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Table of Contents

- 3 **Adrián Navigante**
TRANSVERSALITY:
QUESTIONS OF METHOD
- 20 **Interview with Celso Cintra**
ALAIN DANIELÉLOU'S
MUSICOLOGICAL WORK
- 29 **Wouter Hanegraaff**
CLOSE ENCOUNTERS
WITH THE THIRD KIND:
A HERMETIC THEORY OF
IMAGINAL CONSCIOUSNESS
- 45 **Jean-Jacques Wunenburger**
THE MULTI-CULTURAL:
BETWEEN THE ONE
AND THE MANY



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TRANSVERSALITY: QUESTIONS OF METHOD

In this essay, Adrián Navigante reflects on a method that has been a guiding thread in the activities of the domain of Research and Intellectual Dialogue: transversality. This method appears as a possible reorientation in thinking and experience in the face of the state of knowledge, the cultural crisis, and the global challenges of the XXI century. Its potential and risks are related with the inevitable task of transforming our attitude to the world, as Alain Daniélou declared in his book *Shiva and Dionysus*, not only on the level of representation but mainly as a reeducation of perception, sensitivity, and relation.



Jean-Paul Sartre and the cover of his book *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, published in 1960. Source: youtube channel “Rien ne veut rien dire” (program Les nouveaux chemins de la connaissance, 16 July 2013).

Introduction: Humus and Horizon

When it comes to defining ‘questions of method’, it is difficult not to think of Jean-Paul Sartre. The first part of his monumental *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960) bears that title¹ and relates it to the task of facing the challenges of the cultural horizon of his time – a horizon which, for many Westerners, remains a universal paradigm even today. It aims at the best possible articulation of life, thought, and action in a social milieu. Sartre’s explicit elucidation of the ‘method’ is, as the Greek word *methodos* indicates, a pursuit of the right knowledge, in this case a path pointing to the relationship between humus and horizon, or between the soil from which a whole conception will grow and the consequences of the latter in the dynamics of the culture affected by it. In the case of Sartre, the questions of method intend to cover the complex passage

from the contingency of subjective and objective circumstances to the necessity of an integrated totality of experience and knowledge, or to put it more simply: between a given situation and a process through which the ‘given’ is transformed. In this sense, *Questions of Method* points to a double movement toward knowledge and being which at the same time rejects their ontological separation: knowledge is ultimately no spiritual abstraction and being is no blind material substrate. Their synthetic confluence presents itself as a totalizing movement which resituates individuals and circumstances (with all the conflicts that their coming together presupposes) within an all-encompassing dynamic of meaning-fulness – a disclosure of ‘meaning’ as historical declension of ‘fullness’².

What kind of ‘work of the spirit’ is capable of such achievement? For Sartre the task does not

consist in grasping something that is already given and remains unchanged, but rather in realizing or – as said above – *transforming* subjects and circumstances toward that ontological and historically relevant confluence. This implies the passage from a static to a dynamic world configuration, which Sartre attempts to summarize taking the history of philosophy as paradigmatic example. Before European Enlightenment, the ultimate object of knowledge was totalizing but static – therefore it remained, strictly speaking, a property of theological thinking. After Enlightenment, the objective Spirit (God) could only survive “in the form of a regulative idea pointing to an infinite task”³. The Kantian critique enabled philosophy to get rid of an outdated ambition of totality – i.e. the rather simplistic concretion of metaphysical thinking in dogmatic statements. However, that important step did not lead to the rise of an emancipated humanity, but to that of a dominant class – the *bourgeoisie* – which naturalized its own relationship to the world to the detriment of the other social groups. The broadest totalization in philosophy was brought about by Hegel, in whose system “knowledge [was] elevated to its most eminent dignity”. In this framework, being was no longer known from the outside; instead, knowledge took hold of it and dissolved its opacity. In Hegelian dialectics, “the spirit objectifies itself, alienates itself and permanently recaptures its course; it realizes itself through its own history”⁴.

According to Sartre, the afore-mentioned movement can only be deemed ‘concrete’ if

we keep in mind that there is an “unsurpassable opacity”⁵ at the core of individual experience. This is the point where Sartre comes back to Kierkegaard to justify the limited space and function of existentialism in a (Hegelian) world-conception that intends to concretize a totalizing movement: “whatever one can say and think of suffering, the latter escapes knowledge insofar as it is suffered in and by itself, so that knowledge remains incapable of any transformation on that level”⁶. The passionate intransigence of immediate life, the pure subjectivity that remains untransformed by the objective expression of the Idea (in Hegelian terms: the passage of God from being to becoming, or from eternity to history) turns out to be a mirror of infinity, an inner mirror reflecting the co-incidence of the tiniest with the greatest. This mirror accepts no mediation. If it did, it could be surmounted and classified – and therefore rendered ‘finite’, provincial, *all-too-human*. On the contrary, the qualitative leap to faith proves to be insurmountable, singular and universal at the same time. The distance between the human individual and God is infinite but remains a direct channel of communication – a channel impermeable to any instance of mediation⁷.

At this point, the conflict between the soil of individual existence (the roots of which are found in the singularity of the human subject) and the horizon of universal objectification (the summit of which is embodied in the Hegelian notion of World-Spirit) finds its resolution by resorting to the dialectics of Karl Marx, who, according to Sartre, “imposes himself

Knowledge has reached a level in which totalization, even in its secular form, turns out to be too general, too abstract, and too vague to ensure the consistency of a plurality of fields in need of further and deeper inquiry.

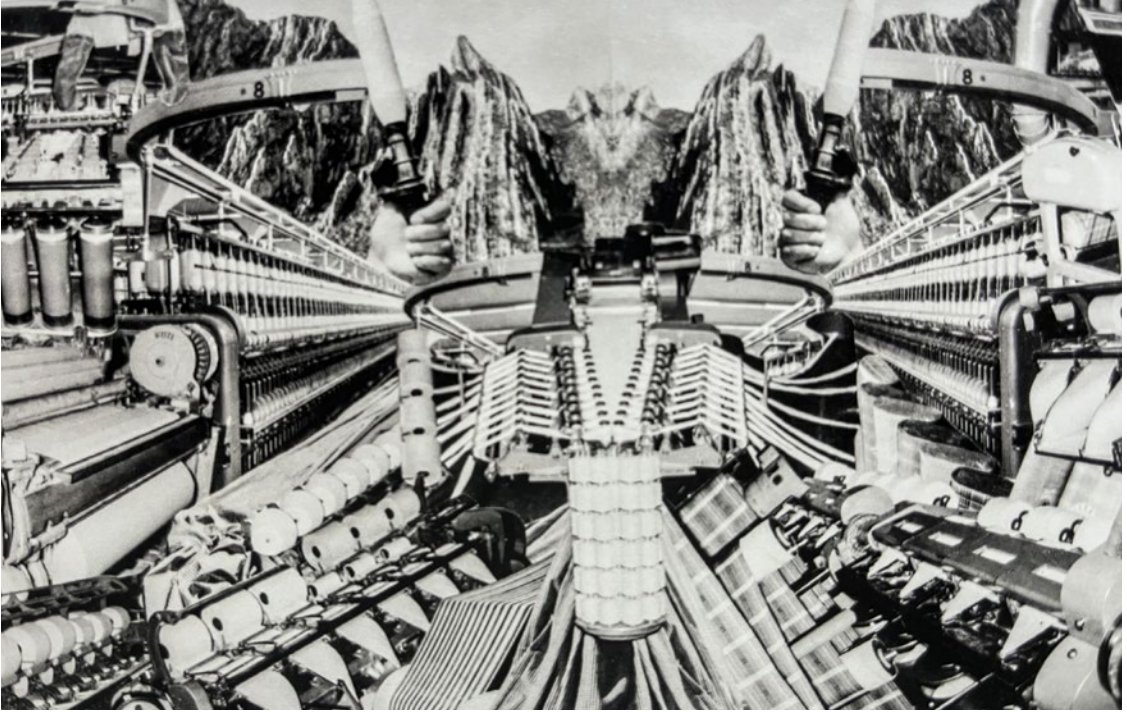
over Kierkegaard and Hegel, since he asserts with the first the specificity of human existence and, with the second, takes the concrete man in his objective reality”⁸. The Marxian *homo laborans*, which is the slave of history, transforms the world. The objective process of capitalistic accumulation endows him with consciousness, it enables the slave to become master of himself. Finally, the world is turned upside down by the self-conscious slave turned into the very subject and meaning of History. Society after a Marxist revolution would shine – at least in Sartre’s imagination – with the light of a post-historical *éschaton*, that is why the term ‘History’, once the local method becomes the universal content, needs to be written in capital letter. After Hegel and Marx, history is not a mere succession of events, but a pleromatic process at work.

Philosophy, contrary to what ordinary people think, is no abstruse discipline. In fact, cultural processes are the result of a long-term incorporation, digestion and, in many cases, ‘domestication’ of philosophical ideas. This means that such ideas are not only the conceptual expressions of a certain period but also a shaping force of reality; they have more incidence on our lives than we think. Sartre says that periods of philosophical creativity are few and far between⁹, and in that sense he is right. Creativity in philosophy means subversion, that is, underlying (or explicit) tension with already-established cultural parameters with the aim of re-tracing the path going from the soil of the given situation to the horizon of its acceptable possibilities. In such cases, shaping means deconstructing, sometimes dissolving, but also *re-shaping*. Non-creative philosophers, on the contrary, are agents of cultural homeostasis (some of them merged beyond recognition with the regional elites of ‘scientists’ or ‘scholars’). They operate with already-digested ideas to shape a continuity of social relations according to constitutive and regu-

lative principles ensuring general consistency. Ordinary people carry out the ideas of these cultural agents with a higher or lower degree of consciousness, depending on their education, studies, self-reflection, and influences. They inherit the ‘naturalized situation’ and contribute – blindly in most cases, purposely in a few exceptions – to preserve its parameters. This means that an analysis of Sartre’s philosophical exemplification can give us a key to understand where we stand today with regard to those questions of method. My conviction is that we stand at a considerable distance from what he thought were the universal (counter-) parameters of ‘philosophical creation’, and that is the main reason why *other* questions of method should be raised and programmatically developed as a general orientation.

Post-Modernity as Underlayer: The Return of the Repressed

In his book *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), Jean-François Lyotard declares that “science has always been in conflict with narratives”¹⁰. This verdict must not exclusively be taken in the sense of the traditional opposition (known in Plato) between *logos* and *mythos*, but mainly in the sense of a unification of knowledge through a ‘meta-discourse’ of science. Only scientific trials are conducted in laboratories (the way rituals are conducted in temples), but the knowledge of science is communicated in and to the world. In this sense, there is no denying that science finds its own legitimation through something that accounts for its content and at the same time transcends its method, something that cannot be contained in the very epistemic equation: *a narrative process*. The narrative emanating from science is not any narrative, though. It must be a narrative of knowledge, so it cannot be other than philosophy – philosophy as a *metadiscourse*. The aim of philosophy in Lyotard’s ‘given situation’ is not only to legitimate but also to *amplify*



Lola Álvarez Bravo. *Hilados del Norte 1* (circa 1944), a work displaying a perspectivist view of overwhelming urban processes of late modernity. Akland Art Museum. Source: *México Moderno. Vanguardia y Revolución*, Buenos Aires 2018.

the status of truth immanent to each special field of research in order to reach the whole extension of society. The classical function of philosophy is to justify, amplify and unify knowledge stemming from regional ontologies (biology, physics, sociology, psychology, etc.). It is precisely this paradigm of a *meta*-narrative (nurtured by its own previous designation: philosophy as ‘science of sciences’) that cannot survive the transformations brought about by the post-modern condition.

Although modern episteme gained the upper hand in the XVIII century, the metanarratives of the emancipated human subject (Kant), the realization of the Spirit in history (Hegel) and the total transformation of society (Marx) were attempts to consolidate a world configuration in which, even without God, a unified

meaning is preserved and deployed as a collective promise of ‘fullness’. The *postmodern*, says Lyotard, “is incredulous in the face of such metanarratives”¹¹. Knowledge has reached a level in which totalization, even in its secular form (as thematized by Sartre), turns out to be too general, too abstract, and too vague to ensure the consistency of a plurality of fields in need of further and deeper inquiry: “The obsolescence of the metanarrative device of legitimation is paired with the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and that of the institution that depended on it”¹². Knowledge cannot be totalizing any longer; on the contrary, “it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our capacity to bear the incommensurable”¹³.

Like Sartre’s *Questions of Method*, Lyotard declares that his essay is “a writing of circum-

stance [*un écrit de circonstance*]"¹⁴. Therefore, it is not a mere declaration but a diagnosis of his time. Ten years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the French philosopher of post-modernity anticipated the total fragmentation of knowledge – which was already taking place and turned out to be the reverse-side of the last (quite degraded but highly effective) form of imperialist cohesion: the global expansion of finance capitalism¹⁵. Sartre's radical prescriptions, such as that of the retrograde character of all anti-Marxist ideas or the reactionary character of plurality¹⁶, are rendered obsolete by Lyotard's argumentation. The challenge is not any longer unification, universalization, and prescriptive truth, but de-centered cohesion, plural cohabitation (not always harmonious) and (agonistic) articulation of different narratives. With Lyotard, the utopian solution related to the bridge or the link between knowledge and social life is replaced by a pragmatic one. What is the positive side of it? Mainly the innovative reading (and denunciation) of the essential relationship between scientific knowledge and narrative emplacement *as a form of concealed (or disguised) cultural imperialism*. From this perspective, there is not much difference between a Christian mission bible-bashing to death indigenous populations in South America, an enlightened French humanist stifling a black insurrection in Haiti, and a Soviet militant destroying shamanic communities in Siberia.

Progressive de-legitimation of sciences – in the sense of an abandonment of metanarratives – implies, according to Lyotard, above all interdisciplinary work: "the valorization of team-work is related to the prevalence of a performative criterion of knowledge"¹⁷. In this sense, the focus on a plurality of disciplines must bear in mind a dialogical operation whose mediating instance does not step back from paradoxes. The logos of post-modernity is too open and fluid to accept the old chains

related to classical standards of logic and rationality, since the consistency of representation is to a great extent an operation of power and dominance, and the plurality of views flowing beyond every prescriptive border intrinsically deconstructs the configuration of a homogeneous and well-delimited mainstream. This operation has consequences that go far beyond what Lyotard thematizes in *The Postmodern Condition*. In his considerations on 'paralogy' (which forms the last chapter of his book), we find an enigmatic sentence: "The little narrative remains the quintessential form adopted by the *imaginative invention*, foremostly in science"¹⁸. If the term 'paralogy' is to be taken as an argumentative register that transgresses the norms of valid reasoning, 'imaginative invention' is an expression that reinforces the access to another way of configuring the world. Lyotard seems to affirm the following: there is a passage from paralogy to *paralogic* in the sense of 'working on paradoxes'. In other words, if the only totalizing instance of the post-modern period is that of an expanding 'crisis' (crisis of knowledge, crisis of justification of knowledge and action, crisis of valuable social links, crisis of authority, crisis of dialogical capacity, etc.), there is an increasing vitality of small narratives working everywhere *locally* and reshaping segments of reality beyond generally accepted parameters. Can this tension be resolved in any other way than by means of a sublation of all different cultural registers – whatever their provenance – in the unifying (and leveling) power of the global financial system?

In his introduction to the English version of *The Postmodern Condition*, Fredric Jameson takes "a further step that Lyotard seems unwilling to do", namely "to posit, not the disappearance of the great master-narratives, but their passage underground as it were, their continuing but *unconscious* effectivity"¹⁹. Reading the obsolete metanarratives of history (mainly Hegelianism and Marxism) as unconscious determinants

does not seem a step forward but rather backward. It turns out to be as regressive as the postulate that obsolete systems should be totally buried and in no way borne in mind when it comes to evaluating the present. The movement of digging out deeper layers should not reinstate mainstream tendencies of former periods, but rather disclose the *real symptom* of what is called European culture: that which pulsed underneath the conquering logos of its own universalization process. The unconscious is not only political, but also socio-cultural, ecstatic, collective, life-world and cosmic related, multiple and perspectivist in its own auto-póiesis. It is not trapped in a biological or sociological or historical evolution, it is not confined to the selectivity of a single cultural complex that has declared itself the only one valid and subjugated the existing ontological diversity to fit its own exclusive and unequivocal world-configuration. It is in those deepest layers that the terminological difference between 'European' and 'Western' finds its intrinsic link: the West is Europe's horizon, or the survival of the European humus (basically Christianity and Enlightenment) in the minds of the conquered and assimilated. This link is of course not devoid of tensions, like those between the USA and Europe at present.

For Lyotard, post-modernity dissolves metanarratives and brings up the challenge of a plurality of logoi impossible to sublate. But even further: it discloses the return of the repressed. Is there any 'image' for what lies behind the paradoxes of European metanarratives? Lyotard reaches

the deepest layer of the Western humus in his interpretation of the *Shoah*. In his book *Heidegger and 'the jews'* (1988), he thematizes the original repression (by means of the Freudian concept of *Ur-Verdrängung*) of a culture that promised a totalization of knowledge and an expansion of universal values only to end in the worst catastrophe of modern times: Nazism as the invention of a biological particularity (the Aryan race) elevated to a soteriological imperative (Europe's salvation from both Soviet communism and American liberalism) demanding the emplacement of a politics of imperialist war and racial extermination. The fact that the allied 'democracies' were against German expansionism does not necessarily mean that they cared so much about the extermination of the Jews²⁰. Lyotard is therefore right in writing 'the jews' without capital letters, "to make it clear that I am not thinking about a nation", and in the plural, "to mean that I am not presenting any [...] political subject (Zionism) or religion (Judaism) or philosophy (Hebrew thought) under that name"²¹. Lyotard's 'jews' are a subtractive object: inconsistent, unreachable, symptomatically expelled from every field – of identity and difference, of being and becoming. Heidegger's ontological difference could not reach them. They are a non-figure that pulsates beyond any representative formation and can never be grasped, not even as something that was erased the moment it took place. Lyotard refers to a multiplicity whose inconsistency forces the powers of dominance and expansion to perpetual (and sterile) attempts to *cover that hole*. In this sense,

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Auschwitz, paradoxical symbol of what defies every instance of representation: the bottomless pit of Western civilization. Source: Public Domain Pictures Net (publicdomainpictures.net).

the reflection on the *Shoah* is for Lyotard the external border of every attempt to consolidate Western culture in terms of consistent identity. I will leave the moral question aside (since it would demand a long excursus) and concentrate on the transformation in Western thought that the XX century brought about, especially after the fall of all totalizing metanarratives. Post-modernity as the return of the repressed is the step beyond the conviction that there is an evolution, an expansion, a consolidation, a progress, and a differentiation carried out by the West for the sake of mankind.

The Rebooting 'Flip-Side': Strategies of Othering

Fredric Jameson's strategy persists. The Hegelian-Marxist complex is tempting because it explains quite clearly (and critically) the functioning of Western society through history, but this temptation should be resisted the moment the conceptual complex takes that functioning as an absolute parameter for *all* civilizations. This happens mainly because there is an irrational fear of (heterogenous) multiplicity lying

behind those constructs. For this reason, religious people think that only a 'transcendent One' can guarantee their salvation after death, and secular people demand the existence and intervention of a 'welfare State'. If the disappearance of metanarratives (which ultimately guarantee 'the One' behind the multiplicity, the homogenous subsuming heterogeneity) is a fact in the light of history, nothing guarantees that the consistency of such metanarratives should survive a descent to the waters of the Acheron. Following Jameson's fashion, one can always resort to 'unconscious layers' as the unseen (i.e. underlying) horizon, but as I pointed above, the risk is to mistake unconscious layers with defense mechanisms. In that case, the work of the Spirit would keep blocking the disclosure of the repressed – it would perpetuate the symptom. If there is a reverse-side of the light of history, it is highly improbable that it should preserve the logic of what dominated its surface in the previous historical paradigm. To put the matter more clearly: if post-modern knowledge dissolves a metanarrative of universally valid cultural parameters based on the 'high culture'

of the West, neither Hegelian nor Marxist (and let alone Christian) references will help in grasping either the cultural complexity of non-Western cultures nor the internal contradictions and 'barbaric' features within that so-called 'high culture'. To understand the other(s) does not mean merely to describe their ways of behaving (as ethnographers do) but mainly to question our own assumptions as to what a legitimate point of departure in a process of (mutual) understanding really is. The assumption of a political unconscious is therefore the last defense mechanism to preserve an old strategy of *local* cohesion (Europe, the West) in which the local still believes that all the others (or otherwise localized) are mirrors of that specific locality²².

If we decide to cancel the defense mechanism that claims an unconscious survival of metanarratives, this action will certainly not lead to the disappearance of such totalizing discourses from the face of the earth. However, their validity will be for the first time relativized in a way that allows us to move on – not precisely along the line of the '(old) work of the Spirit' but rather toward a (*renewed*) *work on spirits*. Where are those spirits? The irruption of the postmodern showed quite clearly that beneath each homogeneous construct of modernity – however solid it might seem – there is permeable soil connecting with subterranean contents and meanings that challenge the solidity of what is taken to be 'the ground floor' of our cultural building. The black pit thematized by Lyotard in *Heidegger and 'the jews'* is an epochal closing. Semitic culture appears as the external limit of a Europe claiming homogeneity, but the historical incursions of Western power opened other channels that now come back in the in-between places of the colonial palimpsest. If we move the eye away from the unifying strategy of Christianity (with its transcendent God and its desecralization of Nature) and the heritage of the

Enlightenment (with its eschatological superordinate translated into progress and emancipation), many other spirits appear: South Asian, African, Amerindian, Australian, Siberian, etc. These spirits can barely be subsumed within a protraction of Western culture (as was intended in the past with categories like Indo-European culture or – even more boldly – Universal Self Consciousness mysticism). They impose themselves with their own specificity ever since anthropology made a decisive detour and replaced its former alliance with colonial power by a new attitude toward *the other(s)* based on unprejudiced understanding.

Of course, one could always say that non-Western cultures, even those which could not be – well or badly – assimilated to our 'universal parameters' (like China, Persia and India), do have their own metanarratives, sometimes orally transmitted (like the complex mythology of Indigenous peoples), sometimes contained in oracular patterns (after all, Ifa divination is as complex and elaborated as the revered and ever popularized *Yjing*), but the point is not whether they have or not a meta-structure of cohesion; it is rather the epistemological and ontological results of the enactment of those narratives. They don't unify meaning towards the homogeneous superordinate that characterized modern rationality in the West. They don't define nature as a self-contained sphere of inanimate objects, nor do they consider that human beings are the only entities endowed with interiority; they don't think that events are better explained by their causes, nor do they experience time as something that passes and space as something we (as material bodies) merely occupy; they don't possess universal truths to be disseminated, nor do they think that the earth obliterates the dead. Judged from our own world-configuration, they push us to renounce many taken-for-granted assumptions about reality and relations. They show us that beyond all

our conscious efforts (in the name of progress) and our defense mechanisms (to preserve the superiority of the West) and our collective shadow (to impose our worldview *for the good* even at the price of extermination), there is a reverse-side, or perhaps I should say a *flip-side*²³. The hole of the (absolute) 'other' is not merely a subtractive impossibility. It is a gate toward new epistemological and ontological challenges that Western culture should assume instead of clinging to outdated (and counter-productive) strategies of survival. If there is a form of 'humanism' to defend at this point, it is a form in which the utterly external and extraneous, so challenging or threatening as it may be, can have a place among the conditions under which we 'see' (i.e. experience) things in order to configure a world and describe the world(s) of others. It is no longer a question of integration, but of rebooting the hermeneutic machine, beginning with our own position.

Working on that flip-side implies changing our strategies of 'othering'. This is the most difficult thing, because the 'other' is *per definitionem* external to a well-demarcated identity territory, which we identify with our 'self'. Saying that the 'self' is a construction does not mean denying its value. It means introducing a degree of relativity in it, and the degree of relativity grows according to the cultural dynamics we are faced with. The cultural dynamics of globalization is in this sense a major challenge because it inserts the 'other' within the very foundations of the 'self' and at the same time seeks to erase all differences by resorting to the quantitative homogenization of 'the market' (the place of unlimited exchange and potential realization of needs and desires). This is the promise of its metanarrative, but it is not necessary to be a philosopher to realize that the dissolution of borders offered by the market is precisely the opposite of that old (Christian) utopia of a unified mankind – which also had its sinister consequences along its 'historical realization'.

The subversive power of the Post-modern is the capacity to create micropolitics of difference and alternative cartographies of desire. The danger is that if fragmentation remains a spontaneous reaction against homogenization, it may end up being swallowed by it without even noticing. From the proliferation of the myriad forms of new-age spirituality, there is practically no single movement that critically reflects on *a differential work on the spirits (of the 'others')*. They fall very rapidly into full identification with old traditions or into a fully emancipated individual invention. In most cases, both end up being market products instead of cultural alternatives to the crisis of our time.

Transpiring Invisibility: Toward a Transversal Reorientation of Experience

What does this 'alternative *othering*' look like? Historians of religion like Jeffrey Kripal (a rare specimen in the field) try to incorporate the effects of radical differential experiences within Western culture into the very ontological conditions of the social construction of meaning. His methodological intervention contributes to a relativization of what were thought to be absolute parameters of understanding and defining 'reality'. The interesting thing is that he reconstructs alternative movements *within Western culture*, not only in poetry and literature (from William Blake to Evelyne Underhill²⁴) but also in the field of scholarship (from Frederic Myers to Jacques Vallée²⁵), working at the margins of the dominant epistemology to relativize its effects. There is still the temptation, and that is an undeniable aspect of Jeffrey Kripal, to link the epistemologically subversive methodology he introduced in the field of religious studies with a 'mystical model' independent of any culture – which can be easily brought back to Western strategies of assimilation instead of alternative strategies of othering. Kripal's transgressive bent in his definition of

“the knowledge of such a [subversive] historian of religions as “a kind of gnosis”²⁶ is very inspiring if taken as an expansion of scholarly research into the hidden (or repressed) side of receptivity, imagination, and insight within intellectual production – precisely because such procedure takes reflexivity to a point of reversal and the dominant epistemology of modernity to a point of internal fracture. But it can end up being reductive if it does not bear in mind that every relativization of mainstream parameters needs to be *located* and its location cannot be the dominant emplacement of ‘universality’ (whether Christian, secular, or non-dual). The local articulations of the flip-side are much more interesting and cohesive than any potential relapse into strategies of unification that end up replacing the dualism of modern Western ontology (self/other, subject/object, mind/body, imaginary/real, etc.) by a non-dualism that looks more like a ‘naturalized substratum’ (after the fashion of traditional metaphysics) than like the ontologically dynamic ‘between-ness’ required – by the very context of our crisis – for new strategies of ‘othering’²⁷. Working on the spirits of the others, that is, on the paralogical or paradoxical incorporation of radically different modes of thinking and being into our social and ontological scaffolding, is betting not only on the postulate of a flip-side but also on the articulation of it without confining local cartographies to epistemological invisibility. The best way to do justice to the ‘other’ is not by pasting it on the smooth skin-surface of our ‘self’, but rather by letting it transpire through the tiny pores of

one’s own cultural defense shield.

A very significant example of alternative othering is provided by post-structuralist anthropology, out of which arose the very controversial but also fruitful expression ‘ontological turn’²⁸. When (and how) does anthropology take this turn? Eduardo Kohn provides a useful answer to this question: “I define ontological anthropology as the nonreductive ethnographic exploration of realities that are not necessarily socially constructed in ways that allow us to do conceptual work with them”²⁹. That the anthropological exploration of other realities may end up questioning the basic assumptions of the ones describing those realities is something that anthropology has known since its very beginning. That the experienced disparity may challenge those assumptions to the point of compelling the anthropologist to re-configure his/her ‘reality’ against the inherited ‘soil’ of experience and intellection is something quite different. Normally anthropologists are willing to modify their horizon of expectation for the sake of the discipline, but not the (pre-reflective) soil of their own methodological assumptions. In the last case, the reality of the ‘other’ ceases to be an object of research and becomes a non-objectifiable living perspective displaying a retroactive effect on the ‘self’ of the observer; it turns each one of the latter’s own analytical and even existential resources upside down, and this may lead to sacrificing the discipline itself. In the face of this challenge, the two alternate solutions in the history of anthropology

The ungraspable aspect of the ‘other’ is a gate toward new epistemological and ontological challenges that Western culture should assume instead of clinging to outdated (and counter-productive) strategies of survival.

have been to reject it, partially or altogether (as has been the case with missionaries, colonial agents, and ethnocentric scholars – even in the post-colonial period), or to emphatically identify oneself with it (like certain heterodox authors who decided to take a jump off the rational edge and ‘go native’). Utter rejection of the challenge of the other is simplistic and retrograde; one-sided identification can be fascinating and sometimes arduous – but still proves to be insufficient when it comes to *facing the challenge*. Another kind of response is demanded, based on a transformation of the basic ‘questions of method’ (including the – positive or negative – projection mechanisms at work in the attempt to ‘grasp’ the other) in order to hold the insurmountable tension of opposites³⁰. What is required to face this challenge and do justice to its complexity is a *transversal (re-)orientation of experience*.

What does this transversal reorientation consist of? To begin with, it is a reorientation concerning the method. The mechanics of globalization demands a *transcultural* response, in the sense that each culture is permanently addressed and challenged by ‘external agents’ in a way that the latter are reinserted within the immanence of the affected identity. This is especially the case in the West, which is forced to assume, for the first time in his *self*-contained history, the relativization of its own ‘universal’ parameters *also from within* – or in social terms: a progressive hybridization of its ‘soil’. A proper reorientation in method should not only accept the fact that the reflexivity of Western thought can no longer reject the ‘ethnological input’ leading to its own ontological relativization. But there is a further step to take. The moment the ‘other’ ceases to be a (straight or inverted) mirror of our ‘self’, this ‘self’ immediately ceases to be the *fundamentum* we thought it to be, and many instances of difference and otherness become visible. The ontological relativity of mainstream Western

principles and values should not be confined to the challenges of anthropology, such as the consideration of animistic cosmologies as examples of an instructive phenomenology of relations³¹ or the revalorization of the totemic imagination as narrative device of (de-centered) local resistance in the face of capitalist deterritorialization³². There is also an internal critique to carry out because difference and otherness are not only part of an external landscape; they constitute our internal dynamics. A transversal reorientation is a learning process, a reeducation of our perception and cognition, a modification of our being-in-the-world. We can reeducate our mode of thinking with critical training, but the register of critique will tend to remain fixed on the very soil that constitutes our hegemonies of representation. We can criticize a political system, the application of a law, the uses and abuses of science and technique, discrimination and racism, or the distribution of wealth in the world. Our hegemony of representation remains nonetheless intact. Quite different is to question the fact that only humans have an interiority, that is, to ascribe a soul or a spirit to animals and plants – certainly not *metaphorically* but in concrete interaction with them –, or to say that nature as a self-contained domain of objects does not exist, or affirm that the difference between the different actors in the chain of being does not lie in their substantial constituents but in their body’s capacities to be affected by other bodies – the body being in this case a fluid and perspectivist energy quantum disclosing world(s). This is the input of ethnology. But this input has been the whole time among us, in the undercurrents of Western culture. It suffices to think about visionary poetry and esoteric thinking. After all, what is the alchemical experiment of Michael Maier, what are the mythological effusions of William Blake, or Antonin Artaud’s theater of cruelty? They are not merely three imaginary attempts at restitution of a cultural



University of California Publications in American Archeology and Ethnology (1903).
Berkeley University of California Press. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

horizon in periods of collective disintegration (the Thirty Years' War in the case of Maier, the French Revolution in Blake, and the collapse of Europe between the two world wars in Artaud)³³ but rather a way of questioning the very soil that led that culture to experience such convulsions. They attempted to re-shape the coordinates of world-relation in periods of increasingly reductive *monoculturalism*, but their work will never become visible if we don't re-read it from another viewpoint than that of the self-sufficient critic whose assumptions about 'elucidation', 'contextualization' and 'solid argumentation' remain intact before and after confrontation with those authors.

Conclusion: Transversality as 'Balancing Act on a Hanging Bridge'

Just as critics do not venture into the world of poets, anthropological knowledge, as useful and sometimes challenging as it may be to question deep-rooted assumptions about the value of other modes of living, tends to set a limit to its own reflexivity, precisely at the point where the main presuppositions of the discipline are threatened by the analytical reversal that other cosmologies and social practices demand. This step back is 'reassuring' in two ways: it prevents an irrational 'flight from reason' (going native), and it reinstates the scholar in a position of power that is not only related to his own institutional status but to a hegemonic constitution

of reality. One can *describe* the other, in detail and even sympathetically, but ultimately one cannot *act out* the other. The other remains a representational object – however scrutinized, appreciated and recognized it may be. The skepticism related to a possible permeability of the method has a clear counterpart in the skepticism with which most anthropologists react if they are asked to venture an extension of their theoretical assemblages beyond their ‘objective descriptions’³⁴.

A transversal reorientation does not consist in thinking differently while keeping hegemonic presuppositions intact. It does not mean discarding everything related to the inherited world-configuration, either, since that is utterly impossible, even in the most radical cases. Reorientation means challenging the soil, opening the gaze, reshaping the horizon *in both directions*: learning from the ‘other’ on the level in which objectification ceases, deconstructing the ‘self’ accordingly, but at the same time re-shaping the ‘self of the other’ through the inevitable distance being bridged over (which is not without tensions and conflicts) and nurturing an ‘internal other’ within ourselves. The transversal reorientation is an in-between, a work of interstices, and at this early stage it can be compared to a balancing act on a hanging bridge whose anchorage, deck and ropes are distressingly unsteady. Transversality³⁵ is in this sense a very daring act with no guarantee of success, but in the present context and given the serious challenges that humanity is facing, it is necessary. It is also the method philosophy should adopt to deal with such issues, since philosophy is almost by defi-

nition a transversal way of thinking – partially coupled with science, partially coupled with arts, but also independently enough to cut through both domains; closely related to life in order to embrace an ‘art of living’, but at the same time detached from the immediacy of the former to come up with judgements concerning one’s own actions; solidary with societal processes and experiences (of a religious, legal and political sort), but at the same time in rupture with them in questioning even the very basis on which they are built.

A philosophy based on a transversal reorientation in thinking would certainly not preserve the totalizing function that Jean-Paul Sartre ascribed to it. It would not limit itself to well-delineated rhetorical interventions for the sake of a social communication of specialized knowledge, either. The first task is too big, since the world is more than what almost thirty centuries of Western philosophy can summarize and sublate. The second too is limited, since in the post-modern and post-secular world knowledge is not only produced by the scientific and technical elites of Western culture – there are also forms of oracular knowledge, plant-based knowledge, trance-related knowledge, mystical-hermeneutical knowledge procedures, etc. Such modalities of knowing cannot be reduced, as in the colonial past, to a cabinet of curiosities, nor can they be taken at face value out of sheer fascination (the problem of superstition does not lie in *the other* but in the mechanisms of appropriation applied to the other’s universe). They need to be integrated into a progressive and thorough philosophy of world compossibility, with all the difficulties and promises

1 The title in the original French version, *Questions de méthode*, was translated into English as *In Search of Method*. For the purposes of my essay, I will maintain the literal translation ‘questions of method’.

2 In spite of his declared atheism, Sartre’s movement adopts to a great extent Hegel’s historical ‘Theodicy’ as expounded in the latter’s Lectures on the *Philosophy of History* (1837), that is, it does not show much discontinuity with the Christian conception of revelation that Hegel intends to translate into a totalizing meaning of ‘world history’: “Our treatment of the subject [philosophy of History] is, in this aspect, a Theodicy, a justification of God, which Leibniz attempted in his own way on a metaphysical basis with indefinite and abstract categories, so that the ill found in the world may be comprehended and the thinking Spirit reconciled with the existing evil” (G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke 12: Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Frankfurt 1986, p. 28).

3 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Tome I, Paris 1985, p. 15.

4 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Ibidem*, p. 22.

5 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Ibidem*, p. 23, note 1.

6 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Ibidem*, p. 23.

7 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Ibidem*, p. 24.

8 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Ibidem*, p. 26.

9 “il est bien clair que les époques de création philosophique sont rares” (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Ibidem*, p. 21).

10 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, Paris 1979, p. 7.

11 Jean-François Lyotard, *Ibidem*.

12 Jean-François Lyotard, *Ibidem*.

13 Jean-François Lyotard, *Ibidem*, p. 8.

14 Jean-François Lyotard, *Ibidem*.

15 Lyotard takes as a point of departure of this historical phase the 1950s, which coincides with the achievement of Europe’s reconstruction after the World War II (cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *Ibidem*, p. 11).

16 These two verdicts are easily deduced from his declaration of Marxism as the “unsurpassable philosophy of our time”, which means that there is no anti-Marxist argu-

ment that can possibly contribute to the progress of mankind and that the rejection of a totalizing reason capable of integrating plurality means a regression into provincial nodes of dogmatic thinking (cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, pp. 21 and 29, respectively).

17 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, p. 86.

18 Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, p. 98.

19 Fredric Jameson, *Foreword to The Postmodern Condition*, Manchester 1984, p. xii.

20 In this respect, cf. Alain Badiou, *Le siècle*, Paris 2005, p. 15.

21 Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger et « les juifs »*, Paris 1988, p. 13.

22 Of course, the locality is not always geo-political. It can also be implanted in the structure of thoughts and feelings of its carriers – especially in the so-called ‘global context’.

23 The word ‘flip’ in the expression ‘flip-side’ intends to evoke, in this context, the promising effort of a historian of religion like Jeffrey Kripal to shake the foundations of scholarly rationality with a methodical procedure of intellectual transgression that does not in any way attempt to throw Western intellectual history overboard. His conception of ‘the flip’ is a clear illustration of what can go beyond ‘the hole’ of otherness in the West to extract new hermeneutical possibilities: “The moment of realization beyond all linear thought, beyond all language, beyond all belief, is what I call ‘the flip’ [...]. The pages [of this book] attempt to flip the reader via story, philosophical argument, and simple human trust (in the otherwise-unbelievable stories that other human beings tell us here) [...]. I begin by employing a set of common extraordinary experiences to call for a new recalibration of the humanities and the sciences toward some future form of knowledge” (Jeffrey Kripal, *The Flip: Epiphanies of the Mind and the Future of Knowledge*, New York 2019, pp. 12-13). If taken as an ethnology of

abnormal (or counter-canonical) experiences within Western mainstream culture, his work is very valuable and needs to be collated with ethnological work on other cultures to build a new morphology of human and non-human relations.

24 Cf. Jeffrey Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism*, Chicago and London 2001, especially his 'Blakean-Tantric inversion of Freud' (in the Introduction) and the epistemological complexities of 'experience' brought about by Underhill's work (in chapter 1), which go in the direction of my argumentation.

25 Cf. Jeffrey Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*, Chicago and London 2010, where he deals also with other authors like Bertrand Méheust (and by extension with William James, Gregory Bateson, Ernesto de Martino and C. G. Jung) and the science mysticism in the fantastic narrative of Charles Fort.

26 Jeffrey Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom*, p. 5.

27 In this respect, a good example would be Terence Even's approach to the "problems of otherness", summarized thus: "Such defining ethnographic problems as what is the nature of kinship? Or how can there be order in society without government? or [...] what is the sense of magico-religious presumptions? [...] require for their resolution nothing less radical than ontological conversion" (Terence Even, *Anthropology as Ethics: Nondualism and the Conduct of Sacrifice*, Oxford and New York 2008, p. 3).

28 The discussion literature on the question of the ontological turn in anthropology is vast and it is not the purpose of this essay to provide a thorough account of it. For a succinct reconstruction of the ontological turn in French anthropology see John D. Kelly, The Ontological Turn in French Philosophical Anthropology, in: *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (4), 1, 2014, pp. 259-269; for a systematic evaluation of the anthropological turn outside of France, see

Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*, New York 2017.

29 Eduardo Kohn, Anthropology of Ontologies, in: Donald Brenneis and Karen Strier (eds.), *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 44, pp. 311-327, quote p. 315.

30 It is usually argued that in multicultural societies there is no such 'tension of opposites', especially because many people stem from more than one provenance. Even when multiculturalism is a reality, and the 'fluidified' (inner and outer) boundaries of individuals and social groups contribute to a permanent re-shaping of the cultural landscape, there is always a construction of 'self' at work in relation to 'other(s)', and the modality of that relation is not devoid of tension (even within the same individual or group). In such cases, alternative strategies of othering are not only carried out in the outside world but also in the inner sphere of one's own (apparent) 'self'.

31 Cf. Graham Harvey, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, London 2019.

32 Cf. Barbara Glowczewski, *Rêves en colère. Alliances aborigènes dans le Nord-Ouest australien*, Paris 2004.

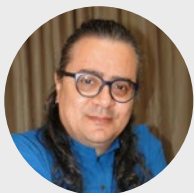
33 These attempts are not to be taken strictly speaking as chronological responses (Maier's *Atalanta Fugiens*, for example, was composed on the eve of the Thirty Years' War, as opposed to Blake's visionary work, which is contemporary and posterior to the Reign of Terror), but rather as atmospheric or field-related reactions – anticipatory, contemporary, or retroactive – to their perception of an acute crisis; nor are they to be seen as successful attempts. Antonin Artaud's *Les nouvelles révélations de l'être*, for example, is a kind of apocalyptic manifesto in which he sees unequalled flashes of insight on the catastrophes of the coming times. However, as late as in 1943, Artaud wrote a dedication to Hitler in one of the copies of that book. The failure of Artaud's attempt does not really lie in his dedication to Hitler, but mainly in the effects of

it, or more precisely in having provided the psychiatric power (in his case Dr. Gaston Ferdière) with the perfect excuse to re-interpret almost the whole of his poetic operations – from the mystical openings in content to the glossolalian rupture of discursive logic – as ‘madness’ (cf. Antonin Artaud, *Œuvres Complètes VII*, Paris 1982, pp. 423-424).

34 A refreshing exception to this rule is Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, whose work contains not only

solid research and a philosophical elaboration of the ethnographic material obtained through local fieldwork and complementary readings of extensive ethnographic records, but also a political agenda to further the survival and interests of Amerindian peoples.

35 My debt to Félix Guattari in the subject of transversality, far beyond the parameters of the field in which he mainly worked (alternative psychiatry), is something on which I will elaborate in a future essay.



Celso Cintra

Composer, musician, musicologist, and professor at the University of Uberlândia, Brazil. Author of the book *Alain Daniélou e seu labirinto musical [Alain Daniélou and his Musical Labyrinth]*, São Paulo: Novas Edições Acadêmicas, 2020.

INTERVIEW

ALAIN DANIELLOU'S MUSICOLOGICAL WORK

From 24 to 25 March of this year, Celso Cintra held a workshop at the Labyrinth on Alain Daniélou's musical dialogue, in which he dealt systematically with Daniélou's musicological project – including his critique of Western music, the philosophical background of Indian classical music, and the influence of musical intervals on human emotions. This interview intends to highlight some instances of the dialog with Celso Cintra during the workshop as well as some relevant aspects of Daniélou's musicological work: the question of equal temperament and just intonation, the difference between harmonic and modal music, Daniélou's verdict on the 'arbitrariness' of Western music, as well as some shortcomings in his own theory.

Interview by Amanda Viana, Assistant FAD Research and Intellectual Dialogue
Translation from the Portuguese by Amanda Viana and Adrián Navigante.



Prof. Celso Cintra and Daniélou's Rudra Vina. Photo by Bishal Diganta.

Q: Celso Cintra, it is not so usual to find a Brazilian musician and scholar of music who has worked systematically on Alain Daniélou's philosophy and theory of music as well as his views on musical cognition. Brazil is a country extremely rich in musical traditions of different kinds and Daniélou's work seems to be quite distant from that world. What is the reason for your choice?

A: I was raised in a family that was very fond of music, especially of Brazilian music – my father listened to a lot of *choro*¹ and *samba*² and my mother listened to a lot of *Roberto Carlos*³ and *Jovem Guarda*⁴. In time, I became more and more seriously interested in music due to punk rock, especially in my teens. Rock music touched me with its lyrics. The most politicized songs as well as the most poetic ones went through my pores, my mind, my emotions. I never had the same kind of experience again until years later

when I became acquainted with Indian music. I ended up not only listening to rock music but delving into everything that was related to it: concerts, magazines, TV programs, etc. I once read in an interview with Ian McCulloch, the vocalist of the band *Echo and The Bunnymen*, a particular comment on his song *The Killing Moon*, in which he said that for him music still needed “magic and mystery”. Years later, as an adult, I read the book *O Som e o Sentido* [*The Sound and the Sense*]⁵ by José Miguel Wisnick, in which Wisnick quotes Alain Daniélou. I don't know why, but for me the way he quoted Daniélou and the passage he had selected somehow brought me back to that phrase by McCulloch. I had the impression, that Daniélou could in a certain way explain what the phrase “magic and mystery” meant and how it could become real. This event led me, in the 1990s, to my bachelor's degree in Composition and Conducting. I wanted to find out what the “secret”

of music was. But that ambition had to be postponed for a long time, until the beginning of the 2000s, when I finally read Alain Daniélou's books. When I realized that he talked not only about Western music but also about Indian music, and even more: that he had lived in India and studied a very special Indian instrument, the Rudra Vina, his writings and his experience in that culture ended up being a special inspiration and motivated me to follow his traces by means of profound research.

Q: One of the first things that strikes the reader as surprising in reading Daniélou's musicological work concerns the question on the nature of music. Even if he accepts the existence of different musical languages, he does not share the relativistic answer (which is the most usual today) concerning the nature of music. The relativistic position states that there are different epistemologies according to each cultural complex, and that there is no underlying "nature of music". Daniélou, on the contrary, seems to be convinced that we can find invariants underlying musical languages and a kind of natural anchorage of the musical phenomenon. Do you share that view?

A: Daniélou was a man of his time, in the same way in which I am a man of my time. We should not forget that he was a pioneer in the field of Ethnomusicology, which at that time was called 'Comparative Musicology'. For my part, I do not believe that there is a 'nature of music' underlying all cultural sound phenomena. There are cultural groups which don't even have the idea of music in the way we understand and postulate it. However, we must bear in mind that Daniélou's work focuses on musical languages that do allow that kind of analysis. We see this, for example, in his book *Music and the Power of Sound* (1995, revised edition of his *Introduction to the Musical Scales* from 1943). Here he describes some musical languages, namely Indian, Chinese, Ancient Greek and Western Classical, whose similarities are based on the idea of

the discrete division of musical space and have the octave as a common element.

Q: According to Daniélou, sound relations cannot be understood without numerical symbolism, and the more clarity we gain about that symbolism, the better our understanding not only of the production but also of the reception of sound. Daniélou is convinced that if we ignore such relations, we fall into irrational and degenerate ways of making and reasoning about music. What is the place of mathematics in his musical theory? Is it a discipline enabling the quality of sound to be measured, or is it also a key to seeing a kind of pre-empirical arrangement of sound? Mathematics, in Daniélou's work, is used as a kind of common language that permits the analysis of the common aspects of different musical languages. However, he always stresses that mathematics is worthless without bearing in mind the phenomenon of audition, and that usually the most experienced musicians achieve more accuracy by listening than by calculating. In this sense, mathematical analysis would grasp what musicians perceive temporally (when they listen to sounds), but independently of the time factor. Regarding numerical symbolism, this can be approached mathematically, but there is also a temporal side to it, for example when we listen to successive or simultaneous intervals. In this sense, I understand mathematics more as something complementary to audition. It enables a confluence of time and space, since the mathematical relations of intervals leads to a geometrical visualization of numbers, a pre-empirical combination of sound, so to speak.

Q: In Daniélou's theory, the opposition of modal and harmonic music is seen as a contrast between a "natural" and an "artificial" system. What makes a melodic framework like the Indian *rāga* "natural" and the twelve-tone technique "artificial"? In other words, what authorizes Daniélou to add in his descriptive ar-

guments about musical systems what seems to be a severe judgement of value?

A: In the text *L'Agression harmonique* [*Harmonic Aggression*, 1974]⁶ Daniélou defends Schoenberg, the father of 'Twelve-Tone Music', and other experimental and avant-garde composers of the 20th century, such as Webern, Satie, Stravinsky, Ives, Cage and Stockhausen. He says that these composers created a type of music that was no longer based in the harmonic teleology of the tonal system. As such, their new form of composition could provide the Western ear with musical perception devoid of harmonic audition. In this way, it is possible for the Western listener to appreciate Eastern music with less prejudice, since this kind of music was negatively understood in the West, usually looked down on as a primitive phenomenon. However, Daniélou argues that, in music, there should be a close connection between theory and sound phenomenon, and in his eyes Twelve-Tone Music – and later 'Integral Serialism' – is responsible for their separation. This criticism can also be found in the West among composers and music analysts. For Daniélou, the Western harmonic musical theory, based on modulation and transposition, allowed the progressive adoption of 'equal temperament' and little by little lost touch with sound phenomenon. His evaluation is centered on how far or close the musical theory of each system is from its own respective sound phenomenon.

Q: The phenomenon of sound, that is, its realization and possibility of being perceived, presupposes the notion of interval in the sense of a variation (in pitch) implying difference and relation (between notes). According to Daniélou, the *content* of that formal relation between notes seems to be not so much the material realization of differentiated sound, but mainly the effect of that realization on the hearer, whether it is a sensation, an emotion, or an image. What is the nature of that content within the framework of Daniélou's theory? Is it hu-

man (that is, psycho-physiological) or non-human (a metaphysical meaning related to a cosmic arrangement), or both?

A: According to Daniélou it is both: human and non-human. He wrote two books to treat this issue, which he himself considered his most important works: *Music and the Power of Sound* (1995, revised edition of his *Introduction to the Musical Scales* from 1943) and *Sémantique Musicale* [*Musical Semantics*, 1967]. In the first, he deals with the aspect most related to the non-human dimension or to the dimension that is exterior to human phenomena, i.e., the metaphysical relationships related to cosmic principles concerning each musical system. In the second, he deals with aspects related to the human being in his/her own individuality, for example, he describes the psycho-physiological effect of music, he explains how and why a certain effect occurs in our audio-mental apparatus, he goes from the physical capture of sound by the ear to the psychological consequences of this capture in the brain and in the mind.

Q: Daniélou had his problems with the notion of "ethnomusicology". This discipline was in his eyes problematic from the very beginning, mainly due to its tendency to treat very rich and complex systems of music (such as Iranian music, Gamelan music from Bali or the music of Tibetan Lamas) as primitive and exotic. However, from the perspective of ethnomusicology, Daniélou's approach could be criticized as lacking in specificity (that is, understanding the music of the others in itself) and, despite his anti-colonialist efforts, still ethnocentric, since the parameter of the comparison remains the elitist music systems of the West (whether one includes Indian or Iranian classical music within that parameter or not). It is perhaps for this reason that, since the publication of Alan Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music* (1964), Daniélou's comparative approach was considered old-fashioned. What are your views on this question?



Workshop conducted by prof. Celso Cintra: *Alain Daniélou's Musical Dialogue*, March 24-25, 2023. Photo by Bishal Diganta.

A: Merriam's contribution established a 'new paradigm' in Ethnomusicology, in the sense that Thomas S. Kuhn gives to this expression in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). In this sense, despite Daniélou's contributions to the field, especially if we think of the huge number of records he produced for the *UNESCO Collection of World Music*, his approach has become outdated. However, when I came across his work, I noticed that there was still much to reap from it. The point is to understand his work in a new way. It would be necessary to elaborate a new interpretation, to 're-describe it' – in the Rortian⁷ sense of re-description – to broaden not only his research, but also our own understanding of Western music. That is why I argue that there are many contributions to be reconsidered in the field of Composition, Musical Theory, and Philosophy of Music.

Q: If we follow Daniélou's reasoning, especially his views on the difference between modal and harmonic music, the loss of the tonic is the

entrance to the realm of the arbitrary. Why are simple harmonic relations (that is, the combination of different intervals as well as the relationship between each interval and the tonic) *non-arbitrary* and what would "non-arbitrary" mean in that context? Does non-arbitrary mean "necessary", "motivated" or "fixed by convention"?

A: When Daniélou refers to arbitrariness, he mainly points to it in the context of his interpretation of sound and musical effects at the time of listening to music. He advocates objective music, the effects of which (on the listener) can be exactly controlled by the composer and the performer. Such objectivity would be impossible with equal temperament or with very complex interval relationships because it would go beyond the capacities of our brain to process such intervals. For Daniélou, the human brain works simultaneously with binary, ternary, and quinary languages. This means that whatever lies outside these languages would be reinterpreted (by the brain) in an un-

predictable way, both arbitrarily and randomly. Ultimately, the brain tries to adapt musical relations to one of those three languages. This would lead us to the idea that the appreciation of music is not only subjective, in other words: it is not motivated by taste or a circumstantial state of mind, but also by the physical conditions of the body of the listener at the time of listening. However, if these relationships are carried out by the musician with the necessary precision using simple harmonic relationships, there would be no possibility of any arbitrary interpretation because the brain would not be led to a ‘mental fatigue’ of reinterpreting what it hears. In this sense, I think that Daniélou would consider a non-arbitrary interpretation of music as something necessary, although in Western music there are non-arbitrary cases established by convention, such as the ‘theory of affects’ of the Baroque period.

Q: In his *Sémantique musicale*, Daniélou states that the psychological effect of modal forms and their influence on the personality and character of human beings is like entering the realm of magic. In referring to ecstasy and trance, he says that such states are not at all mysterious but are the result of a repeated use of specific sound groups. We are once again confronted with the question of intervals, and one might think that Daniélou limits the magic effect (strictly speaking within a sacred context) to modal music, but that is not the case. In fact, polyrhythmic drumming in Africa or the cycle of fifths in China are, in Daniélou’s reflections on the psychological effects of music, cases of systems with remarkable individual and collective influence. One could also say that just intonation and equal temperament are not without “magical effects” on the listeners – for example, if we think of Georg Friedrich Handel or Johann Sebastian Bach. What is the specificity of musical effects in musical systems alien to just intonation and equal temperament?

A: Firstly, we must distinguish between just in-

tonation and pure or just interval. Just intervals are those found in the harmonic series. The Indian modal system and the Chinese system use just intervals, since both intervals are found in the harmonic series. Just intonation, which was proposed by Gioseffo Zarlino in the XVI century, is also based on the harmonic series. However, when the Western harmonic system applies just intonation, it inevitably modifies each set of chords, since the notes used for the construction of the chords do not coincide with the notes used in the construction of the scale. In this way, there is a continuous change in the pitch of the notes to keep the just intervals. These continuous changes would not allow the brain to accurately fix the sound relationships between the notes, since they change the pitch and consequently the interval relationships. This undermines a precise interpretation (by the brain) of the interval relationships between the notes. As for the music of Bach and Handel, they were created when equal temperament was not hegemonic. At that time, some unequal temperaments, so-called ‘good temperaments’, were used, which kept some intervals pure and others tempered. The tempered ones were used for short passages of modulation. In this way, when stable tones were reached, it was possible to hear pure intervals again. So, we have basically two situations: With just intonation there is a continuous change of notes to keep just intervals. With equal temperament we constantly have the same notes and the same intervals, but they are not just. Neither of the two uses allows the brain to process the intervals as objective and continuous information. This situation would not happen with Indian modal music or Chinese modulatory music, since their pure intervals are unambiguous and continuous.

Q: In the framework of his “Shaivite-Dionysian” conception of religion, Daniélou denounces the human being’s loss of a link with the different levels of being (which for him makes sense of

the term “religion”), beginning with a concrete interaction with Nature in its non-objectified manifestation. For the purpose of re-establishing that link, he announces, in his book *Shiva et Dionysos*, a program for the future where certain phenomena like reconnection with one’s own sexuality, the ritual use of entheogens or an increasing awareness of sacred places are seen as larval stages of a renewal. There seems to be a similar consideration in his theory of music. His denunciation of the “harmonic aggression” in the West is quite clear, but in some essays he values American folksongs, jazz or the Negro spiritual and even the musical background of the hippie world (giving as its shining example the funeral march at the end of the film *Hair*). What makes those styles so special for him?

A: Daniélou was a staunch critic of the modern interpretation of classical music, especially that of the romantic period. For him, sentimental interpretations were wrong due to their misunderstanding of the musical text and to the performer’s personal interpretation. On the other hand, an interpretation based strictly on technique, he considered cold and without content. So, from my point of view, what Daniélou appreciates in these musical manifestations such as Jazz, Rock, Negro Spiritual, Disco, and Popular Song is their vitality, their freshness, their direct connection with the feelings and emotions of the performers and listeners.

Q: You have been working on Alain Daniélou’s musical theory for decades, and you are yourself a musician. But your music, with which you familiarized us during the workshop you recently held at the Labyrinth, does not follow the Indian classical modal system, nor is it afraid of radical innovations mindful of John Cage’s musical experiments. Is there a place for Alain Daniélou in your musical art?

A: Alain Daniélou and John Cage were very important for my musical training: The first for his way of poking into certain questions or

‘putting his finger in the wound’, so to speak. In doing that, he managed to show the contradictions between the theory and the practice of Western music. The second, John Cage, is also important because he cast aside Western music and tried something completely alien to our tradition. Daniélou was the subject of my doctoral thesis, John Cage was the author I worked on for my master’s degree. When I compose music with defined pitch as its main material, I always have Daniélou and his research on sound relations in mind. Cage emerges when I compose something a little more conceptual or experimental. I never compose music to express myself. Sometimes, to quote Cage, “I make music just to listen to it”. For sure, there is also room for Alain Daniélou in my musical art.

Q: In the last chapter of your book “*Alain Daniélou and his Musical Labyrinth*” [*Alain Daniélou e seu labirinto musical*. São Paulo: Novas Edições Acadêmicas, 2020] you point to three shortcomings in Alain Daniélou’s musico-logical work. The first one is related to musical cognition. You state that Daniélou’s excessive confidence in the physical or natural aspect of musical perception ends up being detrimental to the cultural aspect. The second one concerns the relationship between music language and cybernetics. You say that Norbert Wiener’s cybernetics, on which Daniélou’s views on the human audio-mental device is based, is not a psychological or cognitive theory but a theory of communication. The third one is linked to the exclusivity of natural tuning as a vehicle for the objective communication of ideas. Could you expand a little on these shortcomings in Daniélou’s thought?

A: I have been doing research on Daniélou mainly from the perspective of Musical Cognition because he makes an effort to describe how the brain understands musical language, as he clearly shows in his book *Sémantique Musicale* [*Musical Semantic*]. Although his arguments are coherent and logical, one must



Dinner time at the Labyrinth, part of the Workshop conducted by prof. Celso Cintra: *Alain Daniélou's Musical Dialogue*, March 24-25, 2023. Photo by Bishal Diganta.

understand that, since the first publication of that work, much has been developed in this field – in addition to what has been done in the field of Music Psychology. With regard to Daniélou's excessive reliance on physical or natural aspects, it is important to mention two authors who suggest two possible universals in the study of music: Leonard B. Meyer with regard to nature and culture, and Enrico Fubini with regard to nature and history. Even though Daniélou's research focuses on music from specific civilizations, as he shows in *Music and the Power of Sound*, he does not address the cultural issue from the point of view of habits and customs, but from the perspective of metaphysical correspondences. Because of that, he attempts to describe the common origin of intervals used by the music of different civilizations. He also associates these intervals with their origin

of the harmonic series, which is closely linked to the idea of resonance as a natural phenomenon. In his book *Sémantique Musicale* [*Musical Semantic*], he approaches this subject from the psycho-physiological perspective and deals with the effects of musical sound on the individual's brain – once again a natural aspect. It is clear, in both books, that we can identify and differentiate natural intervals from tempered ones on the level of audition, but this interpretation of interval effects would be merely cultural. The type of sensation elicited by the intervals in an Indian listener would be different from that of a European or of a Chinese or a Greek, so there are cultural differences and, in a certain way, cultural relativism. However, Daniélou asserts that the effects of modal music are absolute, so he thinks ultimately in terms of invariants. The second weakpoint in

Daniélou's work, as far as I am concerned, is his use of cybernetics. At first sight it seems right, since he begins with the principle that music is a language and, as a consequence of this, has the capacity to transmit something susceptible of being understood. Cybernetics as a theory of communication would therefore provide an explanation of that function. However, if we bear in mind the latest developments in the field of musical cognition, we see that the complexity of the musical phenomenon goes beyond all possible elucidations provided by cybernetics. Despite certain advantages of cybernetics as an explanatory device, it cannot account for phenomena such as the appreciation of music by deaf people, the effect caused by music on people with Parkinson's disease, the use of music in treating autistic patients or

people with ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), for example. It was a first step, but it is not enough at present. The third shortcoming concerns Daniélou's exclusive emphasis on natural intonation as objectively capable of communicating the 'musical sense'. Daniélou privileges modal music because its intervals and notes do not change during its execution. But this privilege is not impartial. His preference for modal music is due to the fact that he studied Indian music very deeply. This was a great contribution, but we can nevertheless pose this question: Is the privileged status of Indian music due to objective parameters or is it a consequence of Daniélou's personal preferences? This aspect is not sufficiently clear in his work. •

1 *Choro* (cry or lament) is an instrumental popular urban music genre originated in the 19th century in Rio de Janeiro. Its main characteristics are improvisation, modulations and counterpoint.

2 *Samba* is the name for several rhythmic variants mostly originated in the Afro-Brazilians communities of Rio de Janeiro and Bahia in the early XX century. It is one of the Brazil's most distinctive symbols.

3 Roberto Carlos (1941) is one of the most popular Brazilian singers and songwriters.

4 *Jovem Guarda* was at first a Brazilian musical television show broadcast in 1965 by Rede Record. The term soon expanded to designate the entire movement and style surrounding it. It was influenced by the American *rock n' roll* of the late 1950s and by the British Invasion bands of the 1960s. The music became in many cases

softer, and more naïve versions were produced with light and romantic lyrics aimed at teenagers. Among its exponents are Roberto Carlos, Erasmo Carlos and Wanderléa.

5 José Miguel Wisnik. *O Som e o Sentido*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2017.

6 Cf. Alain Daniélou, *Origines et pouvoirs de la musique*, Paris 2005, pp. 69-76.

7 Celso Cintra refers to the American philosopher Richard Rorty (1931-2007) and his radical relativistic claim that *anything* can be redescribed to look good or bad. In Rorty's view, redescription is more an imaginative activity than a procedure based on strictly factual parameters. This is no shortcoming but rather a redeeming aspect of thought in the face of the unfortunate crave for certainties, in other words: a contribution to pluralism and tolerance.

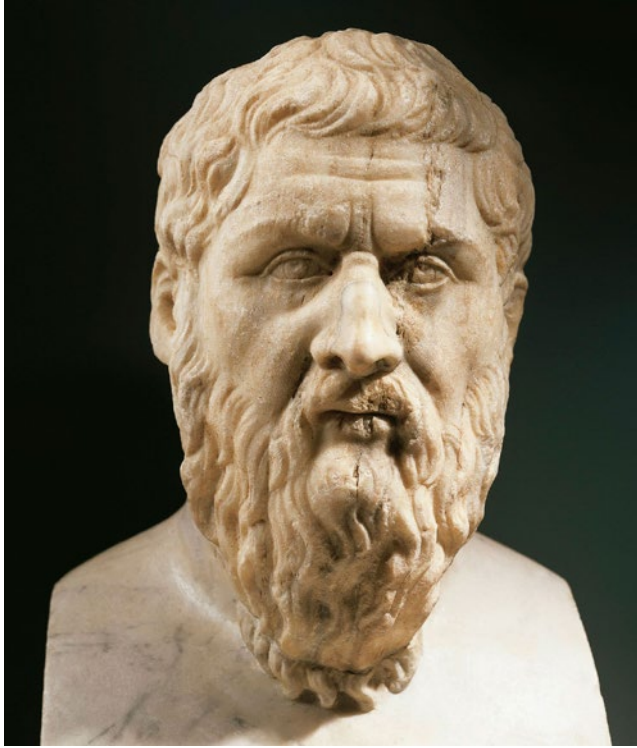


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CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE THIRD KIND: A HERMETIC THEORY OF IMAGINAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In this essay, Wouter Hanegraaff analyzes a neglected theory of consciousness and the imagination central to Hermetic literature. *Corpus Hermeticum XI*, in particular, describes a radical state of consciousness expansion referred to as the *Aiōn*, in which the human mind is said to participate completely and consciously in the “incorporeal imagination” of the universal divine mind or *Nous*. By going back to the original terminology and its intellectual context in late antiquity, Wouter Hanegraaff brings to light a theory of consciousness that has been forgotten and misunderstood, but may prove highly relevant to current discussions in philosophy and cognitive research.



Marble portrait bust of Plato (428-248 BCE) dating back to the IV century BCE. Capitoline Museum, Rome. Source: DeAgostini/SuperStock. In: britannica.com/biography/Plato.

The so-called Hermetic treatises were written by anonymous authors in Roman Egypt during the first centuries CE. They are very well known to scholars as important historical sources for popular philosophy and religion in late antiquity, but have almost never been approached from the perspectives of psychology and consciousness studies.¹ In this short article I argue that in actual fact, they contain a subtle and fascinating theory of consciousness grounded in classic post-Aristotelian views of the imagination (*phantasia*). The intellectual tradition from which these texts emerged has been neglected and marginalized to a truly remarkable extent between antiquity and the eighteenth century, when some of its basic insights were rediscovered and reinstated by Kant and Fichte – only to be covered up once again, first by Kant himself and then by Hegel.² The crucial importance

and continuing relevance, for philosophy and the study of consciousness, of these theories of the imagination has nevertheless been emphasized in different ways notably by Martin Heidegger (who rediscovered the Kantian theory), Cornelius Castoriades (who did the same for the original Aristotelian perspective), and Chiara Bottici (who has sought more recently to restore it to the agenda of political philosophy and critical theory). My larger argument is that the human faculty of imagination (*phantasia* in Greek, *Vorstellungsvermögen* or *Einbildungskraft* in German³), as theorized in this tradition, may well be of key importance for understanding the nature of human consciousness. To explore the connection from a systematic perspective, modern specialists in the study of consciousness can look for inspiration and important insights to classical theories and ap-

proaches that have seldom received the attention they deserve.

Plato's *Chōra* and Aristotle's *Phantasia*

Classical Greek metaphysics distinguished famously between the realm of Being and that of Becoming. In Plato's *Timaeus*, for instance, these "two basic kinds" (*eidē*) were formulated in technical language. To understand the important passage in question, we first need to be aware of a crucial but severely neglected issue concerning translation. The Greek word *nous* is conventionally translated as "mind" or "intellect"; and its activity, *noēsis*, is most frequently rendered as "thinking." However, these standard lexical translations do a very poor job at conveying the actual meanings of *nous* and *noēsis* in ancient philosophy, whether Platonic or Hermetic. In fact, they obscure the very nature of these "noetic" processes of human cognition, by using philosophical language that sounds comfortable to modern readers but is far removed from the original meaning. The sober truth is that modern English has *no* words that even approximate the subtle meanings of *nous* and *noēsis* in ancient Greek philosophy – these terms are strictly untranslatable.⁴ It is for this reason that on the following pages I introduce the verb *noeticizing*, as a neologism necessary to capture the activity of *nous*.

With these observations in the back of our minds, we are now ready to read the following key passage in Plato's oeuvre about Being and Becoming:

... the following must first be distinguished: what is that which always is [*to on aei*] and has no coming-to-be, and what is always coming to be [*to gignomenon aei*] and never is? The former is to be noeticized with the help of *logos* [*noēsei meta logou*], being always the same, but the latter is to be opined by opinion [*doxēi*] with the help of unreasoning sense perception [*aisthēseōs alogou*],

coming to be and passing away but never really being.⁵

Thus the timeless noetic reality of "what really is" stands against our perceptual space-time reality of impermanence and multiplicity, sense perception and mere opinion. So far, so good. Notoriously, however, Plato was preparing the way here for his later introduction of a *third* "kind" – something baffling and utterly mysterious referred to as the *chōra*. While the passage in question may seem obscure or enigmatic at first sight, that impression results in fact from the extreme precision of its formulations. It therefore deserves to be read with the utmost care:

... there is a third kind, the everlasting *chōra* [*triton de au genos on to tēs chōras aei*] which does not receive destruction, which provides an abode [*hedran*] for everything that comes to be, but is itself apprehended without sense experience [*met' anaisthēsias*] by a kind of bastard reasoning [*logismōi tini nothōi*], hardly trustworthy; which we see as in a dream, and affirm that it is necessary for all that is to be somewhere in some place and occupy some *chōra*; and that that which is neither on the earth nor in heaven is nothing.⁶

Regardless of how we interpret the exact nature of this *chōra* (if indeed it can be interpreted at all), there is broad agreement among specialists that by introducing this "third kind," Plato utterly deconstructs the dualism of eternal Being versus ever-changing Becoming.⁷ While the *chōra* is everlasting like Being, yet it functions like a necessary, indispensable substrate or receptacle of everything that pertains to the domain of Becoming; it is imperceptible to the senses and cannot be grasped by proper or legitimate reason; and since it neither *is* nor *becomes*, one can only refer to it as "nothing." Therefore is it or is it not? Somehow it must be neither or both. While the *chōra* lacks any formal qualities, it both receives and reveals

them; while it never appears itself, yet it makes everything apparent.⁸ We cannot presume to know with absolute certainty what Plato meant by *chōra*, but I suggest it would be perfectly natural for readers in antiquity to be reminded of another concept – that of Aristotle’s *phantasia*, the imagination. In a famous passage of *De anima*, he observes that internal images (*phantasmata*) appear to the noeticizing soul as objects of perception, which it then avoids if they seem bad and pursues when they seem good. Thus it is, he notes, that “the soul never noeticizes without a phantasm” (*oudepote noei aneu phantasmatos hē psuchē*).⁹ This elusive faculty of imagination never appears directly or independently, but only through what it does; it is “different from either sense perception or discursive thinking (*dianoia*), although it is never found without sense perception”¹⁰; and it enables human consciousness to store images and remember them. Commenting on Plato’s statement that the *chōra* escapes our proper faculty of reasoning and is seen only “as in a dream,” John Sallis has made the perceptive remark that what we see in our dreams is always “an image that goes unrecognized as an image, an image that in the dream is simply taken as the original” – one must be awake to distinguish between the two.¹¹ Most modern readers experience some difficulties in grasping the point at issue here, and its implications, because it seems to conflict with our default post-Enlightenment assumptions about fantasy and imagination as *contrary* to rational knowledge and the reality principle. However, this difficulty of understanding in fact illustrates

the very problem of translation that I already highlighted with reference to *nous* and *noēsis*: as it happens, the Greek word *phantasia* has no proper equivalent in our modern languages either. As explained in a meticulous analysis by Chiara Bottici,

The contrast [of *phantasia*] with the modern view of imagination as purely imaginary could not be greater. The proportions of this rupture are evident in the embarrassment of modern translators who cannot render the Greek term *phantasia* with the literal translation “*fantasy*” because this would mean the opposite of what Aristotle had in mind when writing those passages. Alternative modern terms are needed to capture the meaning of Aristotle’s *phantasia*: “actual vision” or “true appearance,” that is, expressions that mean exactly the opposite of what literal translations such as “imagination” and “fantasy” would convey to modern readers.¹²

Therefore the term *phantasia* did not refer to mental delusions or creative inventions divorced from reality, as we usually assume: it meant simply “appearance” or “presentation,” from *phainesthai* (to appear).¹³ As such, it covered absolutely *everything* that *appears to be present* in human consciousness. In stating that “the soul never noeticizes without a phantasm,” Aristotle therefore referred to the imagination as nothing less than “the condition for thought insofar as it alone can present to thought the object as sensible without matter.”¹⁴ In other words, no mental or intellectual activity of *any*

The term *phantasia* did not refer to mental delusions or creative inventions divorced from reality, as we usually assume: it meant simply “appearance” or “presentation,” from *phainesthai* (to appear).

kind is considered possible without the faculty of imagination: “there is *always* phantasm; we are *always* imagining.”¹⁵ Because this point is obscured by our common understandings of “imaginative” or “imaginary” as not cognitive but delusionary or deceptive, I adopt Chiara Bottici’s convention of using *imaginal* as an adjective that makes no assumptions either way about the reality of what is being perceived.¹⁶

The Hermetic Aiōn

Against these backgrounds, I wish to call the reader’s attention to an important Greek treatise known as *Corpus Hermeticum* XI, in which the pupil Hermes Trismegistus receives instruction from no one less than the personified *Nous* itself, understood in a Hermetic context as the ultimate divine reality of universal Light. Here the *Nous* calls Hermes’ attention precisely to a “third kind” of reality intermediary between God and the Cosmos but not reducible to either of those two. It undercuts the dualism of Being and Becoming just as the *chōra* does in Plato’s *Timaeus*, but here this third kind is referred to as the *aiōn*. As an introduction, Hermes is first presented with a systematic overview of how the whole of reality is structured. There is a hierarchy of five levels, each one of which is the source of the one below it: from God comes the *aiōn*, from the *aiōn* comes the Cosmos, from the Cosmos comes Time, and from Time comes Becoming. Each level is said to have an essence (*ousia*) and two energies (*energeiai*).¹⁷

[Name]	[essence]	[energies]
GOD	wisdom	nous & soul
AIŌN	remaining identical	permanence & immortality
COSMOS	order	recurrence & counter-recurrence
TIME	change	increase & decrease
BECOMING	life & death	quality & quantity

This structure is less complicated than it might seem at first sight. That the Ptolemaic geocentric cosmos with its continuous circular movement of the planetary spheres brings forth time was a perfectly standard assumption; and that “becoming” depends on time is equally obvious. The three lower levels therefore belong together as the cosmic domain of time and change. Thus it is easy to simplify this five-part division by reducing it to a more basic triple division: God – *Aiōn* – The World (= Cosmos/Time/Becoming). The result is a familiar standard structure in which eternal Being (God) is pitted against Becoming (the world) – but with the *aiōn* added in between, as a surprising “third kind” that apparently neither *is* nor *becomes*, or does both at the same time. CH XI continues by explaining that while God is the ultimate source (*pēgē*) of all things, the *aiōn* is their true being (*ousia*); more specifically, it is the divine power or soul that allows the cosmos to function and move. As it always remains identical, it is imperishable, indestructible, immortal, and wholly envelops the cosmos.¹⁸

Before the teaching returns to the *aiōn*, Hermes is now invited to look at the cosmos through the eyes of the *Nous* itself (*theasai de di’ emou...*). As with earlier instances in the Hermetic literature (notably a passage in which the pupil’s attention is called to the innocence of a newborn baby¹⁹) what this means is that he must look with a gaze of wonder and love:

behold the cosmos as it extends before your gaze, and carefully contemplate [*katanoēson*] its beauty: a flawless body, while older than anything else, yet always in bloom, young and flourishing in ever more abundance.²⁰

The text continues to praise this supreme spectacle of cosmic splendour: all is filled with divine Light and Love, everything is full of soul and in never-ending harmonious movement,²¹ and the whole is forever held together by the universal goodness of God alone: “one single



Ancient marble portrait of Aristotle (384-322 BCE). Roman copy (II century BCE) of a Greek original (c. 325 BCE). Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome (Italy). Source: A. Dagli Orti/©De Agostini Editore/age fotostock. In: britannica.com/biography/Aristotle.

soul, one single life, one single matter.”²² As the central power of creative abundance, the generative Source in its boundless generosity never stops giving birth to all that is. “And that, dear friend, is life. That is beauty. That is goodness. That is God.”²³

So here we have Hermes looking at the cosmos with what the Hermetic literature often refers to as “the eyes of the heart,” the internal gaze of wonder and love, marvelling at the beauty of it all. It is at this point that his teacher makes a characteristically Hermetic request for extra concentration²⁴: *some of my words require special attention, so please try to understand [noēson] what I’m about to say now!*²⁵ And what follows is important indeed. As Hermes is looking at the cosmos, what is he *really* looking at? This is what the *nous* explains to him:

All beings are in God – not as though they were in some place ... but in a different manner: they rest in his incorporeal imagination [*en asōmatōi phantasiāi*]. ... You must conceive of God as having all *noēmata* in himself: those of the cosmos, himself, the all. Therefore unless you make yourself equal to God, you cannot understand [*noēsai*] God. Like is understood only by like. Allow yourself to grow larger until you are equal to him who is immeasurable, outleap all that is corporeal, transcend all time, and become the *aion* – then you will understand [*noēseis*] God.”²⁶

Regretfully, modern specialists of the Hermetic treatises have almost universally ignored the request for special attention, for the abundant critical literature shows a singular lack of in-

terest in precisely this key passage about the incorporeal imagination.²⁷ We find lengthy and erudite discussions of what the word *aiōn* could mean in late antiquity, but no recognition or discussion of what our text so clearly says: that here this term refers to God's incorporeal imagination filled with the *noēmata* of all that is.²⁸ And yet, precisely that statement is of key importance for CH XI as well as for the important parallel treatise CH XIII, the famous treatise on rebirth.²⁹ According to the Hermetic literature, our normal human consciousness gets deluded on a constant basis by the "phantom images" of the imagination. These must be distinguished from the supreme true image of the divine Monas: while the former belong to the realm of change and Becoming, the latter stands for permanent Being. But in CH XI we are presented with a *third kind* of imaginal awareness. Unlike the other two, this is not an inherently limited perspective "from somewhere" (for even the supreme image of the Monas described in CH IV 9-11 will still be perceived by one single human consciousness as it freshly emerges, in Platonic terms, from the cave of impermanence and multiplicity) but the eternal divine perspective *from everywhere*. In other words, this is not the image of God as it appears to human consciousness, but the All as it is perceived in God's *own* consciousness. Whereas isolated images that appear in human consciousness attract our selfish desires, so that we pursue them and end up getting enslaved in matter, the point is that God perceives *all* images simultaneously. He feels no need to pursue any of them, because he already possesses them all and privileges none over the other; therefore this universal divine consciousness alone is perfectly free from the limiting temptations of desire. The truly remarkable statement made by CH XI is that *human* consciousness is not separate from this *divine* consciousness but is capable of full participation in its universal mode of imaginal perception.

Behold [*noēson*] him who contains all that is, and behold [*noēson*] that there are no boundaries to the incorporeal, that nothing is quicker or more powerful. ... You can see [*noēson*] this for yourself. Tell your soul to travel to India, and it will be there faster than your command. Tell it to go to the ocean, and again it will be there quite as quickly – not as though it were moving from one place to another but as though it was always already there. Then tell it to fly to heaven, and you will find that it needs no wings. Nothing can stop it, neither the fire of the sun, nor the ether, nor the cycles of the stars, nor the other heavenly bodies. Cutting through all spaces, its flight will carry it all the way up to the ultimate corporeal thing. And if you wish to break through the outer rim of the cosmos to see what is beyond it (if anything beyond the cosmos can be said to be),³⁰ you can do even that. See what power you have, what quickness! ... Having perceived that nothing is impossible for you, consider yourself immortal and capable of understanding [*noēsai*] everything – all arts, all learning, the nature of all living beings. Rise higher than every height and descend lower than every depth; gather all sensations inside you of all that is made – fire, water, dry and humid. Be everywhere at once: on earth, in the sea, in heaven, before you were born, in the womb, young, old, dead, in the hereafter. If your *nous* can behold all these things simultaneously [*noēs-sas*] – times, places, actions, qualities, quantities – then you can know [*noēsai*] God.³¹

Again and again we are faced with the difficulty of translating the Greek terminology of *noēsis* ("behold," "see," "understand," "know") for which we may have to learn using a neologism such as "noeticizing." The passage makes clear that the activity of *nous* is perceptual and not just conceptual, imaginal rather than just intellectual in our narrow post-cartesian sense of

that term.³² In Aristotelian terms, God himself “never noeticizes without a phantasm”; but the point is that in Hermetic terms, he never does so without *all* phantasms! If indeed the human soul could participate in this universal consciousness, it would evidently be freed from its enslavement to the bodily senses, which limit and constrict our field of perception by forcing our consciousness to concentrate always on just one particular time and one particular place to the exclusion of all others. Hence the significance of the final sentences: this is not about some kind of Superman ability to travel through the universe with the speed of light, but about the possibility of being consciously present at all times and in all places simultaneously (*homou*). This universal consciousness is described as God’s “incorporeal imagination” and referred to as the *aiōn*.

It is therefore misleading to translate *aiōn* simply as “eternity,” as in most modern translations.³³ From Homer through the Hellenistic period and into the Christian era, the word could be interpreted as long or even infinite duration or as timeless eternity, but could also mean the human life force or source of vitality. In the central tradition of Parmenides and Plato, *aiōn* was understood as a *monas* in which temporal distinctions were all present together, and Plato seems to have thought of it as a living being.³⁴ Keeping in mind that time itself was described as a *phantasma* by Democritus and probably Epicurus as well,³⁵ an interpretation of *aiōn* as God’s incorporeal imagination (*phantasia*) makes perfect sense. Exactly like the *chōra* in Plato’s *Timaeus*, in CH XI it functions as a “third kind” that cannot be reduced to either

Being or Becoming but mediates between the divine noetic world and the material world of the senses. As such, it transcended the limits not just of time, but those of space as well. In terms of modern philosophy it is remarkably similar to the crucial Kantian concept of the transcendental imagination (*transzendente Einbildungskraft*) that allows *noumena* to be perceived as *phenomena* (appearances) in human consciousness.³⁶

It is significant that on no less than three different occasions, the *Hermetica* explain human perception by the analogy of a painting, pointing out that although we actually look at a flat surface we see images that give the illusion of three-dimensionality. Thus the *Nous* explains to Hermes in CH XI 17, again with that characteristic request for special attention (“try to understand noetically [*ennoēson*] what I’ve been telling you...”),³⁷ that the notion of an incorporeal idea, a word that comes from *idein* (“seeing”), is not so astonishing as he might think: “on paintings you may see mountain ridges rise up in sharp relief although the painted surface is actually smooth and even.”³⁸ Likewise, Hermes says in the *Asclepius* that we think the world is visible “because of the forms of species that seem to be imprinted on her as images similar to a painting”³⁹ But in fact, he insists, the world is not visible. Finally, the same point is made in one of the Stobaeian fragments.⁴⁰ All these passages reach the same conclusion: what makes vision possible must itself be invisible, that which allows things to appear must forever dis-appear. Today the Hermetic authors might have said that our daily perception of phenomenal reality

What makes vision possible must itself be invisible, that
which allows things to appear must forever dis-appear.



Elohim Creating Adam (1795c.1805) by William Blake (1757-1827).
Source: Wikimedia Commons.

is similar to watching a movie: one needs a projection screen *and* one needs to be unaware of its presence.

In CH XI, the *Nous* tells Hermes explicitly that learning to participate in God's own imaginal consciousness is the indispensable key to *gnōsis*, ultimate salvational knowledge. Such knowledge is impossible in our normal state of restricted consciousness, because

... if you shut your soul up in your body and humiliate it, saying "I can know nothing [*ouden noō*], I can do nothing, I fear that celestial ocean,⁴¹ I cannot rise to heaven, I do not know what I have been, I do not know what I will be,"⁴² then what do you have to do with God? Then you are powerless to know [*noēsai*] anything beautiful or good, in love with the body and bad as you are. For ignorance of the divine is the worst defect there is. But to be capable of knowing him [*gnōnai*], to wish it and hope for it, is the straight and easy path that leads directly to the good. On that road he will meet you

everywhere, you will see him everywhere, at places and times where you least expect it, while waking or sleeping, on sea or on earth, at night or in daytime, while you speak or as you're silent – for there is nothing that he is not.

So will you say "God is invisible"? Don't speak like that. Who is more visible than he is? He has made everything so that you might see him through all that is. That is God's goodness, therein lies his excellence: to make himself apparent through all that is. For nothing is invisible, not even among the incorporeals. *Nous* shows itself in the act of *noēsis*, God in the act of creating.⁴³

There is no conflict between the strongly world-affirming perspective of CH XI as a whole and the message that divine knowledge will escape those who are "in love with the body." Note that problem lies not in the body as such, but in a limited consciousness that "shuts the soul up in the body" and allows it to be dominated by the negative passions.⁴⁴ The

soul must be liberated from enslavement by opening its eyes to the beauty and goodness of divinity that literally surrounds it on all sides.

Concluding Remarks

To recover the relevance of these classical views for modern discussions of consciousness and the imaginative faculty – or rather, to even begin grasping their meaning at all – we need to cross a formidable abyss of understanding and translation. Our very word “translation” comes from the Latin *translatus*, the past participle of *transfere*, “to carry across.” The German *übersetzen* (“setting across,” as for instance in lifting something up from a river’s shore and putting it down on the other side) makes the same point, as does the French *traduire* (viz. *transducere*, “leading across”). All these words reflect the very acute insight that what happens in any act of translation is always a *transfer* of meaning across a liminal space of radical discontinuity. Concerning the most central vocabulary of classical Greek philosophy, it is routine practice to translate *nous* as “mind” or “intellect,” *noēsis* as “thinking,” and *logos* as “word,” “speech,” or “reason,” and we are completely used to conducting our scientific and philosophical discussions of consciousness in these and similar modern terms. As a result, we have lost touch with some of the core assumptions, insights, contexts, and understanding that informed the philosophical traditions of which we claim to be the heirs. One does not have to agree with Martin Heidegger’s philosophical system to agree with his basic observations about what happened to *logos* and *nous* in the course of Western intellectual history:

Thinking becomes the *legein* [saying] of the *logos* in the sense of uttering a proposition. At the same time, thinking becomes *noein* in the sense of apprehension by reason [*die Vernunft*]. The two definitions are coupled together, and thus determine what is henceforth called thinking in the Western-European tradition. The coupling of *legein* and *noein* as proposition and reason are distilled in what the Romans call *ratio*. Thinking now appears as what is rational. ... *Ratio* becomes reason [*Vernunft*], the domain of logic. But the original nature of *legein* and *noein* disappears in *ratio*. As *ratio* assumes the dominant position, all relations are turned upside down; for medieval and early modern philosophy now explain the Greek essence of *legein* and *noein*, *logos* and *nous*, in terms of *their* own concept of *ratio*. But that explanation no longer illuminates – it obfuscates.⁴⁵

Giving the unquestionable centrality of precisely these terms to what “thinking” is supposed to mean in Western intellectual history, this is no small matter. It may be comfortable for us to think of intellectual developments between Greek antiquity and modern philosophy as a history of progress in which ancient but incorrect ideas have given way to better, new and more adequate concepts. But before considering such an interpretation, congenial as it may be to our own cherished beliefs and default assumptions, we should explore the alternative possibility that we may have lost sight of acute insights about the nature of consciousness and the imagination simply because we no longer understand what they meant. •

Abbreviations

- Ascl.: Asclepius (Latin in Nock & Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 2).
- CH: *Corpus Hermeticum* (Greek in Nock & Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vols. 1-2).
- HD: *Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius* (Armenian in Mahé, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 5).
- SH: *Stobaeon Hermetica* (Greek in Nock & Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vols. 3-4).

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Endnotes

1 The argument outlined in this article is part of a larger book-length treatment in which I try to remedy this situation: Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality and the Historical Imagination: Altered States of Knowledge in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press 2022). Among the most important standard works are Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (4 vols.); Mahé, *Hermès en Haute-Égypte* (2 vols.); Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes*; Van den Kerchove, *La voie d'Hermès*; and Bull, *Tradition of Hermes Trismegistus*.

2 See notably Castoriadis, “Discovery,” 215; Schulte-Sasse, “Einbildungskraft/Imagination,” 89-93; Bottici, *Imaginal Politics*. For Kant’s cover-up between the first and second edition of *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, see Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem*, 126-132; Böhme & Böhme, *Das Andere der Vernunft*, 231-250; Warnock, *Imagination*, 13-71; Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, chs. 1 and 5. For Fichte and Hegel, see Castoriadis, o.c., 214-215; idem, *Imaginary Institution of Society*, 391-392 note 53.

3 The differences between *Vorstellungsvmögen* and *Einbildungskraft* would deserve a separate discussion. For a short discussion at the example of an early nineteenth-century pioneer of consciousness studies, see

Hanegraaff, “Carl August von Eschenmayer,” 22-23 with note 8.

4 E.g. Banner, *Philosophic Silence*, 187; Godel, “Socrate et Diotime,” 26 with note 58. For discussion, see Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, pp. ***.

5 Plato, *Tim.* 27d5-28a4; cf. Miller, *Third Kind*, 41-42.

6 Plato, *Tim.* 52a-b (with very slight adaptations in the interest of readability; cf. translations in Sallis, *Chorology*, 118, and Hyland, *Questioning Platonism*, 116-117).

7 Hyland, *Questioning Platonism*, 109-122 (here 114), with an important critique of Derrida’s influential analysis in *On the Name*, 89-127 (as summarized by Shaw, “*Chôra*,” 108, “Derrida deconstructs a house that was never built, at least not by Plato or his Neoplatonic successors”); Sallis, *Chorology*, 91-124; Miller, *Third Kind*.

8 Shaw, “*Chôra*,” 111.

9 Aristotle, *De anima* III.7.431a. See parallel statements in III.7 and 8, and in *De memoria* quoted in Castoriadis, “Discovery,” 233; and see discussion in Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, Chapter Seven, pp. ***. As noted by Castoriadis, the proposition was intended to be “universal, absolute, without restriction” (o.c., 239).

10 Aristotle, *De anima* III.3.427b.

11 Sallis, *Chorology*, 121. At the expense of its radical nonduality, *chōra* was identified with matter (*hulē*) by the time of the Middle Platonists, and Plotinus concluded that matter itself was incorporeal, “a sort of fleeting frivolity ... nothing but phantoms” (Enn. III.6.7; see Sallis, o.c., 151). As pointed out by Sallis, Kant’s concept of the transcendental imagination in the first edition of his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* is in fact “a reinscription of the chorology” (o.c. 155).

12 Bottici, *Imaginal Politics*, 20-21.

13 Bottici, op. cit., 20. On *φαντασία* as derived from *φαίνεσθαι*, see Camassa, “*Phantasia* da Platone ai neoplatonici,” 23-25; Bottici, op. cit., 20 with 206 note 18: our understanding of the imagination as a creative faculty appears “only very late and very rarely.” For a longer discussion, see Nussbaum, Aristotle’s *De Motu Animalium*, 221-273 (with reservations: Bottici, op. cit., 20-21 with 207 note 20).

14 Castoriadis, “Discovery,” 231 (note that “sensible” potentially refers to all the senses, not just visuality).

15 Castoriadis, op. cit., 228., 235-236; and see references to Aristotle on p. 233. Modern cognitive research confirms that “imaginative operations of meaning construction ... work at lightning speed, below the horizon of consciousness” (Fauconnier & Turner, *The Way We Think*, 8; Hanegraaff, “Religion and the Historical Imagination,” 133-135).

16 Bottici, *Imaginal Politics*, 57: “in contrast to the unreal and fictitious, which is associated with the imaginary, the imaginal has no embedded ontological status; it makes no assumption as to the reality of the images that fall within its conceptual domain.” It is important to note that such a “radically agnostic” understanding of the imaginal runs counter in that respect to the original perspective of authors such as Henry Corbin (who introduced the term to current philosophical debate) or James Hillman (ibid., 58-59; cf. Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, Epilogue, p. 367 note 55).

17 CH XI 2. Following Nock and Festugière (*Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. I, 147), I see τὸ ἀγαθόν, τὸ καλόν, ἡ εὐδαιμονία as a scribal error. Whereas in CH XI 2 these words have no clear function and are stylistically out of place, they appear in CH XI 3 as a clear response to Hermes’ question about the nature of wisdom; therefore I assume that “wisdom” is meant to be the primary term (contrary to Scott, *Hermetica*, vol. I, 206, who leaves out ἡ σοφία instead of τὸ ἀγαθόν). Scott’s addition of ποσότης (quantity) seems perfectly reasonable and has been universally adopted.

18 CH XI 3.

19 CH X 15 (see discussion in Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, 198).

20 CH XI 6.

21 CH XI 7-8. Several commentaries (& Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. I, 159 note 23; Colpe & Holzhausen, *Corpus Hermeticum Deutsch*, 127 note 355) are painfully blind to the obvious meaning of divine “light” and “love” (conjunction of opposites and contraries) in this passage. For the explicit distinction between light and fire, cf. HD II 6 (Mahé, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 5, 222-223; and note that the light appears wholly “as it is in itself”: it is not a phenomenal appearance but a noumenal reality).

22 CH XI 11. This direct equivalence of divine light with soul, life, and even matter (ὕλη) is a particularly strong confirmation of the radical nondual perspective of CH XI and indeed of the “spiritual” *Hermetica* as a whole (as argued at length in Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*).

23 CH XI 13. Since God is only life and abundance, what we call death and dissolution is really just change and transformation (CH XI 14-15); see discussion in Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, 271-274.

24 On these characteristically Hermetic requests for special attention and concentration, see Kingsley, “An Introduction,” 33-35, 38-39; Moreschini, Dall’Asclepius, 81; Van den Kerchove, *Hermès Trismégiste*, 84; Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, p. 62, note

59.

25 CH XI 18.

26 CH XI 18 and 20.

27 See the close parallel with CH V 1, discussed in Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, 231. Scott, *Hermetica*, vol. I, 218-219 puts $\phi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$ within brackets (!) and distorts the original so completely that his translation does not even remotely reflect the original. Nock & Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. I, 154 have “représentation,” without a footnote. No commentary in Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 172, 133 (“Vorstellungskraft,” no footnote); Van den Broek & Quispel, *Hermetische Geschriften*, 146 (“het zuivere denken van God”: “the pure thinking [!] of God,” no footnote).

28 Festugière’s 60-page discussion of CH XI and the *aiōn* (*La révélation*, vol. 4, 141-199) manages to overlook almost everything of importance. From p. 146 on, he vanishes down a rabbit hole of extreme erudition in pursuit of the word αἰών, distinguishing seven possible meanings, of which the first two are considered relevant, but at the expense of what CH XI itself says about it. His discussion of “the psychological conditions of the problem” (op. cit. 149-151) provides nothing of the sort; and his analysis on pp. 159-175 imposes a dualistic “static/dynamic” straitjacket on the *Hermetica* that obscures precisely the intermediary nature of *aiōn* as a “third kind.”

29 In CH XIII, we read how the pupil Tat in fact “becomes the *aiōn*” and thereby achieves the state of expanded consciousness described as a theoretical possibility in CH XI: “Father! I no longer picture reality by means of my eyes but through the noetic energy that comes from the powers. ... I am in heaven, on earth, in water, in the air; I am in animals, in plants; in the womb, before the womb, after the womb; everywhere ... Father, I see the All, and I see myself in the Nous!” (CH XIII 11, 13). Detailed analysis in Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, Chapter Eight).

30 Since we cannot assume that the text

means to say there is nothing beyond the cosmos, not even God or his nous, I interpret this as a question about the nature of “being” along the lines of what we find for instance in Iamblichus, Response to Porphyry I 8 (see *Réponse à Porphyre*, 20-21): the realm of the gods cannot be enveloped by being – it must be the other way around. 31 CH XI 18-20. Cf. HD V 1 (Mahé, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 5, 230-231): “the nous sees everything” whereas the eyes see only corporeal things. It is not that the eyes allow the nous to see, but rather that the nous allows the eyes to see reality as it truly is. Hence this is not about rejecting the senses but about using them noetically.

32 The ability “to make far off things present” through the imagination was an important aspect of nous since as far back as Homer (see von Fritz, “Noûς and νοεῖν,” 91; “Noûς and νοεῖν, and their Derivates, Pt. I,” 224 with note 10, 225, 239).

33 Scott, *Hermetica*, vol. I, 21 (“become eternal”); Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 41 (“become eternity”); Salaman et alii, *The Way of Hermes*, 57 (idem); van den Broek & Quispel, *Hermetische Geschriften*, 146 (“word een eeuwig wezen”: “become an eternal being”). Only Nock & Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. I, 155 has “deviens Aiōn” (but see *ibid.*, 164 note 58: “Ou: deviens éternité,” followed by references to the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* that I consider irrelevant to the meaning of *aiōn* in CH XI); and Colpe & Holzhausen, *Corpus Hermeticum Deutsch*, 134 has “werde zum Aion.”

34 Von Leyden, “Time, Number, and Eternity,” 36-37 (with reference to Simplicius).

35 *Ibid.*, 37-38.

36 Castoriadis, “Discovery of the Imagination,” 244. See also reference above, note 12, and consider the remarkable statement in HD VI 1 (Mahé, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 5, 234-235): “humanity’s creation is the world; if there were nobody to see [the world], neither would he truly exist, nor that which is seen” (whereas Mahé and van den Broek here choose to translate the

Armenian *stac* 'uac as "possession" [κτῆσις] instead of "creation" [κτίσις], I suggest that this latter option results in a much more logical statement). See also HD VIII 6 (Mahé, o.c., 256-257) "Everything came into being for you"; IX 2 (Mahé, o.c., 262-263) "external things would not exist if there were no internal ones." From the same perspective it is tempting to speculate about the possible relevance of SH X, about the nature of time (see the very useful footnotes with source references in Litwa, *Hermetica II*, 67 note 2-3).

37 See above, note 25.

38 CH XI 17.

39 Ascl. 17.

40 SH IIA 3-4.

41 I see this as an obvious reference to the "open sea" of ultimate beauty in Plato, *Symp.* 210d. Reitzenstein saw it as referring to der *Himmelsozean* in Mandaean and "gnostic" texts (Review of Scott [1927], 282 note 3); Festugière qualified this as "décidément fausse" (*La révélation*, vol. 4, 141 note 3) but provided no plausible alternative. To me it makes no sense to suggest that the author means just the normal sea (as in Nock & Festugière, *Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 1, 156; Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 42; Salaman et alii, *Way of Hermes*, 58; Colpe & Holzhausen, *Corpus Hermeticum Deutsch*, 135; van den Broek & Quispel, *Hermetische Geschriften*, 147). Note that Mahé draws close connections between the aiōn and the Egyptian Noun, described as "the original ocean" of being ("La création," 23-24, cf. 29; referring to Morenz, *La religion égyptienne*, e.g. 222).

42 Quispel imposes a reincarnational reading on the text (van den Broek & Quispel, *Hermetische Geschriften*, 147); Holzhausen sees a parallel to the well-known "gnostic" passage from Clement, Exc. ex. Theod. 78 (Colpe & Holzhausen, *Corpus Hermeticum Deutsch*, 135 note 383). I see neither of

those interpretation as obvious, since the statement refers to the soul's transcendence of temporality ("before you were born, in the womb, young, old, dead, in the hereafter").

43 CH XI 21.

44 On the importance of negative passions in Hermetic spirituality, see Hanegraaff, *Hermetic Spirituality*, Chapter Six.

45 Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?*, 213-214 (my translation, with transliteration of the Greek terms; cf. Heidegger, *What is called Thinking?*, 210-211). Heidegger's argument is based on his analysis of a famous formulation by Parmenides χρή τὸ λέγειν τε νοεῖν τ' ἐὸν ἔμμεναι (Mansfeld & Primavesi, *Die Vorsokratiker*, 322, frg. 9). Note that according to Heidegger, thinking never gets farther from its original meaning than "when it gets the idea that thinking must begin with doubting" (Heidegger, op. cit., 214). This remark is of course directed at Descartes and suggests a perspective similar to what we find in the *Hermetica*: knowledge consists rather in a revelation or disclosure of true being. Heidegger's basic point is confirmed by von Fritz: "Hellenistic philosophy replaced the contrast between νοῦς and αἴσθησις, which is characteristic of the latest stage of pre-Socratic philosophy, by the contrast of λόγος and αἴσθησις" ("Νοῦς and νοεῖν, and their Derivates," Pt. II," 32). Heidegger also notes, correctly, that investigating the meaning of logos and nous means questioning the very foundations of Western thought. See e.g. *Was heisst Denken?*, 182-183, 199, 207-208 (against those who think such questions to be eccentric or useless, he points out that without λέγειν and λόγος and what these words signify, we would have had no Christian trinitarian speculation, no modern technology, no Age of Enlightenment, no dialectical materialism, and so on: "the world would look different without the λόγος of logic").



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THE MULTI-CULTURAL: BETWEEN THE ONE AND THE MANY

Contemporary debates in sociology, history and politics tend to highlight the opposition between unifying globalisation and identity resistance among peoples and cultures. In this essay, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger discloses other processes – much deeper, subtler and more complex – which can be reduced neither to identity affirmation (on the basis of the expression ‘shock of civilisations’) nor to a fusion of the cultural model with the dominant power. He inquires into the epistemological and anthropological conditions of a model capable of bringing together ‘the same’ and ‘the other’, the ‘universal’ and the ‘difference’ in a harmonious way.



Nativity scene in Salvador (Bahia, Brazil). Photo by Jean Jacques Wunenburger.

Introduction

Globalisation aims at eliminating border differentiation and erasing cultural differences by standardising financial practices, the consumption of material and intangible goods, languages, etc. Long idealised by the aspirations of a juridical cosmopolitanism of European origin, it has become the form of unilateral domination of a neo-liberal trading and juridical model of American origin. The recurrent question about this ideal is whether the juridical relation of egalitarianism among the world's inhabitants actually requires a standardisation of languages, mores, creations and values of the type that can be seen in the Biblical reference to the time before the tower of Babel.

One of the reactions to this influence of globalisation consists in claiming radical differences between people and cultures (as well as between religions), deep-rooted identities, watertight borders, purity of ethnic or religious groups, etc., thus opening the way to intense

intercultural confrontations.

As often occurs, after identifying the two extremes, appeal can be made to a third way embodying a compromise capable of making way for a mixture of warring differences. This would open a new Babelian utopia of identities participating with diversity: a third way between the retreat to antagonistic identities (ending up in identitarian phobia) and a loss of identities through standardisation (the so-called 'macdonaldisation of the world'). This new utopia attempts to affirm differences (in an anti-globalist fashion) as well as their coexistence, or more precisely: their positive interconnection (in a post-modern sense). From then on, there is an increasing claim for hybridisation and *créolisation*, that is, processes leading to a confusion of pluralities, a tree structure free from specific cultural traits, characterised by grafts and borrowings ensuring relationships and intertwined alterity.

How can we ensure that this cultural impulse

can in turn ensure a consistent, strong, regulatory, protective and creative paradigm? How can we open to the difference of the other and become enriched by it without losing identity and slipping into chaotic undifferentiation? Wouldn't such a third way end up in a vague and inconsistent thinking with uncertain outlines? Very often this type of thinking is schematized and enacted by terms such as hybridisation and cross-breeding – both cultural metaphors deriving from bio- and zoo-technology. Can such analogies do justice to the complex procedures required to synthesise the heterogeneous? Can post-modern creolisation resist the cacophonous tendency of globalisation, the introverted assertion of identity thinking and the civilisational shock?

What are the prerequisites, the logic forms, and also the difficulties and paradoxes of this emerging and alternative thinking? Without a doubt, it is a matter of constructing a new transcultural category to transform enclosed identities, a category that might be distinguished from the post-modern creolisation and hybridisation. An alterity that has been assumed should in fact be situated beyond the pair of alienated identity and its undifferentiated fusion. How can we think of interculturality in which a 'plural unity' can be achieved?

These categories of creolisation and hybridisation are destined to represent and normalise the cultural transformations deriving from the encounter of different cultures. They favour in this way immigration and multiculturalism. How can these differences be brought together without levelling and blurring them? How can we compose a plurality of identities without mixing and standardising them, without leaving them juxtaposed with no relationship whatsoever? How can some cultural imaginaries open themselves to alterity (putting an end to eurocentrism) and integrate transgressions without being impoverished in a formless (post-modern) mixture, being rather enriched

in an unheard of and innovating figure which may in turn transform former structures?

We may take a few very concrete examples that might become sources of a new hermeneutics. For example, How is it possible for the Westernisation of martial arts to avoid the production of soft versions (as is usually the case with *New Age* phenomena) and instead enrich the Asian tradition by means of the categories and experiences of Western social sciences (as can be found in *Tai chi* and shamanism)? How can, on the contrary, Asian technological imaginaries produce new imaginaries which are far from duplicating or aping Western models and in which Taoist tradition integrates *high-tech* mobility as a new ethos (related also to cars and robots)? How can religious or spiritual corpuses (Christianity, Buddhism), without opposing each other or merging in some pseudo-concordism, produce mythemes or theological concepts that amplify rather than reduce their cultural horizon?

In order to prepare this vast conceptual work of complex anthropology, we shall explore various epistemological rectifications to the idea of the mixing of differences, drawn from various philosophical conceptions (from Plato to Schleiermacher, passing through Leibniz) that are to be developed to avoid the ambiguities and illusions of creolisation.

Translating Alterity

Every encounter with alterity (in customs, language, etc.) requires a translation. The latter must at the same time integrate the alterity with my identity and respect the singularity of the difference. Such a relational exercise has always been likened to treachery (thus the well-known equation 'translator = traitor'). The problem is precisely that of translating an alterity in its own culture, at the same time renewing it. Translation is no betrayal, but rather an unveiling of layers of latent meaning. The



Dr. Schweizer hospital in Lamberene (Gabon). Photo by Jean Jacques Wunenburger.

development of Japanese martial arts in the West is an example of this problem inherent to intercultural translation. Consequently, a translation is a transformation, or a metamorphosis (the other into the same, the same into the other). This is what Éric Caulier, tai chi theoretician and practitioner, means when he writes:

“In order to penetrate certain mysteries of *taijiquan* practice in China, I had to abandon my cultural references, but such an attitude rapidly becomes unworkable when the same discipline is to be taught in the West. On the contrary, I had to regain full possession of my cultural context if I wished to transmit a living and comprehensible teaching; otherwise, I would be condemned to attract only through a superficial and exotic aspect. Unless the original context is taken into account, one is condemned to a partial view of the matter. Without translation or interpretation, *taijiquan* is reduced to a caricature. It is merely one more item on the long shelf of new well-being recipes. It would become a fleeting effect of fashion, taken up by some “new activists” in search

of exoticism. A true translation or interpretation makes it possible to cast light on the archetypical models conveyed by *taijiquan* and to appreciate the richness and diversity of the forms manifested by these universal schemes”¹.

The Mediating Third-Party Link

A mixture of differences also presupposes, among other things, a reference to a common symbolic core out of which an interface may arise. The religious dialogue shows that it can often be reduced to one from two paths: the one seeking a transcendent unity (fusion with the smallest common denominator) or a common origin, starting from the point of view of filiation (Christ traced back to Dionysus, then to Osiris, in the mythical pattern of death and resurrection of a divine figure). But doesn't this path reproduce the inevitable process of a face-to-face that also ends by privileging one or the other party? It is always worth seeking a third path from which both the one and the other can best be described and understood, a mediation, a third-party that might bring together

two entities and, above all, integrate a third?² A form of intercultural rationality thus invites us to establish, in any situation involving comparison, the mediating point of view of a third interpreting party, who alone can overcome the horizontal and frontal position of disparity and make way for a dominating intelligence that replaces both points of view. This hermeneutic power of the mediator is invoked by the founder of German hermeneutics, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), and can also be found – scattered and fragmented – in various forms of contemporary thought.

In Schleiermacher, as in most philosophers of the Romantic period, we find the idea (ultimately retraceable to Plato) according to which communication is only possible where there is a bi-polar structure enabling the creation of a symbolic bond. In a text drawn from his work *On Religion*³, Schleiermacher affirms – anticipating certain ideas of the psychologist C.G. Jung – that each human soul, that is every psyche, is the outcome of two opposite instincts. All of us have an inner bipolar structure consisting of two tendencies: the attraction of whatever surrounds us and its eventual integration in our own life by absorbing it completely and assimilating it in the innermost part of our soul. The other tendency consists in the aspiration to increasingly develop one's own internal ego and disclose it from the inside to the outside, penetrating all, communicating part of it without ever exhausting its scope.

In short, we can recognize a centripetal tendency leading us to assimilate what is outside ourselves, and a centrifugal tendency that is rather extroverted, a tendency pushing us to communicate our ego to the outside. Schleiermacher

also maintains, for the purpose of his hermeneutic psychology, that every person develops one of these polarities more than the other, in variable proportions. However, the recessive tendency remains always present since no being is totally unilateral or univocal. As a consequence, we see the development of a wide diversity of psychological structures in humankind, since persons are different from one another due to the multiple situations affecting the same bipolar structure. Nevertheless, as Schleiermacher ascertains, beings are for the most part aligned with extremes, whence the development of contrary behaviours, generating conflicts and hence difficulties in communication. As a result, the problem is to bring these two poles closer, thus completing or accomplishing the 'closed circle', re-establishing a balance in the psychological constitution of individuals and their attitudes (whether they open or close circles).

Schleiermacher then introduces the mediator as reference. The latter is an individual in whom the two tendencies are balanced; he is the hero, the legislator, the inventor, the tamer of Nature, the 'good daemon' who is, in the end, the great communicator. From a theological point of view, we can say that Schleiermacher rediscovers the Greek god of communication, Hermes, thanks to whom information circulates harmoniously among human beings and who can generate universal understanding: "If therefore we have mediators at our disposal, they are those beings in whom the composite structures are in balance and who, as a consequence, can make these structures circulate. So, if we have such mediators, each will silently cast light on himself and the others, and the

Many daily communications occur in the form of stories, narrations, not in the instrumental form. Narration is based on 'pragmatic markers'.

communication of thoughts and feelings will occur in a simple fashion, through the easy play consisting both of uniting the different beams of this light and subsequently dividing them again, and of dispersing it to reconcentrate it again on different objects. The least consistent word will count, whereas nowadays the clearest expressions are not free from misunderstandings”⁴. In short, for Schleiermacher it is a matter of finding a fertile structure that can produce a balance between complementary opposites, starting from the existence of a third-party communicator.

What can we say in this context about contemporary philosophy? We can start from Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) which, despite its Marxist rather than existentialist inspiration, still presents a continuity with regard to the analyses of the ‘relation with the other’ expounded in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and illustrated in his theatrical works. However, in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre shows that he is more concerned with political action and with that entity that seems to constitute society, whereas in his earlier work he remains too confined in the windowless relationship between I and you, he now further stresses a ternary structure. The binary formation as the immediate relationship between person and person is the necessary basis for any ternary relationship. But inversely, like the mediation of one man between two men, the latter is the basis on which reciprocity is recognised as a reciprocal relation. We can say that reciprocal relationships only exist when the binary has been surpassed to the benefit of the ternary. Consequently, in human relationships, there must always be a third person – present or ab-

sent – who constitutes their basis. Speaking of a Paris street-scene, Sartre says: “These onlookers who lean over the water for the taxi-driver who looks at them from his vehicle are united by the same curiosity, and this active curiosity reveals the existence of a transcendent but invisible end. There is something to be looked at. Through his mediation, the third party reactivates the objective meanings already inscribed in the things that constitute the group as a whole”⁵. Here we are not dealing with a street impact by means of the splitting of a group of onlookers and someone who watches them. From this example, it is clear that in the end everyone must watch something else, a third-party object which in some way gives objective meaning to the whole situation.

On the other hand, Dany-Robert Dufour tackles the same question in *Les mystères de la trinité* (*The Mysteries of the Trinity*)⁶. The study of language reveals to us the importance of the absent third, of the ‘he’ as necessary tie between the ‘I’ and the ‘you’ in any instance of communication. Similarly, the last works of Jean-François Lyotard on narrativity also meet Dufour’s thesis. Many daily communications occur in the form of stories, narrations, not in the instrumental form. Narration is based on “pragmatic markers”⁷, that is, features that render the discourse operative. And the essential marker that enables the narration to achieve the status of communication introduces precisely an ‘other’ who re-counts. In other words, in recounting, one always operates in the form of: “he told me that”. Here we are dealing with a ternary device: the narrated, the narratee and the narrator. These instances constitute what Lyotard calls the ‘pragmatic triangle’, whose

An alterity that has been assumed should in fact be situated beyond the pair of alienated identity and its undifferentiated fusion.

function is to repeat proper names... I have the story of x, I am y, you are z, and you are now the depository. We arrive thus at a kind of triangle: 'I' recount to 'you' the story I know about a third ('he') and so on. It is essential to consider how the communication includes this opening towards the third party within language itself.

The originality of Jean-François Lyotard or Francis Jacques⁸ lies in their valorisation of the absent third party, which may be present and eventually become the active and actual mediator of a face-to-face dialogue. One may therefore claim that 'the interreligious' – which was the starting point of our inquiry – gains by drifting towards an outside narrator (the third person) and diverts the I-you dialogue – which would otherwise be exposed to the competitive relationship of the imposed differences or similarities. It is thus a gain to deviate from the dialogue and pass the baton to a hermeneutic mediator. Such a mediator can be the source of a new discursivity which could be dubbed a *trialogue*, an account that provides a fresh view of the two earlier texts⁹.

The Paradox of Identity

How can we conceive a type of communication between heterogeneous cultures which is nevertheless provided with relational structures due to their original and forgotten affinities? If true communication operates between heterogeneous entities and is oriented towards the same whole, what is communication? How can they be recognised as similar in dissimilarities without suppressing the latter for the benefit of a universal, identical information? This kind of approach is already propounded, towards the XVII century, in the philosophical logic of Leibniz, who sought to conceptualise a universal harmony of substances (called 'monads') enclosed in a unique perspective on the All of the universe. For Leibniz, actually, whatever lives constitutes an absolutely unique monad, meaning a substance in itself

and for itself, whose power contains the totality of all that exists, like a mirror that reflects everything around it. Each monad is thus a 'point of view' on everything, which Leibniz compares to the different perspectives of travellers coming from different cardinal points, as they approach the same town. The identity of a monad comprises the multiplicity of all that is: *"Every substance is like an entire world and like a mirror of God, or else of the whole universe, which each expresses in its own way, a little as the same town if seen differently by the person who looks at it. Thus, the universe is in some way multiplied as many times as there are substances, and the glory of God is similarly doubled by as many as are the wholly differing representations of his work"*¹⁰. Consequently, since each substance is self-sufficient, it has neither doors nor windows¹¹; nevertheless, it is not like an isolated atom, having no ties with other monads. We must therefore imagine an inter-substantial communication operating through relations, without contact and without producing real effects. In other words, the substantial tie (*vinculum substantiale*) is comparable to the ether of Newtonian cosmology. For centuries, Newton's ether had been conceived as a semi-material environment capable of influencing at a distance. Each monad has at disposal what the Romantics called 'elective affinities', relations at a distance (which, for Goethe, as also for Plato, brings together conflicting beings) and what Lewinian psychologists call "energy fields"¹². From that moment, monadic substances are in line with the others, to the extent to which each contains within itself the lines or the imprint of the internal structure of the other monads.¹³ Its configuration yields by itself, taking the same line as the others, without abandoning itself or changing its nature. In this way, a harmony of substances is established without loss of substance and preserving the uniqueness of each one of them, without translating dissimilarity into similarity. Later, Leibniz extends this para-

digm to all problems of organising differences and develops a project of ‘unity of religions’, without actual uniformity. So, it becomes clear that there exists a universal model of monadic harmony reaching mutual compatibility without being wholly identical: “The perceptions or expressions of all substances respond to each other, so that each, carefully following certain reasons or laws that it observes, encounters the other, which has done the same, as when several, agreeing to meet together at some place on a certain date, manage to do so effectively, if they wish. Although all express the same phenomena, this does not mean that their expressions are perfectly similar. It suffices that they be proportional, just as several spectators believe they are seeing the same thing and agree on that basis, whatever each one sees and says according to the measure of his sight”¹⁴.

Weaving against Intermixing

In Plato we find several hermeneutic molds for a fruitful relationship between different beings. Turning to the myth of an androgynous humanity, he criticises the sterility of homogeneous fusions (male or female homosexuals) and enhances the value of exogamy, a coupling of different entities¹⁵. If we accept the transposition of the myth of gendered individuals to cultures, one finds in Plato a paradigm of the marriage of cultural differences, even extending to procreation and childbearing. This liaison, relationship, interlacing of opposites cannot however occur without conditions. The myth insists on the preparation of the coupling by a divine intervention that re-positions the sexual organs, and the fable confirms the need for prior preparation and adaptation of the entities to be joined together. The union of opposites and complementary entities is, too, exposed to bad disharmonic liaisons – unless it is regulated by a delicate harmony.

Plato’s myth of the androgynous again opens a suggestive line of interpretation by showing

that reinforcing the identity of a cut-off part proves to be sterile. Conversely, if we want to reconstitute a living world, it is best to establish a complementary harmony with the other. But this reinsertion within a totality does not involve mere absorption within a whole. The severed parts of the androgynous must still be reconstructed in order to be adapted to each other and rendered functional to remake a whole. Such is the theme developed in the myth of the androgynous as told by Aristophanes in Plato’s *Symposium*: “First you must know that humankind consists of three genders, and not two – male and female – as we have at present. There is a third holding the other two together. The shape of each of these humans was a single piece with a round back and circular flanks. They had four hands, and the same number of legs as hands; then, two faces on top of a perfectly round neck, and alike the one to the other, so that the head belonging to these two faces, placed opposite to each other, was single... Why were there three genders and why were they so formed? It is because the male was originally an offshoot of the sun; the female gender an offshoot of the Earth; lastly the one that participates in both an offshoot of the moon, since the moon is also part of the two stars... Consequently, these beings had a prodigious strength and vigour: their pride was immense. They even came into conflict with the gods”¹⁶. In order to punish them, Zeus cut all these beings into two. Under such conditions, the cutting split the natural being. Thus, each half longed for its other half and joined it again. Initially, each half sought to unite with other halves, randomly, in an endless, totally sterile cycle. Zeus decided to reposition the sexual parts so that certain encounters could be fruit-bearing couplings. Since then, Zeus makes possible two types of relations between halves: those between male and female, coming from the mixed whole (heterosexuals), which become fertile; those between two halves of the same sex (homosex-

ual), which are sterile. In this way, the halves of homogeneous beings unite, but are sterile, while those that are complementarily opposite manage to procreate.

In what sense can this symbolic text help us to progress in considering the problem of mixed identities? Firstly, this myth of an androgynous humanity may actually be the first systematic text on that subject, since it explains the properties of an individual, or a sexual gender or society, not in relation to another external element, but from its place in the whole, of which it is one of the poles. Its structure and its contrary-symmetrical relations precede the adventitious relationships contracted by the elementary entities. In such a case, there are two types of juxtaposition of sterile entities, which merely halve the homogenous ('the' pure male and 'the' pure female). In other words, the relationship between similar beings involves a coming together, but it is lifeless. On the other hand, for the mixed category consisting of heterogeneous, opposite and complementary elements – that of the androgynous – to re-form Unity, a linking third party must first be introduced (such is the contrivance of Zeus). This third party is symbolised by the sexual organs and their positioning. In other words, to avoid complementary coming together by contiguity and ensure that the two parties come together in their difference, a mediating structure is needed, a 'plug'. Being plugged in, or in other words: having influence, is the condition that allows you to grasp and, similarly, on the intellectual level, to understand. But the divided elements, which seek to turn once more toward each other (through the intervention of Eros) can only provide a plug if they simultaneously

turn towards the total roundness of their origin, that is, towards the 'round-shaped' world. In short, one of the lessons taught by the Greek myth is that it is not sufficient to unite with the Other to recreate a living resemblance, nor is it sufficient to be similar if we want to reconstitute a unity. True unity is that of a complex, and such unity presupposes a fundamental opposition between two partners who reunite in dissimilarity when they turn towards the One (*uni-versus*), symbolised by the round androgynous.

Can we then transpose the myth to the problem of dissimilar societies or cultures, which are at the same time parties sharing the same world, the All of the world, understood as a round being? In such a case, the uni-versity of cultures would no longer belong to a homogenising and abstract universality, but to a hierogamy (a sacred marriage of opposed complements), to an erotic-agonistic tension, on a background of mediation by cosmic totality. Intercultural relations, which create a bond between dissimilar cultures, can be understood, in a Platonic sense, as coming under a symbolism of the lunar star, that is, the one placed in the middle, serving as an intermediary between opposites. It is thus distinct not only from cultural relations of solar inspiration, of exclusively male and even phallocratic domination, but also from one-sided female-inspired – or maternal – relations seeking a generalised fusion through a common adherence to Mother-Earth. We would thus be halfway between the subjection of decentred peoples under a dominant authoritarian group and an imperial unification that absorb all parties in a fusional unity¹⁷.

In Plato's conception, the bond between dif-

In human relationships, there must always be a third person – present or absent – who constitutes their basis.



Tour in Taipei (Taiwan) with pagoda style. Photo by Jean Jacques Wunenburger.

ferent beings also takes up the analogy with weaving – a delicate art and technique in contrast to the mere mixture. Between a bond that accentuates resemblances and a de-bonding that follows the trend of differences, weaving effectively builds up an effect that is neither a mixture nor a juxtaposition, and is thus differentiated from contemporary intermixtures. It is the royal art of true Masters, inspirers or legislators, of human communities: “It means not allowing separation between temperate and energetic characters, but weaving them together, on the contrary, through their common opinions, honours, famous men, pledges exchanged between them, so as to form a smooth tissue, and... a beautiful weave”. The aim of political action is reached when “the art envelops human beings in a common life through concord and friendship, thus forming the most

magnificent and best of tissues, and envelops in each city all the people, slaves and free men, and holds them in its weave and commands and directs, without there being anything overlooked that concerns the city’s happiness”.¹⁸

In such a way, Plato illustrates the search for the figure of a society based on the idea of justice, which is clearly demarcated not only from the democratic Athenian city, which lives on excessive separation (gods and men, free men and slaves), but also from mystical communities in which initiatic selection excludes those who are not disciples of the god. Any such mixed sociality would therefore be placed under the aegis of AtheneMinerva who, with Hephaistos (according to the myth of Protagoras), is the possessor of the knowledge necessary to humankind. For, as shown by James Hillman’s reading of Plato, Athene, daughter of Zeus, is

the goddess-mother of weaving who opposes both the violence of Prometheus and the drunkenness of Dionysus and knows how to shift the implacable will of Ananke towards the need of this world. After all, Athene has always been capable of combining and weaving the implacable forces of vengeance, transforming them into the structure of the Acropolis, utilising that remarkable combinatory term of ‘foreign resident’¹⁹.

Are such speculations just an ideal seeking to reconcile myth and reason, or is it possible to see there some kind of syncretic pole that recognises a socio-political configuration based on a mediation of diurnal and nocturnal regimes²⁰? One can, of course, see nothing in this weaving but an episode of the future of societies, an ephemeral and uncertain moment that sees a diurnal pole tilt and become its opposite, or vice-versa. In such a case, socio-political syncretism, which is based on an interpenetration of civil and religious societies, would occur with an historical rhythm, involving the alternation of opposite phases, through a compensation of extremes²¹. However, it is also possible to take this paradigm of weaving as a sign of the existence of an autonomous form, a specific configuration, not a median transition, but a society of a third kind, based on a complex interlocking of contrary structures. For Joël Thomas, the history of Greece and Rome makes it possible to identify these complex configurations (the century of Pericles, the Augustan period of the foundation of the Roman Empire, mirrored symbolically by Vergil’s *Aeneid*) that unite opposite poles. In this case, we see a kind of balanced hybridisation between a logic of vertical separation and a logic of horizontal circulation, allowing the culture to ‘breathe’ and bringing it to its highest creative point: “Man is never so profoundly alive as when he integrates, in his religion, his culture, structures based on circulation and exchange, meaning on a metamorphism that gives us what I should call a

profound description of the world... It is only in enantiodromia, that ‘open’ form of hybridisation, that one is truly creator, and thus alive”²².

This kind of modelling thus allows us to give back form and sense to composite units that are equally far from extremes. The weaving paradigm facilitates the conceptualisation of mixed entities. This should enable the search, within a historical period, for a mixture of units distant and separate in space or time. Platonism provides a myth-related logic capable of incorporating mediation, a ‘hermetic’ function (traceable to the god Hermes, the figure of the ferryman), who assures the passage between two opposites while nourishing both of them at the same time. Thus, an apparently offset pole becomes a bridge; a point of passage, which is nevertheless far from ensuring circulation flows, is implanted in the art of both transferring and weaving, to the extent that the peripheral becomes once again a true centre by means of its hybridisation of differences, while the dominant identity pole retreats into its reductive identity.

These four conceptual operators, among many others not tackled here, extracted from texts that are miscellaneous either in chronology or in their problem-solving, may become a sort of hermeneutic point of convergence facilitating an approach to that enigmatic idea of the harmony of differences, a sublime form of multiculturalism. While the latter is generally the outcome of hazy thinking and impoverishes the relationship (making it become a kind of unpredictable and in the end a chaotic mix), strong harmonic thought aspires to be the preparatory condition for the encounter of heterogeneous societies and to become a lasting condition, maintaining both similarities and dissimilarities. More deeply however, we can say that the condition of cultural duality (a binary couple) is not simply the result of some conventional or arbitrary construction, but that it is the active implementation of a previ-

ous arrangement of potentialities so that the experience of the encounter of different entities is implemented with a considerable degree of precision. The ultimate difficulty of this problem is that the coexistence of different but

compatible identities is set in motion by potentialities, that is, by means of that which is not yet implemented. The potential of cultures that are different in their identity remains a fascinating and sometimes discouraging enigma. •

1 E. Caulier, *Les sens du mouvement, une approche transdisciplinaire du tai chi chuan*, EC éditeur, Belgium, 2019, p. 58-59. This type of nuance is also found in M. Heidegger, comparing the Japanese translation. See J.C. Gens, “L’inspiration extrême-orientale de la méditation heideggerienne de l’espace” in *Esthétiques de l’espace ; occident et orient* (in: J.J. Wunenburger and V. Tirloni, eds: *Esthétiques de l’espace ; occident et orient*, Mimésis, 2010, p. 131 et seq.)

2 See our analysis in “Interreligious epistemological and hermeneutics paradigm”, in *Diverse cultural and religious ways of thinking: a dialogue*, Revue Concilium, Londres, 2017, no. 1, p. 17-26.

3 F. Schleiermacher, *Discours sur la religion* (1799), trans. Aubier, 1944, p.122.

4 Schleiermacher, *op.cit.*, p 126.

5 J.P. Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Gallimard, 1960, p. 189.

6 R. D. Dufour, *Le mystère de la trinité*, Gallimard, 1991, chapter 23, p. 94 et seq.

7 J.F. Lyotard, *La condition post-moderne*, Ed. de Minuit, 1979.

8 See F. Jacques, *Dialogiques, Recherches logiques sur le dialogue*, Paris, PUF, 1979. *Différence et subjectivité. Anthropologie d’un point de vue relationnel*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1982.

9 On this point we may quote the works of the American sociologist T. Caplow, *Two against One: coalitions in Triads* [Deux contre un. *Les coalitions dans les triades*], (A. Colin, trans. 1971) and his European inspirer Georg Simmel. They show how the triadic form makes it possible to render the revolving multiplicity of relational and communication processes. Like Plato

and Aristotle, Simmel insists on the fact that only a three-entity communication structure can contain complexity. Similarly, Caplow reminds us that when two entities cannot manage to come into direct contact, a third makes it possible by the operation of mediation, by explaining and ‘translating’, for example. Here, the regulatory third is consequently present.

10 Leibniz, *Discours de métaphysique*, IX.

11 Leibniz, *op.cit.*, XXVI.

12 Voir K. Lewin, *Psychologie dynamique*, PUF, 1959.

13 Voir Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l’entendement humain*, II, 12, 1.

14 Leibniz, *Discours de métaphysique*, XIV.

15 Plato, *Le Banquet* [The Symposium], 189d sq., Les Belles-Lettres.

16 Idem.

17 See our development in “L’unité plurielle au miroir des médiations mythiques” in: Joanna Nowicki, ed: *Europe : La danse sur les limites*, Paris, Romillat, 2005, p. 105-116.

18 Plato, *Le politique*, Les belles-lettres, p. 311.

19 J. Hillmann, *Le polythéisme de l’âme*, Mercure de France-Le mail, 1982, p 116.

20 See J. Thomas, “La pensée complexe des romains” in *Sociétés*, no. 38, 1992.

21 See our study: “Le comble et la catastrophe : pour une histoire héraclitéenne”, *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, Genève, 1986, tome XXIV, no. 73.

22 J. Thomas, “L’espace du héros ou les destins croisés”, *Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1987, vol. 56, Insel Verlag, Frankfurt-am-Main, 1989, p. 176.

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