a central role in his ontology and understanding of the world and which should be understood as an "affirmation of life." According to Spinoza, man is first and inevitably entrusted to his own emotions. For Spinoza, the affections are the

---

62   J. Lacan, Radiophonie, television, Torino 1982. For Lacan, the discourse of the master represents the function of prohibition and interdiction as a universal rule, in which the power of the signifier imposes rigid identifications upon the subject and thus the rule of the law.

63   See M. Benasayag / G. Schmit, Die verweigerte Zukunft: Nicht die Kinder sind krank, sondern die Gesellschaft, die sie in Therapie schickt, München 2007 (or Les passions tristes. Souffrance psychique et crise sociale).

64   *Extimity* is a neologism by Lacan that associates the prefix "ex" – meaning "out- side", extraterritoriality – with the adjective intime that refers to intimacy, the interior. Thus, the extraterritorial nature of that which, to subjectivity, is the most intimate is signified.

imprints that humans leave to each other by activating the creative power of sensibility. In the experience of the *affectus*, the subject is led *outward, outside of itself*.

The moment one touches and is touched, one's own "relational energy", as Luce Irigaray would say, is directed toward the other. In doing so, the world is constructed.[65] Any passion that implies a reduction in the potential for action is called *tristitia* (grief), while *laetitia* (joy) denotes the passion in which it grows. Joy and sorrow also signify the proportion of activity and passivity of a human life.[66] For Spinoza, grief is "man's transition from greater to lesser perfection".[67] As soon as one feels sadness, the body falls into passivity and stagnation.

This sadness is heightened by the fact that the subject is constantly experiencing the social imperative of "feeling good" about himself, so that he also perceives his sad situation as his own fault. For Spinoza, a mode is an "inadequate cause" if it does not extend into the living flow of living affects but represents an unfruitful self-affection. Such self-affection interrupts the possibility of successful encounters in order to actuate the singular potency of existing in a forced isolation in which the relational abilities dry up and the passivity of life prevails.

Therefore, Spinoza's politics consists in the texture of living relations that create openings in the state-body that become critical instances in face of a repressive regime. For power reduces the circulation of affects. It loves sadness because the sad mode does not move but obeys without appreciating possibility. Thus, sadness never leads to "intelligence" because it reduces agency by leading existence into a vicious circle of consistent closures.

For this reason, powers and governments rely on the sadness of the subjugated, who are increasingly exposed to the power of the Other and thus weak and passive regarding their agency. Sadness will never create "common concepts" or relational intelligence between bodies but will be exposed to the randomness of encounters and subject to discordance and seclusion. Following

---

65 Luce Irigaray claims that "human energy is not just about growing, as it occurs or at least seems to occur in the plant world. There is a relational energy to be experienced and educated because it is human. This type of education is still absent in our culture. The majority of us live most of our own lives split between a non-educated energy in terms of their own sexual orientation and a formally codified and imposed modality of appearance and action that is inappropriate to their own nature" (L. Irigaray, Elogio del toccare, Genova 2013, 11).

66 G. Deleuze, Cosa può un corpo, Verona 2007, 58. See A. Böhler, Deleuze in Spinoza – Spinoza in Deleuze, in: V.L. Waibel (ed.), Spinoza – Affektenlehre und amor Dei intellectualis, Hamburg 2012, 167–186.

67 B. de Spinoza, Complete Works, Ethics in Geometric Order, E 3, Definition of affects 1–3.

Spinoza, one could say that today's widespread sadness is an expression of the spread of a general melancholy, which appears like a subtle "radiation" of resignation and euphoria.

Some critics speak of a *new psychic economy*[68] and of *new subjects*. These are not just simple changes in Western societies, but a hitherto unknown "anthropological mutation"[69] that fosters profound individual and collective changes of our emotional household. It affects the mindset, the actions, the mode of our desire and the general understanding of the subject.

According to Lacan, whereas the "discourse of the master" legitimizes itself according to a hierarchical conception of power and autonomy, the "discourse of the capitalist" is grounded in an unlimited circulation of goods and everyone's right to their own enjoyment. The "inner-worldly asceticism", which according to a hypothesis by Max Weber made possible the arrival of capitalism, turns into an invitation to consume, to enjoy consumption. The uninterrupted cycle of objects creates the illusion that in infinite consumption, the "void of being" of our existence may find fulfillment.

The circulation of capital is kept alive by a proliferation of small *jouissances* and inauthentic discourses manifesting themselves in the obsessive supply of gadgets, fictional objects of desire – empty words, as Lacan would say. Such objects of enjoyment, of discourses, of culture, of industry, of sublimation extend to everything that seems potentially capable of filling a fundamental void, that of the true lost object. This generalization of excess in the free market reverses the nature of the "lost object": The surrogates that make the system shine produce a portrait of the "thing" that tends to fill every void, culminating in a psychotic ending.[70]

In reality, the "thing" that stands for the enjoyable fusion with the maternal origin is precisely that which resists any signification, that which has no object and around which lies the "gravity" of a deep silence, a radical alterity, a void that abolishes all subjective attempts to represent one's own desires. The immediate enjoyment of the thing is a kind of "rejection" of the great visionary desire –, in the context of this rejection, J.-A. Miller speaks of a renunciation

---

68   C. Melman / J.-P. Lebrun, La nouvelle économie psychique: La façon de penser et de jouir aujourd'hui, Toulouse 2009; M. Fiumanò, L'inconscio è il sociale. Desiderio e godimento nella contemporaneità, Milano 2010; Recalcati, L'uomo senza inconscio.

69   Pier Paolo Pasolini had already written of an "anthropological mutation" with regards to the deep transformations that came with the arrival of consumer society. This mutation consists in the impoverishment of human space and the tragic destruction of singular qualities, be they superficial, deep, or spiritual. See P.P. Pasolini, Lutheran Letters, Manchester 1983.

70   See S. Žižek, The Ticklish Subject, 369–377.

of the "heroic paradigm" – in the name of a cynical materialism relative to the drives that expresses the nostalgic return to the oedipal father without recognition nor gift.[71]

The *effect of subjective enjoyment* is a new bio-power[72] in post-industrial Western societies. This manifests itself as a practice that is not characterized by desire and passion but by indifference. The ethical imperative of the permissive zeitgeist, which stands in radical opposition to the repressive prohibitions of the premodern society of order and discipline, is: "Enjoy!". It is characterized by the fact that it has made excess the normality of existence. Desire takes on a despotic form that no longer seems sustainable today.

It drowns in *jouissance*, which, paradoxically, the prohibition to enjoy turns back into a *prohibition of not enjoying*. This prohibition is no longer organized around a guilt complex but rather a *not-measuring-up*. Being "in shape" and imperatives like "Be who you are!", "Be happy!", or "Enjoy yourself!" are proving to be the contemporary global imperative of pluralistic Western societies that lacks a moral and cultural horizon shared by all. But this production apparatus simultaneously *creates* and *empties desire* by there being "nothing" beyond the objects. The goods are not a substitute of the *object a*, but phantasms without gravity, which cannot convey well-being.

A perfect expression of such an all-pervasive aestheticization is the character of the *Jeune Fille* (*The Young-Girl*)[73], designed by a collective and anonymous (de-subjectivized) writing team, a radical dispositive transforming and radicalizing commodity ideology into an imaginary anthropology in which the question of existence is conceptualized as a problem of management and the figure of the total consumer is drawn. These are some of the characteristics and expressions of the "Young-Girl": "I want people to be beautiful." ... "The Young-Girl knows so very well *the value of things*." ... "The

---

71   The psychoanalyst and publisher of Lacan's seminars Jacques-Alain Miller writes: "Lacan calls them *lichettes*, a small piece of jouissance. Modern society is full of such substitutes to jouissance, little trifles. The small pieces of jouissance are characteristic of a certain lifestyle and a mode-de-jouir (J.-A. Miller, Paradigmas of Jouissance, in: Lacanian Ink 16, New York 2000, 33).

72   V. Codeluppi, Il potere della marca. Disney, McDonald's, Nike e le altre, Torino 2001.

73   Tiqqun, Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl, Cambridge MA 2012. Tiqqun is the name of a collective that publishes the magazine "Tiqqun" in Paris. The chapters of the book are, among other things: "The young-girl as self-technology"; "The young-girl as a commodity"; "The young-girl as living money"; "The young-girl as a compact political dispositif"; "The young-girl as a war machine"; "The young-girl against herself: the boy-girl as impossibility". [TN: In the present examples, the use of "jeune" represents a pun on its two meanings, namely "young" and "young adult". "Jeune Fille" or "Junge-Mädchen" could thus also be translated as "boy-girl".]

Young-Girl never creates anything; all in all, she only recreates herself. "…" The Young-Girl invariably calls "happiness" everything to which THEY chain her".

The Young-Girl is never simply sad, she is also sad that she's sad. "…" The young-girl wants to be desired without love or loved without desire."[74] As these quotes show, the young-girl seems to be programmed for seduction, youth and desire. His / her experience ultimately results from being docile regarding any oppression and suggestion, so that his / her language and feelings are systematically directed by an economic, cosmetic, and mimetic machine, aiming at incessant entertainment by the merchandise spectacle. Self-care is directly linked to the totalitarian control of each stage of life, insofar as it is "human capital" that must be offered and handled in a continuous presentation and display of oneself.

The Aestheticization of the Lifeworld

In the time of the "vaporization of the Father", what remains is the enjoyment of the appearance that the world of goods and "images" offers us. There remain "technocratic strategies", as Michel de Certeau calls them,[75] namely, the way to navigate between habit and invention. The "discourse of the capitalist" exaggerates enjoyment and fragments the affective forms of relationships. It feeds on the ideology of the *homo felix*, who aligns his *life to a time without a feast* following the illusory ideal of the narcissistic satisfaction of one's own potential.

There is no life without "an addition not amenable to projection or prediction, in other words a *contingent-random* one"[76]. In the terms of Lacan, this supplement would be the *object a*, insofar as it is an object that has always been lost, namely, that passion that orientates and attracts the desire of the object without it being possible to represent it. According to Spinoza, it is the possibility

---

74   Tiqqun, Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young-Girl, 23–28.

75   De Certeau, The Practice, 85–92.

76   K. Appel writes: "Time (or world time) is thus fundamentally more than the accumulation of its moments. It becomes human only at the point where *chronos* is lifted in favor of the no longer representable feast. Preparations are certainly made for this feast in the time preceding it, often down to the tiniest detail, but it gets its force from an addition not amenable to projection or prediction, in other words a *contingent-chance* one. Perhaps at this point we might start to ask whether the way in which the "superfluous" (superbundant) chance *qua* chance expresses itself celebratorily is not in fact a key aspect of the feast." (K. Appel, Christianity and a New Humanism. Historical-Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Bible, Hegel, and Musil. First Transition – From World Time to the Feast and Death, A. The Seventh Day, 4).

of that which exists to inscribe its natural existence in the substance according to the variations and developments of its own *vis existendi* and *potentia agendi.*

In the infinite production of contingent existences that compose an affective texture of the world, separation is overcome only in working on something collective, in the pleasurable circulation of encounters and good relationships within a social body that constitutes the substance of life. In contrast, the flow of goods and the endless entertainment offered by the media and the internet, which (re-)produce a texture of digital humanity every day, weaken that collective texture and dramatically reduce the field of variations and "gravity" of living social relationships.

Alain Badiou is convinced that ruthless self-censorship, namely, a civil program of self-restraint and discretion, is the *conditio sine qua non* of any politics of emancipation. An excessively tolerant approach does not take into account the fact that today power no longer resides in censorship but in an infinite permissiveness that, as Badiou says in *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art's* fourteenth thesis[77]. In the absence of borders and sources of friction, in fact, everything is in free fall. Everything happens at the same speed without interruption. What is missing is grounding and the connection necessary for a web of relationships and a common world of reciprocal and vital alternations and attractions.

We are currently experiencing an uncertain state of vision, caught between technological fetishism and constant skepticism concerning the visible, which calls for the question of the true nature of human experience.[78] This question is at the center of the fundamental dynamics of post-industrial societies, in which, as Vitta notes, "the process of history is bluntly diverted: the world of 'forms' has changed the 'form' of the world."[79]

The aesthetic construction of the shapes and images becomes the dominant tendency of our new industrial and consumerist affluent society. The

---

77 "14. Since it is sure of its ability to control the entire domain of the visible and the audible via the laws governing commercial circulation and democratic communication, Empire no longer censures anything. All art, and all thought, is ruined when we accept this permission to consume, to communicate and to enjoy. We should become the pitiless censors of ourselves" (A. Badiou, Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art, in: Lacanian Ink 23, New York 2004).

78 Within the horizon of the imaginary, the facts lie at the same level of vision, which is neither imagination nor conception but rather a third afflicting plane, a phantasm. The technological recording of the real event depletes it of its content and transforms real violence into a fictional phantasmagoria. The miracle of special effects creates a mass doubt in the face of which common sense used to say: "But that's just a game!", which no longer works in our day and age.

79 M. Vitta, Il rifiuto degli dèi. Teoria delle belle arti industriali, Torino 2012, 6.

enticing power of the aesthetic in the system of production and communication produces a *generalization of the aesthetic categories and values* (style, fashion, design, marketing, entertainment, cosmetics, creativity, culinary art, furnishing, etc.), not least through the technological acceleration of traditional means of expression (photography, cinema, new media, etc.).

The aestheticization of the lifeworld is currently not only a question within the realm of aesthetics but rather concerns a new order of the social world, that is, a new psychic economy as well as a new way of understanding the human experience. It therefore concerns not only our partial access to the artistic world but rather *our general encounter with reality*. Therefore, aestheticization is a fundamental phenomenon of our society, as is the secularization and technique to which it is strongly connected. "The aesthetic," says Perniola, "is the socio-anthropological dimension of the Western way of life".[80]

It should be emphasized first of all that the aestheticization of the lifeworld strongly ties the latter to the "aesthetic economy"; namely, the domain of all products that are under the dominant influence of the new media. The market system appeals to the aesthetic sense, it relies on the enchantment and enthusiasm that surrounds its products, consumerism exploiting the mechanisms of lure and fascination, in other words, aesthetics. The market has become so strong and effective because the visions and dreams of globalized citizens are being increasingly entrusted to the narratives advertising commodities. The enchantment of the media world thus creates the dream of a new potential reality.

The phenomenon could be described as follows: the paradoxical event of the twentieth century is that the whole legacy of the Fine Arts has gone into the system of commodity production and mass communication. "Supermarkets are similar to museums," Andy Warhol once said. The commodities, the shops and the streets are the new places of the aesthetic.[81] It is a continuous phenomenon that permeates all forms of our collective existence.

Last but not least, it transforms religious experience by providing aestheticization with a massively subjectivist component that promotes the search for identity, the anesthesia of collective life, and the liberation from individual

---

80   M. Perniola, Contro la comunicazione, Torino 2004, 64.

81   To use Lacan's terminology, art has lost its symbolic meaning and has fallen to the level of the imaginary. The classical artistic approaches were deconstructed in the 20th and 21st centuries (by Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri, but also Picasso), while the beauty of art was shifted to the field of production and communication (from Andy Warhol up to advertising). Camille Paglia writes: "[The Avantgarde] was killed by my idol, Andy Warhol, who included the most conspicuous commercial capitalist imaginary (like Campbell's soup can) that most artists had so far consistently spurned in his art".

responsibility. This aestheticization dramatically expands into the political sphere, which has meanwhile made itself an object of representation, exposing the insecure masks of its own spectacle unrestrainedly to the civic and media scene. It concerns the "whole system of objects" as defined by Jean Baudrillard, namely, it permeates the products that define our social context.[82]

The dominance of "playing to the gallery" promotes an "aesthetic atmosphere" through design, cosmetics and advertising, which, according to Gernot Böhme[83], creates a hybrid virtual and phantasmic universe that extends beyond all veractiy to all spheres of individual and collective life. Today, aesthetics equals an "access" to the world, which is a point of reference shared by all, insofar as it produces ideal beauty as a continuous enchantment of everyday life. This enchantment clearly expresses itself in the pursuit of self-realization, the optimization of enjoyment, the ever-increasing quest for physical well-being, the search for the product image and the "look", new developments in cooking and eating, the political cult of the personality etc.

Creativity is for selling, selling is for enjoyment, enjoyment is for prosperity. The ingenuity and the talent of enjoyment, which one might also call luck without content, express the power of thought that must be purposive in terms of psycho-physical well-being in the process of aestheticization.

The "fine art" of the humanist tradition and romantic aesthetics have at present massively broken out of their demarcated domain and transferred to the world of digital technology and the system of commercial products that make up the aesthetic "skin", i.e. which forms the omnipresent mediator of contemporary consciousness. As a result, a new aesthetic "dispositive" has emerged that distinguishes itself in all these technological and economic developments and replaces the high arts. The critic and theoretician Gillo Dorfles[84] wrote in 1965:

---

82   "At the opening of the Holy Year, it was decided that Wojtila should wear a lurex coat because this synthetic fabric was more luminescent than the other materials and therefore more effective for television. So we are faced with a backdrop that has already planned reality." (G. Dorfles, Il feticcio quotidiano, Roma 2012, 7).

83   See G. Böhme, Aisthetik. Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre, Munich 2001.

84   G. Dorfles (born in Trieste in 1910, died 2013), critic and philosopher, professor of aesthetics at the University of Trieste and Milan and visiting professor at several American universities, is an outstanding figure in European culture. In 1948 he founded the MAC (Movimento per l'Arte Concreta). For further reading on this topic consult: Discorso tecnico delle arti, Nistri-Lischi 1952; Il divenire delle arti, Einaudi 1959; Nuovi Riti, nuovi miti, Einaudi 1965; Le oscillazioni del gusto, Skira 2004; Artificio e natura, Skira 2005. His most famous work may be: Il Kitsch. Antologia del cattivo gusto, 1968.

> It is wrong to continue to believe that "art" is only that which is worshiped in museums or in concert halls, while at the moment it is ... being broadcast by the media and produced by industrial systems.[85]

Nearly 50 years after this claim was made, the *consumption of images* has clearly become the core of the economic system.[86] The quoted citation therefore has a prophetic meaning. It indicates a direction that should be pursued today. The current aestheticization of the lifeworld is linked to the mechanization of thinking and everyday life. Today, beauty is located in digital technology, in the videos and in the performance of the media industry. The nymphs or graces of Botticelli, the warmth of Dürer's living nature or Turner's landscape poetics are multiplied and repeated in fashion photo reports and in the reports of the contemporary "society of the spectacle" (Guy Debord).

In this context of aestheticization, even Bosch's nightmares or Dalí's surrealistic distortions transform into the special effects of science fiction films, video games and advertisements. Although art works seem to lose their "aura" *in the age of technical reproducibility* (Benjamin), digital culture reproduces the same aura in a strong collective enchanting effect. Roberto Diodato writes:

> Today the categories of modern aesthetics, the concepts of beauty, taste, genius, originality, creativity, and feeling, are introduced with extraordinary social effects: they are the soul of the economic of the so-called advanced Western world ... of post-industrial capitalism; they are the laws governing the behavior of our common home.[87]

In his book *Il feticcio quotidiano* (*The Daily Fetish*) Gillo Dorfles examines the new tendencies of contemporary Western sensuality or the rituals, practice and changes in the use of symbols and the rapid change of taste (e.g in fashion trends) that modify our aesthetic perception. He claims that our so-called rational, secularized and enlightened society is still shaped by mythical undercurrents: "The veneration for the singer Madonna instead of the religious figure" – Dorfles writes – "is of course a form of idolatry".[88] This represents a dangerous (post-modern) use of symbols and myths. For while symbols have always structured the social bonds of the community, the new idols serve the subject's timeless narcissistic aspirations for self-realization.

---

85   G. Dorfles, Il consumo delle immagini e la comunicazione artistica, in: G. Dorfles, Arte e comunicazione. Comunicazione e struttura nell'analisi di alcuni linguaggi artistici, Milano 2009, 10.

86   F. Carmagnola, Il consumo delle immagini, Milano 2006, 95.

87   Diodato, Il futuro anteriore dell'estetica, in: L. Russo (ed.), Dopo l'estetica, Palermo 2010, 93.

88   Dorfles, Il feticcio quotidiano, 15.

The key words of this configuration are the dominance of the surface, the excess, the meaning of the scene. Victor, the protagonist of *Glamorama* (1999) by Bret Easton Ellis, follows the motto: "The surface is a promise".[89] His life is a display of surfaces and a sum of missed opportunities. In the novel, one encounters great metaphors of the mercantile and immaterial heart of the contemporary world, starting from the blending of reality and *Reality Show* to the confusion of roles and identities, from the subject of the doppelgänger to the fascination of ambiguity.

This fictionality represents the possibility to invent and communicate experiences and achievements that stand beyond the dichotomy of false-true, apparence-being, subject-object, surface-depth. It is important that these services participate in economic value processes. Fulvio Carmagnola writes:

> The aesthetic appearance of the commodity is the place of manifestation of an oxymoron, a relation of opposites that would have been impossible at the enlightened and romantic modern age: the false, he appearance, the body, surface, glamor are signs of themselves and of what is true.[90]

The hypothesis here is that the symbolic order, namely the world of symbols, values, principles, meaning, the written and unwritten laws of our collective life, has become an image and the imaginary, and in this form constitutes the aesthetic element of our economy. "Today, most of creativity is focused on marketing products rather than products themselves, be they sports, shoes, or feature films".[91] Therefore, our current economic form can be described as fictional and imaginary.[92]

Production – consumption – media communication: these are the main features of the new political economy of aesthetic phenomena. Mario Perniola asserts that "this tendency absorbs aesthetic instances by de-constructing the world of work ... In this way creativity is promoted at all levels and one gets

---

89 "Surface is a promise" was also the billboard advertising by the Volkswagen Group at the Frankfurt Motor Show in 2003. This ingenious advertising shows just how real the aesthetization of the lifeworld is and how it shapes our thoughts and feelings. "Innovation is the search for the shape of tomorrow. The surface is not only a technological apparatus, but also a glimpse of the future and an anthropological vision. Functionality lies in man's nature." See Carmagnola, Il consumo delle immagini, 131–133.

90 Carmagnola, Il consumo delle immagini, 8.

91 W. Gibson, L'accademia dei sogni, Milano 2005, 74.

92 See R. Diodato, Marketing, o dell'esperienza estetizzata, in: P. Pellegrino (ed.). Estetica & Marketing, Lecce 2010, 31–36.

the impression of participating in an exciting and avant-garde act. The creative manager represents the heir to bohemian artists.[93]

This expresses itself in the twofold movement of the commercialization of the aesthetic and the aestheticization of the world of commodities, in the indifferent praise of diverse *lifestyles* or s*tatus s*ymbols. The economy is aesthetic insofar as it produces goods whose appearance is decisive for their value, and which produces pleasure, or rather enjoyment. In any case, it seems that beauty has become simultaneously more widespread and weaker in this process of aestheticization. Its increasing dissemination through the world causes a growing melancholy *feeling of emptiness*.

Law and Pleasure of the Word

The problem is not primarily that the "great narratives" that could provide us with ideas to guide us have come to an end (according to Lyotard) but rather that post-industrial Western society is providing us with new great narratives. The Neo-Enlightenment epic of science and technology, the ideology of the neo-liberal market economy, and the neo-romantic epic of eros and prosperity.

The model of Western development is based on these three models of freedom and the will with which it tries to tell its history through digital language. The epic of the great narratives relocates to the short little media stories presented in commercials, talk shows, television series and the creativity of design and fashion, which still have a strong and influential effect.

It could be said that postmodernity is the end or crisis of the symbolic, or rather, that it represents the shift from the symbolic to the imaginary. In this shift, the experiences, narratives, meanings, discourses become "easier" and "weaker". They are *without gravity*. The symbols in premodern and modern communities had the crucial power to structure collective and shared reality through written and unwritten norms, rules, laws, rituals and myths.

Today's prevailing images are chaotic fragments of the imaginary that have disrupted their affiliation to the symbolic system of shared meanings and values. What is even more radical is the fundamental problem that the "epidemic of the imaginary" not only reflects itself in the "particles" of melancholy and confusion but also produces a monotony of excess, which leaves subjects without protection, without "garment of grace" and subject to the intolerable proximity of the real. Our age is referred to as the "age of fear," because transgression is made the norm by the absence of prohibition.

---

93   M. Perniola, Del sentire, Torino 2002, 65.

This lack leads us into the oppressive proximity of the object-cause of desire, the real of desire. We lack the space to breathe created by prohibition. Symbolic prohibition no longer works, because the unwritten rules of enjoyment are not considered "symbolic castration", through which the symbolic order is established, but as a regulation of transgression itself. The price for this lack of guilt is fear as the only emotion that does not mislead us.[94] When the symbolic order wavers and its organization of the real decays, fear arises.

Without the protection of the symbolic, namely, of the "father" or of the "word" installed by him, the real becomes unbearable and fear remains as the only possible answer of the subject to reality or, in other words, to the destruction of reality now left without symbolic protection. Therefore, anxiety does not represent a situation of separation from but rather to the excessive presence of the real.

If symbolic efficiency is suspended, then the imaginary falls into the real:[95] This means that what is repressed through the symbolic returns in a hallucinatory form, so that the connection between the imaginary and the real becomes threatening. It produces a grinning and ghostly double of traditional authority – Hitchcock and Lynch are masters of depicting it – super-egoist and cruel characters that replace the lack of the prohibition of the symbolic order.

The crisis of the symbolic order is a *crisis of the law of the word*, i.e. the absence of the words that shape the instincts, humanize their chaotic and speechless core, and thus allow them to distance themselves from their aggressive aberrations. This often only leaves violence. For desire is capable of orienting and structuring existence around its inexhaustible mystery by inserting it into language. Life becomes humanized thanks to the blessing of the word of the Other.

Lacan thus remains in a horizon already outlined by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, showing that humanity demands to be recognized in the particular value of the Other. The value of my word depends on the Other hearing it, and the word becomes meaningful only when the Other answers it. There is no word for Lacan that finds its fulfillment without the Other:

> Now all speech calls for a response. I will show that there is no speech without a response, even if speech meets only with silence, provided it has an auditor, and this is the heart of its function in analysis.[96]

---

94 "Anxiety is that which does not deceive" (J. Lacan, The Seminar, Book XI, 41).
95 See S. Žižek, The Ticklish Subject. The Absent Centre of Political Ontology, New York 1999, 369–377.
96 J. Lacan, Écrits, 206.

Herein lies the dialectical dimension of the word, which finds its realization only through its being heard by the Other. In a similar sense, M. Recalcati writes: "No word is merely the word of the subject, since its structure constitutively involves the Other, the answer of the Other, the response of the human community in which the dialectic of recognition actually takes place."[97]

The word addresses itself to the place of the Other, so that the discourse gains its meaning in a retroactive temporality, *après coup*. The one who speaks never really knows what he is saying, because he sends to the one who listens a message that only completes itself in the moment when the Other answers, the Other in turn sending the message retroactively.

In Lacan's Rome lecture of 1953, one can read: "Human language would then constitute a kind of communication in which the sender receives his own message back from the receiver in an inverted form."[98] The dynamic of the word opens itself up to another conception of time, not composed of positive sequences that follow a deterministic chronology. For the future as retroaction (*Nachträglichkeit*) and as anteriority (*après coup*) means that the event of the past only gains meaning in relation to *the event of the contingent word*. This makes it necessary to undertake a retroactive signification of the past, because the past can only become history if it historicizes the present, if it touches on the word by calling on the Other regarding the future of its listening.

> What is realized in my history is neither the past definite as what was, since it is no more, nor even the perfect as what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the process of becoming.[99]

The process of subjectivation is always a resumption, or better said, a recording of the past, of what has been, towards a future of what is not yet. So it is about an arrival as an open opportunity to give our own story an ever-new meaning. The subject of the unconscious is the place of a constant re-admission of what has arrived, in a creative and continuous subjectivation of the already existing. It is a fragile and contingent process, but it has all the necessary power to change the course of our lives.

Sometimes a positive symbolization of the "already existing" is enough for the *resurrection* of the subject to happen. Likewise, it is sometimes enough for someone to speak your name or listen to your word, for the discourse, whose entire existence was left interrupted to become a possible narrative of the present, opening up new possible horizons of meaning within history.

---

97   M. Recalcati, Jacques Lacan, 78.
98   J. Lacan, Écrits, 246.
99   Ibid, 247.

In a time shaped by the aestheticization of the world, with its digital imaginary, any temporal codex, historical hypothesis, or symbolic texture seems to dissolve into indeterminacy. The discourses dissolve into images, into an uninterrupted repeatability of their flow. *Logos* and *logo* are exchanged. The symbol becomes the logo, the brand and its "narrative", that is, advertising, the new (short) description of the postmodern, which must keep desire alive.[100]

This brings with it a new social constellation that transforms the temporal event of being into the imaginary flow of appearance. This means that the editing of the "commercial" and the blog infects every other possible way of storytelling by inventing a *new syntax and rhetoric*. Even classic narrative content in the dramas or comedies on television and cinema are interrupted by advertisements, so suddenly *the symbolic falls* into the *imaginary* and we are brought back to "reality". The "categorical imperative" of the postmodern digital and commercial ego is to break the symbolic power of the large, detailed and touching narratives in favor of one's own hedonistic search.

The contemporary subjects, especially young people, are enthusiastically immersed in this technological environment that first appears as industrial design – from the new Volkswagen to the iPhone – which gives them access to reality. But unlike classical artworks, as Camille Paglia notes, there is *no spiritual dimension* in them. Is that true? Although the following statement may appear very bold at first glance, I would like to point out that even the successful commercial naming of the iPhone product with the "i" (ego) contains a strong reference to the configuration of the postmodern subject.

This subject circles around its "I" in the constant search for its (imaginary) identity, which regards the iPhone or iPod or iPad as a projection screen of its own self-reflection. This search for a subjective identity does not include an alterity or the necessary encounter with the real Other, who is the only one who can offer the subject true recognition beyond its narcissistic circling around its own self-realization.

The virtual objects simulate real relationships, human experiences, real feelings in the form of fictional objects. The virtual exchange of contacts and friendships, the permanent need to always stay connected, express these ways of the subject which requires at least one virtual icon (e.g. the Facebook logo, the emoticons) for actual reality. This partially explains the success of Apple: Apple products represent a special form and beauty, namely surprising touchability (touch screen), a huge memory (the post-modern and digital memory) and beautiful computer graphics – Steve Jobs once said that he owes his main inspiration to a calligraphy course.

---

100   See G. Dorfles, Nuovi riti, nuovi miti, Milano 2003.

The Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris claims[101] that computers, smartphones, tablets are by their very nature large storehouses in which all the contacts, the messages, the thoughts of our lives are kept. Even the things we have forgotten remain stored there as in a kind of unconscious.

For Ferraris this storage is a kind of supplement of the soul, a reserve soul. The traditional idea of the soul among the Greeks was that of a wax tablet in which speeches, feelings, reflections were imprinted. The iPad is the outer prosthesis of this inner panel, and it is man's most recent prosthesis – following archives, books, documents etc. – with which mankind tries to remedy the finiteness of its memory and, above all, its lives. As long as a bit of memory remains somewhere (even in the iPad), it still seems possible to preserve a bit of soul.

These media products try to recapture the spiritual experiences of life by using the elementary needs and feelings of the human being: friendship and liking (the "like" button), touching, hearing from other people etc. However, this results in a certain loss of spiritual etiquette, because on this level the subject cannot decode its intentionality, its real experience, its real desire. And the more the subject tries to communicate, to connect with the Other, the more it understands that this way of establishing contact with the world substantially falls short of the effective embodiment of affects and feelings. The shortening of the syntax and the sentence in digital language (Twitter, texting) may well precisely express this unconscious disappointment.

What corresponds to the commercial aestheticization of the world is the immanence of beauty in consumer products, whose seductive appearance inspires human desire. What is the task of philosophy and theology in view of the fact that philosophy has always thought about the beautiful, the pleasant and taste? The questions I would like to ask are the following: Why is something considered beautiful?

What does the shift from the angel of traditional painting to the angels of Fiorucci, from the oriental kilim carpet in Anatolia to the kilim carpet as an ethnic institution in Europe, or from Christ's cross to Madonna's necklace with a cross mean? But first and foremost the question is: How can aesthetics open up a new view of the beauty of human experience and of its symbolic nature within this present process of aestheticization, whose images and imaginative forces are in strong relation to the economic system?

---

101   M. Ferraris, Anima e iPad, Milano 2011.

Aesthetics and Rehabilitation of Time

Today, the aestheticization of the lifeworld clearly expresses the fact that aesthetics plays a fundamental role in our interaction with the world. Therefore, the question of aesthetics should assume a fundamental anthropological and even ontological character in this context.

The paradox is that only a *rehabilitation of aesthetics*, namely, a new perception of reality and a living sensitivity regarding the meaning of life can redeem one-dimensional virtuality and the timeless nihilism of the aestheticization of our lifeworld and thus form a new humanism.

A vague appeal to the classical ideal of beauty can merely nourish the aestheticizing and playful "drive" that this appeal seeks to call into question. This "solution" does not seem to be able to face the most important question that the aestheticization of the lifeworld poses. It is therefore important to emphasize that it is no longer possible to strive for a pure ideal of beauty that does not know contradictions, failure, defeat. This abstract and ahistorical beauty has become unbearable in our time because it does not know singularity nor contingency and thus neither knows human experience. This kind of beauty, too, creates an *aestheticization* of life by bringing about an *anesthetization of feeling*.

The aesthetic judgment on the beautiful is always both a judgment of taste and a one of sense, in other words, it essentially expresses as specific purposiveness. Kant writes: "The judgment of taste is therefore not a cognitive judgment, hence not a logical one, but is rather aesthetic, by which is understood one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective."[102] But this subjective determining ground claims universal validity, inasmuch as the judgment of taste "ascribes the satisfaction in an object to everyone."[103]

Where can one experience, find or invent a new *subjective universality* today? I believe that the various present experiences that the subject makes in its imaginary current interaction with the world always lack something important, which is a *real experience of time*. In our world of digital media, what comes to light is the man's deep need to stay in touch, to live in a world shared amongst and with one other (the World Wide Web), and to relate (to each other), to communicate in a common language.

However, this virtual domain lacks *a real aesthetics of time and the word*. The rehabilitation of aesthetics in particular calls for the recovery of the *temporal* dimension of life through a deepening of the aesthetics of the word (instead

---

102   I. Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment. Edited by Paul Guyer, Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment, § 1 The judgment of taste is aesthetic, Cambridge 2000, 89.

103   Ibid, 99.

of the image). It is about the taste for "grammar", the desire for connections, the interest in the distinction and the organization of reality, which can only be produced *by narrativity*. In order to create the connection between the particular and the general, the "time of narration" seems necessary today.

Today it also seems necessary to give the subjective experience of narrativity a new meaning and centrality. For Kant, the judgment of taste is also the effect of a particular view, an operation of the senses, which reaches from the particulate to the general without concept. The judgement of taste is looking for a rule, a law, because these rules and laws are not natural. One could also say that this aesthetic power of the judgment of taste, which can give meaning to life, can be realized through the discovery of the *logic of time*.

Following Lacan, one could say that past, present, future and memory are of linguistic nature. For Lacan, that means that the experience of temporality and its effects is an effect of language itself. Historical continuity depends on the acceptance of paternal authority, as Lacan says. In this sense he speaks of the "name of the father" as a linguistic (but ultimately as an ontological) function. When this master signifier breaks down, the human being is in danger of sliding into psychosis, in which even time no longer remains as an identity-structuring dimension. Schizophrenia is based on the failure to enter this symbolic order. It represents a collapse of language that brings with it a break in the experience of time. This means that only the logic of the narrative can unfold the meaning of experience and bring to light its (retroactive) truth.

In the configuration of our society, however, it is important to overcome the tendency to see image and word as merely contradicting one another. It thus seems necessary to give syntax a new meaning, or a new differentiated structure, namely, to arrive at *an aesthetics of language and time*, which, with the *aesthetics of the image and space*, realizes a kind of connection that may enable us to break out of the imaginary closed circle of virtual reality.

It is no coincidence that in contemporary art there is a return to graphs, to inscriptions, to words in pictures, which manifests itself as an enjoyment of the text, as the aesthetic enjoyment of a kind of readability of the world. It is a about positioning words in the picture, about the aesthetic search for an original semantics. Abstract art wanted to achieve this pure semantics by overcoming representations and shapes, in which words were only to remain as the titles of the works. But it has become increasingly clear that no signification emancipated from the signifier can exist without the meaning of a fundamental order, a basic syntax, that is, without a shared symbolic order, beyond the bad infinity of (digital) combinatorics.

Nowadays it seems that different contemporary artists (e.g. William Xerra, Johannes Zechner, Marco Nereo Rotelli, Hannes Priesch, Maurizio Nannucci,

Leo Zogmayer, Werner Hofmeister, Fritz Ganser, Markus Wilfling, Helga Chibidziura, etc.) feel compelled to incorporate the insurmountable experience of the word into their own works in order to bring the effectiveness of Scripture back into play. The ways of the Kabbalah, as well as the artistically designed initials of the missal and the breviary represent the prehistory of this religious possibility of a combination of words and images, a new religious calligraphy in a way. It is about a new appearance of connections as the texture of signifiers capable of representing a new syntactic order.

While the images express the constant circulation of commodities, the narrative embodies the transmission of meaning. While the imaginary order of the "time of the imaginary" offers timeless objects, the gift of narrative founds the subject in its historical singularity (or subjective universality). The narrative generates new worlds but no interchangeable products, since it invents the meaning of the event and does not simply represent something useful.

This is a *non-utilitarian* purposiveness ("purposiveness without an end") as a critical instance regarding the current relocation of aesthetics in the market system of Western society.

In this context, what would be the significance of the syntax, which should not only be understood as a purely technical theory of grammar but as the linguistic comprehensibility and readability of the world? The function of the words is not only to depict something, but also to describe an experience that had. We need words, not only to make ourselves understandable to others, but also to make ourselves understandable to ourselves.

The role of the syntax is to elaborate and structure human experience reflexively within the time of the narrative. Thus, it represents not just an arrangement of words and sentences but also the order of affects and the logic of meaning. The purposiveness of the narrative does not consist in the production of a world, but in aesthetic reflexivity that finds meaning and introduces it to the subject, who clothes meaning in a sensual phenomenon.

The narrative could be the "*second skin*" of the subject, which can act as a protection against an aestheticizing form of nihilism. It is not about the pure reflexivity of the mind or reason but about a sensual reflexivity without concept, which has its own syntax and logic that represents time in a special way. It is about the past, the present and the future (and the past future) of life, which always needs a syntax. To paraphrase Kant: "Language must be able to accompany all my ideas".

In connection with the narrative, could one attempt to call this sensual reflexivity a "temporal spatiality"? – A "temporal spatiality" beyond the dualism of sensuality and reason, which not only gives art objects an "aura" but also reveals a higher purposiveness? The logical order of the narrative is not a static

or abstract arrangement of events and words but a temporal development that does not take place against the background of a logic of the "space-image" but the "time-image".[104] While sensuality achieves a particular temporality through narrative, this narrated sensory experience could represent the place of that particular universality where the subject could find a possible sign, a singular call, and some orientation for its life.

It is said that Kafka had the habit of taking a walk in the park with Dora Dymant from Steglitz to Berlin. One morning in the early summer of 1923, just a few months before his death, now withdrawn from the world because of his tuberculosis, he met a little girl who was desperate and completely distraught. This grabbed his attention and compassion. Kafka did not hesitate to approach her and ask her why she was sad. The girl named Elsi replied that she had lost her doll.

As a result, Kafka compassionately invented a story to ease the suffering of the loss. The doll, the writer said, was not lost but simply set out on a long journey to get to know the world. Kafka spontaneously replied to the girl's skeptical reaction that he had received a letter from her. The girl was convinced, and Kafka took care in creating the letter between the girl and doll with as much seriousness and creativity as possible. Every day in the park, his reading of each letter took place aloud and like a pact and encountered an astonished and attentive listener.

In her stories, the doll explained that it would have been necessary for her to experience new things, to get to know the world and to meet new people, without wanting to cause her friend, whom she had left behind in Berlin, pain. According to Dora's statement, Kafka had executed the scripts with the utmost care, in a lively and precise prose, in the alchemy of an encounter full of secrets that took place with reliable regularity for three weeks. The last letters were like an epilogue designed to gently prepare the girl to say goodbye to the moment when the doll would disappear forever from the girl's life without causing trauma. In fact, the final split did not produce any imbalance.

If an affliction is fortunate enough to be part of a story, it might lose its unfortunate power in order to participate in a common cause. It is not a merely imaginary and phantasmatic transformation but the power of the shared Word, which gives things their name by leading them out of the ominous burden of mute silence. The Law of the Word and the grace of the story give the feeling of life continuity and a horizon in a way that does not simply dissolve it in the fuzziness of the emotion but gives it the perspective of believable and understandable meaning.

---

104   See G. Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image: Cinema 1*, London & New York. 2002; idem., *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, London & New York, 2005.

This is possible because the narrative produces a spatiotemporal deferral, i.e. the necessary "displacement" which – as is the case with anamorphosis – reconfigures the experience beyond the illusion of a direct and frontal encounter with the events. The "technical mediator does not randomly aim for an immediate emphasis, for real time (i.e. the temporal zero-point of the simultaneity between action and reaction), replacing the infinite a-chronicle of the babble with narrative syntax".[105]

In contrast, the narrative gives the subject time to enter and exit stories, gaining a relaxed and patient look at one's own and other people's lives. The time of the narrative is like a "gown of grace", a "second skin" that protects and collects in its drama the scattered pieces of human desolation, freeing them from their fossilization and weaving them back into the time of care and proximity. The question that should be asked both in the stories and in analysis is the question of the effectiveness of the word. In analysis, it becomes increasingly clear that the word treats and that the body speaks. Lacan exemplifies this question in his interrupted seminar *On the Names-of-the-Father*:

> The average person or man in the street does not seem terribly astonished by the effectiveness of this practice that occurs entirely through speech. And he is, in the end, quite right, for indeed it works, and it would seem that, in order to explain it, we need first but demonstrate its movement by working. To speak is already to go to the heart of psychoanalytic experience. Here it makes sense to first raise a question: What is speech? In other words, what are symbols?[106]

The significance of the word's effectiveness implies, but transcends, the performative meaning of language since it is a question of the possibility of the word and symbolization to *save* human life. This concerns not only the therapeutic process of analysis but also the significance of a divine revelation in words as it occurs in the Bible.

For centuries, the Bible represented the immense lexical, cultural and iconic wealth of the West. According to William Blake, the Old and the New Testament are "the great code of art"[107]. In his *Mimesis* (1946)[108] Erich Auerbach acknowledges the Bible and the Odyssey as the defining models of our culture,

---

105   F. Stoppa, La restituzione, Milano 2011, 216. The Italian original says: "Il mediatore tecnologico, non per caso, mira ad enfatizzare l'immediatezza, il tempo reale (ossia il tempo zero della simultaneità fra azione e reazione), sostituendo l'infinita sequenza a-cronica di cinguettii alla sintassi del racconto".

106   J. Lacan, On the Names-of-the-Father, 7.

107   "Jesus and his apostles and disciples were all artists, and the Old and New Testaments are the great code of art."(W. Blake, Complete Writings. With Variant Readings, Oxford 1972, 777).

108   E. Auerbach, Mimesis. Represented Reality in Western Literature, Princeton 2003.

and Northrop Frye looks at the *Scriptures in his The Great Code, the Bible and Literature* (1981)[109] as the universe in which Western literature and art operated up to the 18th Century and still operate.

The biblical word in its entirety can also be understood as the narrative of the word's efficacy in the people of Israel, as the place where various figures of the human experience make a potential everyday encounter with the "full word" that can bring about a real change in human life. In the biblical stories, in fact, the various embodiments, inscriptions, injuries, and imprints of the word onto the body of the believer are told, expressing ever-new locations of the symbolic.

Today it seems necessary to ask whether in this tradition Christianity can still be understood as a narrative of these incarnations of the word, in which the mortality and the vulnerability of the human can be discussed. As in Kafka's encounter with the doll, in which a childish pain could be treated by a charming correspondence, the "big code", namely, the Bible can be read as that religious and cultural *depositum* in which every wound, every yearning, every cry, every suffering quest for meaning and every word of discouragement can find a *symbol*, a narrative, a metaphor and a hospitable answer. It is a linguistic "seam" in which the special and contingent fractures and wounds can be sublated into a saving texture, illustrating the universal *Humanum*.

The works of the Italian artist Giovanni Bonaldi express a possible combination of images and words in which this effect of the sacred text manifests itself in its urgency and truth. They deal with the appearance of sacred manuscripts[110], of mysterious letters as temporal tables of an alliance between Judaism and Christianity, as hospitable arks of the lost, fighting against disappearance and oblivion. The Torah is portrayed by the artist as a shrine or chalice, capable of receiving human injuries and incisions.

To show this possibility on the threshold of images and words, object and subject, I would like to refer to another artist, Emilio Isgrò, who invented the "Theory of Over Coating". He developed his poetics in Milan and Venice, which abolishes any redundancy while (almost) protecting a fragment of the miracle of the word. In his paintings, he does not produce cuts in the canvas (like Lucio Fontana), but crossing out words.

This not only means that a (crossed-out) language should be received in the images. By erasing, Isgrò rather wants to show that language has *almost* gone into what is foreign to it but that there *still* remains something of it. "There is a

---

109   N. Frye, The Big Code. The Bible and Literature, Toronto / Buffalo / London 2006.

110   G. Bonaldi, L'origine tesa – The Tension of Origin, Milano 2003; G. Bonaldi, L'ospitalità dell'Arca, Milano 2006.

time to cross out words and there is a time to regain them," the artist writes in his book *La cancellatura e altre soluzioni*.[111] This erasure thus does not intend to reject the word but rather to unearth its lost dimensions beyond any artificial "special effect".

Without suppressing the despondency, the fears and the suffering, it knows how to inscribe them into a wonderful texture, in which the imaginary, the symbolic and the real seem to unite in a precarious and wonderful equilibrium and the variations of the pulsating common human shine, if only for the contingent act of reading. These are indeed "narratives of tangibility"[112] that generate those joyful encounters that, as Spinoza said, reveal the meaning of the whole and life in the intensity of a momentary and fleeting vision.

They are like those "moonbeams by sunlight" (Musil), which spread over what is most sensitive and precarious and illuminate the invisible interweaving of the fabric of the world. It is not for nothing that Spinoza defines this "being seized" as *amor Dei intellectualis*, which is able to understand the natural connection of modes and attributes, which translates into an affective relationship with what exists. In the uncertain time of the aestheticization of the world, that is, in the contingency and inconsistency of temporal shapes, which offer no ultimate meaning, the "this face was transfigured, becoming peaceful, deceptively beautiful, and radiant, by a single thought! For what if it were God Himself who was devaluing the world? Would it not then again suddenly acquire meaning and desire? And would He not be forced to devalue it, if He were to come closer to it by the tiniest step? And would not perceiving even the anticipatory shadow of this already be the one real adventure?"[113]

The reciprocal *gift of the narratives* could (precisely because of their "untimeliness") represent a contemporary subjective experience of the "sad affects" in the post-secular epoch and introduce them into it. This aesthetic "invention of the ordinary" or "practice of everyday life", which is narrative, could be an opportunity to overcome today's aestheticization of the lifeworld. It represents an attempt to find narrative antibodies against the "excessive minimalism" of digital communication in order to free oneself from the atemporal and a-syntactic placenta of images for experiencing a new, shared historical linguisticity.

---

111   E. Isgrò, La cancellatura e altre soluzioni, Milano 2007, 78.

112   K. Appel, Christianity as a New Humanism. Second Transition – From the Contingency of Existence to the Body of God, 27.

113   R. Musil, The Man Without Qualities II. From the Posthumous Papers, Translated by Burton Pike, New York 1961, 162–163.
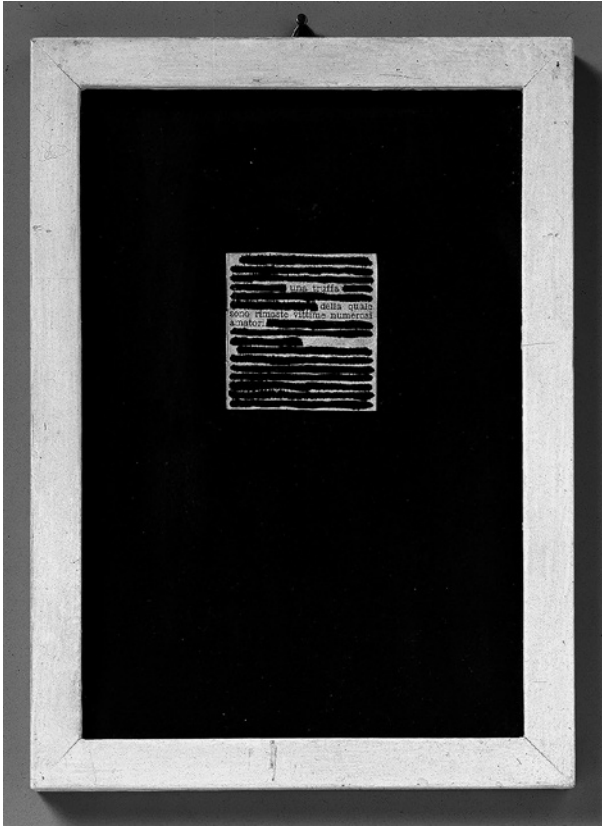
Fig. 3.1   Emilio Isgrò, Cancellatura (Erasure), 22 × 16cm,
                Chinese ink on newspaper on a light cardboard box,
                Private Collection, Milan, 1964.
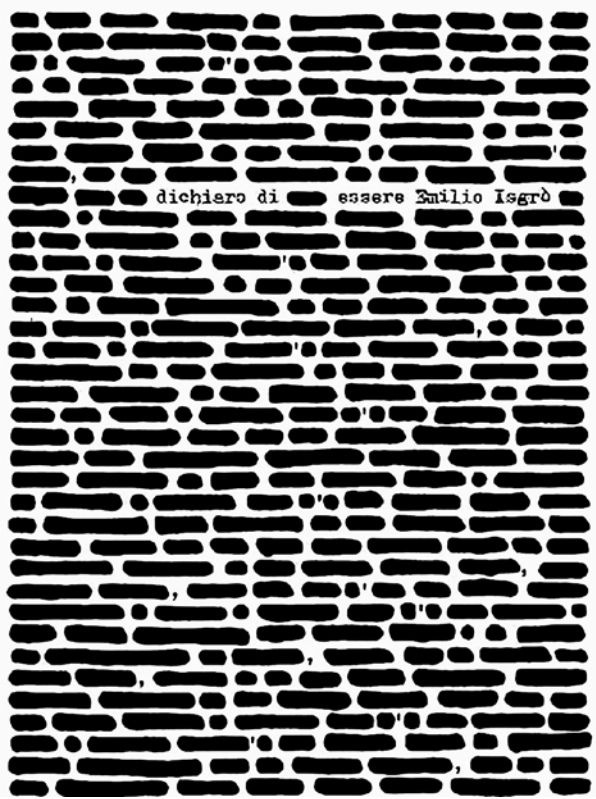
Fig. 3.2   Emilio Isgrò, Dichiaro di essere Emilio Isgrò
                (I declare that I am Emilio Isgrò), 400 × 287cm,
                Acrylic on canvas mounted on wood, Collection
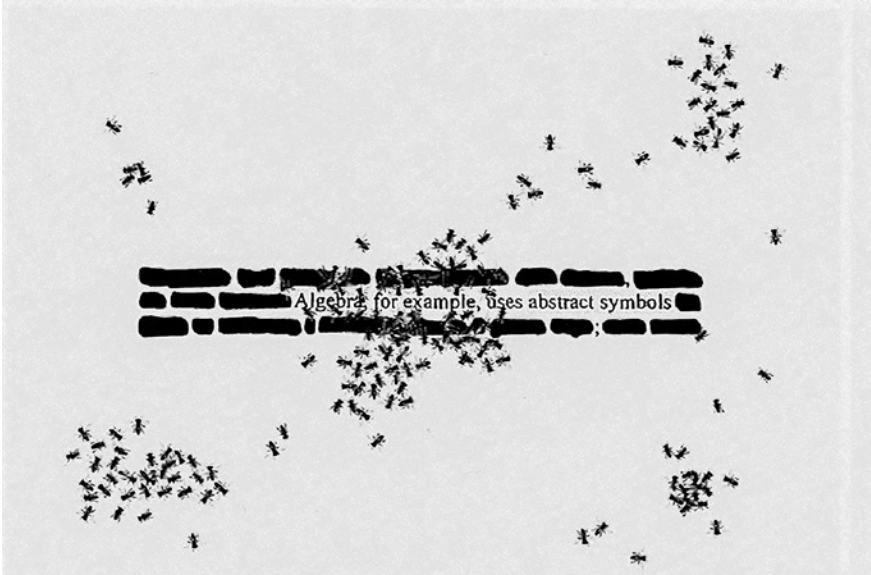   Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci,
                Prato, 2008.

Fig. 3.3   Emilio Isgrò, Algebra, 70 × 100cm, Acrylic on canvas mounted on wood, Private
                Collection, Milan, 2010.

The Price of Prayer

Kurt Appel

1.   Prayer and God's Heavenly Palace

The question of prayer, in my view, is the most difficult and fundamental theological issue of our time.

In his book on religion, Jacques Derrida points out that there is no place for prayer within the conceptual worlds of onto-theology, whose last representative is Hegel.[1] In fact, the symbolic order that has prevailed for centuries if not millennia that centers around God through prayer, seems to have collapsed.

In his great commentary on the apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans, U. Wilckens writes that Paul's real reason for composing this text was that in a situation in which the unity of the gospel was at stake, Paul wanted to assure himself of the prayer of the church in Rome.[2] The mighty voice of the Roman congregation was to penetrate into God's heavenly palace, prompting him to prioritize the apostle's now reinforced prayer.

If we imagine a cartography of prayer, then at first sight we appear to be confronted with two different orders. On the one hand, there is our earth and the worshiper, or the community of worshipers. On the other hand, there is "heaven", the addressee of these prayers, which is influenced by them and intervenes correctively, helpfully and sometimes punitively on this earth. It is never certain whether an event is due to prayer or occurs or would have occurred quasi "naturally" and it is also unclear how the temporality of prayer and the eternity of God relate to one another. This led the wily Leibniz to suppose that our prayers have already been factored in the providence of God.

If we take a closer look at the spatial order of prayer we find that there were always places, times, spheres and individuals where heaven and earth converged. God's heavenly palace extended to the priestly and parental blessing, to ecclesiastical and liturgical buildings and times, to books such as the *Psalter* and the *Breviary*, to musical productions and ultimately to the hearts of the people praying.

---

1   J. Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge. The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone", in: J. Derrida and G. Vattimo, Religion, Stanford 1998.

2   U. Wilckens, Der Brief an die Römer. 3. Teilband. Röm 12–16 (EKK VI/3), Zürich / Braunschweig ²1989, 128–130.

Later I will come back to the fact that the geography of heaven and prayer is more complex than implied in this introductory sketch. But for now what is most important is an experience that has had so far too little impact on theology and philosophy – Nietzsche in all his genius is an exception – and even less in psychoanalysis (with certain exceptions such as Lacan), historical research and sociology. I am referring to the massive trauma suffered by the west through the loss of the heavenly palace and the associated emptiness of prayer. This trauma, subject to brilliant literary depiction, first in embryonic form in the work of Jean Paul[3] and later at full tilt in the writings of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, is bound up with a profound upheaval in the symbolic order (outlined in this volume by Deibl and Guanzini). This order was previously geared towards a transcendent "you" that was localized and centered in the terminus of "heaven". But with the loss of the heavenly palace it began to circle around an emptiness, one that threatens to devour all potential for meaning.

I suspect one of the reasons why the West is often regarded with hostility in many so-called premodern cultures is that this emptiness inspires fear. In the West the act of prayer, the foundation of understanding and doing in many cultures, has been cut off from its addressee. We might also make the passing observation that the Catholic Church clings to a concrete localization of the divine – for instance in the form of the tabernacles that can be found in every Catholic church building – which distinguishes it from Protestantism and may actually represent the true chasm between the two denominations today.

Scripture includes a book that tells with unsurpassed drama of the loss of the divine addressee, namely the Book of Ezekiel.[4] The introductory chapter relates how Ezekiel, to whom "the heavens were opened" (Ez 1:1), beholds the glory of YHWH, the ruler above the cherubs; a second encounter with the cherubs and the glory of YHWH follows in chapters 8–10. This time the heaven is not opened in the plain of the river Chebar in Babylon. Rather, the prophet is transported to the temple in Jerusalem through a vision. So the localization is more complex than in the introductory chapter, where the heavenly palace

---

3   See Jean Paul's famous "The Dead Christ Proclaims That There is No God", under: http://www. gutenberg.org/files/36164/36164-h/36164-h.htm.

4   An impressive commentary has been provided by M. Greenberg, Ezekiel 1–20, New Haven 2007, 193–239. The Exodus of the Presence of God from the Temple prepares its destruction. The following earthly judgment on Jerusalem and its temple is already celestially prescribed. However, the Ezekiel book emphasizes that there is a – at least diminished – presence of God in the exile community for which YHWH is a "small sanctuary" (Ezekiel 11:16). This exile community will be given a "heart of flesh" instead of the "heart of stone" (Ezekiel 11:19) so that YHWH will be their God and Israel will be His people.

begins to touch the prophet in the plain. In this case the precondition for the encounter between heaven and earth is a transportation, a dis-placement of the prophet, who relates how, in "visions of God he took me to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the inner court" (Ez 8:3). The heavenly palace connects with the real site of the temple in Jerusalem, not directly, but through the vision of the ruptured (dis-located) prophet.

The scene is thus located between heaven and earth, dream and reality, Babylon and Jerusalem and future and past in the sense that, within the framework of the vision, the prophet looks back on a future event (the killing of the idolaters). But the thrust of the vision is the abbondonement from the temple by the glory of YHWH. The setting is depicted at an agonisingly slow pace:

> Then the glory of YHWH departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of YHWH's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. (Ez 10:18–19)

This narrative is followed by the nightmarish vision of Jerusalem as a pot in which the victims of the ruling class's violence and finally this ruling class itself are cooked. This scene is connected with the judgment on Pelatiah ("YHWH destroys a remnant"), which contrasts with the prophecy of a new heart of flesh for the exiles, thus for another "remnant" of Israel which may – perhaps – not be "handed down". Following this interruption the attention turns once again to the glory of YHWH enthroned above the cherubs:

> Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. The glory of YHWH went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God. Then the vision I had seen went up from me (Ez 11:22–24)

It almost seems as though the "glory of YHWH" stops once again to bid farewell before definitively vanishing from the temple and thus from the earthly world, that is, to disappear from the human *sphere*. We have to read through many more chapters of the Book of Ezekiel to discover that the glory of YHWH returns to the temple (Ez 43:4), but this theme remains tied to a visionary future that, like the new Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation, points beyond terrestrial space-time.

2. Excursus: Schelling's Attempts to Rediscover the Divine Addressee

This overthrow of the symbolic order prompts us to wonder whether the end of the world might go hand-in-hand with the end of prayer and with the vanishing of the divine throne and the glory of YHWH from the human field of vision. They appear to have been replaced by an infinite melancholy, traces of which we can detect in present-day pop music but also in great popular narratives and mythologies of the twentieth century such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.[5]

One philosopher, in particular, has struggled against this loss with tremendous intellectual vigour, though it is probably no coincidence that there is no definitive edition of the key texts in which he strives to salvage the divine palace. I am referring to Schelling, who as a forerunner of Kierkegaard, Rosenzweig, Pareyson, and the personal-dialogic works of Buber and Ebner, struggled in what is known as his "positive philosophy" for a God to whom one can pray[6]. Hegel was identified by him as his paradigmatic adversary in this regard. He believed Hegel had sublated the division between earthly and heavenly world, still viewed in Kant's work as the dichotomy of freedom and nature and of the moral and physical world, into a dialectics. At this point I would like to devote a brief excursus to Schelling, though I am keenly aware that there is no space to examine his philosophy exhaustively.[7] But we make a brief digression in mentioning it here, because, despite its intellectual magnificence, it exemplifies, in my opinion, the failure of restoring the *heavenly* palace of God back into the human field of vision on the basis of old notions of *direct* access to the divine.

Catholic Theology from A. Günther through H.U. von Balthasar to W. Kasper gratefully embraced Schelling's "attempt at God", though they have often tried

---

5 Tolkien's Middle Earth is a world abandoned by the gods, who have created an insurmountable intermediate space between their residence and the earthly realm. This is why, despite the book's religious foundation, there are no prayers and the gods merely return, as embodied in Gandalf and Saruman, in a transformed, weak and ambivalent form. The associated loss, symbolized especially in the doomed elves, lends this work a profoundly melancholic atmosphere, which may have helped make it one of the most-read and most-discussed books of the twentieth century.

6 A special position is occupied here by Cacciari who, very much like Schelling, strives to imagine the history of the human being. How far even the God of prayers is from being involved in this history would be worth its own investigation. In any case, see I. Guanzini, L'origine e l'inizio. Hans Urs von Balthasar e Massimo Cacciari, Pisa 2012.

7 I tried to provide a precise reconstruction of the idea of God in Schelling's late philosophy in: K. Appel, "Personalität und Alleinheit Gottes. Versuch einer Deutung der Schellingschen Vernunftekstasis", in: K. Müller and F. Meier-Hamidi (eds.), Persönlich und alles zugleich? Theorien der Alleinheit und christliche Gottesrede (Fides et ratio), Regensburg 2010, 81–100.

to pass over his provocative aspects and forced Schelling into a theological framework anchored in traditional metaphysics.[8] Thus their intellectual efforts generated little of a truly novel character. Twentieth-century theology in particular then inserted Schelling's trinitarian ideas, and those of Hegel, into the trope of an often hypertrophic trinity of love – without "forgetting" to admonish Hegel for being overly attached to temporal reality.

Schelling's *Philosophie der Offenbarung* ("Philosophy of Revelation") has been available for some time now in the clearly structured and readable original version, evidently corrected by Schelling himself.[9] In light of the originality and sophistication of his ideas, but also his profound efforts to get to grips with the Kantian critique of reason and religion, I believe this text, if read in conjunction with the *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie* ("Outline of Purely Rational Philosophy"), is superior to many contemporary theological attempts to think about God. It deserves to be seen as one of the most serious and brilliant attempts to conceptualize the personal God of prayer. But there is a problem in Schelling's late philosophy, namely that of language and the associated approach to the issue of God. Despite the insights generated by Kant's transcendental dialectic and despite the experience of the "lack of God"[10] (Hölderlin), Schelling tries to achieve direct access to the absolute through his doctrine of potencies.[11]

At the end of the *Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie*, informed by the trope of Kant's transcendental ideal, Schelling arrives at the concept of the absolute. As the "being actu Actus", it is characterized by the fact that it is "placed beyond its concept",[12] and thus "emerges as the true (existing) lord of being (of the world), as the personal, true God".[13] This conception is underpinned by the idea that, through its realization as idea in individuo, the transcendental ideal rejects itself as all-encompassing unity (omnitudo realitatis). It absolves itself of its own rationally accessible concept of the highest essence.

---

8   Kasper criticizes Schelling's idea of the trinity, for example, for its overly historical connotations. See W. Kasper, Das Absolute in der Geschichte. Philosophie und Theologie der Geschichte in der Spätphilosophie Schellings, Mainz 1965.

9   F.W.J. Schelling, Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung (2 vols) (Philosophische Bibliothek 445), Hamburg 1992.

10   See J. Deibl, "Der Entzug heiliger Namen", in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 4/2011, 523–550.

11   See K. Appel, Zeit und Gott. Mythos und Logos der Zeit im Anschluss an Hegel und Schelling, Paderborn 2008.

12   F.W.J. Schelling, "Darstellung der reinrationalen Philosophie", in: Schelling, Sämmtliche Werke. Ed. by Karl F. August Schelling. First section: 10 vols. [=I–X]; second section: 4 vols. [=XI–XIV]. Stuttgart and Augsburg 1856–1861: Cotta. XI 253–572, here 563.

13   F.W.J. Schelling, "Darstellung", XI 564.

For Schelling, the God of prayer, for which he coins the succint phrase "person seeks person",[14] demands an ekstasis of reason, that is, the cessation of reason's attempts to locate itself through theoretical and practical encounters with the world.[15] This is associated with a kenotic turn away from the peculiar universality of reason towards the radically singular, which is what the God of Eschaton would be – a God never to be apprehended by reason.

The question, however, is whether Schelling's work contains any equivalent of the multifarious linguistic ruptures that Hölderlin sought to bring into poetry, Hegel into dialectics through the trope of double negation and later Heidegger, Derrida and Badiou into thinking the event. Through the trope of reason's rational self-sublation for the sake of the dignity of the contingent sphere, which is the vital frame of reference within which personal prayer can occur – what kind of prayer would merely express general and unaddressed thoughts? – Schelling departs from the highways of classical metaphysics. But we might wonder whether his philosophy undermines its own goals by falling back on metaphysical issues and figures of thought, which are distinguished by a direct orientation of thought towards being, a being conceptualized as presentable and whose essence does not lie in any relocation or displacement. An example of this tendency, occuring particularly in Schelling's Weltalterphilosophie (Philosophy of ages of the world), is the desperate search for first causes, for principles and for a positivizable beginning, something that Kant has problematized in his transcendental dialectic.

Conversely it might be objected that in his positive philosophy, contrary to unmediated access to being as defined later by Heidegger and his followers as the "metaphysics of presence" or "ontic thought in light of presence", Schelling pursues a consistently eschatological approach. This orientation finds expression in sentences such as "The starting point of philosophy is thus that which will be, in other words the absolutely future dimension".[16] Schelling's philosophical language, however, ultimately aims directly at the coming God, who will have been brought to presence. This may entail a failure to fully consider that in post-Enlightenment times the heavenly palace is concealed and that even for many people who have retained their faith, or remnants of it, God himself can no longer directly be localized either in language or in the spaces and eras of our world.

---

14   F.W.J. Schelling, "Darstellung", XI 566.
15   There are thus good reasons for A. Franz's suspicion that Schelling's ideas here are close to those of St. Augustine. See A. Franz, Philosophische Religion. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit den Grundlegungsproblemen der Spätphilosophie Schellings, Würzburg 1992.
16   F.W.J. Schelling, Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung, 24.

For the question arises whether God does not have to be "liberated" from a metaphysically understood beginning. The sympathy apparent within theology for the "big bang" seems to involve a desire to preserve a kind of metaphysical remnant, but attempts to build on theories of this kind seem highly fragile, as evident not least in natural scientists' present-day efforts to rid themselves of the "big bang". Has the first being vanished from the horizon, a being that has steered the world since eternity? Following the disconnection of the heavenly palace from the immanence of the worldly context, doubts arise as to whether a direct line, be it as causa prima or as the transcentental foundation of being, runs between heaven and earth. Last but not least, even the question becomes problematic as to whether and to what extent the logos actually encapsulates reality or leads at a void.[17]

The current deep crisis of both Protestant and Catholic theology, which no longer seem to have anything to say to the world, and (within the Catholic realm) the crisis of Eucharistic worship, which was once the heart of the Catholic faith, seem to be two of many symptoms of the loss of a locatable God. The same goes for the effort, evident far beyond Catholicism, to encounter God in sites of pilgrimage in order to preserve the localization of prayer, at least in places of singular renown. With the loss of the intersections of heaven and earth, our conception of space and time is also becoming ever more leveled out and virtualized because it lacks a center and features nothing but *self-dissolving peripheries.*

There are two critical issues that require illumination. The *first* is the *price/prize/praise of mortality*[18]. It is in fact prayer, as will be developed below, that runs counter to the idea of a fusion of finite subjects with the infinite (whatever this may mean in concrete terms) subjectivity of God. To put it another way: when prayer is addressed directly to God without detour or relocation the idea of union with the divine seems to hold sway. But when the addressee can no longer aim directly at his other but can reach him only via the detour of self-relocation, the idea of a departure from the self as center of power (from the self as the *first* person) arises, and thus the idea of mortality. In the first section of this book the accent lay on the price that the human being must "pay" for its vulnerability. This contrasted with the desire to make a bet with God, to be able to gain immortality by one's own efforts and to turn this bet into a driving force of history, even at the price of a relapse into meaningless nothingness. In

---

17 See K. Heinrich, Von der Schwierigkeit nein zu sagen, Frankfurt / Basel 1982.

18 As already stated at the beginning of the book the word "Preis" in the German title "Preis der Sterblichkeit" implies both the price that a thing costs and the prize of honour that one receives, and thirdly, the praise that one gives to somebody.

this last part, after the passage through the crisis symptoms of language (Deibl) resp. of the symbolic orders (Guanzini), an accent should be placed on "praise", on the fact that prayer is also an experience of de-subjectification, posing the question of whether *prayer* is not in fact also *praise for the gift of mortality* (see chapter 3).

The *second* key issue is the *temporal form of prayer.* It was pointed out in my first essay that the temporal form of Christianity is an *anachronistic* one, that the Christian does not coincide with any era but exists within the displacements and ruptures of history. An essential expression of this was under the heading of "epilogue", which expressed the fact that Christian existence begins at the point where historical tropes have run out of steam, where even the contrast between death and life can no longer claim validity as an ultimate reality, where the world as it previously was is obliterated, that is, left behind and reconfigured. With reference to Musil and thus building on part one, but also taking into account the contributions of Deibl and Guanzini, it is the aim to tease out *how prayer is bound up in an essential way with the "devaluation of all images" and with the new symbolic order to which this gives rise* (see chapter 5).

In light of the key insights sketched above, in the following survey it will be aimed to provide a detailed interpretation of two Bible passages, namely Psalm 36 (chapter 3) and Mk 6:30–46 (chapter 5), which are punctuated with philosophical reflections (chapter 4 and chapter 6). With the aid of these texts light will be shed on paradigmatic acts of prayer, not least in order to give us the space to examine the addressee and content of prayers. The many different forms of prayer and its various facets cannot be exhaustively addressed. But it will be demonstrated how much prayer and new humanism, as well as prayer and the speaking of God, are mutually entangled. This affirms the pleasing idea expressed, among others, by J.B. Metz, that theology is first and foremost a speaking to rather than a speaking of God.[19]

3.   Prayer as Evocation of the Divine Name and Glorification of YHWH (Ps 36)

One of the most remarkable psalms in the Psalter, the great Book of Prayer of Israel and the Church, is Psalm 36. It contains profound reflections on the essence of prayer. I refer the reader here to the outstanding interpretation of

---

19   See the key remarks by J.B. Metz on prayer in: J.B. Metz, "Ermutigung zum Gebet", in: Metz, Mystik der offenen Augen. Wenn Spiritualität ausbricht, ed. by J. Reikerstorfer, Freiburg 2011, 98–114.

this psalm by N. Lohfink.[20] The following translation of Ps 36 thus borrows from his:

1   To the choirmaster. Of David, the servant of YHWH
----
2   The whispering of infidelity to the sinner –
     (it speaks) within the space of *my* (own) heart.

     Never (is there) any fear of God (*elohim*)
     before his eyes

3   For he has flattered himself (too much) in his own eyes (for) his *iniquity*
     (*'āwōn*) to be found out, (so that it might be) hated.
4   The words of his mouth (bring) *mischief* (against the poor) (*'āven*) and
     deceit (*mirmāh*);
     he is no longer capable of willing good through wisdom.

5   Thus he will (continue to) plot mischief while on his bed,
     to travel a way that is not good,
     and will not reject *evil* (*ra'*).
----
6   O YHWH, your *faithfulness/grace* (*chesed*) (reaches) to the heavens,
     your *trustworthiness* (*'emûnāh*) to the clouds.

7   Your *righteousness* (*zedāquāh*) like (as far as) the mountains of God,
     your *judgments* (*mišpāt*) (press as deep as) the great primeval flood,
     human and animal you constantly **rescue**, o YHWH.
----
8   How precious is your faithfulness (*chesed*), o God (*elohim*),
     so that all people take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

9   They feast on the fat of your house,
     and the river of your delights (Eden) – from that you permit them to
     drink.

---

20   See N. Lohfink, "Introspection and Cosmic Mysticism. Psalm 36", in: In the Shadow of Your
      Wings: New Readings of Great Texts from the Bible. Translated by L.M. Maloney, Collegeville
      2003, 98–110. See also E. Zenger, Dein Angesicht suche ich. Neue Psalmenauslegungen,
      Freiburg / Basel / Vienna 1998, 82–90; T. Lorenzin, I salmi, Milan 2001.

10   For with you is the fountain of life;
      in your light *we* see light.

11   O continue your faithfulness (*chesed*) to those who know you,
      And your righteousness to those of upright heart.

12   May the feet of pride not tread upon me,
      or the hand of the sinner drive me away.

----

13   **There** the practitioners of evil lie prostrate (35:8);
      they are thrust down (35:5) and unable to rise (35:11).

Ps 36 builds on the preceding psalm in two respects. First, Ps 35 ends with the supplicant vowing to murmur the glorification of YHWH all day long, which is then realized in Ps 36. Second, at the start of Ps 36, David is referred to in the singular as the *servant of YHWH*, which establishes a direct connection to Ps 35:28, in which David is identified through this terminology. A contextual link can also be observed in the fulfillment of the promised glorification in Ps 35, and second through the theme of *enemies*. In Ps 35, as in sub-collection 35–41 as a whole, the topic of *persecution* is to the fore. The supplicant of Ps 35 is confronted with a superior force of malicious and arrogant enemies out to kill him. In Ps 36 the situation worsens in the sense that the enemy who was rallying his forces against the worshiper in Ps 35 has moved even closer.

The place in which hostility is now to be found is in fact one's *own heart*. It is from there, "offshore", that we hear a perverse oracle featuring a melange of guilt, violence against the weak and poor, treachery and wickedness. All the external enemy's characteristics that harried the worshiper in Ps 35 have moved inwards, such that the adversary described there emerges as the projection of the supplicant's own mind, emotions and affections.

The world in which the speaker of Ps 36 finds himself has shrivelled down to a tiny speck: the self-immured heart. In this constricted space there can be no room for any alterity. It is filled up entirely with the "self" and its projections. These, moreover, can no longer be recognized as such – because there is no possible place of self-distancing. In German the fear of God can be conveyed by the word *Ent-setzen*, which expresses a disturbance in the very redoubt in which man has settled in order to shut himself off from his surroundings. So what is now occurring throughout the day is not the glorification of YHWH indicated in Ps 35:28 but rather a total – spatially as well as temporally –seamless, immanent machinery of self-ish malignancy that knows no "outside" and no depth. One can add the observation that the four denominations of evil project the

four ends of the earth onto the soul, thus reinforcing the impression of something that is closed off. It is hard to imagine a more powerful expression of Augustine's "incurvatus in se".

With this flourish the psalm might have reached its end. But it continues. To be precise, the first part right after the title (v. 1), which in four verses sketches the aforementioned utterly depressing scene, is followed by two other parts along with a kind of epilogue. The third portion, like the first, consists of four verses and thirty-six words, so that the psalm exhibits a clearly framed center. This generates the following structure: The heading in verse 1, which extends the narrative arc to the preceding psalm, is followed by the first main section, which depicts the internally contorted heart as the precant's true enemy (vv. 2–5). Between this and the third section – as I have mentioned, both use thirty-six words as well as the term "God" (*elohim*) – the actual center of the psalm, consisting of two verses and sixteen words, is inserted.

The central section of the psalm begins immediately with the tetragrammaton YHWH and also ends with it. In analogy to the four words used to describe the enemy in the first section, four words are selected to represent YHWH, namely *faithfulness (grace), trustworthiness, righteousness* and *judgment.* Notably, the avowal of the *righteousness* of YHWH fulfils the promise made in Ps 35 to murmur his *righteousness* all day, while also establishing a close relationship to the supplicant himself who, in Ps 35, grants joy to those who want his *righteousness* (35:27).

So while there was an immense chasm between YHWH and the worshiper in the first section, in the second section a new relationship is established. This is all the more remarkable because there is no path leading from part one to part two. The divine name entails a totally new approach, for even if the tetragrammaton is the location of an appeal, the supplicant of the first part is not its initiator. In the first part there was a sober account of the situation of the self-incarcerated sinner, from whose heart emerged a non-locatable voice of the breach of faith. The second part radically alters the entire scenario: It is a *different* voice that arises and interrupts the external description as well as the oracle of self-projection from vv. 2–6.

This *different* voice, which relies on the unsayable tetragrammaton whose call begins with an interruption of the voice, a pause, a silence and an awareness of the unsayable, expands to assume a cosmic angle of vision. Instead of the four words manifesting the self-contained perspective of the oracle at the center of the heart, a new immeasurably broad landscape comes into view. God's communion extends far beyond the earthly realm to heaven, his trustworthiness to the clouds. After the visible panorama has unfolded upwards, the same thing happens with the architecture of the cosmos. Righteousness

extends to the mountains of God, and here we should think not just of their height but also of their roots, which extend infinitely deeper even than the immense roots of the trees.

The next step creates a connection between space and time. The mountains' immeasurably deep fundaments are further deepened so that they extend all the way to the primeval flood on which the whole world, including the mountains, is built. The gaping chaos of the old world is touched by the law of God and stripped of its power of death, as the next sentence indicates: "human and animal you (constantly) rescue, o YHWH". The spatial horizon of the voice extends to that which "is" beyond all being. The same applies to the temporal horizon, which transcends the sphere of death as the deepest expression of the boundless chaos, insofar as YHWH rescues everything from it. This salvation extends not (only) to the supplicant, or Israel, or humanity, but encompasses every living thing. With the evocation of this force of rescue, which pervades the cosmos from "heaven" to the "primeval flood", in other words from *eschaton* to *proton*, the hymn to YHWH reaches its climax and can pass into the renewed enunciation of the nameless name. Between God and God or, better, between YHWH and YHWH, the entire cosmos is paced off and becomes a part of praise that culminates in the confession of saving grace for the sake of all mortal existence.

In the third section the addressee shifts. It is no longer the explicit name of YHWH that is invoked, but the general appellation "God" (*elohim*). Thus, what follows, is a supplement to a sequence that is already self-contained. After the silence necessarily associated with the tetragrammaton, a new appeal to God begins. The motif of *faithfulness* (*grace*), which already introduced the form of the name of YHWH in the central section, is singled out here. This leads the worshiper to two crucial places that enable him to recall himself through a recapitulation of history. The first is the temple in Zion featuring the cherubs, whose wings shield the human being, the second the Garden of Eden. Here we shift from God's comprehensive expansion throughout space into the vast realm of time. The third part opens with the *eschaton*. At the end of days, as we know from Isaiah and Micha, human beings, far beyond Israel, will flood to Zion and thus to the temple as the place of the cherubs.

This image is indicated in v. 8 before immediately turning into the *proton* in the next verse. The specific wording of this passage – "stream of joys" – evokes the name "Eden", in other words the Garden of Paradise. Temple and Paradise are connected through the motif of the shared meal, in other words the feast, which extends from *eschaton* to *proton*. In v. 10 the feast is associated with the *life* and *light* of God. God is the sun of righteousness, radiating through the entirety of the cosmos all the way down to the primeval flood, in

other words to death-pervaded Sheol. But the crucial point seems not to be simply a rescue from death, as Lohfink thinks, but rather the Cosmic Feast, which signifies precisely Divine salvation that reaches to death. So it is less a matter of salvation from death than the incorporation of death into the great feast, which leads to the fountain of life and the vision of God. It is of decisive importance that this vision is no longer experienced by the isolated heart immersed in the prayer, but by a "we" that binds the worshiper to Israel, to all humankind, to all life, and to God Himself.

The last two verses of the third part, which again revolve around motifs of the beginning (heart, righteousness, sinner), return to the topic of *knowledge*. God is to extend his fellowship to those who know him. If we consider the intimate dimension of this verb (*jedah*), which in Hebrew also means sexual intercourse, it becomes understandable that one of the purposes of the Psalm is the worshiper's and – in light of the "we" – the mortal world's intimate fellowship with God. In the opening the worshiper knew nothing of this mortality – "Never (is there) any *fear of God* before his eyes" (v. 2) – and he imagined himself to be untouchable and invulnerable. In contrast, having been *ousted* (*ent-setzt*) from his own opaque self-reflection by the divine name, the worshiper can now bring his mortal existence into fellowship with God and celebrate this ousting. However, the worshiper is still warned about the pride that lurks before the heart of arrogance, threatening to overwhelm him as it did for Cain. The "driving away" that might occur at the hands of the sinner (v. 12) is reminiscent of the expulsion from paradise, which is executed this time by the proud heart itself, which considers itself to be invulnerable.

The final verse (v.13) seems to be an inorganic conclusion. It corresponds to the heading (v. 1) within the symmetrical structure of the psalm. The words "lie prostrate", "thrust down" and "rise" forge an even closer link with the preceding psalm (35:5, 8, 11). But more significant is that the breaking of those who do not know death takes place in a "there", which brings us to the second enigmatic core of the psalm. The first was in the center and referred to by the name of YHWH, which framed this center as addressee and interrupted the first part. In the closing verse the reader of the psalm is confronted with the fact that the "there" cannot be placed anywhere. It may refer to the temple and to paradise or to the fellowship with God. But if we consider the function of v. 13 as a hinge within the psalm collection 35–41,[21] an even more radical interpretation suggests itself, one that is crucial to the dynamics of the prayer: the "there" refers to the entire psalm or to the psalm collection as such, that is, it points to the act of praying itself. At the beginning we could hear the placeless voice

---

21   See E. Zenger, Dein Angesicht suche ich, 88–90.

of the perverse oracle, whereas here the voice is, so to speak, the voice of the text, of the Psalter itself. It is the voice of "heaven" – the heavenly palace in which the Psalter is sung, making it the true location of heaven or, if we look more closely at the psalm, the place in which heaven, earth and the primeval flood come together and the self-reflecting subject is dis-placed and set free.

The psalm identifies two enigmatic points that must be related to one another and are linked by the motif of rescue, namely the tetragrammaton YHWH and the "there". The latter refers to the divine name, which is the focal point of the prayer, the entire Psalter and the world assembled there. The heavenly palace can thus arise precisely because of the opening of the heart, which is set in motion by the voice of the Psalter and is aligned with the divine name. This name, however, persists as a rupture within the text and manifests itself through the collapse of the proud subject that imagines itself to be immortal. As a result, the entire psalm, at least on a canonical reading, tends towards a silence, one that indicates the prayer's ultimate destination. The prayer builds up, so to speak, an overwhelming excess of images and yet takes leave of them through the "eloquent" silence of the divine name, which indicates the death of all the worshiper's conceptual worlds and into whose intimacy the precant returns. Here the name of YHWH is linked with glorification, which is no longer uttered by the old, isolated subject of the supplicant, but by a *different* voice that *sublates* the first.

4.   Openings: Leibniz, Kant and Hegel or Openness as Monad, Self-Affecting and World-Encounter

Psalm 36 transports the worshiper to the limits of the cosmos which has been separated from all images and projections, opening up the possibility of prayer beyond introspection and manipulation. The question, that, therefore, arises is whether within the cosmos, within the symbolic order of our time, there is a place for the opening and interruption that YHWH signifies. The second chapter addressed the work of Schelling, who sought to tease out the singularity of God.

Following the thought trajectory of Psalm 36, one could say that Schelling is ultimately concerned with the final revelation of the name of YHWH, which is associated with the end of being, whether as a subject or as a substance, but that he perhaps avoided the ultimate consequence of this rupture for language and thought. In this section we enter into a dialogue with Leibniz, Kant and Hegel. There is one thing that all these thinkers have in common, namely their rejection of the naturalistic narrative of the world which was already underway during their era.

This narrative is bound up with the disappearence of the heavenly palace. It is an account without true past or future, a narrative that unfolds in the immediacy of meaningless now-moments. Post-modernity was characterized as the end of grand narratives but what confronts us now is perhaps the most monstrous story of all eras, namely the extinguishment of the universe through entropic hypothermia. Dawkins & Co. – or should we say the conglomeration of atoms that are then given the functional designation of Dawkins, etc? – are carrying on a tradition that ultimately goes back to Zeno, Plato and a specific reading of the dialogue Parmenides[22] and extends all the way to modern nihilism.

To paraphrase Heidegger, we are dealing here with the tradition that determines being as presence.[23] Hegel's suspicion, alluded to in part one, that the final narrative of the Western world would be an all-"nullifying" nihilism, found its political confirmation, much more than in the reign of terror unleashed by Robespierre and the French Revolution, in the all-encompassing terror of National Socialism. Like no other ideology before or since, National Socialism embraced pure annihilation, and thus a "positive nothingness" became the ultimate purpose of existence.[24]

Today we are confronted with a different sort of nihilism, namely a nihilism of temporality. Time here has no telos of any kind, either in the shape of an anticipated future or a past worth remembering. The interchangeability of its moments is matched by the virtual emptiness of our consumer world, in which every object has become arbitrarily replaceable and treatable and reduced to its ghostly image.

The philosophical background of temporal nihilism is the transformation of the timeless being postulated in Parmenidean metaphysics, which was conceptualized as an eternal, unchanging and absolutely self-present and static

---

22   See K. Heinrich, Parmenides und Jona, Basel / Frankfurt 1992. Conversely, see H.D. Bahr, Zeit der Muße – Zeit der Musen, Tübingen 2008.

23   In *Being and Time* Heidegger ruptures this classification through the structure of care and by consistently reflecting upon the primacy of the future. His account of an apresent time in his late work *On Time and Being* is even more radical. That a thinker of this calibre, to put it cautiously, sympathized at least on occasion with the most positivistic nihilism of all previous times, namely that nihilism in which nothingness, as absolute annihilation, becomes the thing in itself, is hard to grasp. But it demonstrates that we must never regress, theologically or philosophically, to the point of abandoning Kant's intellectual achievements and his philosophy of morality and freedom.

24   In no way am I claiming that nihilism is the only way of explaining National Socialism. There are many modern nihilisms and many different forms of meaninglessness, and there are many factors and developments of a political, economic and cultural nature that led to the National Socialist disaster. But National Socialism would have been unthinkable without the modern form of nihilism.

now, into the perfect self-presence of the machine. In "Zenoic" fashion, the pre-requisite for this self-presence is the divisibility of time into numerous motionless now-points, which are amalgamated to form a seamless cause-effect relationship. There is no moment here that is not absolutely determinable and objectifiable, and there is no moment that could point beyond itself. Shifts, displacements, apertures, or overlays have no place here; everything is perfectly presentable. The atomized moment knows no scope for meaning and is therefore entirely unutterable, insofar as every linguistic meaning manifests itself only in the shadings, associations, and "blurring" of the expression. In the first part of the book, it was suggested that bodies are always ex-oriented in their mutual references, that they represent subjects radically opened to the other and that their openings generate a kind of "second skin" as the sphere of their significance. In contrast, machines are entirely disembodied and devoid of any opening towards the other and thus without transcendence and meaning beyond the immediate moment.

This self-contained world subsists as a conceptualization of being that is a conglomeration of absolutely quantifiable and determinable objects, and as well as a sequence of events strung together as arbitrarily contiguous moments. This generates a mechanistic history of the object-world extending from the "big bang" to the end of all structures through a postulated protonic decay in the year 10^{35}, or also with the "evaporation" of the last black holes beyond 10^{100} years. Since every structure can be traced back to particles and their interactions, there is ultimately no ontological distinction or peculiarity, but at most quantitative degrees of each entropic state.

In contradiction to this world of objects whose absolute determinability and nakedness abolish every meaningful symbolic order, the subject essentially represents a disruption, rupture and displacement. The subject does not recount its history as the repetition of the past from a later vantage point. Instead the past is constantly reconfigured and contextualized as well as reimagined. It is in fact an ontological prejudice of the present day, shared by both the historical and the natural sciences, that there is a past as such in the first place. This is not just a matter of asking ourselves how far we can approach an objectifiable past, one whose existence is already taken for granted. Even more radically, we must ask whether something like the past has any ontological consistency or whether it derives its meaning and its being only within the pertubations and refractions of our subject-like symbolic worlds. We can of course write down and consolidate the past (or pasts) in the form of texts, but again it is only the reader who, in the reception of texts in ever new ways, brings this past (these pasts) to life and casts a vision of it.

Even in his early writings, Hegel did not regard the world as an objectifiable space-time into which a subject might be inserted. Rather, in his view, the world is fundamentally intersubjectively mediated. The point of departure is the subject-subject-object relationship rather than the subject-object relation. Our object-world is therefore never to be regarded as independent of intersubjective relationships. Subjects cannot be reduced to objects, as Leibniz already demonstrated and as Kant brilliantly set out later in the paralogism chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Leibniz realized that we never arrive at inner units on the basis of an object-world. We will, as he concludes in the simile of the mill, "only find parts that push one another, and we will never find anything to explain a perception [content of consciousness K.A.]".[25]

Our contents of consciousness, therefore, only become meaningful if they are already constituted as units of significance, which can then also be dissected in a further step ("parts that push one another"). In the realm of our experience, according to Leibniz, we find *one* paradigm for such inner units, namely subjects. For this reason, the world is not an accumulation of mechanistic objects that are spatiotemporally "external to one another", but is instead a world of subjects that "temporalize" and "spatialize" themselves through their respective world relations.

Every monad is an infinite world of relations in which other monads are "perceived", that is, "reflected and mirrored". A human subject perceives other human subjects, the sun, other living beings, such as a beetle. These in turn perceive the human beings and so on. *From this perspective, space and time can no longer be detached from, and are not independent of subjects and their acts of cognition and perceptions.* Rather, they are the expressions, or schema, of the relations that constitute the subject (and are constituted by this subject) – or paraphrasing Deleuze,[26] that (are) "unfolded" (by) the subject. The crucial point is that in Leibniz's work the infinite differentiations, in which we encounter the world, are an expression of the dynamic relations of monads so that they always have a subject-like focus. This means that Descartes's *res extensa* does not exist independently, but is a specific form of expression of monads, in other words of the *res cogitans*, whereby "cogitans" here expresses not only the conscious act of thinking, but rather the subject-like "unity-background" of

---

25   G.W. Leibniz, Monadology, Indianapolis, §17/70.
26   See G. Deleuze, The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque, Minneapolis 1992.

every entity, regardless of whether it is self-conscious, alive, or just plain matter (stars, etc.).[27]

Kant goes beyond Leibniz – through steps which cannot be described in detail here[28] – by demonstrating that the manifold relations of the monads can be constituted only through an infinite explanatory regress within the monad, even though such a regression inevitably leads to antinomies. According to Leibniz the monad's relations are *sufficiently* constituted, if the monad is infinitely "permeable" to all other monads, with this infinite permeability being provided by the singular and all-encompassing subjectivity of God and his affirmation of the world. According to Kant, however, this step towards the infinite means either an interminable, never concludable extension of the finite, or, alternatively, a leap into a no longer definable otherness (the infinite sphere). In both cases, the finite as such is no longer predicable, but is instead "lost" either in this infinite regress or through the above-mentioned leap. The prerequisite for taking either step would be to exceed the bounds of our spatiotemporal experience, which Kant calls an "exuberance".

Conversely, the philosopher from Königsberg presents the world neither as a mechanistic structure (the atheist-materialist "solution") nor as a subject (the pantheist Spinozan-Leibnizian[29] "solution" in the sense that God is the only subject and the only reality). In Kant's work the concept of the atom and the subject is replaced by that of *synthesis*. In every act of perception and thinking a connection is made that corresponds to that of subject-predicate and thus the structure of judgment. The true location of this "synthesizing" is the "productive synthesis of the imagination", in which a synthesis (between understanding and time as form of intuition) takes place that manifests itself in creating the time-series (it produces time; *Zeitreihe*), the content of time (it fills up time; *Zeitinhalt*), the order of time (temporal relations; *Zeitordnung*) and the sum total of time (the correlation between time and object; *Zeitinbegriff*).[30]

In this sense the synthesis is neither subjective nor objective, insofar there is no subject that produces time. Yet neither is there any time existing "in

---

27   The question of non-living units in Leibniz's work would require in-depth discussion. I can only note here that in those spheres in which cosmic bodies generate their own gravity we would surely have to refer to monads from Leibniz's perspective. See H-D. Klein, System der Philosophie II: Naturphilosophie, Frankfurt, etc 2006.

28   See K. Appel, Zeit und Gott, 65–72. See also: B. Liebrucks, Sprache und Bewußtsein IV. Die erste Revolution der Denkungsart – Kant: Kritik der reinen Vernunft, Frankfurt 1968.

29   The final point made in the *Monadology* is that the finite subject is by definition the self-performance of God. See K. Appel, Zeit und Gott 61f.

30   See I. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B 184f., translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge / New York / Melbourne 1998, 276.

itself" independently of these determinations. The result of Kant's idea here, as notably highlighted by Heidegger,[31] is the establishment of an inseparable connection between subject, form of judgment and time. "Subjectivity" refers to synthesis, to time as schema of the productive synthesis of the imagination, to *self-affecting*. This last term is of key importance. It points the way to the Kantian understanding of time and hints at semantic bridges to the work of Leibniz, Hegel and to the topic at issue here. According to Kant, the "form of intuition […] can be nothing other than the way in which the mind is affected by its own activity, namely this positing of its representation, thus the way it is affected through itself, i.e., it is an inner sense as far as it regards its form".[32]

Between the "activity of the mind", that is, between the positing of its representation and the receiving of this representation, there remains a hiatus, no matter how small. There is an unbridgeable gap between the act of positing and the representation of it, which is why representing not only consists of the active moment of affecting, but – equally – signifies being affected. Time is precisely this interval between activity and passivity, this difference that unfurls in every act of self-affecting. It is not simply the drawing of a line within the mind as a continuous act of self-affecting, but displacement and delay within the play of affecting and being affected, activity and passivity. This means that time cannot be sublated into the activity of conceptual synthesis ("judgment"), and remains the transcendental point of reference (as a form of intuition, that is, as the difference into which the synthesis of judgment is formed) of every activity of understanding, by which the subject is constituted. In other words, in Kant's philosophy the subject emerges as the process of synthesis, though this synthesis does not unfold in an absolute sense as in the work of Leibniz (where God is the absolute bond between all monads and thus the absolute synthesis), but is structured around an absolute non-reflectable difference and thus concretizes itself as time. The breathtaking consequence of this idea is that time cannot be conceptualized within an anaffective "space", but is due to the game between "affecting" and "being affected", which contrasts radically with any purely materialistic and objectifiable view of being.

Also in Hegel's work the subject is constituted around a point of difference. Hegel's novel idea, already addressed in his *Early Theological Writings*, consists in emphasizing intersubjectivity as the unfolding of this point of difference. For the subject can only affect that difference which it *is* itself as the difference between singular and universal (for example, in the case of language

---

31   See M. Heidegger, Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, Bloomington 1997.
32   I. Kant, Critique B 67f., 189.

which is the individual idiom and the universal medium of communication).[33] Hegel's early writings try to conceptualize this idea through the category of *love*[34] which is one of two possible forms of unity (synthesis). The *first synthesis* is the *subjugation of the world* through the subject's own reflexivity, as typical of the modern subject-object schema in which differences are subjugated to the subject's will to unify and homogenize. To this end the subject detaches itself from the natural and social ties in which it was embedded and tries to assimilate the world that is separate from it. To be able to do this the subject must render the world finite, objectify it, make it manageable, abstract it from its original connection with the subject, divest it of its difference and "comprehend" it.

In his early theological writings Hegel makes the important statement that "To comprehend is to master. To animate the objects is to make them Gods."[35] While the first part of this sentence characterizes synthesis as subjugation, the *second* part conceives of *synthesis as love*. This is not a matter of the invention of gods, but of the experience that the self cannot apprehend itself as an object (as the master of its own doppelgänger), that self-experience can only arise out of the indisposable other, i.e. that point of difference in light of which time must be conceptualized. Love expresses in these early writings of Hegel a subject-subject-object-relationship, that is a primordial synthesis of aliveness, as the most intimate form of relatedness within the difference(s) of the united life. Only because the subject is opened to the other, which encounters in its transcendent relationship in a subject-like mode (and not as mere object), it can exist and perceive itself as a *subject*. The subject designates an affective space of being in which affecting and being affected are mutually dependent on each other. Like Leibniz, Hegel too universalizes this relationship. Strictly speaking, the subject can come to speak only through subject-like encounters, through the "united life", because it is only the other that gives meaning as a subject. Pure objects would be "mute".

---

33   Departing from the model of self-affecting, P.A. Sequeri develops his ideas in light of the notion of a pro-affecting between Father and Son, whose point of departure is the relational moment. See P.A. Sequeri, "Nur einer ist der Gute. Theologie der Affektion als Umkehr der Ontologie", in: E. Arens (ed.), Theologie trifft Ästhetik (QD 246), Freiburg 2012, 46–72.

34   See K. Appel, Entsprechung im Wider-Spruch. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Offenbarungsbegriff der Politischen Theologie des jungen Hegel, Münster / Hamburg / London 2003; I. Guanzini, Il giovane Hegel e Paolo. L'amore fra politica e messianismo, Milan 2013.

35   Hegel, Frühe Schriften (Werke 1), in: G.W.F. Hegel, Werke 1–20 (stw 601–620), hg. von E. Moldenhauer und K.M. Michel, Frankfurt/Main 1986, 242.

Therefore, in Hegel's theological writings, then, God is not to be thought as the highest souvereign detached from the world, but as *love*, as the subject-like and affective space, in which world-encounter takes place. This encounter oscillates between self-gain and self-loss. The "self" finds itself in the *unity* of the other. But it is precisely in the unity of the *other*, that the self gains itself as subject via an act of self-loss, through a supplement, an *infinite difference* that it cannot appropriate: "The most intrinsic unites itself in the touch, in the feeling up to unconsciousness, the suspension of all distinction […]."[36] In this sentence Hegel is alluding to the sexual encounter as the paradigm of love.

What takes place here *is an opening towards an opening*, an opening that is no longer reflexively accessible. The absolute merger and sublation of all distinction must not be understood in the sense of the first synthesis as the integration of the other, but rather as its release (insofar as there is no longer "something" to distinguish, but merely the subject as difference from itself and thus pure openness). Through the formation of this radical openness, in which the two openings exchange and meet hospitably, the miracle of birth, the "becoming of aliveness", occurs. According to Hegel, then, the truth of the subject and its world is the opening of the other, and of the being within the sphere of radical openness, as embodied by the *child*. That is what is meant when Jesus urges us to "become like children" (Mt 18:3). God as love is radical openness that can be called time. As indicated when discussing the work of Kant, it is time that characterizes the openness of our existence, or the difference constitutively inscribed in our existence.

Birth, child and life do not refer to "something" but are in fact the absolute openness of the world, being towards the other. Rather than the relationship between two objects or even the relationship of a subject to an object, "being" is understood as the opening of life to its other or, better, as opening towards the openness of the other. Within this opened-up space life is *embodied* as the hospitable exchange of affecting and being affected by the no longer positivizable other. It is in this very movement of opening that prayer comes into play as the semantic expression of this radical opening. What is happening here is neither a matter of addressing myself to a delimitable other that is localized and thus positivized by me, nor the self-referential turn of the subject towards itself. Instead, the subject "becomes-other-to-itself". Linguistic spaces, one's own and those of others, upcoming times, both past and present, are opened in prayer towards this other, preparing His arrival, which may occur in the form of a child or even a contingent event.

---

36   See G.W.F. Hegel, I 248.

God is revealed through the openness of a given world-encounter, which excludes the possibility of unmediated access to him. This intellectual path, on which Hegel struck out in his early writings, is continued in a consistent and systematic way in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*. While Hegel's lectures discuss positive contents, it is fair to say that these major works of him are developments of the sphere of openness outlined above. In the first part of the book I briefly sketched the approach taken by Hegel's *Phenomenology* and tried to show how, up to the chapter on spirit, *consciousness* seeks to find itself in its world, in other words to position (*imagine*) itself within it, while in the chapter on religion *self-consciousness* grasps and *symbolizes* itself as a negative other. The second negation would then be difference in itself as pure transition, as oscillating movement and texture of references, that which is radically open to itself, within which Hegel "locates" *speculative* philosophy.

The point of departure is neither a positivizable being, nor a delimitable subject, nor even a "self", but rather that which unfurls itself and creates space within itself, which is encountered in the name YHWH and entails an opening of our symbolic order.

5.   Prayer as Opening and Re-Creation of the Symbolic Order (Mk 6:30–46)

Following this second philosophical excursus, another dimension of prayer will be considered in this chapter, namely, prayer as the reconfiguration and opening of our symbolic order. J.B. Metz emphasizes that the "language of prayers remains full of painful discretion" and "does not condemn the addressee to respond"[37]. J. Reikerstorfer notes that "the lament even more than the affirmative language of praise and thanksgiving preserves the *unapproachability* of God himself".[38]

Both theologians locate prayer in the context of the remembrance of suffering as an experience of resistance against injustice, distress and apathy. It is important that prayer challenges the existing symbolic order of our world as well as our thinking and does not call on God to legitimize it, but confesses his name in seeking to change it. In order to explain how prayer is to be understood ontologically as the beginning of a new world, as a departure from the eon of closure, I would like to draw on an event that has a special meaning within the

---

37   J.B. Metz, Memoria passionis, Freiburg 2006, 98.
38   J. Reikerstorfer, Weltfähiger Glaube. Theologisch-politische Schriften, Vienna / Berlin 2008, 181.

Bible, namely the so-called "multiplication of the loaves". How incongruous this title is remains to be explained. This event is told in all the gospels, and no less than twice in Matthew and Mark. Mk 6:30–46 is the basis of the analysis in what follows.

> The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported him all that they had done and taught. And he says to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them (lit.: and the entrails twisted around him), because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place [desert], and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they say to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" And he says to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go away and see." And finding out, they say, "Five, and two fish." Then he commanded them all to lie down, group by eaters, group by eaters [sic!] on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men. Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.[39]

The context of this pericope is the sending forth of the apostles (Mk 6:7–13). They return from their work and are completely exhausted from the teachings they have conducted. What is initially evoked in this context is the constitution of Israel (and of the church) as a learning community in the Deuteronomic tradition. The substance of this teaching, as the gospel according to Mark underlines, is the Kingdom of God. Jesus impresses upon his followers this doctrine not just intellectually, but also inject it into the innermost fibres of the body. If the "authority" over impure spirits is repeatedly underlined in this context (e.g. Mk 6:7), this is because the old symbolic order that dominates the linguistic, physical and social body is perceived as "demonic", i.e. deeply hostile to life, disorienting and destroying personality. In the center of existence forces emerge that lead people into the abyss of death and isolation.

---

39   The translation of Mc 6,30–46 was partly taken from the English Standard Version of the Bible.

Jesus relieves his twelve collaborators of their burden by instructing them to rest. When the crowd persists in pursuing them, he even performs the teachings himself. His motive leads to the center of what is meant by the Kingdom of God. He allows himself to be seized by the assembled crowd's misery and need. Or, to put it out more precisely, he allows their confusion to be felt in his very inner beings, "*into his innards*". This expresses a key predicate of God, which extends into the internal sphere of the name of YHWH, namely his compassionate care for his people. The injuries, distress, and confusion of the crowd pierce to the innermost sphere of Jesus's body which becomes as the resonant space of these sufferings in its entirety the place of God and thus the new heavenly palace of the divine court. *God himself has thus transposed his old Oriental residence of heaven or the temple, where heaven could touch earth, into the resonant space of a body in which the suffering of the people resounds and a site of compassion and mercy can be carved out.*

This setting is crucial to the following remarks. In place of the ancient geography of heaven, temple/cult and earth, the body of Jesus emerges as the concrete continuation of the Old Testamentary prophetic geography, focused on YHWH's compassion extending all the way to the "divine entrails". The palace of God as a frame of reference for the sacred symbolic order is transformed in a common space of affectivity,[40] a space which finds concrete expression in the teachings and the life of Jesus and those who follow him. The tremendous strain caused by this reorientation of the previous world is immediately made clear to the reader of the gospel. The twelve apostles enter (after having taken a rest?) the scenery, noting – in temporal terms – the evening hour, which is the hour subject to death (v. 35). Spatially, the attention is drawn to the "remoteness/desert-like character" (v. 35) of the place where Jesus is active. The "desert" or "remoteness" (ἐρημος) conjures up another association. It is the place of demons and thus the ancient locus of disorientation in which the subject is destroyed.

With apparent logic, then, the twelve urge Jesus to send the people, in other words the expanded throng of disciples, away so they can buy something to eat (v. 36). But they also seem anxious to go to the "villages", to return to civilization, sparing them from exposure to the demonic threat of the desert. The previous, sinister symbolic order of civilization is rendered null and void in the basileia of Jesus, but this is not consolidated to the point where it can withstand the threat of the desert.

---

40   On this space of perception, see also M. Neri, Il corpo di Dio. Dire Gesù nella cultura contemporanea, Bologna 2010.

In his comprehensive commentary on Mark[41], B. Standaert attempts to show, with great sensitivity, that this gospel was read on Easter night and was intended to bring about the final transfer of catechumens into the eschatological Christian community. The gospel is indeed a radical change in the symbolic order of knowledge and life, a change which, if we follow Standaert, initially leads, via baptism, into a life-threatening desert, before arriving on Easter morning in the eschatological community of the Church. Something similar occurs in this pericope. The crowd has begun to receive the teaching of Jesus, but it would as yet be dangerous to leave them alone in the "desert".

So the arguments put forward by the twelve are not only concerned with necessary nourishment, but also with the question what can be reasonable for the crowd. What they disregard is the fact that the crowd's return to previous social conditions (the villages) also poses a great risk. The danger lies in the futility of previous attempts of teaching and learning, together with the threat of a return to the "fleshpots" of Egypt with their inherently inverted and inhuman orders. As B. Standaert notes there are good reasons why the text – through the injunction that people return to their homes – alludes to 1 Kings 22:17. In this passage such a return is bound up with the sad fact that the scattered crowd no longer has any "master", in other words no frame of orientation.[42] Jesus does not respond directly to the suggestion made by the twelve, but instead directs their attention to "eating". The twelve had been so busy teaching that they did not even "have leisure to eat" (v. 31). Much the same goes for the crowd, which is why Jesus instructs the twelve to "give them something to eat" (v. 37). This establishes a connection to 2 Kings 4:42–44, where the prophet Elisha saves the prophetic disciples from most dire hunger, thus proving himself the representative of the "Lord", which is in itself an indirect response to the twelve. Their question, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread …" (v. 37) highlights the earlier subtle hints of the risk of a futile exodus from the old symbolic order. Within two verses (v. 36–37) the word "buy" is used twice by the twelve in connection with eating. The peril is that the kingship of God, which must remain the point of departure and destination of teaching, will be replaced by the domination of money, which threatens to become the key criterion of the people's well-being. It is at this point that the reader is furthest away from the prayer's addressee. "These people" seem "to have no master" (1 Kings 22:17) who could make a turn from the order of exchange and the economy of give and take.

Jesus does not embrace this logic, rather responds with the question "How many loaves do you have?" and the two imperatives "Go away" and "See" (v. 38).

---

41   B. Standaert, Marco. Vangelo di una notte. Vangelo per la vita. (3 vols), Bologna 2011.

42   See B. Standaert, Marco, 383.

The latter injunction, or both injunctions taken together, imply that a shift of perspective is in the offing. This shift gradually begins to emerge: the first vision brings to light two fish in addition to the five loaves. The text thus steers us away from eating as simple ingestion towards a true meal (or feast). While the number of loaves, like that of the fish, is laughably small, the sphere of the bread and thus of the immediate satisfaction of need is nonetheless surpassed. Of great importance is the next command in which Jesus directs the "crowd" to sit down on the green grass in groups (v. 39). Two levels of meaning are thus evoked. First, the transition from the disorderly crowd to the *grouping* of the people is an important step in the Exodus (cf. Ex 18). But even more important is the reference to the "green grass". So far, it has always been the *desert* in which the narrative unfolds, but the grass now signals a shift of perspective. Our attention is directed to a view that is able to open up the previous marginal existence to new life perspectives.

The following verse, v. 41, conveys the crucial turnaround. What is *not* depicted in this verse is Jesus performing the multiplication of loaves. But Jesus's words and deeds do profoundly echo the Eucharistic event, which is evoked by the sequence "taking", "blessing", "breaking" and "giving", which is interrupted only by the view up to "heaven", from which YHWH fed his people with manna during the Exodus. Analogous to the celebration of the Eucharist, a *transformation* takes place within this sequence and analogous to the feeding with manna a *preparation for the Exodus* commences. Contrary to the common exegetical scheme often used in the case of the multiplication of the loaves, in the crucial verse we are immersed into Jesus's *prayer*, which is referred to, in extremely abbreviated form, through the word "blessing" and the above-mentioned allusions. This opens up a tremendous creative power capable of changing the textual setting utterly. What Jesus creates here is an entirely new landscape. This is characterized by abundance and a festive mood. As in the Eucharistic transformation, where the order of being shaped by bread and wine morphs into the veritable body of Jesus, the reader is seeing here a transformation of the demonic desert into the eschatological, that is, festive gathering of God's liberated people. Time passes into the seventh day.

It is important to remember the starting point of this narrative. The entire scene is set in motion by Jesus allowing himself to be shaken to his very viscera by the wounds of the "old" world, his sensitivity rendering him the voice of YHWH. The union Jesus-YHWH expands in *time* in the pericope cited here, stretching from the Exodus (feeding with manna) to the Eucharistic feast of the *basileia*. There is also a great *spatial* arc from Jesus through the twelve and the crowd to heaven, and also a *qualitative* one, ranging from the desert and its bleakness through the green grass to the plenty of bread and fish. The image of poverty turns to one of plenty. The new symbolic order, that of

the kingdom of God, is characterized by unlimited creative power – the creation of a new, nourishing world along with an affectivity in which the divine name is realized through the person of Jesus.

The decisive moment goes far beyond a request-and-receive schema of prayer, for the entire world is transformed through and into the creative *word* of blessing. Of course the question of the historicity of such a scene imposes itself because it automatically raises the question what is to be expected of prayer. Two interpretations, which are usually regarded as opposed, fall short. We can neither say that the sign of the bread should be understood allegorically without having nothing to do with objective-physical reality, nor would it be correct to conceive of it in a narrowly historical sense as if it were a documentary film on Jesus. Rather, it is all about an entirely new symbolic order, one behind which there is no "other" objectifiable reality, but which cannot be abstracted from the actors as well as the listeners and readers of the event.

The place of the prayer is wherever old symbolic orders are shattered while opening doors for new ones, those in which the creative power, joy and sensitivity of the social and individual body are able to emerge in a deeper way. What is required is thus the "devaluation" of all images that have accompanied and constituted the previous world in order to create it anew. At this point the transition of images leads to a change in the temporal setting. The miracle of Jesus's feeding links the manna miracle of the Exodus to the Eucharistic feast of the *eschaton*. The reader is thus faced with the radical occasion of the feast itself, in which previous temporal instances are suspended and the interlocking chain of cause and effect is fractured.

This brings out the skilfulness of Mark's account: at no point is Jesus portrayed as the one who "multiplies" the loaves and the fishes, thereby becoming simply a causal agent among others, and it is this that opens the eyes for an eruption of exuberant and free creativity, which is no longer measured by the necessities of what is past, but instead creates an entirely new symbolic order. The tremendous difficulty associated with this shift of perspective is evident in the gospel itself. Not long after this scene Jesus's closest disciples once again ask him: "But where in this remote place can anyone feed them (the crowd) with bread?" (Mk 8:4). In 9:16, finally, the disciples "discussed [...] with one another and said, '[...] we have no bread'". Unless we don't want to think of them as extremely stupid, which would scarcely be compatible with the subsequent history of Christianity, we will have to acknowledge that diving into a world that goes much deeper than the world of our sensory and affective desert and is freer than the being of a seamless causal relationship is human beings' most difficult task of all. In this view, prayer does not lead merely to an objectively, or subjectively, perceived new world. Instead, the coordinates are reset so radically that an entirely different mode of understanding is required,

namely an opening that extends into the viscera, one that allows us enter into the world of the miracle.

It is perhaps in this light that the closing sequence must be understood as well: Jesus bids farewell to the crowd, which is now equipped for a new way of seeing and hearing and is released into its responsibility as the people of Exodus, and he concludes the entire narrative with a prayer, because even for him this radical openness and creativity is possible only in a constant correlation with the life-giving symbolic order of the Father.

6.   Prayer as Translation of the Subject

Jesus's bond with the Father is portrayed in a very special way in the Gospel of John, in which, characteristically, Jesus's words to his disciples transition into a prayer to the Father (Jn 14–17). Jesus emphasizes, as this gospel states, that, "The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority" (Jn 14:10). This sentence expresses something that pervades prayer in both the Bible and the Church, namely a displacement and translation of the subject.

At the beginning of this part the idea of the heavenly court was mentioned. The biblical palace was presented as God's court, populated with angels, with one of their main tasks being, in addition to the glorification of God, bringing terrestrial prayers to God. This is radicalized to the point that entire congregations (see the Book of Revelation, in which the letters to the seven churches are addressed to their angels) as well as individuals have their own angels representing them in heaven. "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven" (Mt 18:10), as Jesus teaches his disciples.

The centrality of the representative prayer pervades the entire Christian tradition. One person prays for another, the living for the living, the dead for the living, the living for the dead, the dead for the dead, angels for the living and dead, and so on. Theologically significant is the fact that the dogma of the Trinity has its origin in prayer, not in ontological notions (like the idea that God is in Himself relationship). This is not so much a matter of the potential to direct Christian prayer towards Father, Son and Holy Spirit or that prayer speaks in the name of the triune God. More importantly, the Christian act of prayer is generally performed "in the Spirit through the Son to the Father". If we look at the Psalter, then once again, from a Christian perspective, the worshiper prays through the mediation of Jesus, David, the Spirit, and even Israel.

But what is the significance of this characteristic structure of prayer? Might it help shed light on what Jesus means by the precept "do not keep on

babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words" (Mt 6:7)? This question leads us to an as yet unaddressed issue, namely *translation*. If prayers are said in the Spirit through the Son to the Father, there is at least a twofold translation and shift of the praying subject before the prayer reaches its addressee. The significance of the entire heavenly court, of the representation in prayer that this household provides, particularly through entities that are impalpable such as the dead, angels, etc., seems to lie in the very fact that the praying subject is constituted before God as a translated subject. One might say that in prayer the voiceless subject becomes its own voice – or the voice of the other – and receives orientation, transforming itself from a self-contained being to fundamental openness. "[We are not] unaware of this remarkable possibility that is the very possibility of language, therefore that of our being [thus] the very possibility of the world",[43] writes J.L. Nancy in his book *Adoration* on this connection between prayer and openness to the world. Besides that, however, the fundamental transformation of the subject's voice and orientation is also of key importance. This is a further, radical intensification of Hegel's idea of the subject as "becoming-other-to-itself".

In prayer the subject brings the world into language, places the world and itself in an intersubjective space and orients this space towards a radical indisposable openness, towards the other of its self. Thus, in prayer a differentiated dialectic of subjectification and de-subjectification occurs (or we might also say a subjectification as the dialectic of loss of self and gaining of self). From Lacan we know that the unsent letter still reaches its addressee.[44] For every instance of "self-expression" always also means having turned to the "great other", that is, to the symbolic order into which the subject is placed and from which it receives its recognition, orientation and language.

Human subjectivity occurs through the dialectic of individual and universal, of speaking and being spoken. To put it in more forcefully, the human subject consists in the assumption of one's own status as posited, of being addressed, of being through the other, of the indisposable and unavailable opening suffered by the other. It is a response to recognition that has been granted or denied. Its action and speaking has *been* the action and speaking of the other. Within this being the intersubjective relationship is exceeded, especially if it were conceived as symmetrically contoured by other individuals, since every individual subject was already a recognized and spoken subject in the first word and in the first gesture. Prayer provides a response to the word that has

---

43   J.L. Nancy, Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II. New York 2012, 3.

44   J. Lacan, "Seminar on the 'Purloined Letter'", in: Lacan, *Écrits*, translated by Bruce Fink, New York 2007, 6–48.

already constituted the subject both consciously and unconsciously, though it should be underlined that response and demand are not to be understood in a chronological-causal sense, but occur synchronously: There is no word (Wort) without response, no response (Ant-Wort) without word.

Before returning to de-subjectification through prayer, it should be stressed that the meaning of prayer is not exhausted in a response to an opening and in addressing oneself towards the other. Prayer must also not be understood predominantly as an action of the praying subject. G. Lohfink is right in his criticism that modern-day prayers are often not invocations of God[45], but are instead concerned with the action of the worshiper. The problematic aspects of his book on prayer – which bears a questionable title, in that prayer does not simply provide a home (as if YHWH could ever be our home …) –, are the idea that prayer enters into the "conversation that God himself is",[46] and also that Lohfink conceives the communication between man and God too directly. When reading his book, in which commendable exegetical observations are connected with a highly traditional theology of prayer, one wonders whether the problem of prayer for modern humanity can be simply traced back to a lack of moral effort, or a lack of religiosity. Lohfink seems not to have realized that the unmediated access to God has become profoundly problematic, and it would be interesting to hear his view on what happened to all the unanswered prayers that characterize our epoch so dramatically. Did the worshippers simply not pray enough? As far as the divine conversation of the trinity is concerned – into which, according to Lohfink, the precant is supposed to enter – one might add sarcastically that, thank God, at least within the Trinity the realization of the ideal communicative community, invoked so often in a German culture with such tremendous faith in language, can be witnessed …

Against such views, the element of de-subjectification in prayer can be highlighted. This moment must not be contextualized within familiar mystic tradition to the extent that the worshiper engages in the prayer of the Holy Spirit and thereby leaves behind his contingent, empirical existence. Rather, attention must be paid to the fact that the subject's desubjectivation means that the content of the prayer will never directly make it to the one to whom it is directed, especially if we are to assent on Lacan's dictum that "a letter always arrives at its destination"[47], and if we bear in mind that "the signifier's

---

45   G. Lohfink, Beten schenkt Heimat. Theologie und Praxis des christlichen Gebets, Freiburg 2010, 66.

46   G. Lohfink, Beten 25.

47   J. Lacan, Écrits, 30.

displacement determines subjects' acts, destiny, refusals, blindnesses, success, and fate".[48]

Jesus is reported to have made the unsettling remark that a belief, like a grain of mustard seed, is all we need to tell a mountain: "'Move from here to there', and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Mt 17:20). Apart from the always possible allegorical interpretations, the idea could rise in this saying that it was about a miracle of shift and displacement, in which case the mountain would become almost incidental. The core of the prayer lies, as already adumbrated in the interpretation of Psalm 36, in the very fact that the divine name displaces and shifts the word. Against this background, we might perhaps understand the entire gospel according to John as one great prayer manual, since Jesus repeatedly appears in it as the one who strangely deflects the questions and the desires of his interlocutor while never offering direct answers. So the essence of prayer is not that God responds directly to a request, but that the request itself undergoes a relocation and shift through prayer. Even in the intercessory prayer the Christian cannot simply take the place of the other, because this would mean that the other becomes the reflection on one's own desire. He can only take the place of a deplacement, carry out semantically this preliminary shift, in which the Other becomes the subject at all.

Hence, prayer is not characterized by a linear cause-effect relationship. Indeed, it seems pretty absurd to consider myself as the "cause" of the fulfilled wish of the other. Because I have prayed for you, God has done this or that for you. It would be just as odd to put the fulfillment of a prayer down to my way of praying (its form, intensity, my moral integrity). The institution of priesthood can probably be traced back in significant part to the hidden knowledge that prayers are not directly addressable, in the sense that, within his community, the priest is responsible for the translatory activity mentioned above. This necessity to translate prayers highlights the fact that the wish, thanks or praise through which the worshiper opens himself to the other/God will undergo a shift before its possible arrival.

As long as this shift – Guanzini made this point in her discussion of *anamorphosis* – has not occurred, language remains captive to general images and phantasms. Such language would be the ongoing production of these images, which express nothing personal, certainly not the *name* of the supplicant, but merely the various imaginative constructs of the overarching symbolic order, which as shown earlier aimed at obfuscating one own's mortality. To express this in more biblical terms, what comes to the fore here are the predominant obsessions ("demons") of the social body in which we are configured. In these "images", language and the aims of prayer would

---

48   J. Lacan, *Écrits*, 21.

dissolve, so that in the end only a self-referential mirror, the virtual surface of abstract desire, would remain, reflecting "nothingness" and extinguishing our contingent individuality.

Overcoming this "demonology" entails a shifting of our supplications (to echo Lacan: in a transition from pleasure to desire) which is the only way that prayer can attain its goal. This goal would then be to receive oneself as an *individual* through the transcendence of all images and phantasms. Or to put it in theological terms, *the purpose of prayer would be subjectification before God*.[49] If love is where our ultimate subjectification is realized, then prayer would be the gift of love, through which we open ourselves up completely to receiving our name, that is, our own unique *vocation*. Through the translation of our images, this gesture which is the only way that would in turn be bound up with their abandonment. Prayer would thus produce a peculiar emptiness and openness in which the subject would no longer be predicable, but only callable by name: "Mariam!". Receiving the name as vocation would then, as described in John 20:11–18, be the point of departure for a second turn (the first was, let's remember, the turn away from the sphere of the "own" to a willingness to follow one's beloved to the place of death), towards the witness and vision of the Lord ("I have seen the Lord!", Jn 20:18).

7.   The Prayer: Epilogue

At the center of Christian prayer is the "Lord's prayer", which calls Christians into the *basileia* (kingdom) of YHWH. The approach of the *basileia* is marked by manifold openings, such that Jesus could state: "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor" (Lk 7:22). The openness of the *basileia* was intrinsically symbolized by Jesus's name and the open wound of his body (Jn 19:34). As a result, the taking into the affective space of Jesus's vulnerable body, a compassionate and open body into its very bowels, and the associated narrative landscapes, became the calling of the Christian, who receives his (or HIS) name through this process. This receiving of one's name expresses the special character of prayer, which is rooted in relocation and marked by overlaps and shifts. From a Christian perspective, that name always consists of the superposition of two names (one's own name and that of the messiah), which form an oscillating and never fixable center.

---

49   See J.B. Metz, Mystik, 110. Here he gives us the fine sentence: "The prayer is the oldest form of the human being's struggle over his being as subject".

Through the four parts of this book, the authors of this book have attempted to show vulnerability and mortality as primary motifs of the "new" human being and thus of a new humanism. Mortality should not be understood as a transition to "nothingness", but as the loss of all the masks, camouflages, images and forms of protection that characterize our existence. In *Being and Time* Heidegger rightly highlights the fact that in being towards death we are unrepresentable. In this sense, our mortality also indicates our individuality and irreplaceability.

What remains decisive is the shifting and (self-)displacement of the locatable and objectifiable subject. The object-like dimension of our existence, our positivity, is capable of succumbing to nothing, or, is itself already an expression of it, as it was shown in the context of the Fall. However, if the subject is embodied as a sensitive reference and openness to the other, cloaking itself in a second skin of narratives, signs – Benjamin might say *quotations* – and ever new porosities, it will be and will remain all the more vulnerable, and this is what endows it with its special form of existence.

But the maximum injury it can suffer would be its reduction to a mere object. Would this mean the annihilation of the subject, or would it rather be associated with the total retreat, the absolute absence of the subject, which would nonetheless entail the spectral presence of a "remnant"? Mortality first of all means the loss of positivity, that is, the loss of the potential to objectify the subject. Precisely because it is not positive, because it is not disposable and controllable presence, the subject can step outside itself; it can feel, touch and be touched. Mere objects can surely never come into contact, each remaining enclosed in its own presence. The subject can die and thus elude a symmetrical frame of reference. There is no indestructible core of the subject, because such a core would in turn presuppose the presence of a positive "something". Also, the subject cannot become "nothingness" if this nothingness were interpreted as an objectifiable void.

The loss of positivity means that the subject cannot be the object of a *final* narrative. Even those narratives in which we *will* have received the voice of the subject, his injuries, his touch and affections, can only anticipate the moment of their own departure, because "even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25). It may be at precisely this point that prayer begins: when the subject has lost its positivity, when it is the entirely open space "between" narratives, when "everything" has been said about it, when its body is permeability to the other, when the images with which it was occupied have been translated into a vocation that is no longer representable, when its voice begins to cross times and spaces, when it has become the praise (price, prize) of mortality …

Contributors

KURT APPEL
is Professor for Fundamental Theology at the Institute for Systematic Theology and Ethics at the Faculty for Catholic Theology at the University of Vienna and Speaker of the Research Centre "Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society".

JAKOB HELMUT DEIBL
is Tenure-Track-Professor at the Faculty for Catholic Theology at the University of Vienna and Scientific Manager of the Research Centre "Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society".

ISABELLA GUANZINI
is Professor of Fundamental Theology at the Catholic Private University (KU) Linz.

Detailed Contents