

Charles Stein

The Parmenides Project

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Introduction to The Parmenides Project

There are, in the journals that comprise the main body of “The Parmenides Project,” at least a dozen efforts to set out what exactly the Parmenides Project is. In a sense, the terms of it are such that every entry is a new introduction, a fresh attempt to articulate what my investment in the strange archaic poem of a thinker whom many consider the founder of Western thought in fact involves.

But I do want to give, at this date, a temporary framing device for the project, in honor of my opening this web site, since this site will, for the foreseeable future, be its primary public face. For the rest of this note I will assume the reader needs no introduction to the basic facts about Parmenides. In any case, something of this sort is provided in the entry below entitled, “Introduction to the Poem of Parmenides.” Here I will concentrate on a brief history of my project and sketch out the principles on which I have pursued it.

I took an interest in Parmenides in an undergraduate Greek course (perhaps 1966) where we were reading passages from pre-Socratic philosophers. No one could make any sense of what Parmenides was saying about “Is,” and most preferred to move on to the currently fashionable Heraclitean fragments. But the seeds of fascination were sewn in me, if only because I had long cultivated a taste for impenetrable texts as generally offering the most profitable

grist for my own intellectual mill. I may have worked at translating a few lines at that point.

My interest re-awoke many years later—in the late 1970s—reading Giorgio de Santillano’s remarks about Parmenides and what he considered to be its cosmological setting, and I translated at that point a substantial portion of “Fragment 8,” thinking that I would find some way to incorporate it in some poem of my own.

In the mid-80s, in discussion with the logician and concept artist, Christer Hennix, I found that we held in common an avidity for Parmenides. I showed him my translation and he encouraged me to complete it.

Over the next few years a project slowly gestated in my mind. What if one *assumed* that the rigorous strictures imposed upon thought by Parmenides were justified?—this against the weight of the entire Western Tradition that it supposedly initiated, and certainly against the almost unanimous consensus of modern commentators. What if the sense in which it was justified corresponded to various Eastern philosophic and spiritual positions, as in fact some commentators have suggested—Advaita Vedanta, Madhyamkha or rDzogchen Buddhism? What if Parmenides were in fact a contemplative-poet-statesman-healer-thinker—there at the very root of Western philosophical tradition? What would the Parmenidean position *look like* when faced with later philosophical views, or more particularly, what would later philosophical views look like when confronted with the Parmenidean vision of intellectual practice? Since I saw that in fact no one in the West had taken Parmenides up on his challenge (what I take that challenge to be can be found in the essay below, “Notes on Parmenides”) the Parmenidean “option” might provide a salutary vantage point from which to critique modern philosophical positions. This might in fact yield an alternative “deconstruction” to the one elaborated by Derrida and to some

extent by Heidegger, a deconstruction possibly suggesting precise ways in which Western intelligence might integrate itself with mind practices inherited from the East.

Heidegger of course repeatedly suggests that a “new beginning” for thought might ensue from an alignment on that which remains “unthought” in Parmenides, but Heidegger never addresses (in the texts of which I am aware) the precise concerns that I am calling the Parmenidean “option” or “challenge.” The re-opened inquiry into the meaning of Being that is of course the signal thought of Heidegger’s work inspires my own at many points, and, assuming that the “object” of Parmenidean thought is in fact Being, clearly directs one to a renewed meditation on Parmenides’ writing. The reader herself will have to judge to what degree the Parmenides Project is dependent on the Heideggerian journey.

In the summer of 1991 I took up the study of Herbert V. Guenther’s *The Matrix of Mystery: Scientific and Humanistic Aspects of rDzogchen Thought*. This work (as is the case with many of Dr. Guenther’s books), presents rDzogchen thought in English through the assimilation of concepts and modes of thinking borrowed from various Western perspectives, including Heidegger’s. In particular, he chooses to translate the Tibetan word “gzhi” as “Being,” “thereby indicating the similarity in philosophical understanding between the rDzogchen view of Reality’s dynamic holistic ground and that of Martin Heidegger’s view of Reality’s nonreductive, essentially open character...” (op. cit. p. 5). I am a practitioner in the rDzogchen tradition, and a root motivation for the Parmenides project has been to seek in Parmenides an affinity in Western thought for the “view” of rDzogchen itself. I took Dr. Guenther’s assignment of this key rDzogchen lexical symbol to the word “Being” as a signal to go ahead with my Parmenidean project.

The material of the project itself consists of a journal of reflections, more or less completed essays, poems and poem fragments, based in some cases directly on the Parmenides poem, but more often on the consequences of a few assumptions I hold about it. These constitute the hypothetical framework of the Parmenides Project as a kind of extended thought or “being” experiment. Rather than accept conventional translations of rDzogchen concepts, I have attempted to work them through for myself using the Parmenides Project as a take-off and landing point. The assumptions can be stated as follows:

1. That the force and intent of the Parmenides poem is not at all to initiate a philosophical tradition based on the proposition that Being Is One, but rather to *forestall* the spiritual errancy that such a proposition (or indeed any philosophical proposition save the bare utterance “Is”) would give rise to.

2. That there is a special sense in which the world of multiplicity and apparenity relates to this “Parmenidean Object,” and this is given in a locution in the poem which I translate, “Everything that *seems* must seem *to be*.”

Everything in the Parmenides Project is a meditation on these two assumptions.

The website opens with my translation of the Parmenides poem together with an “introduction” that is adapted from my introductory essay to *Being=Space X Action: Searches for Freedom of Mind in Mathematics, Art, and Mysticism*, Io, 41, North Atlantic Books. It is followed by a series of essays composed initially in my Parmenides Project journal and edited for separate release. At this date (May, 2002) I have chosen to post these writings as an initial offering. I will add essays and other entries as I edit them. I plan to post most of

the journal entries themselves as time goes on, but I have not decided precisely on the appropriate editorial procedure for doing so.

I welcome private communication about the project and will *perhaps* post responses in a separate section of the site if responses warrant it. My e-mail address is cstein@webjogger.net.

The Parmenides Poem (Introduction)

Charles Stein

(Edited from the "Introduction" to *Being=Space X Action: Searches for Freedom of Mind through Mathematics, Art, and Mysticism*, Io # 41, North Atlantic Books, 1988.)

Parmenides is usually recognized as the beginning of the "rational" tradition in Western Philosophy. He is the first to leave a text behind in which the assertions are supported by definite arguments, and where belief demands proof.

Yet the Parmenides that appears in his fragmentary poem is not simply rationalist in any familiar modern sense. He writes, for one thing, in verse, not prose. The occasion for his setting forth his arguments is a visionary journey; his mouth piece, a goddess; and the object of his vision, an enigmatic and mysterious totality that, though unnamed, is referred to by the locution "esti" (it is) or "on" (Being). The Goddess who speaks of Being is apparently Diké or Justice, and thus though the technical philosophy is thoroughly abstract in content, its domain seems to be the whole of human action, and its attitude, ethical. (Some researches have considered her as going without a name, or, in some cases as bearing the name "Aletheia," "Truth.")

The Parmenides poem in fact opens a rather impressively large range of philosophical issues which remain unresolved to this day: the questions of the unity of knowledge, the unity of being, the unity of knowledge *and* being, the nature of proof, the nature of thought itself, the nature of justice, the relations between thought, proof, knowledge and justice, the possibility of rational cosmology and the relationship between logic and cosmology, the existence and nature of abstract entities, the privileged status of philosophical knowledge—all these questions *became* explicitly formulatable questions immediately following the production of Parmenides' poem, none of them are definitely resolved today, and the future of science, culture and the human spirit all depend to a far from trivial degree on how these questions come to be reflected upon.

The text of the poem comes to us in fragments recorded by later philosophers: Aristotle and Simplicius principally. It is generally assumed that it appeared in two parts: one delineating a "true" path, the other a representation of a path of mere opinion. The reason for this division is not clear from a study of the existing fragments. Numerous analyses have been suggested. It is also uncertain what proportion of the entire poem we are in possession of, and, in the case of certain passages, to which section they belong.

The poem is written in dactylic hexameters, the meter of the Homeric Poems and the Delphic oracular responses; however, the diction is not derived uniquely from the Homeric dialect and if the formulaic theory of the technique of Homeric poetry is correct, the Parmenidean poem does not employ it. Exactly why Parmenides wrote in hexameters when there was already precedent for philosophers to write without them is conjecture.

Though the thought of the poem is supported by argumentation, this thought manifests in the context of an ecstatic vision. Parmenides is taken on a journey in a chariot, and, with the assistance of the daughters of the sun god, he ascends into a super-celestial region normally forbidden to mortal inspection (or, according to some, descends to the underworld). Parmenides' personal qualifications for the journey combine with a certain good fortune to create the conditions for his welcome by the goddess.

Parmenides' chariot journey resonates with similar voyages occurring in the texts of cultures geographically proximate to and contemporary with the Classical Greeks, cultures whose interrelation with the Hellenic world is speculative but by no means impossible. I am thinking, in particular, of the Vision of the Chariot in *Ezekiel* and the metaphor of the chariot in the *Upanishads*. A variant of the image of the chariot as a metaphor for a spiritual journey is taken up, of course, in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

Parmenides tells us that the horses that drive his chariot have the capacity to take him as far as he wishes to travel. I read the horses as images for his own mental capacities, the chariot as the vehicle of thought *cum* contemplation upon which he journeys. Parmenides has mastered his own intelligence and his own mind as far as that is possible, and this qualifies him for contact with a transcendent source of wisdom, the goddess herself.

The goddess herself is unique to Parmenides. I speculate that the reverence paid to the goddess justifies the use of Heroic verse. In any case the hexameters do not appear to be wielded ironically: Parmenides is not mocking the poetic tradition by using its style. Though his thought is a new vision of reality and a radical critique of ancestral myth and recent philosophy alike, something of the sense of the sacred as manifested in the poetic tradition is being honored and carried forward here. Again, though Parmenides radically decomposes previous thought, the sacred awe of the truth that such predecessor ontologies radiated in their poetries is being transmitted in a new mode.

The symbolism of the poem is a species of mystical allegory wherein persons and objects, though figurative, cannot be replaced by the abstractions for which in fact they stand. Diké is more than abstract "Justice," yet she is also more than an anthropomorphic goddess: Parmenides' conversation with her and the instruction he receives from her constitute a communication and instruction from Justice itself; and Justice is taken as somehow identical with the transcendent object, the It Is, of which the goddess speaks. That Dike speaks in arguments and proofs bespeaks the nature of Justice: Justice is inseparable from correct reasoning, and the rationality of Being conjoins its own theodicy.

The restrictions on reasoning that Justice demands are stringent. In particular, a certain form of negative reasoning or negative existence is radically forbidden. That which Is Not cannot be asserted To Be, and thus no creature made up partly of Being and partly of Non-Being can be granted any share in existence at all. Being is whole, self-identical, bounded, indivisible, and eternal. It is like a "well-rounded sphere." It has often been wondered how Parmenides could have permitted himself numerous negative expressions in the delineation of Being, if the existence of non-being is to be so severely interdicted. But a recent study by Scot Austin (*Parmenides, Being, Bound,s and Logic*, 1986, New Haven, Yale University Press) demonstrates that the ban on negative language

is itself limited to a ban on the positive assertion of negative subjects: such constructions as “the non-existence of X exists.” It does not disallow such assertions as “X does not have property y.” Austin argues that Parmenides’ language is consistently disciplined in this way, so that the charge of self-contradiction or verbal unconsciousness will not hold.

The image of the “well-rounded” sphere is extraordinary. It has often been taken literally, as if Parmenides meant to project a spherical cosmology of a material sort. In fact, the image is clearly a simile—it is meant to express the concept that measurable distances (such as the distances measured by geometers) have no application within Being. There is no distance as far as things of the mind are concerned. The aspect of the sphere that is intended in the simile is that which is contained in its formal definition: that all points on its surface are equidistant from its center. Similarly, all “points” or thoughts within Being are correlated without subdivision or hierarchical organization of any kind.

Parmenides’ “sphere of being” is often, in recent literature, taken as the prototype of the kind of systematizing, totalizing cosmologies and philosophies which, imposing themselves on the world, justify hierarchically-organized social structures, mind-stunning supersystems, and all the political, social and theological tyrannies of western history. But it seems to me it is important to notice that whatever the aspirations of systematic thinkers in the west From Plato through Hegel and Marx to Carnap and Goodman may be, none of them in fact takes up the challenge of the restrictions upon intellectual assertion leveled by the goddess. Plato (who is most often taken to be Parmenides’ heir) after explicitly merging the concept of Being and Non-being to form the hybrid Becoming, throws up his hands in despair of ever understanding what the Master really meant. The cosmological sphere of Being that Plato presents in the *Timaeus* and which is generally thought to stem from Parmenides, is in fact a version of the sphere that Parmenides describes in the second part of his poem—the part presumably dedicated to a presentation of the way of “opinion,” namely—a “likely construction,” an “eokos logos.” But whereas for Plato such constructions are things one proposes when one has a hint of the truth but cannot prove it, precisely such hints and propositions are, by Parmenides, interdicted.

Parmenides, then, far from being the progenitor of the totalizations and hierarchies of subsequent western thought, and thus the figure most to be assailed at a time in history when western thought is tottering, stands outside of the whole tradition as a monstrosity and a castigation against it, out of its origin. Parmenides was a hope that has not yet been fulfilled because his actual proposition has never been seriously entertained or analyzed with any particular depth.

The connection between the Parmenides poem and the cultures of India has been remarked upon. Something like Parmenides’ sphere of Being exists as a symbol for the Buddhist’s principle of the Dharmakaya; and the expression of the absolute object of contemplation through the denial of a series of predicates is a common feature of Indian absolutism. Ingenious analyses have been offered likening Parmenides’ chariot journey—with its axle that gives off musical tones and radiates heat and light—to the processes of Kundalini Yoga. That Parmenides was educated as a Pythagorean is part of the Parmenides tradition. That Pythagoras’ doctrine, with its vegetarianism, metempsychosis and general soteriological scheme owes *its* similarity to Indian metaphysics to Pythagoras’ personal journeys to the east is part of the Pythagorean tradition. Thus the possibility exists that the Parmenides poem reflects a hidden dimension of cross-cultural fertilization between India and the Ancient Mediterranean.

Another aspect of the Parmenides poem that looks suspiciously like typically Indian approaches to epistemology is its bipartite structure: the poem contains a doctrine of

“two-truths,” one pointing towards an absolute that cannot be expressed properly in speech but can be acceded to through direct realization, the other a relative, conventional truth—a matter of historical convenience, common sense, or heuristic practice. The doctrine of two-truths is prominent in both Buddhist and Hindu metaphysics. Whether or not Parmenides’ poem owes anything to the east in this regard, the division of the poem into two contradictory doctrines deserves comment. A text that argues elaborately for the connection with India and which we discussed in Rhinebeck is Oscar Marcel Hinze’s *Tantra Vidya* (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1979).

Notes Toward a Translation of The Poem of Parmenides

Charles Stein

Fragment 1

The mares that are able to take me
as far as I want to travel
had so taken me
once they’d set me down on the Daimon’s Way—
for it is *She* that takes the Knower through each town.
Onto such a route had they placed me
and the knowing horses carried me along it, straining at the reins.
And the daughters of the sun went before us, leading the way.

The axle of the chariot
urged round by eddying wheels attached at the ends
put it in motion
and the axle whistled and shimmered as it turned in the nave
while the daughters of the sun sent us into the light
having come out of Night’s abodes
and pushed back the veils from their faces with their hands.

Up *there* are the gates of the tracks of day and night
fitted above with a lintel
and below with a threshold of stone
and the openings themselves, high up in the air,
are closed by mighty doors.

Dike—The Equalizer—holds the keys to them.
And the sun’s cunning daughters
used mild speech to persuade her
to open the gates.

The gates, when opened, opened on a vast expanse
and the daughters of the sun
drove the chariot and mares out on to it
and the gates were fixed on singing axle hinges.

And taking me by the right hand she spoke to me thus:

“Oh Youth, linked with your mares to immortal charioteers
who have lead you here to my home—Welcome.

Since it is by no means an inappropriate destiny
that has sent you forth to travel this path
far from the wanderings of mortals

but a Right and Just one,
it is necessary for you to learn all things—
both the stable heart of well-rounded truth
as well as the notions of mortals—

(and in these there is nothing at all to put your faith in)
nonetheless you shall study such matters also—
how the *things that seem*

(and these pervade everything)
must seem *to be*.

Fragment 2

But come, and I will instruct you.
And you must take back home with you what I say—
whether in fact there are only these two ways for thought to travel:

Either:

“— *is*”
(and also) “That—*is not*”
is not

(and this is the path of which one
ought to be persuaded
for it leads to truth)

Or:

“—*is not*”
(and also) “That—*is*”
cannot be

(and I say that this is an unconvincing road:
it doesn't turn.)

You cannot know what in fact has no being—
this is impossible
and you cannot speak if it.

Fragment 3

For “to know” and “to be” is “the same.”

Fragment 4

Consider things, which, though being far away
are nonetheless certainly present to the mind.
For you shall not cut off being from its continuity
with itself.
It will neither be dispersed from, nor contracted within
its kosmos.

Fragment 5

It is all the same to me where I begin
for there shall I return.

Fragment 6

It is necessary to know and to say that Being is
for the other way—the thought that—is not—cannot be.
It is. And “cannot be” *is* not.

Think about this.

And now I must dissuade you
not only from taking *that* one of these two courses
but also from another
upon which mortals wander double-minded
not knowing anything
for only ineptitude straightens
the errant thought in their minds.
They are carried along
blind and obtuse—
these utterly astonished ones
this indiscriminate horde—
by whom the “to be” as well as the “not to be”
are thought of as the same
and
at the same time
not the same
and that the track down which everything passes
is backward turning.

Fragment 7

For you are never going to put *this* thought to rest:
that things that are not are.

So urge your thoughts off this duplicit pathway
and don't let well-worn habit force you down it—

don't let your eye wander

don't let your tongue wag

don't allow your ear to echo aimlessly;

Rather, judge by thought

the much disputed proof which I have spoken.

Fragment 8

There is only one path left
and that is
that “—is.”

And on it there are many indications
that Being is unengendered
that it cannot be broken apart
(for it is whole, without parts)
that Being does not fluctuate,
that it has no end.

It never *was*, It never *will* be. It is all NOW—
one continuum.

For what kind of engendering can be sought for it?
How and from what source might it have grown?

And do not say and do not think
that it came out of not-being
for it cannot be said and it cannot be thought
that “—is” is not.

And what need could have driven it to grow
starting from nothing
at some time earlier
rather than at some
later time?

...

[[What debt incurred, stirred it to grow
then, rather than at some other time
if it first came into being out of nothing?]]

...

since it is altogether, of a single piece.

Nor does it exceed itself or fail to reach itself
thereby disrupting the continuity of itself.

But Being is everywhere replete, everywhere continuous
and all of it is connected

close
to all of itself.

But without motion

locked within the limit of mighty bonds
anarchic without beginning
and not to be brought to an end
(since both “coming into being” and “passing out of being”
have been banished far away by true belief)

the same in the same remaining with itself
it lies where it is

for strong necessity has locked it in limiting bonds
and imprisons it all about.

Nor is it lawful for Being to remain uncompleted:

Being lacks nothing.

For if it lacked one thing it would lack it all.

Because of this, therefore, to think and the thing thought
are the same thing (namely Being)
for you will not find thought without the being about which
that thought is uttered.

And nothing is or ever will be outside of what is
since Fate has fastened Being to remain
a motionless whole.

And all the other designations
which mortals have laid down
having trusted them to be true
are only names

namely: “coming into being” and “going out of being”
and the mixture of the two not-being and Being
together
alteration of brightness and color
and change of place.

However, since there *is* an uttermost limit,
“—Is” is fully established on every side

resembling in dignity and mass a well-rounded sphere
equally distributed, balanced in every direction
for it must not come out somewhat greater in one place
 somewhat smaller or more humble in the next
as neither does not-being exist
 to prevent it from accosting its like
nor can Being be either more or less than Being is
 in one place as over against another place
 since all of it is inviolable, equidistant from everywhere
and all of it alike within its bounds.

At this point I stop such thought and speech
 as you ought to put your trust in
concerning truth. From here on, learn the beliefs of mortals
listening to the deceitful ordering of my words.

For they set up two forms in their minds for the business of naming
whereas even one form is incorrect. In doing so they have strayed into errancy.
They discriminate bodily antitheses and set up signs
apart from one another: on this side the bright tongue of flame
being gentle and most light, in all ways the same with itself
and in no way the same with another; and on the other side
 in opposition
thick night. Solid. Massive. Bodily:

I speak to you here of what is merely a plausible cosmos
so that no thought of a mortal
 may ever get the best of you.

Fragment 9

But since all things have been dubbed “Light” and “Night”
and according to their powers this pair has been
 attributed to various entities,
all is full at once of light and nocturnal obscurity—
full that is of both—since nothingness
 nothing
 has a share in.

Fragment 10

You shall know of the aetherial nature
 and of all the signs in the aether—
and of the inapparent acts of the pure torch of the spotless sun
 and from what it came into being.
You shall learn of the wanderings
 of the round-eyed moon and its nature.
You’ll know from whence the encircling heavens grew
 and also how Anangke, guiding it, bound it

to hold the limits of the stars.

Fragment 11

How Gaia and Helios and Selene, Aether and the Galaxy,
outermost Olympos and the hot strength of the stars
rushed into being

Fragment 12

For the narrow rings are filled with unmixed fire
and the next ones are full of the night
and a tongue of flame shoots out.

In the middle of this is the Daimonness
who steers all things
and she commands the commingling
and the hateful births of everything
sending the female to mix with the male
and then contrariwise, the male with the female.

Fragment 13

She devised
Eros—absolutely the first of all the gods

Fragment 14

Night-shiner— about the earth
wandering
—an alien light

Fragment 15

always straining after the rays of the sun

Fragment 15a

water-rooter

Fragment 16

According to the disposition of bodily parts—the limbs that wander everywhere
is the mind present in persons.
For the nature of the limbs which thinks in persons

is the same in all and each.
And the full is thought.

Fragment 17

On the right sides—males

on the left sides—females

(sides. that is, of the womb

Fragment 18

(Latin fragment)

Fragment 19

Thus according to opinion, these things gestated and now exist
and hereafter they shall grow and later perish.

And for each of them humans have established a distinct name.

January 1, 1995

Phantom Ideality

1. Ideality is a mode of appearance, of "seeming-to-be." It is the mode of the phantom. It arises under a variety of conditions: sensuous, conceptual, intuitional, constructional, and so forth.

2. The reality of a phantom is the undecidability of the reality of a phantom.
(A ghost that does not tease belief is not a ghost at all.)

3. Whereas a perception reports of an entity that seems to be, a phantom shows an entity whose being can neither be confidently asserted nor denied.

4. In truth, all perceptions and all determinate thoughts share this phantomatic character, but do not seem to do so. In the phantom, the true relation between Being and appearance, for a moment, and, as it were, under a veil, shows itself.

5. The ideality of the sign, the ideal signified, is a phantom. Upon close inspection, we cannot decide whether the signified is reducible to the class of the sign's references, or, irreducible, points to an "ideal object" in a universe of signifieds, an ontological zone unique to the ontology of signs.

6. The objectivity of the world and its temporally extended objects is a phantom, a world of phantoms. We can neither admit nor deny the independence of the "things" from their constitution in our consciousness, our history, our culture.

7. The objects of mathematics, when we consider the indeterminability of the great foundational systems—classical, intuitionist, formalist—are phantoms. We cannot decide without dispute regarding their ontological status. They resist final determination as mental constructs, social conventions, or independently existent entities.

8. And the temporal present—the famous "now" point—is phantomatic. It determines that which in our experience is most concrete; it serves as a limit, in fact, for the experience of concreteness: there is nothing more concrete than the unmediated present instant; whatever is most concrete, takes place "now." And

yet, in itself, the present cannot be grasped but as a "cut" dividing two other phantoms, the future and the past. It situates the unique, and yet is perfectly generic, there being no difference between one "now" moment and another apart from the phantasmagoria of their evanescent content.

February 23, 1995

Being, Unity, and The Good in Platonic vs Parmenidean Contemplative Practice

I wish to demonstrate a fundamental contrast between the Platonic and the Parmenidean view of the notions, Being, Unity, and the Good and the roles these notions play in motivating two contrasting contemplative attitudes.

First, Platonism, as exemplified in Plotinus. The Plotinian One is that principle which, in lending unity to all entities that possess self-identity, accompanies and is manifest in whatever is; whatever is participates the One in so far as it achieves its own "good," its own self-identity or nature. "Being" is therefore something of lower rank than the One, since each thing that has Being must participate the One, and Being itself participates the One. The Good and the One are the Same since that in general which each being seeks is its own Good; that is, to be itself entire, to be one with itself. Contemplation aims not for Being but for the One. The intellect (nous), whose function it is to know Being in the sense of recognizing beings as what they are in their identities, must raise itself to that point in itself where it recognizes Unity—the One—as its own principle and prior; it must seek to unify itself with that One which, because it is beyond the objects that the intellect knows, can neither be said to be nor not to be.

Being on this account is equivalent to identity, so whatever is—is as one. Whatever is multiple has fallen from its unity, its identity. And since Being itself is a universal in which all beings participate and at the same time the concrete sum of all such participating beings, Being itself is multiple, i.e., has already fallen away from its own unity and thus, again, is less than the One.

A pre-requisite for contemplation is unification or self-unification, since without this, the ascent to the One itself is unmotivated and has, as it were, no launching pad.

Again: I discover myself to be myself by virtue of my participation in unity. I must then seek to overcome my own diversity from unity itself. The value of all lower things is measured by their exhibition of unity.

Now, this theme of the participation of the being with its identity in the One redounds throughout the Western traditions: in Christianity, the notion that the individual soul is a simple substance; in Coleridge the Ensemplastic force; the principle of gestalt in modern psychology; aesthetic theories of unity; dreams of political totality or social harmony or psychological integration or physical holism; rational systems bent on self-consistency and the law of non-contradiction (whether directly dependent on the Plotinian concept or on the Platonic thought that preceded him, the Christian thought that succeeded him, or the scientific and rational thought that sought to replace Christianity without criticizing its drive toward unity). Each of these doctrines valorizes the principle of unity. Oneness is the supreme achievement. It is consummation and perfection. We are less than ourselves when we fail to integrate the multiplicity of our tendencies, thoughts, attitudes into a psyche whole; our conflicts do not only tend to our destruction and cause us wretchedness and pain, they involve us in non-being; our heterodoxies are blemishes, partialities, deficiencies,

perversities; our enigmas and paradoxes are failures to resolve our thoughts into unity; our stylistic pluralities betoken lack of resolve or failure to realize an identity or failure to integrate the elements of our work. In all these attitudes, a common theme is that Being is linked to identity/unity. Being is preeminently predicative: the unified ensemble of characteristics that define a thing as the specific thing it is, the form in which it participates, the criterion it satisfies, the measure to which it conforms.

In contrast: Parmenideanism. For Parmenides, all these unities, these harmonies, these coherent multiplicities, though still involving unity as a principle of identity, represent a thoroughly different relation to Being itself.

First, the self-identical entity is not a being except figuratively and in a very special sense: it is a seeming-to-be. It involves Being not because it exemplifies an ensemble of characteristics unified in its definition or because it realizes an atemporal form, but because as an apparition it involves Being in its structure. Everything that seems must seem to Be.

Second, even if, in appearing as a fully formed apparition that does indeed show forth its definitionally unified ensemble of characteristics and thus indeed exhibits unity through its identity—still this being-as, this predicative sort of being, this identity only one-sidedly reports of Being itself; for Being, not as identity, but as concrete existence is ALSO apparent in the incomplete phases of the formation of a thing as well as in multiplicities that do not show formal unities; it dwells in heterogeneous aggregates, in randomly kinetic ensembles, in incoherent or unresolved paradoxes or enigmas, in divided personalities or psychic conditions with contradictory attitudes, contrasting feelings, or processes of intellect or sensibility that, engendered under various conditions and suited to the pursuit of various ends, (or the pursuit of no ends, or contradictory or

absurd, humorous, or simply heterogeneous ends), entertain heterogeneous ensembles of ideations, truths, or feelings. Being qua existence is a factor in apparencies that exhibit chaos, conflict, lack of formal distinctness, emptiness, ugliness, peremptoriness, rebelliousness, obstreporousness, or pluck.

This does not mean that we need to valorize these states of multiplicity in general, any more than we need to condemn them in general; that is to say, its does not suggest that we *ought* to prefer them. But it may mean that where we do have reason to prefer them, choose them, affirm them, dwell within them, discover their possibilities, their virtues, their uses, their qualities, their pleasures, we may do so without fear of falling away from our very Being for entertaining or attending to or practicing states of appearing-to-be that do not dogmatically push towards the One.

That we may and often do prefer the unified states to these others goes without saying. But we do so because of our evaluation of their actual apparency, not because of an imperative inherent in Being to glorify the unified and the self-identical, whether their concretely appearing characters satisfy our concrete exigencies or no.

Returning now to Plotinus and his hierarchy that requires the One to rest at a higher station than Being: We say that we need to invert the First and Second Hypostases (the One and Nous/Being). The One is not the supreme condition, but a characteristic of a certain phase of apparency. It presides over precisely those seemings-to-be that exhibit determinate identity. But Being surpasses Unity because multiplicitous and indeterminate conditions and states also appear for sentient beings and therefore share in seeming-to-be and therefore in Being and therefore have equal rights with identities.

The contemplative states commended by Plotinus that involve the isolation of that facet of the intellectual principle, the *nous*, which gazes beyond itself to the One and seeks to unify itself with the One as to its own innermost prior and Good—these contemplations need to be reconceived as pertaining to Being itself. For these states are not at all beyond “being and non-being.” It is not the case that we fail to be certain whether or not they actually exist. In fact, the state of the self-contemplation of Being is the only state of whose Being we cannot entertain doubt. However, it cannot be said of such contemplation that it is either One or Many. Rather, the sentient being, in recovering its own principle of sentience, its pure-awareness, and discovering in awareness the principle of apperency, must seek that wherein Being announces itself in each instant, whether an occasion of unified identity or a passing moment of indeterminate *sensa*, or any degree of mixture of the two. Rather than isolating itself from the apperencies of ordinary existence, contemplation finds itself at the heart all that seems to be.

May 14, 1995

An Archaeology of Reference 2

In reference in general one thing is taken to point to another.

Pointing to another is pointing away from oneself. The object that functions as a sign points away from itself and allows itself to be substituted for by another.

The space of signs is a space that in general points away from itself towards another space or world, and allows itself to be substituted for by that other space or other world.

In substitutivity, taking-as-the same is combined with pointing, to allow the substitutivity. There is a double loss here: the thing pointed to by the sign does not appear "in person" but only as replaced by the sign, so both the sign itself and the represented thing are absent. But this is not so in self-reference:

In self-reference a sign points to and is taken as the same as itself. The space of signs that in general points towards the other, presents itself as that other.

Self-reference thus cancels the other-pointing character of the sign-space and makes the sign or sign-space present in itself. What had been representation becomes presentation. Unlike direct presentation, however, self-referential presentation retains the sign-space because the sign is still substitutive, since here some thing absents itself in order to present itself. This seeming difference between mediated and unmediated self-presentation is subject to the following observation:

The thing that functions as a sign, if it is a physical thing, exhibits quasi-stable perdurance and is an enduring object. It has already passed over radical impermanence. It had already become "the same as itself" by virtue of being an enduring thing, before it came to be used as a sign.

The momentary object (say a printed letter or word) vanishes with its moment, but its subsequent moment, by the very fact that it is taken as a subsequent moment of just this thing, exhibits itself as a self-referring sign. It points to its prior moment and allows itself to be taken as the same as that prior, that is to say, to be substituted for it.

In being substituted for it, it suppresses the difference between itself and that which it replaces, and declares the "being" of the identity of the thing it is, even as it too vanishes in turn by being replaced by its successor.

The internal machinery by which this substitutivity is effected is recondite indeed, but it clearly already involves all the basic elements that we recognize in understanding the nature of the sign.

The parts of the machine are: succession, repetition, substitution, pointing, sameness, identity, reference, self-reference. Both the thing that is used as a sign and the thing signified already have their structure by means of this machinery.

January 6, 1997

**Notes on some passages from
Henry Corbin's *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital***

Each of us carries in himself the image of his own world, his *Imago Mundi*, and projects it into a more or less coherent universe, which becomes the stage on which his destiny is played out. He may not be conscious of it, and to that extent he will experience as imposed on himself and on others this world that in fact he himself and others impose on themselves. This is also the situation that remains in force as long as philosophical systems profess to be "objectively" established. It ceases in proportion to such an acquisition of consciousness as permits the soul triumphantly to pass beyond the circles that held it prisoner.

p.8

Comment. The ideal of objectivity imposes destiny as objective. Historicity occults the emergence into consciousness of *the Imago Mundi*, and prevents not the imposition of this image, but our liberation not *from* but *through* it.

Our question is of the historicity of historicity! What historical condition imposed this occultation?--and a correlated inquiry into the origin of one's own

assumptions, based on the problem of an historically originated ontological will, under which one's own will falls, unless liberated. The *Imago Mundi*, taken as the individual's potentiality for ontological originarity, is subjected to an epochal, that is to say, historically originated ontological will in the form of one's unconscious assumptions about being, (what we used to call "concensual reality") that masks and distorts it. The "historical function" of each of us is something that has to be ferreted out from under such mediation.

The possibility for both the discovery of the ontologically *originary Imago Mundi* and its subjection to an epochally determined picture of the world is given by Heidegger's analysis in *Being and Time* of Dasein's concern for Being as a whole: that how things stand with the being of the world matters to us, whether we grasp this concern in authentic resolve or allow it to be covered over through an historical determination we are not responsible for.

But Corbin passes one step beyond these questions, by seeing that even the authentic *Imago Mundi* may be unconscious: we may project the image of the world that is appropriate to us without knowing that we are doing so, and thus be in the grips of an objectivist or historicist fallacy: the belief that an "objective reality" (that gives itself in the form of a determinate set of philosophical tenets) or an "objective" historical narrative governs our being and destiny.

The historicity of historicity. Historicity itself is an emergent form, arising in history and imposing itself as the form of emergence.

Corbin gives an alternative from out of "the Orient" to occultation by historicity. Philosophy, he maintains, is guided by that which, when consummated, is encountered "in person" as the individuated angelic form of the Active Intelligence. But the hypostatization of this Intelligence beforehand is both the act of that Intelligence itself and the condition for its incursion as an evidential experience. What we call the *event of Declaration* occurs in time and appears to be a personal, "historical" decision; but this decision cannot occur without its being guided by the very object it decides for; though, conversely, the appearance of this object will not arise without this decision being made in its anticipation. [We could compare here the problem of the relation between distinction and indication in Spencer-Brown.]

But if the "root" and possibility of Declaration always goes back to the topology of Being itself, what fundamentally Declaration "sees" that authorizes its hazarding concrete steps toward the possibility field it originates and seeks to

get underway, is in every case Being itself. The topological feature of Being that is relevant here, would be its propensity to take on appearances.

...one can profess neither Thomism, Scotism, nor Augustinianism, and yet 'valorize' these theological universes positively, and, without taking up one's abode in them, keep an abode for them in oneself...

The more perceptions and representations of the universe each monad integrates, the more it unfolds its own perfection and differs from every other.

p.9

One cannot free oneself from the past without freeing the past itself; but to free it is to give it a future again, to make it significant.

p.10

But to integrate a world, to make it one's own, also implies that one has emerged from it in order to make it enter into oneself. This is precisely the experience attested by Avicenna's visionary recitals, and they attest what is most contemporary to us in his teaching. At the frontier reached by the *Recital of Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, the soul has the experience that, by acquiring consciousness of itself, Anima, it can know the Angel. But knowledge of the Angel and the pleroma of the Angel are beyond the system of the cosmos and its sphere. They must be left behind...

p.15

It is only upon the condition of being thus reconquered as a world living in the soul and no longer a world into which the soul is cast as a prisoner because it has acquired consciousness of it, that this spiritual cosmos will cease to be liable to shatter into fragments at the content of material or ideological advances fed from other sources.

p.15

the soul ... to free itself from all the schemata of the world.

p.16

The Self is neither a metaphor nor an ideogram. It is 'in person' the heavenly counterpart of a pair or a syzygy made up of a fallen angel, or an angel appointed to govern a body, and of an angel retaining his abode in heaven."

p.21

The awakening of consciousness to the soul's condition as a stranger and, in his emergence to itself, its meeting with him who shows it the way, its guide, its nous.

p. 23-4

From the very beginning, then, in the heart of being, arises possibility, a possibility-not-to-be—that is, the part of nonbeing that the Archangelic intellegizes when he considers his own being in itself, which being has no 'why' except the necessity that causes it to be from the necessary Being. But then it is the latter that necessarily gives rise to this being whose being, by having the possibility of not being, has already crossed the threshold of nonbeing.

p. 25

Comment: The continity of the series: Being:Necessity:Possibility, where "possibility" stimulates the dyadic question: Being or Non Being? --seems broken in the transition to Possibility. But Necessity itself is a possibility: there might have been no necessity, though in fact there is necessity. But then necessity too is drawn into non-being, since it too is infected with possibility. Is the necessary being necessary necessarily, or only contingently? This very question, the possibility of raising it, shows that possibility already infects Being, whatever the answer. So necessity is only necessary as a matter of fact, ie contingently. Yet the necessity of necessity is a property of Being itself: it is the necessity of Being, not its merely happening to be, that constitutes its essence. Necessity is necessary necessarily, not contingently. In Being, there is no question of possibility, no alternatrive to the necessary. But then all falls silent: possibility is excluded from Being. Which decidedly is not the case, since Being is nothing if not the possibility for the appearances.

The topology of Being however is intransitive: Being/Necessity/Possibility do not comprise a linear series. In thought, Being is first a possibility, whose

necessity must be demonstrated. Necessity itself is a consequence. Possibility itself is necessary. Being itself takes thought, and is the thought of itself. This topology dictates emergence.

Two perspectives emerge in this dilemma: a perspective of Being itself, which has no perspective, no difference, no contingency, no apparency. And the perspective of appearances, wherein as soon as any being is ascribed to appearance as such, Being itself seems “drawn down into the fluctuating empire of generation.”

One wants to unpack the topological properties of Being so as to derive therefrom the structures of appearance, but the first movement to discriminate the elements of such a topology already rupture the indivisible state of Being and introduce into it the very elements one wishes to derive from it. Thought thus seems outside of Being, thoroughly on the side of appearance, yet thought is itself the primordial property of Being, its own unavoidable duality thus reads as ineliminable.

.....

The celestial ‘clime,’ that of the spheres, originates in the portion of virtual nonbeing contained in the being of each of the Archangels of the pleroma.

Each heaven is the thought of an Archangel, not of an Archangel fallen from his station but rather of an Archangel “saddened” by the limitation of his being. The Soul to which he gives origin is the moving Soul of his heaven, which, like it, has issued from his thought, and it draws on his heaven by the motion of nostalgia by which it is itself drawn toward the Archangel from which it proceeds. Hence the celestial motions are here neither direct expressions of the supreme divinity nor expressions of a terrible and antidivine Necessity, but an immense symphony of desire and nostalgia for a boundless perfection.

P.26

Comment: If the Dervish assimilates his movement to the heavenly spheres, he too participates in the energy of this desire and this nostalgia.

Then Exile, the wretchedness of the earthly condition, originates not in the original “sin” of an erring humanity that feels itself guilty before a judge, but in a “drama,” a fall of being, long before the appearance of earthly

man. He shares in this drama because he is of the same celestial race as the original *dramatis personnae*.

P.26

Comment: Being—the Ancestor

From our perspective, Possibility is a liminal matter: liminal between Being and Apparancy: Possibility is not so much infected with nonbeing as it is the amulet of access to Being from a site that otherwise is given over to oblivion.

Possibility is a modality of Being itself: the modality that liberates fact from its ossification under objectifying regimes.

Being only *has* modalities if seen from within the worlds already emanated by it, i.e. apparent worlds. Yet Being is accessible from all points within apparancy as its innermost possibility, i.e. the possibility of sustaining a state of response to whatever arises as internally replete with its own further possibility.

Possibility: the dyadic contingency of “to be or not to be,” is transformed into a nondual precommitment to sustain the link to Being at the heart of apparancy.

April 18, 1997

Karma and the Possible

Karma vis a vis: the modality of The Possible

Karma is that which resists the declaration of the modality of the Possible by determining happenings according to general patterns, forms, categories.

The Possible takes whatever is present as its novel opportunity. Karma takes whatever is present as another instantiation of its own, momentarily dominating generality.

But Karma itself at every moment is in process of formation; so at every moment when the Possible declares itself, Karma is weakened. This is Self-Liberation.

April 25, 1997

Possibility and Death

“Death sentence came as a great ripple of calm.” Allen Ginsberg

Possibilities are possibilities for determinate facts, yet in the Modality of the Possible each actualization of a possibility in a new fact anticipates the further application of the Modality of the Possible itself. In “The Practice of Possibility” facts are received as further possibilities, rather than as final determinations.

In the modal dialectic between Possibility and Factuality, an actualized fact is instantaneously transmuted into a fresh possibility, so no fact obtains absolutely.

In Heidegger’s formulation in *Being And Time* “death is the possibility of no more possibilities.” Possibility here means the possibility for *more facts*. But under the Modality of the Possible, possibility transmutes facts *right up to the end*. In the Practice of Possibility there is an anticipation of the further conduct of the practice: every on-coming fact is already on the way to its own transmutation into a new possibility. Possibility does not anticipate facts, it anticipates Possibility itself.

If death is the “Great Fact,” its anticipation in the Practice of Possibility is the anticipation of the “Great Possibility”: release from the oncoming of the facts

themselves. Death is anticipated under the mode of *Requiescence unto Being*. Not that the actuality of the facts is terminated, for that would spell the end of Possibility itself, but that the Modality of the Factual as obscuring the possibility of the Practice of the Possible is decisively put out of play.

In death, no determinate fact can be anticipated, including the fact of one's own utter extinction.

To be in a state of openness towards the Great On-Coming is to be in a state of Possibility. Let it be—let it come. But this “it” has no referent other than the anticipation that “it” will open on to Possibility. In the possibility of no more possibilities—in Heidegger's “being-towards-death”—we see the relation to openness as such—to Possibility as such—to Requiescence as the soteriological aim and practice.

The anticipation of rebirth in another world or in this world is the inner conviction, under the Mode of Factuality, that something about one's self is *irreparably* the case. It is the conviction that our “karmic patterns”—the compelling tendencies that render us unable to enter the Mode of Possibility—have not been exhausted. Great Death is not possible, so we anticipate the Oncoming of death with a crescendo of fear. This fear is entailed by the inner regard that takes the self as a determinate fact: either that the self is going to be terminated, or that it is going to be judged by its determination's becoming evident, or that it is going to continue to suffer the consequence of its own factuality in further factuality—that there will be no relief.

Karma is the inability to enter the Practice of the Possible; thus all three forms of the fear of death: fear of annihilation, fear of judgment, fear of repetition, arise from Karma. And similarly regarding the corresponding forms of hope: hope of immortality, salvation, or good rebirth.

The myth of the special realms such as the “Copper Mountain of Guru Rinpoche” or “Amitabha’s Pure Land” represent the possibility of entering the Practice of The Possible.

The calmness that some feel at the onset of dying—the quieting down of the factual before the Great Fact—is a glimpse of the easing of Karma—Requiescence: the opening of the gate of pure Possibility to Being itself.

November, 1999

Attention/Time/Magic

It seems that time has already made its move before our attention lands upon its object. But then attention too has passed to its next intention, before we have aligned awareness upon what attention attends.

We cannot align awareness on time itself, but we can allow awareness to obey attention’s passage, and thus rest awareness asymptotically close to the movement of time.

Attention shifts with time without thematizing, grasping, objectifying that upon which it falls; or time perpetually releases attention from its object. Awareness of attention, in attempting to follow, grasp, thematize, objectify attention’s target, attempts to arrest the perpetual relinquishment afforded by attention’s temporal substrate—to *have* its object; to *stop* time.

Objecthood, whether perceptual or cognitive, is the success of awareness in this regard—the apparent disengagement of the temporal heart of things. Without this disengagement, nothing remains the same. There is only the riding of the silent jet-stream of temporal becoming—a becoming without becoming, because there is no static object not-yet-arrived, on the way to which becoming becomes.

The appearance of the identity of an object depends upon the effort of awareness to arrest the radical transiency of attention's temporal substrate. Yet the possibility of such dependence does not derive from the character of awareness alone, but upon a deeper character of diachronic time itself—deeper or coemergent with its transiency.

Time's perpetually being other remains with an obdurate persistence. It will not cease in its vanishing. It will not be grasped in its transiency; but in the train of duration that grasped objects travel on (“the train / goes by / its riders”), time's dual character of bestowing and abolishing at once appears. There is an atemporal essence at the heart of time, without which its impermanence would not be able to produce even the appearance of itself. If we do not find that which is not impermanent, impermanence itself disappears. Either way, atemporal eternity is co-eternal with radical transiency, and the objectivity of things that endure—their holding the identity we grasp in them—depends upon this dual character of the temporal substrate: its transiency; its eternity.

The authentically atemporal must subsist along with radical impermanence for the appearance of duration and identity to make an appearance. Appearance is the offspring of eternity and transiency, neither of which can themselves appear.

If being is time, it shares time's dual character; and being's two sides—existence and identity—coincide with those two sides of time. The being of something is its abiding in existence. The existence of something is the abiding of its identity. Beings—abiding existences—spring inlaid on time's perpetual perishing.

But for some time now, it has been impossible to deny that being, abstracted from identity and existing, finds atemporalities that do not abide, whose mode of giving themselves does not present abiding entities.

For Derridean differance, trace, spacing, do not abide. They name what gives rise to that which cannot have arisen. These notions will neither vanish nor stay still; something in them edges away like a blind spot. They provoke or indicate another wrinkle in being beyond existence and identity. They specify from an outside that is nowhere, the double duality of being and time.

But if differance gives the spacing in which existence and identity, impermanence and identity, come forward, does differance accomplish anything other than to rename an impossibility already betrayed by time itself? Is this other "scene" that is "older" than time and eternity, anything other than the enigma of the inextricability of time and atemporality itself? Derrida, in at least some of his moods, does not think otherwise. But with this admission, the magical and its bond with time begins to approach.

We ask, if being as the presencing of what is present is exceeded by a giving or a letting be that gives what presence never stays, is this giving not already the time that attention approaches but with which it can never coincide, that awareness

approaches through its obedience to attention's movement, but loses as Blanchot knows, Orpheus-wise, in its objectifying, thematizing grasp?

We know that when awareness slumbers, time does not cease to move on. Time does not bother with what its objects fail to hold onto when attention flags and awareness fails to objectify. Yet the traces of duration are not dependent upon the acts of awareness/attention that intermittently recover them. The evidence of objects that hold their self-sameness over time in spite of indomitable transiency, is there to be discovered whenever awareness recovers itself sufficiently to attend. But Is the atemporality of the durative object—its self-sameness over time—an artifact of its own discovery? Or is the objectifying power of awareness a capacity awareness enjoys only because the atemporality of objects precedes it, is its model, its evolutionary possibility and cause? But if awareness evolves to appropriate enduring objects only because there are objects for it to appropriate, this only demonstrates from the “objective” side of time that its atemporality is equiprimordial with its transiency.

Once the objectivity of an atemporal factor within time itself is admitted, the the objectivity of a temporality that extends beyond what the individual subject constitutes approaches as well. We see an objective synchronic temporality, not only time's extension diachronically fore and aft: its advance encompasses what falls beyond our ken—and does so to infinity. We do not envision a limit to its pervasiveness; yet however widely it ranges, it also remains where we are. It saturates, fills us entirely. We are penetrated thoroughly, intimately by its movement, as we are carried into the polyphony of its expanse. There is nothing in us not of it, or else that within us which cannot come to presence; which

exceeds our own possibility; which allows the infinite to invade us without remainder, is nowhere thinkable apart from the infinite itself.

*

What cannot come to presence is that without which nothing can come to presence. Yet nothing *does* come to presence; or that which we experience does so, is also compromised by an essential contingency, partiality, absence and loss.

Awareness that would have its object loses what it grasps in the too successful moment of its grasping. Just where it allows itself to obey its own attention, as attention follows time, its object is “deferred.” The habituation of the self-same is seized by the faithful interruption of temporal difference. Yet this difference is not other than the very time that arises and falls at the germ of awareness itself. Awareness moves from and toward a situatedness only within time’s relentless interruption and its interruption’s perpetual abiding: from it, as if toward an object; toward it, in its recovery of its own act of grasping.

*

The perpetual incursion of the infinite expanse of time threatens that which isolates itself and holds its own, alarms that which insists upon its objective self-identical, reified phase; but that same incursion appears as grace and blessing, succor, *jouissance*, release, to whomever has known her own existence to have become irksome or moribund. We would hold what we have but be rid of our burdens, even when or especially when such burdens are ourselves, our pain, or our thankless, repetitive efforts to maintain ourselves merely. As we wish for

change or wish to stave it off, we feel the invasion of the infinite—the pervasive indomitable duality of time—curse or blessing, demonic or divine.

*

If, per chance, our awareness and its attention requiesces in the proximity and pervasion of this infinite, the infinite *as a power* flows into our ken. There seems no barrier to the availability of a potency whose boundaries with the self have been over-run.

What we wish to call a certain phase of The Magical would be the activity of placing foci for this influx: a strategic attitude of openness combined with the tactical means of directing what flows through. Magic is thus aligned on Will, as the followers of Aleister Crowley have it. But this “will” is not the will of technological intervention and willfulness. It is a “technology of the sacred,” not a technological instrumentality.

*

How, then, does the “technology of the sacred” differ from the profane “instrumentality” of the technological? By the intimacy of its means, the proximity and moral hazard involved in its engagement. For it is in the tactical inhibition of the grasping of the object, the local suspension of the noetic bases of ordinary instrumentality, that magical possibility is encouraged. The reification of the object, typical of ordinary awareness, is suspended so that the influx might approach.

*

The feeling of the infinite proximity of that which is beyond one's ken arises precisely when awareness ceases to reify the objects in its field, but does not relinquish its own operancy, or fall into a belief that what comes to presence does so only by its own means. Time invades not only through the transitory character of its onrush, but through the pressure of an atemporality that is felt to have already intricated itself into whatever does arise.

Awareness follows attention's intimacy with time; it is in this following, this intimacy, this courtesy and carefulness, so strange to the ordinary flux of awareness, that the extreme difference between magical efficacy and technological instrumentality subsists.

Instrumentality operates tactically through a full deployment of conceptual means, discursively isolating an aim and pragmatically limiting attention to those features of the ambient that pertain to it, applying attention itself in a fully focused and regimented manner, subordinating attention to aim. Strategically, reality itself is grasped beforehand as the field for potential contribution to that aim. Neither attention nor reality are allowed to assert prerogatives that might compromise it.

In magical efficacy, the aim is found within the infinite. Tactically, awareness respects its own attentive touch with time. The idea of the aim is held as a request, however much in the popular imagination the role of the magus is to command. Awareness waits in readiness for the moment to arise in which the intended consequence flows towards it. Strategically, ontologically, the entire

openness of being, beyond not only its aim, but beyond instrumentality itself, is taken as the very source of its power. Thus though an aim is arrived at, reality is not fixed as that which is subordinate to the attainment of it, and attention's gathering itself from the being stream in which it awakens, is never compromised.

June 6, 2001

Contradictory Totalities

We pass from thinker to thinker, artist to artist, or epoch to epoch. Each seems to appeal to totality. Each projects a wave from the all. Music does it. Poetry does. Philosophy. Not in their propositions only. But as if they were drawing on something that is feeling its way both towards and from—a feeling about how things are. Not this thing or that thing. And not a logical proposition, at least not in logical form. Not all somethings are something. But in each case an outrageous demand is made: Forget about everything else but what arises before you in the ambience of this work, this thinking, this epoch, this proffered modality of how things are. Each is all there is; or each demands that it be participated in through such an allowance.

And there are multiplicities of such works, such epochs, indeed such Persons. And each is both true and false in its demand, in its outrageous claim. It is false because that to which it appeals and that from which it draws its force cannot be enclosed uniquely in its orders. But it is true too, because as a singular realization, a vision, as it were, it provides the only sort of link toward what it aspires to. The merely logical conundrum that won't let anything escape from

“that which is”—does not only issue in dry frustration and immobility—it does indeed bring positive discourse to its knees. But as the target of desire it has very different effects. The thought of the multiplicity of totalities is both an absurdity, and an access to fecundity itself.

*

“Everything capable of being believed is an image of the truth,” says William Blake. That doesn’t mean every image is true. It means that in spite of the impossibility of any image being true, the process of imaging is always a treacherous and particular access to what is true in that which draws it.

*

Being is one—
ontologies are many.

And the experience for me of Olson, Duncan, Buddhism, modern physics, Heidegger, Ben Boretz, Franz Kamin, George Quasha, Don Byrd, Richard Grossinger, Elliott Wolfson, Marcia Lind, D.G Leahy, Altizer, Alia Johnson, Robert Kelly—in fact each actual person who is or has been alive enough for me, to project a feeling for how things are in any way –Megan Hastie, Michelle Rhodes—Harvey Bialy—their engagement with what is real—each one is in fact a crazy, impossible, and vibrantly necessary working of ontology. A way of disposing what is real and unreal, what is fudged or imagined, what is asserted or avoided or denied. Even my animals do this. Every nuanced crinkle of a

whimper or meow or way of scampering or submitting or soliciting—is an arrow from Being, in a sense that is not even now stated by the familiar 2500 years of deep and shallow logic chopping or contemplation.

I only use Being here, because it doesn't seem to me in fact to have been exhausted at all. And as an intellectual question: the unity of being seems open. Is all this multiplicity of total takes on how It Is—the very multiplicity of ontologies, each one of which says of itself that it is the only one—may this not bespeak a common, inaccessible, source and target? How can you know that it does NOT? Why isn't it at least a very interesting question?

September 13, 2004

Everything Gets Up and Walks Away

The Aristotelean doctrine that a being is identical to its determinate properties, i.e. that being is identical with essence, i.e. that either something is "intelligible" i.e. "determinate" "all the way down" or else it doesn't exist, can be expressed succinctly in modern logic by the formula

$$\forall x \exists p: x \in p \vee \neg x.$$

In English this reads: <For every entity x there is a property p [understood as the class of all objects defined by having that property] such that x is a member of p or else there is no such x.>

Remarkable: all this formal specification lands one right back in the famous confusion between the existential and essential meanings of "being". Existence is denied to an object because it fails to have an essence.

Aristotle's *intent* is, indeed, to deny existence to whatever cannot be determined by some concatenation of properties "p" so as to avoid both the existence of formless matter and the independence of Plato's ideas.

Now, the sense of "existence" first configured in the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is useful just because it prehends absolutely from all "process" or "Evolution"—is useful—sans the mythological and dogmatic assertion of its ontological necessity—for with it we can see that "every x" might indeed include some x for which there is no "p" for it to be a member of. I say this because it is only when we can find existents that are not just picked out from a common matter that has always been around that we can get a feel for existence itself as other than a concatenation of properties, but as a concrete actuality. But that actuality, once, grasped, is by no means limited to the determination of entities by essences. And, in fact, the impossibility of finding an adequate p for most things that matter—for persons, situations, fleeting though utterly concrete intimate experiences, affections of all sorts, qualities adored, abhorred, or ignored, concrete communitarian processes—is what makes the universal surveillance of existence so excruciatingly painful, now that it is rather rapidly gathering steam as global fact and imperial policy.

The sequence of events in the history of thought that needs to be developed then is this:

1. $\forall x \exists p: x \in p \vee \neg x$. (The ontological configuration that for every x there is a p such that x is a member of p or else there is no such x [Aristotle])
2. The assertion that the first "category" after "substance" is "quantity." [Aquinas]
3. The perfect abstraction of the number concept from bondage to the things enumerated (so that every p *can* be grasped and suitably expressed as an extensive magnitude, fulfilling Aquinas's assertion). [Renaissance mathematicians culminating in Descartes, history delineated by Jacob Klein.]
4. Descartes' sly alignment of "extension" as the "most real" feature of nature, upon his coordinate geometry as the ideal practice of intellect and the method of science: eventually, every existent can be assigned its coordinates. This is, to wit, the Galilean/Cartesian project to devise concepts of existence such that everything that exists shall have its quantitative evaluation.
5. The alignment of the concept of money on the new concept of number. A process leading in the 20th century to the "liberation" of capital from dependence upon specie, just as number became "liberated" from being contingent upon the

counting of existing things—leading to the complete volatilization of money as pure credit, credit of credit, etc.

6. The final capitalist project that everything which can be identified—everything in its being—i.e. every x that is a member of p —shall be evaluated, priced, and owned.

7. Once all x 's shall be conceptually assembled and assigned to their p 's; once all existents (all the x 's) shall be surveyed and rendered by their identities (rendered relative to their p 's) all existents shall be conceptually assembled under One P , one sign, and therefore rendered capable of being evaluated under one price, and therefore, ultimately, through the logic of capitalist accumulation, competition, and under an ontology that sees nature ontologically under the figure of greed—owned by one subject,

once all existents are identified with their properties, being will effectively be reduced to capital, all of Being, so construed, Unified and Appropriated.

...

THEREFORE: the sole basis for the theoretical, apocalyptic and revolutionary HOPE that this Omega Point, as it were, of capitalist expansion and its ontological basis in the modern "Gestell"—can be everted, transmuted, vanquished, overcome—is the truth that

$$\neg [\forall x \exists p: x \in p \vee \neg x]$$

In words: IT IS NOT THE CASE that <for every x there is a p such that either x is a member of p or there is no such x >, i.e. IT IS NOT THE CASE that the totality of existents can be identified with and by their discernible properties, i.e. IT IS NOT THE CASE that Being is conceivable as the totality of descriptions subsuming existence;

rather, IT IS THE CASE that Being exceeds essence; that the existence of x as p is the description of a configurative event not an ontological fixity; that the entire series from identification through evaluation through quantification through pricing and appropriation is a vast chimera; that when One Capitalist Subject Owns Everything At Last—at that Holy Moment,

Everything will Just Get Up and Walk Away.

$\neg [\forall x \exists p: x \in p \vee \neg x]$

$\forall x$ means "for every x"

$\exists p$ means "there exists some p"

$:$ means "such that"

$x \in p$

\in means "is a member of," indicating that what comes after it is being treated as a class

\vee means "or"

\neg indicates negation: "it is not the case that"

ON WHAT CAN BE DONE

NOTES ON PARMENIDES

Consider the arrival of Parmenides' thought of Unique Being as a moment of completion that is simultaneously the initiation of dispersion: Parmenides culminates, through the discovery of logic, a feeling for the sacred that is evinced

in the temple architecture of Egypt and Greece: sacred geometry, proportion, and number prefigure the strictures of Parmenidean justice and logic. With the three generations that follow Parmenides (Zeno, Socrates, Plato), the worship, intellect, and constitution of the polis focused in Eleatic vision fall asunder. It is the Parmenidean sparagmos—the body of the law ravaged—the light, too hot . . .

The Parmenidean demand was that nothing except "Being itself" be said "to be." The discipline that might have followed from this demand would have been:

- that thinkers refrain from asserting being of anything other than Being itself;
- that "the things that appear" in every case be understood as reporting Being, but, in themselves, failing of Being;
- that the impulse to assert that the appearances "are," (an impulse arising from the unique "it is" to which all such appearances refer) be inhibited.

Such a discipline would have been motivated by an experience of the sacred that felt the accumulation of the divine epiphanies of prior ages now to reside and be fulfilled in an act of mind that had achieved an abstraction adequate precisely to such an experience: for Parmenides, intelligence is sacred praxis.

The quest for universal form in Plato has already been accomplished with Parmenides, but the Eleatic insight is lost in Plato's assertion of a kind of quasi-

being for the appearances through the concept of "becoming." For Plato the appearances both are and are not—one of the "paths of thought" interdicted by Parmenides.

For Parmenides, only the most universal concept and its object can perfectly coincide. A thought that admits a diversity of objects is itself diverse from at least some of its objects. But to think Parmenidean Being is to achieve unification with that Being. As diversity as such is denied, certainly there can be no diversity between thinker, thought, and object. To think that some particular thing IS, is to lose access to unique Being altogether. If each and every thing that appears might plausibly have Being (rather than that each thing appear as a sign that Unique Being has taken on, in particular, *this* appearance)—then Being becomes grounded in the experience of appearance, the contradictions of experience become the conditions of Being, and the sacral character of Being is rendered absurd or enigmatic as the universal vision becomes impossible. If, however, nothing that can be experienced explicitly is anything other than an occasion for the appearance of unique Being itself, then the mind that lifts itself to this conception, upon each occasion wherein it acknowledges an appearance as an appearance of Being, gains access at such a moment to its own condition as one with Being as well.

The mind's epiphanies are its moments of cognition. When there is no cognition, there is no access to mind. But the mind as such does not have an

appearance: the occurrence of appearance, nevertheless, evinces an occasion of mind.

If that which appears, in such an occasion, is said to Be, (if I say of the stone I recognize as a stone that it truly IS a stone) the mind will appear not to exist, since the criterion for the being of something is now that something appear—but the mind does not appear.

What it means for the appearance to implicate the being of the thing that appears becomes an enigma. The sense impression must be supplemented by the “form” or “class” to which the thing is assigned; the existence of a realm of forms independent of sense and diverse from the materiality of the object seems indicated. The mind as the hypothetical ground for the forms arises.

But mind here is no longer linked to the actual occurrences of its own cognition. It is posited inferentially, rather than known on its own ground.

In the Parmenidean vision, knower and known coalesce at the intimate center of the moment of cognition. The mind that thinks Platonic forms is, therefore, decidedly not the thinker of Parmenidean Being.

That the things do not exist but that they appear, is not to challenge the dignity of the things. Rather, all appearances—all particular things—are situated as occasions of the unique value.

Liberated from conflicting claims of being, from assertions of identity, from competition for existence, survival, status or worth, the intimacy that every apparent thing shares with unique Being becomes accessible as its value.

Each thing, in its appearance, communes from its nothingness with Being.

Each thing rests in its concreteness, its individual character, precisely to the degree that it abrogates the claim of being and allows its own apparency to settle into a transparency to Being.

Whereas Platonic thought denigrates the specificity of each transitory existent before the ideality of the form it instantiates, Parmenidean Being allows each appearance to participate in the sacredness of Being by pointing through itself, towards it.

Here no hierarchy is possible. For each appearance provides an access to Being itself. To recognize that something appears is to access Being as that to which, through its instigation of the claim of being, it truly refers.

The sacred reeks of the violence that severs the sacred thing from the profanity in contrast to which it shines. But where Unique Being is recognized as the sacred, no such violence arises, for Being is at once rejoined to its other—the appearances—since every thing that seems must seem to Be.

Sacred art prior to the Parmenidean moment embodied abstract principles insufficiently general for the mind to discern its own event or for Being as such to articulate itself as the unique subject/object of sacred concern. But the feeling of the sacred embodied in such art nevertheless points toward the Parmenidean moment. Sacred art experiences the development of geometric and proportional abstraction in a sacred context and for sacred ends. The embodiment of geometrical techniques controlled by arithmetical proportion orients spiritual attention in an ascent toward an experience of the universal that need not deride the values of the particulars. In the intellectual contemplation achieved at the Parmenidean moment, axiomatic geometry and the generalization of the logical

character of that geometry (the demand of Parmenides that thought be judged by proof), an aspiration implicit in previous sacred art is realized.

In the development of "philosophy" thereafter—a project which Plato saw could not be prosecuted without abandoning the Parmenidean strictures on the provenience of Being—we see the progressive desacralization of the intellectual life.

Charles Stein

1991

OUR OBJECT

OUR OBJECT is unlike the others in the following way:

Every ordinary object may behave as a name for the class from which it receives its identity, so that the presence of such an ordinary object in perception points away from itself precisely in the moment of perception, gathering in the recognition of it, the shadow or trace of the class to which it belongs.

But OUR OBJECT ceases to be itself at the moment that such a pointing away from itself towards its class occurs.

And yet OUR OBJECT is uniquely the *same* as its fellow members.

To prevent the ordinary object from pointing toward its class is to inhibit the cognitive element in perception.

When the ordinary object is inhibited from subjoining to its class, the inhibited cognitivity may metamorphose into the emergence of OUR OBJECT.

The multiple occurrences of OUR OBJECT are authentically identical.

They therefore do not severally, in their moments of emergence, serve as names for the absent members of their class, because each one already is all those absent members.

When, following an emergence of OUR OBJECT, I seize the trace of that emergence, a recognition seems to take place of the form: "It is that, once again." But it is the trace that I discern and the trace that serves as a name for the class of such traces—even and especially when the trace is recognized as such.

Finally, normalization in all its phases—from the accumulation of the heterogeneous multiplicity of sensations into an equivalence class of identified traces, through the operations of ordinary language, to the construction of abstract systems—normalization takes its impulse and possibility from the authentic self-identity of OUR OBJECT.

NOTE ON PARMENIDES 2

Being shows in showings, but the particular things shown are not beings. In each showing, what is is only Being, and what shows is only seeming. But in this revelation of Being in every showing, in a manner of speaking, Being shows, though it is never the case that "a" being is.

The difference between Being and beings is the difference between Being and seeming. Beings are not. What IS in beings, is only Being.

What is the same across the difference between beings and Being? Beings only seem, but in every seeming, Being is.

Being is the potentiality for seeming. Thus Being does not seem.

In every seeming, that which seems, seems to be, but is not. Yet in every seeming, Being is—not as that which seems to be—but as itself—the ever-the-same, the inalienable.

We must not think that only what is manifest is in being, for in that case Being is non-being: what is, is not.

If we think that what only seems lacks being, then precisely what is manifest has no being.

But if Being is the potentiality for seeming, seeming is always the manifestation of just that potentiality.

It is the manifestation, not the potentiality, that fails of Being, because Being must be the *archetype* for beings, not the *ensemble* of beings.

Being is potentiality in the sense of a possibility that is in fact in play.

Being, though potential, is the potentiality that is in play in all manifestation.

beings: showings/manifestations/appearances/seemings-to-be

Being:

If we begin by thinking the manifestations are as they seem, we very quickly discover the contrary: that which *is* in the manifestations, diverges from the manifestations themselves. "Things are not what they seem."

This is the basis for all idealisms that take it that the perceived world is a construction. We arrive at our perception of the world through an ever-incomplete process of correction.

Or rather, we stabilize perception and diminish our receptivity to such a degree that it is always possible to return to the things for further information about them. Each time we so return, we learn that the manifestation of the thing as it appeared up to now was diverse from its being. The thing in itself becomes the limit of these processes of self-correction. The limit, however, is never reached, and we see that the positing of the limit is itself of the nature of our own cognitive activity. Thus the "being" of the thing cannot be discovered either in its manifestation or as the end result of a series of corrections, but must be sought from the side of the process by which the thing itself is constructed.

But on the side of the process by which the thing is thought, we need not distract ourselves into an inaccessible realm of ideal entities—abstract categories or discursive principles. On the contrary, we resort to the primacy of unmediated

sensation—bare sentience—and from there we appeal to awareness itself, in the direction of its limit of concreteness—to discover Being.

In the pursuit of the thing in itself we pursue a chimera, but the motivation for this pursuit lies in the way that awareness saturates bare sensation, passes through its transitory character, and discovers itself as the timeless motive for the construction of the things.

Awareness, incapable of grasping itself as an object, gathers the heterogeneous moments of bare sensation into equivalence classes which it now pursues as things. The things are appearances—manifestations. But what they manifest is awareness itself in self-alienation.

Appearances are only such for awareness. But awareness itself is Being. Thus our formula: *whatever seems must seem to be*.

"as if analogy were so"*

Our situation propounds itself as a story we discover as we tell it or as it is told, already duplicitous, redundant, the first time 'round. We have the impression that the tale of what we really are, what we do and suffer, is such as can be told; but also that no specific telling tells it all or tells it right. There would always be other reckonings -- analogical or parallel tales, to complete the real.

But does this incompleteness at the source of apparency deride the thought of a dynamism and vitality, a treasure trove and vigor at the heart of Being? It surely does unmask a dark propensity, for thus are we sold on analogy. We assume an identity when we grasp the analog of our situation, heard of another in the tale: we "identify" with the persons of the story.

This analogical identification is, of course, prior to analysis. We give ourselves over to identity without ascertaining whether the analogy on which it

is based is an apt one; we do not take note of the limits of its aptness; we do not inquire into its procedure; and we surely do not raise the suspicion that what we truly are may not be capable of analogical characterization at all.

To recover from our analogical identifications requires some careful teasing apart of our self-presence from the "form" under which it is grasped. But the problem is that, when we are somehow stirred to undergo this self-inflicted surgery, we tend to perform it by replacing one analogical form with another. Critiquing the aptness of some analogy, we search for a better one. Cognizant of excess or exaggeration, we put up a limit. But if what we truly are on our most intimate terrain is without form, no story, no image, no limit imposed upon analogy, will peg us down.

Thus to arrive at the formless center of our reality, however, is not yet to raise the question of how it is that, in general, we commit ourselves to analogy.

In the Dzogchen teachings of the Tibetans, an essential formulation has it that though our "essence" is formless or empty, another complexion of our being, translated usually as our "nature," perpetually generates apparent form. Though all appearances belie what we really are, what we really *do* is take on appearances.

Formlessness of essence -- what does this mean? An essence is the character of an entity by means of which we distinguish it from another. It is a mark that is proper to the thing. It is the manner in which a being reveals that which it intimately, inwardly, and truly is. To speak of an essence is to provoke a noetic movement beyond the appearance to the thing as it is in itself, but in such a manner that the thing as it is in itself discloses its self through its appearance. A being's essence is its private, inner reality, but such as can be linked to its public display. Its essence is just that display which does not betray the intimate character of a thing. Essence therefore, in this sense, involves apparent form. To

say that an essence is "empty" or without form is paradoxical. It is to say that its appearance is to have no appearance, that its proper distinction from other things is to fail of such distinction. A formless distinction is no distinction at all. A formless essence is an essence without an essence, or it is an essence that remains tucked up in itself with such thoroughness that no determination of it can appear without betraying it.

Now to be without an essence and yet somehow still to be -- is to *court* analogy. Without determinate character on my own terrain, I spontaneously grasp myself on the basis of my similitudes. The origin of my spontaneous commitment to analogical identity seems to lie precisely in my essenceless essence, my lack of distinctness from that which I am not. It is not just that I have no essence. I am the project of a belief that it is possible to discover or attain one after all.

Since an essence is both a principle of distinctness and the inward core of the distinguished thing, the essenceless essence of this inner core does not amount to the possession of determinate form or the grasping of a distinction between one's own characteristics and those of another. Rather, it determines one's concrete existence as paradoxically anterior to all determination: though lacking in form, we are not for all that lacking in a certain concreteness, self-presence, or existence as such.

My spontaneous impulse to seize upon identity through analogy does not arise simply out of my lack of determinate character, but from the contradictory fact that *though indeterminate, yet I am*. The indeterminate yet immediate character of my own being projects me into a quest for identity and ever-renews that quest through the dialectic of analogy -- the spontaneous exercise of an analogical will, succeeded by the pain of contradiction and the loss of sense of

identity. The disclosure of the inadequacy of the analogical, spontaneously reanimates it.

The dialect of identity is an impossible project. It cannot culminate in the attainment of determinate identity at last, and its self-corrections and reanimations cannot lead to an as-yet-unattained but in principle attainable core. Rather, it labors in the production of new analogies, new contradictions, new connections. And if it gain some respite, some apparent stability in its self-identification, it does so at the cost of its own awareness of how that stability is sustained by social supports, themselves as dubious and ephemeral as its own elusive character.

The dialectic of identity may be terminated, however, if the spontaneous will to analogy seizes upon the formless as its only analogical truth. Now the question is: if my analogical will is the failure to appropriate the formlessness of my essence, why, when this failure is overcome, does my own apparent form not cease to appear?

Perhaps an indirect answer might be this: that the manifestation of outer appearance is not *explained* by the analogical will and its dialectic; rather, the fact of appearance itself is among the conditions for the dialectic's possibility. I seek true form because, though inwardly formless, outwardly I do take shape. The intimacy of formless essence with external appearance may not *proceed* from errancy but be among its causes. It might just be of the essence of essenceless essence to generate apparent form.

Our appearances are not errant accidents, inessential to our true but formless being. To be both formless and yet not being-less is to generate apparenancy.

The necessary generation of apparent form from formless essence is our nature. And it is this nature that gives the possibility of our errancy, the

possibility of the wanderings of an analogical will. *For if we did not take form, we would not seek a true form, and if we were possessed of a true form, the quest for the apprehension of it would culminate in a vision of our determinate being. But neither of these is the case.*

The generation of apparent form from formless essence is productive not only of errancy, but of the positive display of apparent being itself. Essence and nature are neither dissociated nor in any way apart from each other, but nondualistically co-implicate. If apparency occurs and is not true, its essence is essenceless. The nondual identity of essenceless essence and empty appearance is the depth of the display of Being -- the energetic manifestation of the concreteness of existence.

*Gerrit Lansing

PROPOSITIONS ON BEING 1

Parmenidean Being is not limited to its manifestations as Presence or Presencing but is the horizon for generalizations within two domains: the mind and its assertions and the world and its appearances.

Whatever mind asserts, conjectures, or projects, are, in general, taken as candidates for Being.

Whatever the world appears to contain—its objects, processes, characteristics; its laws, its histories, cultures, languages, possibilities—similarly, in general, lay claim to Being.

Yet whatever the mind proposes beyond itself and beyond the world is also proposed as Being; that is to say, even that which exceeds thought, when thought, falls back under Being.

With the concept of Being we come to the limit of thought's competence. What is beyond Being cannot be thought. We are not thinking when we refer to it.

When we refer to that which is outside of Being, our very means of reference transfer it once again to the domain of Being.

Generalizations that seek to characterize Being in general, in general, fall short of Being.

Being outstrips its specifications (as the Continuum outstrips the subsets of its points.)

Being is the Limit. The Horizon.

As we approach the limit of our thought, Being may manifest as mathematics and the natural world; that is, we have a general language and a world independent of that language, and the representation of the one by the other. But Being is not confined to the rigmarole by which a world and its description go to bed with each other.

Nothing can be said of Being "as a whole" other than to deny its negation. But the signaling out of individual beings depends upon the possibility of their negation. I point to *this* thing, i.e., I indicate that it is not these other ones.

Being itself has no *other* from which it can be singled out. Therefore, negation in the sense of difference, cannot apply to it.

Negation is the withholding of the designation "it is." It can be applied to all the "beings" that are not Unique Being itself, since they can be distinguished from each other. Each being "is not" each other being.

Yet if these quasi-beings are distinct from Unique Being, then Unique Being would seem to have an "other," namely, the quasi-beings—*ta dokounta*—the seemings-to-be.

Unique Being "is not" its seemings-to-be. But just this is untrue. The seemings-to-be "are not" except in that Unique Being is all that truly "is" in them. And since the quasi-beings' only mode of existence is negative, they do not consist of an "other" that exists distinct from Unique Being—they are not.

To be distinct from something, a thing must be set apart from that other thing; it must occupy a distinct locus, in "logical space." But the quasi-beings are not distinct from Unique Being in this way: for just where the quasi-beings only seem to be—there we find that Being actually is.

As appearance, the many entities appear. But as for being as they appear—they are not: there is no place outside of Being where the appearances "are not."

To speak of a multiplicity of beings is to embroil oneself in the contradiction: they are, but they are not, and to seem to impart to Being the contradictory properties of having no other but at the same time having an other in the multiplicity of beings. We overcome these contradictions when we refuse to call the members of multiplicity, beings, but refer to them as "quasi-beings," "appearances," "seemings-to-be."

They "are not" insofar as they appear to possess being in themselves. But they are, for all that, intimately associated with Being since, in each case Unique Being has taken on an appearance once again.

It makes sense to say of the seemings-to-be that they are not in themselves but that their apparent being nevertheless embodies the Unique Being which is all OF them that truly is.

Soteriological arises from our concern to let the seemings-to-be *requiesce* in Being. We would awaken the "gnosis" through which the seemings-to-be abandon the assertion of their own being and discover their identity with Unique Being itself.

Beyond the mathematical and the physical is the "gnostical": the non-assertion of the seemings-to-be as beings, and the arousal of the gnosis of the inseparability of the seemings-to-be from Unique Being.

Being itself is the beyond, the horizon, of the seemings. And it is that which "presences" in that which is present (though Being is not exhausted by what may or what does come to presence.)

This "beyond," however, does not manifest in excess of what appears, as if to confirm a difference of Being from seeming; for as soon as this excess is accessed, the seemings-to-be are there as well.

Seemings are many. Being is one.
Because it is Unique and has no other.

PROPOSITIONS ON BEING 2

It is never the case that an existent truly exists as its predicate or as any concatenation of predicates. As it is in itself, Being always exceeds its specifications.

Insofar as a being coincides with its predicates, it is not its being that is in question, but its relation to the sentient others for whom the assertion of those predicates seems true. The relation yields an appearance from which the being escapes and to which it can always be made, through further appearances, to stand in contrast.

The substrate, the object in itself, is never captured by the predicates that qualify it. The substrate in fact cannot be isolated from Unique Being, since every attempt so to isolate it *produces* a difference from the "remainder" of Unique Being; but 1. Unique Being cannot be divided, that is, there can be no remainder, and 2. the individual's "being" is supposed to exist independently of our *producing* the difference that distinguishes it.

Either there is no true Being, and all use of the term "being" is simply a pragmatic and conventional comparison of appearances, or Being Is, but is not AS its appearances.

Yet every appearance presumes Being as its aim, its sense, and its intention. . . . If Being is not, even appearance loses its sense.

Where appearance appears, Being is. But not as the individual thing that appearance asserts. With this "not" opens the inquiry regarding the being that lies beyond the appearances.

Now the being beyond the appearances cannot yield itself as a correction of the being that the appearances at first assert. It is not the replacement of one errant seeming by a seeming that eliminates the error, for the error lies not in the determinate details of the appearance, but in the general attitude that the being that in fact is aimed at by the appearance is the being of any determinate set of details whatsoever.

Appearance: the seizure of Being for the AS. The claim of being.

Without the AS, no difference between one occasion of the manifestation of Being and another is determinable. Yet the richness of the play of apparitions is sustained, ie it occurs, and we have access to it.

Without predication, without distinction, without the indexing of the aspects of appearance by combinations of characteristics selected from a matrix of possible properties, the differences among the appearances are "mute." We have the plenum of sensory difference discussed in Hegel's famous chapter on Sense Certainty—a plenum without intelligibility, without a voice. Yet Being is sustained throughout its mute appearances in spite of Hegel's famous chapter (as a later Hegel knew quite well). Though no difference be seized for thought, the richness of the apparitions plays within the consistency of Unique Being that pervades and covers them all.

Being is Unique. It has no other. But in each occasion Unique Being itself sits at the center of appearance as its source and aim. There is a bond between appearance and Being that is other than the relation of Being to being-as.

Being is operative in the act of cognition as its very center of concern. In this way Being is linked to a principle of "awareness."

Awareness is "awareness of": determinate passages of phenomenal streaming. Yet awareness itself is never identifiable with the content of those passages. If the entire character of awareness were indistinct from the determinations that constitute it, awareness itself could be represented independently of its own presence.

In an exhaustive representation of consciousness as content, awareness itself can be ignored without changing the representation. If we identify Being with the content of consciousness, the stream of phenomenal appearance, then of course awareness "does not exist." But if we reject this identification, denying to content/appearance the claim of Being, we recover Being on "Our" side, where awareness swells with appearance from its ground in Unique Being.

PROPOSITIONS ON BEING 3

If we acknowledge that the assertion "it is and it is as" is the "form" of that which is given in experience; and if we see this form as a fact of our natural history, a qualification of our nature; then we can wonder whether other forms than this one are not possible to beings. But this curiosity destabilizes the entire field of knowledge for it relativizes all of what we know. And it is clear that we are incompetent to decide the quandary into which it throws us:

- If we assert that our own form of experience is indeed thus relativized, this assertion itself comes under the judgment.
- If we deny that our form of experience is thus relativized, i.e. if we assert that our knowledge extends beyond or has a source from beyond our own condition, this denial and this assertion still fall under the form whose limits we hold our knowledge exceeds.

We need a footing outside of assertion to guarantee a stand beyond assertion, or even to give assertion the possibility of a determinate sense, but we do not know if we possess such a footing.

If we do indeed, this footing involves a stance that eliminates all save its own unique assertion. We assume this stance not by thinking or speaking but only concretely, and, as it were, on the very ground of the stance itself: Unique Being exceeds the form of its own assertion.

In ordinary discourse, we at times prefer to deny relativization, since such denial at least holds us open to the possibility that the meaning of the search for truth comes to us from a "beyond" that surpasses our nature or any nature: that we are open to the possibility that Being itself is not the product of beings as a feature of their cognitive apparatus or processes, but the source both of the beings and their comportment towards what is. [Nota: relativism = idealism]

With this stance, Being is not a peculiarity generated in the course of cultural evolution through the interaction of the linguistic population of the Indo-European world with the accidental features of the structure of the verb "To Be" in Indo-European languages [cf the arguments of Kahn and GEL Owen to the effect that the Parmenidean reflection on Being is the fulfillment of an evolutionary probability, given the peculiar combination of the use of "esti" in Greek as deriving existential, veridical and predicative roles from esti's function of marking an assertion, esti being originally the copula.]

But the stance itself is clearly an act of choice. Given the fact that both the assertion and the denial of relativization are ungrounded, we are forced to take a stand, a leap of faith, and we do do so, whether we relish the act or not.

THE PURCHASE

Whatever its ultimate nature, our attention is subject to a certain modification. An automatism when left on its own, attention is susceptible, as is breath, to being taken under wing and brought back home. Yet once domesticated, this automatism is not vanquished—it remains but flows, like the spirit, instant by instant, according to an internal order of its own.

This is evinced in the observation that there is no certainty where the next moment will find attention lodged. Turn your head and you must follow your own eye to discern the object on which it falls. And neither the ear nor the tactile/proprioceptive senses are free from this subservience to the contingency of the ambient. We can turn our senses wherever, but that on which our attention comes to rest within the arena towards which we have directed it, cannot be commanded by our will.

Narrowing the range of this arena does not remove the automatism. If you fix your eye on as minute a region of the visual field as you can discern, there still will manifest instantaneous changes within and around the target point whose details occur without anticipation. If you do manage to anticipate some feature of the evanescent scene, this anticipation arises on its own. Its contours, scope and context, as well as whether it occurs at all, are determined without your consultation.

The unavoidable and evanescent spontaneity driving our most intimate attention is common to both purposefully directed acts of attention, and the ordinary play of consciousness. It is because of the invariable spontaneity of

attention that the modifications to which it is subject in practices of contemplation prove fruitful for gaining insight into the general nature of our cognitivity. It is not that contemplation, developed on the basis of a certain capacity for fixation and in relative mental stillness, achieves a mastery over the automatistic freeplay of attention. On the contrary, narrowing the bandwidth of the field over which attention ranges, occasions insight into its essentially evanescent, spontaneous, and automatistic character.

The essential character is the transitory nature of manifest being, the radical impermanence of all that seems to be. That which comes to apperency does so powered by an inner dissolution that absolutely conditions its manifestation. But equally, that which comes to apperency—the things of the world—are durations. Our attention dwells with them and upon them. Each item is a bandwidth, a specialized arena, upon which and within which attention lavishes its evanescent moments. To the extent that we pass from attendance to attention back to the things upon which attention dwells, our world appears composed of objects, their relations, their characters and connections, and the contextual horizons in which they are ensconced. These elements of our world do not suggest the radical impermanence that the movement of attention reveals at its own inner heart. That is, the objects change and move, come into being and pass away, but do so withing the habitus of their own apparent identities. These identities are durative identities. There is something that comes into being, holds its own for a time, and passes away. With the things that seem to endure, there is change, but not radical impermanence. Radical impermanence lies occulted by the durative identity of the world and its things, or is itself discovered only by a shift in attention away from the things themselves and toward attention *itself*.

Yet at another level, the constitution of the durative items of the world do preserve the impermanence that attention to attention may succeed in intuiting.

If we attempt to discern that which remains constant in the durative—that element in ordinary experience which apparently escapes radical impermanence—we do not find that we can induce it to become the explicit theme of our attention. We are forced to construct cognitively the essences of our objects and worldly situations, in order to grasp that wherein the radical impermanence exhibited by attention seems to break down.

Without this construction, the durative identity of the objects disintegrates before our gaze. There is nothing that escapes the instantaneous passage of momentary appearances, as soon as we attempt to conceptualize the durative identity that seemingly subtends the appearance of ordinary things. That is, if we apply attention to the objects, their durative identity vanishes in favor of the characteristic evanescence of attention itself. The ordinary appearance of objects as “beings”—rather than as evanescent appearances—depends upon attention in a certain deficient mode, a “default” position in which, when attention fails to recognize its own participation in the production of the phenomenal scene, the radical impermanence of its own inner character fades into the ghost of evanescence: the appearance of change.

Change is the ghost of impermanence that appears when attention lapses to its own default position. Yet the identity of objects and circumstances that manifests in default ought to call our attention to a second feature of our experience that seems to oppose its driving impermanence.

When attention is drawn to the movement of attention itself, it is possible (with some attention) to intuit, along with this movement, a certain inner purchase—a vantage from which the automatism of attention is itself observed to come into appearance. Whatever the play of attention falls upon, this purchase does not change. It rides without movement within the wave of attention’s movement. Something at the heart of attention does not change with the display

that is disclosed to it. Attention can evert from the display of disclosure in favor of an intimate union with its own internal purchase, its own concrete, continuous, ever-developing but never concretely altering possibility. Without practice, this eversion can only occur sporadically and for brief moments. But the stabilization of our access to this internal vantage can be achieved. It is precisely this that has been the initial accomplishment of yogis and contemplatives of all traditions.

What manifests with this stabilization is not in any way similar to the ghostly changes and durative objects that attention ordinarily discloses. It is radically nonidentical with all that attention discovers as objects, horizons, or movements of attention. It stands outside the very form of identity: it is not an “object.” It is not a “subject.” It fails to conform to the dipolarity of consciousness: it is neither foreground nor background, noema nor noesis. It does not come into being and it does not fall away; nor does it abide for a period between its advent and its dissolution. It is as if *we* came to *it* and fell away from it, but when we move toward it, it is clear that we approach something from which we *cannot* have fallen away, for in being what we are, this purchase in our attention is the precondition for the apparencies, the evanescences, the objects and situations, the comings-to-appearance and fallings-away from presence, the dwellings and abidings that form the conscious and semi-conscious textures of our existence.

That this purchase, this invariant, is aroused or returned to, or that it percolates from the near side of the field from which attention picks out objects, is my justification for feeling that I am, through the very core of my immediacy, ensconced in Being. However I am impelled towards truth—whether by seeking to improve my information about the world through an energized observation or acute analysis of what I find there; or through the active construction of models,

images, sounds, or texts; or by recurring to a silent indwelling, co-present with what manifests or appears: that which has the advantage of that vantage is preconditional and sine-qua-non.

Since all is impermanent and does not exist beyond precisely the infinitesimal span of momentary apparition and dissolution; and since all seemings are constructions, syntheses, aggregations, achieved through the default of attention but in the presence of an invariant co-emergent vantage; it is to that vantage, at once intimate with all that manifests, and aloof, “beyond the world,” that I look for Being.

ON THE MAGICAL

Every apparent object or occasion is a magical apparition.

Every apparition is the manifestation of a spiritual energy that is its essence and whose essence is part of a continuous field of energy and apprehension, continuous, that is, with the being or beings for whom it appears.

Every thing that seems, seems to be.

Apart from Unique Being, all beings are in fact seemings.

Unique Being does not seem. But that which is in all seemings, is Unique Being.

The precise conditions for any apparition may be discovered, but only as aspects of fields of energy and apprehension that include the sentient beings for whom they *are* apparitions.

The being of each apparition, disconnected from its field of apprehension, is no longer an apparition. It is, in fact, Unique Being itself.

Whatever appears may do so in a field with a temporal parameter.

The temporal analysis of any apparition dispossesses us of our tendency to regard it as having been on its own terms. That is to say, we are no longer

disposed to assert that it is as it appears to be. Yet much in appearance arises from concrete conditions of contact.

Sensory contact is as close as apprehension comes, apart from its own self-apprehensions, to grasping the things as they actually are.

Things as they are, that is, considered in disconnection from their fields of apprehension, have fallen back from differentiation and in this way are Unique Being.

The apprehension of a field of energy and apprehension is a magical apparition.

Energy. Field. Apprehension. Time. A magical quadrature. An apparition of Unique Being.

We need certain images, as the founder of Aikido says, to tuck away in our abdomen.

Image of a principle of the whole that will not sort out the world into an existent totality.

This is the excuse for the sort of speech that this text aims at, in spite of the richness of its ontological abrogations.

Magical, because the apparitions, when linked to their conditions, are not reduced thereby to neutral causalities.

The spirits that abide in the things are not explicated as projections merely, since the projecting beings are inalienable aspects of the fields in which the spirits shine.

What are the spirits in themselves? No less than the things, they are Unique Being and nothing else. They too are given as apparitions—the apparition of the qualities, efficacies, and relevancies of the things. Their local powers.

If we intervene in a field and ignore the part we share in that field by the fact of that intervention, our ignorance is efficacious to our undoing.

Every aspiration is the manifestation of a spiritual energy that is its essence and whose essence . . .

Essences are appearances. They distinguish apparition from apparition, fix boundaries to seeming things.

An essence is sweet and redolent of Unique Being. It does the work of unicity, imparting to each thing an evanescent quality, its aroma from the one.

An existent is so in appearance only. In essence, its appearance is fragrant with the Being it does not possess. The essence of the existent is to seem, but to seem to be.

The fundamentally magical character of time lies in its impossible structure. Apparencies span its inexistent ecstasies. It shares with Unique Being (its primordial antagonist) both nameable and unnameable qualities.

The apparent things are its productions. Their evanescence surmounts the impossibility of their own durations through the changelessness of its vanishing heart.

Time as dimension or parameter is an apparition. If time seems extended, it does so from the need of seeming things to seem to be by bridging their vanishing moments and casting themselves as signs or tales, images or identities above the pixillation of their apparency.

The apparent extension of time as a dimension or measure embodies the unlimited character of Unique Being. But as extended, time is no longer time. Every duration compels an eternal original. Time is not time if not everywhere vanishing. There is no way to compare its moments.

Yet that in time's nature that yields to the delusion of temporal extension is its secret rapport with atemporal Being.

We manipulate images by our fascination with a fixity of Being that we ourselves are but cannot grasp in a just apparition. When images live, they not only shine

with an energy that is not their own; they yield themselves to an inapparent nature that is but cannot seem. Being garbs itself in the secondary conditions of our fascination.

When we Fix an image, our fascination would retard the transitory. Not that time stands still. But that which still outstands from time (and throughout its ordinary vanishing) appropriates what in our nature is already its own.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

1

There is nothing for us to do but shift our sense of identity from what we appear to be to Being itself.

This is the return of "the son" to "the mother," (Dzogchen) *the unio mystica*, etcetera.

Mindful relaxation facilitates the presence of Being as energy.

Or the transformations of things into energy.

Or the actualization of things as their energies.

Beyond energy is presence—awareness, itself.
And beyond presence, Being.

Or awareness itself is the space in which the things and energies come to appearance.

Space and the awareness that permeates it are neither things nor energies.

Things are configured energies in space.

To be a thing is to be a distinct thing, some one thing that is not another thing, and has attained an appearance outstanding from the space in which it is configured.

To be an energy is to be a distinct energy, yet in continuity with adjacent energies and mergeable with their contextured space.

Space itself is empty of energies and of things, yet all energies and things are nothing but "declensions"—gradedly emergent apparitions—of space itself.

Energies and things are empty of any nature of their own save the empty awareness/space from which they are emergent apparitions.

Beyond awareness/space is Being itself.

Or Being itself, in so far as it takes on appearances or manifests its capacity for appearance, may "first" take on an identity as awareness/space.

It thus appears that the essence of Being is this state of spatiality, awareness, presence, as if Being were limited to or defined by its capacity to generate presence.

It thus appears that "*esse est percipi*"—to be is to be perceived, or to be capable in principle of appearing before some manner of percipience.

But the space Being takes on as an empty palace or translucent garment for the sake of manifesting styles for energy and localities for things, is not an "essence" of Being so much as its condition for taking on a certain sort of manifesting.

If in our time we have come to suspect "the metaphysics of presence" it is because we have begun to reach in thought that "strata" of Being that cannot be grasped by a presential essence.

If this marks out the boundary of the thinkable, it does so in the paradoxical sense of thinking that very boundary; by extending thought up to its limit, in a certain manner we transgress that limit. This is paradoxical, in that if we transgress the limit of thought, we have not in fact attained the limit of thought.

To approach and paradoxically to transgress the limit of thought—insofar as doing so discovers what at first manifests as the limit of being (being as presence) and then appears as the transgression of that limit by Being—reestablishes in a new sense the Parmenidean dictum that "to think and to be are 'the same.'"

Where thinking goes, what it finds is being. Where Being is, thought will follow.

2

Where Being is, thought will follow.

Yet where thought projects itself in the form of grasping a possibility, what it finds is a form of being "already there."

Thus thought "throws out on the road ahead, the angel it will meet."

Being is prefigured for thought in the form of an horizon: possibility.

We seize a possibility, and the world configured for that possibility, in actuality, appears. To think is to seize a possibility.

To think and, together with this, to be, are "the same."

To be in this sense is to be capable of taking on an apparition as some thing or energy, some configured mass for some form of percipience, or mode of knowing. To be is to be a possibility, a potentiality for seeming, to be capable of appearing.

When something "is" in this sense, when it has the nature of being capable of, of being a possibility for, appearing, this capability, this nature has the form of self-identity, self-*sameness*.

To be a possibility is to have taken on an identity prior to having become an actuality.

When there is a thought, purely evanescent moments of percipient or mental life coalesce into an identity. There is something that remains invariant—that remains the same— between the different temporal moments OF that thought.

But this coalescence between moments of mental life does not yet constitute a thought. There must be "an object" for that thought, and not only that: there must be an act of coordination between that something "mental" and that object such that that something mental is identified with its correlate: the thought and the thing must seem to be "the same."

In the essence of the thing as existent and the thought as invariant mental life identified with an object, the figure of the "the same" comes three times into view.

Thus the literal translation of the Parmenidean dictum, "to einai te kai to noein, to auto" as Heidegger emphasized, -- "to be and together with (this) to think (are) the same" -- shows not that "thinking and being are the same" but that together they share a certain nature, a certain functioning, of "the same."

To be is to be a possibility for appearing. Yet Being is not limited by that possibility.

For us, as thinkers, knowers, perceivers, beings whose life is constituted by the worlds we know, we uncover an essence in the seizing of possibilities as possibilities for being. Yet that nature, that essence, that life—is itself on the side of apparition, seeming-to-be.

We "identify" with our thinghood and seize possibilities as being with our thought. That is, we think ourselves as possibilities for being. We cast our own identities before ourselves, and enact the transference of our own possibility into our own thinghood, our own reification.

But as things and energies, we take place in the empty space that Being manifests for the apparition of such things and energies. Possibilities and their reifications remain empty of essence, in so far as both our possibilities and our concrete apparition—our physical and mental lives—are in manifestation distinct but in essence nowhere apart from the empty space among whose affordances we ourselves are.

Identities are manifested by actualizing possibilities.
But possibilities are already identities.

Possibilities are at once *a priori* and actual: they always manifest as the manifestation of something that always already was there. This manifestation is a form of appearance: the connection between the appearance of a thing and its self-sameness as an identity.

But it is among OUR possibilities to seize upon this self-sameness, this identity, this coordination between *a priori* possibility and concrete manifestation, not

with the intent of fixing upon our identity through its possibility, but as both projected from and projected upon empty space itself.

This empty space taken as empty, rather than as the matrix of possibilities, is Being itself.

Being is the possibility of possibilities (not the matrix of possibilities) and as such, indeterminate or better—*pan*-determinate.

To project our identity onto this empty space—to seize our own emptiness as our "ownmost" possibility—is to engage the possibility that we ourselves are not beings, but Being.

We may thus discover that we have the possibility of shifting our sense of identity from our manifest apparitions, to Being itself.

Finally, to seize upon that possibility is to perform that shift.

OTHER COMPLETED ESSAYS

MODALITIES OF IDENTITY

1

I found, in trying to write something about authorial identity, that I could not do it without first bringing together some thoughts on the question of identity in general. But the general subject of identity eludes determination. There is always something more to say. This text therefore comprises a nonterminating series, its final item to be succeeded by the "lazy dot" notation: ...n... Yet I am afraid that each paragraph in itself ought to be capable of a similar expansion, and that this might even be the case for every sentence or phrase. On the other hand, the critical thesis that determines

these remarks and that ought to subvert the determinateness of the identity to which it gives rise is, in fact, simply to say that the text itself is full of holes: it is a veritable Cantor Dust (Mandelbrot) of missing arguments, and missing arguments for arguments. But it is the nature of that which succeeds in escaping from every exigency of identity to be the final source and cause of all determination whatsoever, so Konx Om Pax. Light in Extension.

2

I am a frequent flyer in the dream realm. In "lucid" dreams -- dreams where I know I dream -- it is this knowledge that confers upon me the power to invert or lateralize gravity and to compel forces that, in the waking state, I am compelled by. At other times, I infer that I am dreaming because I have such power. But this is an inference I frequently do not pause to draw. The knowledge would be superfluous. I am at the moment occupied with more pressing matters than with my identity as a "dreamer": in particular, I must maintain the attitudes of body and intention that sustain my flight. It is enough that I concern myself with my dream activities, anxieties, pleasures, and tasks.

I recently dreamed I inhabited a body years younger than my own and was about to be married to a woman whose name I did not know. At the wedding reception I was surrounded by hundreds of friends and acquaintances, all of whose histories I apparently knew and in whose lives I accepted participation. None of these people resembled persons in my waking life; I was, regarding my traits and characteristics, a stranger to myself, and I

lived in an unfamiliar world. Yet I experienced no confusion whatsoever about "who I am."

Often dreamers assume alternative identities or enter alternative, or self-transforming, worlds: the external accoutrements of self-hood are cashiered for other accoutrements; the laws of motion and the capacities and identities of objects become other than they were in waking "reality." That we remain "who we are" in spite of these fundamental transformations authorizes our attempts to determine our deep identities through psychoanalytic theory and praxis, correlation with ancient myth, phenomenological reduction or brain physiology. Yet if there is some modality of being that eludes the transformations of our dreaming selves, it may not be such as to bestow upon us determinate identities at all.

Some months ago I read a manuscript by an Anglican Minister telling of a Native American teacher who develops in his Anglo-American student the capacity to fly like a hawk -- his "power" animal. This becomes, in the text, a metaphor for the capacities one might discover by divesting oneself of the ordinary "identities" under which it is assumed those powers are lacking. Note: Loss of identity as ACCESS to capacity. Negative Capability (Keats).

3

In "magical" or "ceremonial" practice -- and these days in the games and strategies of therapies and popular Shamanism -- one may assume identities and characters impossible in the social world. One may will imaginal topologies and spiritual weaponry, become one's totem animal, or

converse with a personal daemon. I am what I assert I am, and what appears within the circle of operation I command is what "there is." These identities are not the whimsical products of spontaneous or random fantasy: they ride the methodologies that permit them and function for their practitioners in ways that are relevant personally and socially.

4

As I wish to have an identity at last -- or to be at last liberated from the need to have one -- the concern for identity transmutes into soteriology: I wish to be saved by what I really am from what I am only apparently, or to be free at last from the very need to Be. This last wish is not suicidal: I do not want to be free from existence but from being insofar as it implies determinate identity -- to be some-one or -thing, to show the mark of a nature, category, or type.

The ultimate identity -- pure, Parmenidean, Unique Being -- is guaranteed to "all that is" but absolutely denied to everything that has "identity" -- all seeming things that only are what they are by virtue of not being something else. Such beings are pseudo-beings. They exist by "being-not," and, through this pseudo-identity, they suppress their inalienable but ineffable communion with Being as such.

Under this austere mythology of Being, when I seek to satisfy my yearning "to be at last" by acceding to determinate identity, I lose, by the measure of my own success, my one chance at satisfaction. I confess that this is a mythology that turns my head. It stops me in my mental tracks as I pursue ordinary identity-achieving activities and sends me looking instead

for that in my own seeking which, already conversant with Being, in the course of daily things, passes itself by.

5

A=A. I have always suspected that this ancient hieratic inscription is haunted by a duplicity at the heart of all identity. As a logical axiom it enforces the equivalence of every iteration of each symbol within the logical system over which it presides. Identity is a principle of "normality": it controls the errancy of meaning -- the tendency of symbols to shift from thought to thought, rendering a studied coherence unlikely and accurate calculation or demonstration impossible.

Of course, there are uses for this "logic" that do not attribute its radical consistency to the things and processes and persons of the concrete, actual world. Indeed, the clearer one is about the independence of logical structures from concrete interpretation, the freer one will be of the mistake of attributing logical properties to concretely existing situations. Yet the standard of "logic" in some not so well-defined a sense operates whenever in our daily existence we demand identity, consistency, or coherence of the items, persons, and processes of our world. Everything proceeds as if the formal demand of the logician, $A=A$, pertained not only to the behavior of symbols, but to the existence of things in the world for which they stand.

Applied not to signs but to ordinary physical objects, the principle suggests that there is an identity at the heart of things. The rock in my pocket is still the rock it was when I put it there, and I am who I am through all the vicissitudes and adventures of my being. We are Aristotelian substances. We remain what we were as our attributes change.

In spite of the radically transitory character of all temporal entities, identity asserts that what the Buddhists call "subtle impermanence" -- not the mere changeableness observed in the attributes of stable substances but the continuous disappearance and re-effulgence of the instantaneous existence of all things in time -- is not true.

The axiom of logical normality irreverently supports this substantial stability in spite of the protests of logicians, and our abiding being seems to overleap the indomitable ravages of radical temporality.

Such a world of identities is a world of assurances and stabilities -- quasi-stable perdurations in an otherwise radically impermanent universe -- and provides the basis for all assignation of determinate identity in the form of categorization, genetic or other typologies, normative and objective measurement, medical diagnosis, as well as the psychological reification of one's being in self-image, self-esteem, and the like.

Yet if I am persuaded by the Buddhist view that even substances are radically impermanent, then the instantaneous percolation of all present things from an empty ground includes me at my very root -- it includes me where I swell into apparency even before my own awareness, from a fundament I cannot see or name. The deep mystery of the being of my awareness is married to that fundament. To grasp either, I must submit to the devastation of my identity and be the evanescence of all that I am and all that I perceive and know.

6

"To climb the corporate ladder," "to arrive," "to be someone," "be all that you can be," "to go for it," "to be Number One" -- these are the phrases of a

syndrome that organizes our social order and infects discipline after discipline, context of action after context of action -- so that one is hard put to distinguish the moral status of a political leader from that of a spectacular running back, of a god-father, cultic or spiritual teacher, from a purveyor of junk bonds, a best-selling author, famous artist, or Nobel laureate. All are arranged on parallel rungs of hierarchical ladders suspended from Number One.

Fantasy: parent looks menacingly at child from beneath grim eyebrows: "There's no reason you can't be THE BEST in EVERYTHING!"

The value structure that demands that one measure one's worth by determinate positions on such ladders to Number One destroys the spiritual leisure that the growth of true community or authentic creativity requires. Many people know that they flourish where competition is not the dominating factor yet fail to see how often "achievement" has been thoroughly co-opted by institutional structures whose survival requirements demand the assurance seemingly gained by high standards and the sharpening of competitive contexts.

We are all profoundly "abused" by this instant transformation of all locally experienced value -- all concretely engendered contexts of meaningful interaction, all purely emergent pursuits and pleasures -- into opportunities for participation in one or another of the publicly determined arenas for advancement... And the "opportunities" for eking out a meager existence on the margins of these conditions diminish every day.

7

I have had it put to me that access to multiple, shifting, or dissolving identities may be a privilege available only to those in social circumstances free from the demands made upon identity by urban alienation, rural want, or political oppression. To the colonized, "identity" was determined by the colonizer; therefore the luxury of an identity-free existence was the privilege of the ruling class. Certainly. But then the achievement of an "identity" is no desideratum -- rather the reverse of this.

In the hells of Occidental theologies, identity is absolute and unrelieved. You are the concretization of your defining deeds, intentions, characteristics. In "heaven," perhaps things recover their fluidity.

8

Organized political minorities demand of those who bear the mark of membership that they behave accordingly. The need for this assembling of humans under the kinds that their oppressors have discriminated in order to oppose that oppression is perhaps unarguable. But surely this banding together, this demand for solidarity, this enforcement of an identity that has, in fact, been forced upon one, is at best a necessary and hopefully temporary evil to be put aside as successful struggle brings brighter times. That "identity" and "pride" of membership in any group should be elevated to

ontological status, however tactically useful, is a species of the very evil all such struggle is most justified when it opposes.

9

My concern for my identity often looks as though it were the subjective correlative of objective psycho-structural, psycho-linguistic, or social determinations. My self-esteem answers to my status or my performance, or my pride depends upon my membership in a social group afforded dignity or denied it by the social system in which I am inscribed. Beyond this, my deep identity -- the structural determinants of my unconscious psyche -- are supposed to be capable of disclosure within known and *logically* determined parameters (Lacan). But the *logical* structures on the basis of which kinship patterns, linguistic structures, (and the interconnections of these within the psyche), are held to be compelling, are still structures that, if not constructed, are at least discovered by human minds. The fundamental questions about their ontological status are either unanswerable, answered beforehand by choice of point of departure, or arbitrarily arbitrated by arbitrarily terminating analysis. How are structural theses, for instance, affected by the choice of the logical axioms used to elaborate them? For logic is no more fundamental than geometry turned out to be. Logical systems have been constructed eliminating the Law of the Excluded Middle (Intuitionism), the Distributive Law (Quantum Logic), transitivity, (Perry and Barwise). These logics prove useful in their domains but their possibility disturbs the hope that any single logic is given as the structure of the world. Therefore, the psychological theories that fix identity in the logical structures supposedly underlying psychic formations are themselves in want of foundation.

In The Middle Ages, "Fame" was experienced as the natural radiance of authentic value. But in the age of media-manipulation and the reduction of being to information, where value is stripped from information to yield information qua information, or where value as subjective determination is presumed to be absorbed by information, what luminosity authentic presence radiates is instantly subject to the diffraction, diffusion, absorption, distortion, and aberration of its conditions of transmission and reception.

The essentially technological dogma to the effect that reality is only to be found in that which yields a determinate report and in that which therefore is susceptible to calculation (Heidegger) -- underlies our information-theoretical ontology and issues an astonishing array of contemporary "verities":

- that nature has no nature (Neils Bohr, quantum physics)
- that reality is already simulacrum (Baudrillard)
- that all "presence" reduces to the matrix of possibilities that specify it (Structuralism and its derivatives)
- that information exhausts reality

One sees it proposed in contexts ranging from Cognitive Science to New Age Occultism that our identity IS our informational content: "Hold onto your Software -- the rest is MEAT" (Rudy Ruckert). If I am a complex informational function or matrix of possibilities, then I am identical with my similitudes -- there is no original. I am the copies or printouts of my informational structure, and the science fiction or platonically oriented occult

fantasy of teleportation or rebirth is a plausible project for future technology. But if I work the nondual intuitions of Taoism, Zen, Buddhist or Saivite Tantricism, Nyingma or Bon Dzogchen, then my contemplations show me that there are states where the indeterminateness of presence is not yet absence or vacuity. The absence of information (sunyata, sTong-pa, emptiness, Tao) is not necessarily the absence of being but may obtain in contemplations simultaneously with the emergence of an awareness (rigpa) that is not a teleological product. I therefore doubt that my being is coterminous with my information and assert that information-theoretical ontology is a name for the profound errancy of our time.

11

We know that self-image concerns based on "look" or style pervade our culture on all levels. Clothes and furniture serve as badges within corporate hierarchies; eight-year-olds know what color T-shirts are acceptable in the school yard; members of gangs and families, parties, teams, and cults exhibit the objects, clothes, scarifications, and hair-behavior significant of their roles and states. Where the acquisition of such items requires accomplishment, initiation, or ordeal, such acquisition may be the actual cause of the status gained. But though the genuine interaction between image and status may indeed found the social hierarchies in which they participate -- image-values radiate beyond their contexts as lures and signs for mimetic display.

The failure to gain status through acquiring the requisite image is the source of stress and suffering throughout our culture and ought not be treated lightly or with condescension. But it seems to me that the alleviation of such suffering should be high on everyone's compassion-agenda.

Relative to contexts where hard-nosed standards of accomplishment testify that judgments of achievement and identity have an objective basis, no doubt my remarks will appear sentimental or soft-minded. Consider, for instance, the relationship between performance statistics and real competence in athletic competitions. Here, objectivity and identity seem to entail each other.

Competition is the measuring device by which competence or talent is made manifest. Yet competence in sport can never be simply read-off from the statistical record. Aficionados can recognize the presence of skill by other means than examining the stats, and part of the life of the sport is the interplay between the fan' or commentator's subjective estimate and what the record shows. But notice: it is to the record books that we turn when we want to give objective evidence of skill. Salary arbitrators, for instance, check out the numbers, not the talk shows. The objective identity of Michael Jordan (as a player) appears not in his ability to fly but in his points-per-game average. Now it is just this aspect of identity that is completely bound to the *conventional* criteria of the game: Jordan's fleetness of foot and his capacity to invert the power of gravity (while still awake) would probably still be his without basketball. But their measure -- their value -- and hence their role in his "identity," without basketball, would become ambiguous. Those abilities appear objective as they become measurable, but they become measurable only as they are found within the conventions of the game. What seems most

objective, is in fact only *relevantly* so because completely bound up with context and convention.

What is true in sports is, *mutatis mutandis*, true in other disciplines. The classical musician's miraculous digital skill may be valueless or worse in music-making contexts where discovery and attentiveness rather than execution and interpretation are at a premium; and apart from music altogether, the pianist's dexterity may be no more than a peculiar capacity to fidget in an elegant manner. Identity is relative to context. What is "objective" is not yet identity.

13

My identity seems to rest nowhere on a firmer foundation than in the area of medical diagnosis and treatment.

The medical diagnosis names the concrete condition of my body. It discovers an identity that, indeed, I fear to deny. My illness may transcend my symptom. What I am may thus lie beyond the horizon of what, through my most intimate sensations, I know myself to be.

Now this "beyond" is disclosed from a direction that pertains to a transcendence belonging in general to the material world -- a transcendence that permeates and includes my every atom. Yet the general terms of the diagnosis itself, no less than the observations upon which the diagnosis is constructed, rest on concrete temporal and historical conditions -- so that to understand this most objective of my identities, I must situate the concrete accumulation of data about myself within an historically transitory and problematically developing theoretical and methodological framework. I cannot satisfy my own need to found the material identity that I still cannot

evade. Further, in my dependence on the physicians and laboratories and in my need to act on my own behalf according to their prescription, I fall back upon social judgments and probable estimates -- the reputation of a certain specialist, or such partial probable knowledge as I myself can glean. If, in fact, I do possess a material identity of a medical kind, positive access to it cannot belong to me.

In the process of medical consultation, however, my anxiety for my own existence becomes all too clear. It seems I already possess an "identity" before the diagnosis is handed down, and it is for just this identity that my concern is awakened. Here, "identity" is a thing in quest of its own determination. I need to know how I am, how I really am. That I am at hazard in a radically material world is my conviction even prior to consultation, and it is upon this basis that I turn to "medical science" in order that I might gain knowledge of my condition.

Though I do not "know" my identity, the fact that I seek it in this direction rests on assumptions about my being and the world that, at other moments or in other contexts, I may contradict, doubt, or prove indifferent to. The question about who I am may and does arise in contexts quite distinct from the medical one, and where I may not be at all so convinced of the (in any case) provisional, materialist dogma on which faith in medicine, if not medical science, relies.

14

I sit in a quiet place and listen. Someone is reading a newspaper in the next room. There is a hissing in the water pipes, wind noise rising in the

trees behind the walls. The sounds occur and vanish along time and their occurrence in my field of attention seems to go on without mediation. There is the sound there is, and it is gone before reflection on the trace it leaves identifies the thing that gives it rise. The material machinery of this process, the identity of the things -- the waves of disturbance issuing from the pages of the paper as they crumple slightly on being turned -- seem to wear the sounds they cause like closely fitting garments. The thing is there as it is, "in person," just beneath the concrete apparency that sense convenes. Yet I know that the slightest disturbance in my position in the room would change the sound I hear, as would the smallest alteration in the material condition of my auditory apparatus. So the appearance and the object nestling just beneath it are now more creatures of relation than identity.

15

It has not been my experience that the people I know privately are confused about my identity. But I do observe confusion among colleagues in professional contexts. Here one finds people with well-managed public personae, wielded to advance, and guarded to maintain, their status and their jobs. To such people, I am a veritable nightmare. A college president once almost successfully blocked my appointment to teach sound-poetry in his music department not because anyone had raised questions as to my qualifications but because I possessed a Doctorate in Literature. Such an anomaly would embarrass the fund-raising brochure.

The public productions and acts that fix my identities -- my poems and other writings, my politics, my pedagogy -- interact with each other and with worlds outside of my personal social world in numerous ways, many of which are beyond my control, my intent, or any conceivable sense in which a text I generate or an act I commit might reasonably be thought to express my nature or be a sign of my identity. Yet the consequences of my products and acts form part of my identity nevertheless and may in some cases do so decisively. I certainly can affirm the observation of Barret Watten that we lack the possibility of intuiting the scale of our public acts and that this does strange work with our sense of responsibility, not to mention, our identity.

Nevertheless, arts instructors in "MFA" programs hope that their students will arrive as quickly as possible at an "identity" -- a limited territory of aesthetic exploration by which the latter can be measured and known (and by which the instructors, incidentally, can also be identified and duly credited). Persons with heterogeneous capacities and interests or for whom the process of inquiry takes precedence over the quest for public identity are routinely discouraged in their pursuits.

The two-cultures analysis that resurfaces every few years is untrue from the perspective of arts specialization: just where we thought we ought to look for cultural possibilities to compensate specialization in scientific, industrial, and athletic domains, we find precisely the same forces at work -- the demand for competitive excellence, for well-delimited subject matter, and for identity.

Positive identity as an artistic desideratum is, even today, linked to demands that work show "universality." The privilege of "genius," poetic license, and the like are justified on the grounds that the artistic personality speaks from and to a universal possibility. The assumption is that there is a universal nature to which the genius has unique access; and in the expression of his (rarely her) nature, he expresses this universal nature. But universality and identity in 1992 function primarily in relation to such contexts as the commercial fine-art market, the publishing industry, or the hiring and accrediting procedures of various institutions. Universality -- the principle that in the nineteenth century appeared to the high-minded as a bulwark against eccentric private taste, mere historical persistence, or quixotic public acclaim -- today is simply a name for marketability, the probability that a given product will sell to a generally specifiable clientele. For Identity, read noticeability; for Universality, general appeal.

I do not mean to strike an attitude in this place against commerciality or marketability as such. I only wish to point out that universal relevance is no longer the "absolute estimate" it once laid claim to be.

16

As a reader, I am concerned with the use that I can put an author's work to -- not an evaluation of the author's identity. I do not pretend to be the "universal" reader; therefore, the question of the author's universality is not my business. If I find in an author's work vision, thought, or fantasy that contributes to my own vision, thought, or fantasy, this is a matter of fact that stands only in a secondary relation to questions regarding the author's position in some cultural canon, the prestige or critical attention s/he

deserves, or whether students or cultured persons in general should be cultivated or compelled to become his or her devotees.

So much discussion of politically incorrect writers like Ezra Pound or Martin Heidegger, spiritually marginal or weird writers like Gurdjieff or Aleister Crowley, or academically challenging writers like Charles Olson are conducted as if what mattered were how such "figures" are to be heroized, canonized, valorized, or otherwise inoculated with fixed and certified identities. But if my understanding of the problematic of ontology has been altered by Heidegger, or my interest in poetic tradition or form stimulated by Pound or Olson, or my awareness of the possibilities of ceremonial practices informed by Crowley -- these circumstances are matters of fact, not of choice. That I may dislike their several moral stances or their personal acts may pose profound problems for me, but these are problems I cannot evade and to which the institution of these people as monuments of culture or their consignment to opprobrium is largely irrelevant. What exactly is the function of a negative evaluation of such thinkers by people for whom they have been of no value whatsoever? To whom are their condemnations supposed to serve as a warning? To those who, like themselves, will find them of no use? To those innocents who might find something useful in them and thereby incur a spiritual indebtedness from which they ought to be protected? But I suspect their condemnation is not relative to their usefulness or any form of actuality at all, but is only a matter of -- identity.

Any of us will find that we are located in as complex a nesting of objective, structural configurations as we have the energy or interest to discriminate. For instance:

I am located in a precise position on a kinship grid, a node or nexus in a net of relations defined by kinship terms, diachronically and synchronically discriminated.

Distinct from this, I am a genetically determined bio-organism, the emergence of whose protoplasmic signature is becoming more legible with every research day.

I have a horoscope that assigns to my being a complex symbolic structure that I may attend or ignore as I choose.

I am what I taste, the sounds I make, the odors I emanate; I am my momentary changes in body chemistry and postural alignment; the strategies I internalize to shock or soothe somatic sensations into pacific regimina; the way I spend my time. Or change my mind. I am the indeterminate site of my actual intentions and commitments, the actual course of my most delicate intuitions, the arena of my intercourse with others and the world.

Throughout my life I am continually assigned identities by my deeds or through the interpretation of measurements taken upon my being by the various institutions responsible for making such estimates. These continue to my death and, as history, beyond.

I possess formal rank in my profession or my professions and beyond these my public identities multiply to profusion: they occur in my athletic or cultural associations, my participation in computer networks, clubs and cults; they surface as I express my political or moral allegiances or subscribe to publications or cable channels, hold credit cards, acquire credit plans, make

equipment rentals. (Though my income border on the poverty line, I may still carry around a pocket full of plastic that makes my cheenos bulge.)

Am I the objective nexus of these multiple identities? The factual potentiality for a definite spectrum of personal perspectives? Though I slide from self to self am I not the elusive but still determinate entity that each identity in its own manner signifies? But these public and scientific objectivities collectively form but one modality of the term "identity."

18

There indeed seem to be innumerable "modalities" of identity, each of which might be seen to command or correspond with a modality of cognition and a modality of value. Here are a few current ones I notice active in my world, by way of illustration:

psychology and the psycho-therapies

soteriological religion

political activism

the various academic philosophies

art-making

ethics/morality

scientific objectivity

Each modality, in my sense, asserts its primacy over the others and each, more or less unconditionally, subordinates the aims, values, and modes of identity the others define. Modalities themselves, however, rise and fall with the times and within the lives of groups and individuals.

I say that each of these categories of human cognitive activity operates as a modality in my sense when 1. it asserts its own concerns, categories of being, and principles of value as implying the subordination of the values, categories, and concerns of the others; and 2. when it justifies this assertion with "transcendental arguments" that would persuade us that the condition of possibility for all other modalities lies in its own proper sphere of action, thought, or being.

Under a psychological modality, for instance, religion becomes an aspect of our psychic life rather than its foundation; religious demands play a psychological role, can become pathological, and so forth. Political action is viewed as a matter of self-expression, necessary to one's appropriate adjustment to one's social state, but surely not the context and condition for psychic life in general. Scientific objectivity becomes an ingredient of sanity but can also become obsessive; anyone has artistic "needs"; philosophy serves the intellect that produces it, not the other way on; ethics is a product of the "super-ego" and the sublimation of drives and so on.

The transcendental argument for psychology is that we can have no experience of politics, art, religion, and the others, without the mediation of the psyche, and that these subordinate modalities operate according to psychological laws.

The principle for identity is: I am he or she who the analysis of my psychic life discovers me to be.

Consider now a religious modality. Since religion typically claims authority for the whole of being, clearly the other modalities function only as adjuncts to or distractions from the soteriological project. Even ethics takes second place and has a mere role in redemption. Insanity, political obtuseness or irresponsibility, ugliness, ignorance and irrationality, as well

as their opposites: healthy-mindedness, social conscience, beauty, reason, may all serve or hinder religious aims. Who one is, is solely *where* one is on the path to salvation.

Or the ethical modality. Ethics judges the others: it calls religion to account, demands accountability of the arts; it interferes with political instrumentality by bringing extra-political scruples to bear. The ethical modality seeks to reassert the normative in the face of modern relativism; and though it does not offer transcendental arguments for, or claim ontological primacy over, the other modalities, it nevertheless finds itself at the source of all pretension to any value claimed by them. It therefore erects a vision of ethical identity as the pre-eminent criterion for what it means to be human.

Because ethics appears as the factor of value in the other modalities, it is often conflated with them, as when religion is presented as a system of moral improvement rather than soteriological method, myth, or context, or when the positive influence of art upon the community is urged against an *ars pour ars* aesthetic.

Readers can elaborate whatever modalities they find active in their lives as they wish. I don't think there is any exit from this tableau of modalities, but one can observe their operation and undermine their absolute claims, though to do so is, perhaps, to construct another of them. If one or another modality does organize the whole of one's being, one's "identity" according to that modality will organize the multiplicity of identities emergent with the others.

Given the relativity of the modalities, the demand for determinate identity is, in general, both inalienable and unsatisfiable. Therefore, the being who lives within the boundaries of this demand is a being in search of a true address -- a home apart from where s/he is. For me, this demand dissolves into the soteriological, for I cannot see how anything short of redemptive events can sustain its antinomies. But this only resolves the tension inherent in identity by replacing it with another demand -- the demand that the soteriological quest be conducted in earnest. And that means the suspension (not the resolution) of the primacy (not the activity) of the quest(ion) of identity.

Of course, the soteriological modality discerned from a perspective of concerns not its own may indeed "identify" me with a religious type and confer upon me an identity I myself have no interest in establishing. But from where I stand, this is a matter of indifference. Though a criterion for identity accompanies the determination of any bounded thing, the concern for that identity is something else entirely. This concern is, in fact, a modality of its own -- one which, unlike the ethical or soteriological, does not, with a few exceptions, mix very well with others. For the concern for the marks of identity pertaining to a religious or ethical person paradoxically may very well interfere with the attentions that, independent of the concern for those marks, spontaneously and genuinely produce them.

20

Writing itself may certainly serve as a kind of modality -- it may organize all the modalities whereof it speaks -- and my concern for my

identity as the writer of my text and the thinker of the thoughts in it may take precedence, for me or for a reader, over the thoughts themselves. I may base this concern on transcendental arguments regarding the primacy of writing, as when I assert that the subordinate, subject modalities are only possible in the context of literacy, or even that writing "as such" is the foundation for language and intelligence in general (Derrida). But there are numerous species of authorship where this primacy is undesired, irrelevant, or tiresome. For writing need not behave as a modality, subordinating its content to the issue of its own "performance" qua writing. I am not speaking here only of writing that is directly in the service of extra-literary aims -- properly philosophical, political, or religious texts. Rather, I am calling attention to a certain feature of literary writing itself that exaggerated emphasis on genre-analysis and the psychology of literary performance obscures. For it seems to me that serious literary work can have the interesting character of serving the modalities it subordinates without at the same time becoming subordinate to them. I mean that when I am moved to feeling or thought or action by a text, my experience is not appropriately reducible to the "raw material" (Frye) upon which a properly mature reading ought to base a more scientific description or estimate. I may not be concerned with description or estimate at all, but with engagement through language with the world with which the text deals. If such a world is an hallucination foisted upon me through the operancy of language, literacy, and social history, well then so is my own world, and I have as much chance of gaining insight into the latter through engagement with the concerns of the text as by distancing myself from them by analysis, description, and evaluation.

That said, however, I find that I am often interested by work where, without abandoning engagement with content, the author delivers a problematic multiplicity of modal possibilities. For me the continuing interest of the poetry on which I grew up -- and I am talking of Yeats, Duncan, Dickenson, Whitman, Olson, -- is that a certain shifting of the modal center becomes observable therein, and puissant strategies for being without fixed identity show themselves. Many intertextual issues, for instance, in such work, can be of a modal kind. In *The Maximus Poems*, an attentive reader will find a treasury of intertextual invention, where the precise modality of the activity the poet is engaged has to be determined afresh almost with every context of utterance. It is not just a matter of Olson's having collaged different kinds of texts within his own -- texts such as the poems of historical figures, the writings of geographers, geologists, historians, or psychologists -- but rather of the precise gesture of such inclusions as registering different species of cognitive acts.

21

There is a form of identity to which I do not find myself hostile and which I do not believe to be intrinsically contrary to my own essentially negative attitude toward determinate identity.

On the back of a private note to me penned in 1966, the poet Charles Olson wrote : "The mortal makes the measure work." This dictum has always coupled in my mind with a line from Olson's *Maximus, from Dogtown* in which the Hesiodic figure Okeanos is developed as a principle of cosmic identity qualified by process and framed by a principle of measure:

Okeanos, the One which all things are and by which
nothing is anything but itself, measured so

In my reading, Okeanos is Parmenidean Being: all things exist by virtue of Okeanos' being all things. But this reduction to Okeanos is precisely what guarantees, within the limits of each manifest thing, its self-identity, its individuation, its concrete character. Okeanos is concrete, actual Being, and its character is process. In another place in *The Maximus Poems*, the same notion is called The Black Gold Flower -- the Black Chrysanthemum -- black because fundamentally located on the side of the concrete, the processual, the actual. The fundamental character of the world under Okeanos is that it is "issued" -- it flows out: all things issue from the one and each thing is self-identical, not through participation in eternal form or through the determination of its character through the exclusion of attributes associated with others, but through the concrete process in which it issues, develops, and practices the apparency of its being. It accomplishes the latter by constructing its reflection in finite works or actions and perishes in the end as it reaches its limit or boundary.

Okeanos, Parmenidean Being, though it is the being of all that is, is a BOUNDED thing. This boundedness, in my reading, cannot mean that Being itself has a boundary plane separating it from that which it is not. This is clearly forbidden in the poem by Parmenides as well as by Olson in his prose work. Rather, its boundedness refers to its capacity to impart boundedness to the apparencies it is the source of -- the seeming things that, though having no being AS the things that each appears to be, nevertheless in each case gives report of unique Being itself. Being is both concrete and unique, and the concrete, apparent beings to which it gives rise bear the mark of that

uniqueness. Each thing "is" precisely because it is Being itself. It has individual appearance because the uniqueness of Being is imparted to it. But its "being" is not what it appears "to be."

Everything, Blake says, that is possible to be believed is an image of the truth. All things in their determinate appearance are not "true" in themselves, for they never possess the positive identity they put forth, but their capacity to show this identity is the result and revelation of another truth -- the truth of the unique Being that issues them -- and as such, each apparent thing, lived and received in the energy of its appearance, is an image of the truth.

The practice of this sort of identity surely has its hazards. Fall to one side of the "image" by a hairsbreadth and one has reified appearance and hypostasized being in determinate identity. Insist on radical indeterminacy without attending to the correlative mystery of apparent duration, and one "loses one's mortality" -- one's birth/death right -- the possibility of giving and taking form.

The satisfaction of the need for identity through the manifestation of appropriate formal acts is distinct from the achievement of identity through the satisfaction of conventional criteria. The confusion between these two is natural because both involve the manifestation of an objective form and both in some measure consider the public use and context of this manifestation. But consider the two cases. In the first instance, the manifestation of form satisfies the needs of the being who manifests it. The work or deed occupies the place and context in which it arises, and these provide it with its own measure and scale. It is the satisfaction of its own term that makes it available to the concrete community of others for whom it may be relevant.

Where forms of identity are set in their own context and community of emergence, they have no need of hypostatization or the assertion of absolute identity. The fact that things and acts and persons appear with their specific, apparent forces and capacities is sufficient. But in the second instance, the showing of external form is subject to contexts of judgment that may be quite distinct from the actual community of concern to whom it is addressed. In the latter case, work is judged by standards that are not really more objective, only more general than those under which its own internal principle was generated.

All things contain themselves and pass away

writes Paul Blackburn. The radical impermanence of the things of the world need not be abused by an impossible ascension to eternal identity. What is truly eternal -- truly outside of time -- is that which makes the appearances of duration possible -- not the identities that rise and fall as they issue and dissolve.