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AIR AND BREATH IN RELIGIONS  
AND PHILOSOPHIES

ZRAK IN DIH V RELIGIJAH  
IN FILOZOFIJAH



P O L I G R A F I

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# AIR AND BREATH IN RELIGIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES: INTRODUCTION

Of what [is] this *is*? Of air.  
(Luce Irigaray)<sup>1</sup>

Nothing is more common to the diverse indigenous cultures of the earth than a recognition of the air, the wind, and the breath, as aspects of a singularly sacred power.  
(David Abram)<sup>2</sup>

For contemporary philosophy of religion (in particular within the analytic tradition) “breath” still might seem like a peculiar project, or at the very least disconnected from the way in which most European (or, largely, Western) philosophy has understood itself and its goals. But the forgetting of air in Western philosophical discourse is by itself one of the deepest, unacknowledged tensions, shaping its unfortunate outlook on the world. A new philosophy of religion that is sensitive to air and breath/ing thus has the double merit of decolonising the philosophical curriculum through an inclusion of non-European sources and insights and of revealing how such breath is a fundamental (if erased) element of its own history. The potential of such a paradigm shift inaugurates a new field within philosophy (including philosophy of religion) – called “respiratory philosophy.”

For the ancient cultures and religions of the world living in the natural environment, breathable air was regarded as sacred and known un-

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<sup>1</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999; first published as *L'oubli d'air chez Martin Heidegger*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983), 5.

<sup>2</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 137.

der denominators such as *ruah*, *aér*, *psyche*, *pneûma*, *prāṇa*, *sās*, *jabān*, *qilki*, *ik'*, *mana*, or *sila*, among others. With the demise of ancient cosmological schemes especially in the West, material and elemental denominators such as “psyche,” “air” and “breath” quickly solidified into new metaphysically underpinned concepts of “soul” and “spirit”. These shifts downplayed respiration as a fact of human and other bodies. Western philosophy became a story of masculine domination and the forgetting of the body and its vital breath as one of its main features. Post-Platonic Western traditions of thought gradually de-spiritualised *pneuma* and interiorised the breath into an abstract and disembodied ego/subject/spirit category. Respiration as the *material* ground of our existence has been transformed into various metaphysically solidified and artificially “spiritualised” essences, now fully detached from the body.

Breathing is also closely related to atmospheric thinking. All living beings necessarily dwell in an atmosphere, and atmospheres represent elemental spacetimes whose force and variations can be felt in our bodies on a daily basis. We all are parts of various atmospheric envelopes and experience their contents and discontents throughout our lives. All breathing beings need their own free space to breathe – an envelope or atmosphere in which they are free and which is not possessed by anything or anyone. Around the living breathing being, breathing gathers a sphere of air, called an elemental atmosphere and *being-in-the-air* is the most elemental way of our being-in-the-world. According to David Kleinberg-Levin, “breathing is our very first teaching – a silent teaching – in a life of interdependency, continuity, relationship, giving and receiving.”<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly enough, it was Karl Marx who already recognised in his *Economic Philosophic Manuscripts* this forgotten material genealogy of the breath when he stated that “man, exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature” has been an aspect of humanity radically forgotten by history.<sup>4</sup> With this gesture, Marx inaugurated – for the first time in philosophical history – a new, politically invested way into thinking

<sup>3</sup> Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson, eds., *Atmospheres of Breathing* (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), 10.

<sup>4</sup> *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. R. Tucker (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 115.

about breath within the philosophical tradition. Philosophy of the 19th century brought another important invention with Feuerbach's radical restructuring of the philosophy of religion and theology. Ludwig Feuerbach prophetically wrote in 1841 that his philosophy must be understood as a pneumatic water therapy (*pneumatische Wasserheilkunde*)<sup>5</sup> – in this he gave specific priority to air and water. Feuerbach's idea was also that we need to find and regain our way to nature and our elemental sensibilities and thus a new possibility was initiated to reconnect with “nature,” its elements and our forgotten ontologico-environmental-material being. Feuerbach understood elements in the sense of the Pre-Socratics as water, air, fire, and earth. And, finally, William James was the first Western thinker to question the spirit-breath relation in his *Essays on Radical Empiricism* as he argued: “The ‘I think’ which Kant said must be able to accompany all my objects, is the ‘I breathe’ which actually does accompany them.”<sup>6</sup> James' contention that breath must be the epistemological root of our experience is crucial for respiratory philosophy and has long-lasting consequences.

To work with air sometimes means to become more sensitive to the internal breath, but also to the variety of breathing postures or dispositions of other living beings in their respiratory environments or atmospheres. Sometimes it implies a need to excavate forgotten layers of our bodily sensations and related natural and ethical proximities. A future philosophy of religion must therefore become sensitive to air, breath and breathing and the main aim of this special issue is to point to more hidden, forgotten or less known aspects of respiratory phenomena of the natural environments and life-worlds that we all share.

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This special issue of *Poligrafi* presents ten original interpretations of air and breath in various religious and philosophical contexts – from Jewish and Islamic mysticism to religious and philosophical respiratory thought within Christianity, and further within Asian contexts of

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<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. G. Eliot (New York: Harper, 1957), 276.

<sup>6</sup> William James, *Essays on Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976), 19.

Hinduism and Zen Buddhism. Contributors have also focused on air and natural elements in the Natural Worshippers' religion of Slovenia as well as within the philosophical anthropological tradition of the modern era. Finally, this collection of articles brings new approaches towards respiratory philosophy of religion – as presented by our contributors with their insightful elaborations of the philosophy of breath in thinkers such as Augustine, Franz von Baader, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, María Zambrano, Luce Irigaray and Giorgio Agamben.

*Lenart Škof*



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# Z R A K I N D I H V R E L I G I J A H I N F I L O Z O F I J A H : U V O D

Iz česa [je ta] *je*? Iz zraka.  
(Luce Irigaray)<sup>1</sup>

V ničimer si najrazličnejše avtohtone kulture na Zemlji niso bolj sorodne kot v prepoznavanju zraka, vetra in diha kot vidikov edinstveno svete sile.  
(David Abram)<sup>2</sup>

Za sodobno filozofijo religije, še zlasti v okviru analitične tradicije, se »dih« morda še vedno zdi nenavaden projekt ali vsaj nepovezan s tem, kako večina evropske (oziroma zahodne) filozofije opredeljuje samo sebe in svoje cilje. Toda pozaba diha je eno od največjih notranjih nasprotij v zahodnem filozofskem diskurzu – saj kljub temu, da se ga ne zaveda ali ne priznava, vpliva na njen odklonilen svetovni nazor. Nova filozofija religije, senzibilna za zrak in dih/anje, ima tako dvojne zasluge za dekoloniziranje filozofskega kurikula, upošteva namreč tudi neevropske vire in uvide ter razodeva dih kot enega od temeljnih (česarvno izbrisanih) elementov svoje zgodovine. Potencial takšnega paradigmatkega premika odpira novo področje v filozofiji (vključno s filozofijo religije), imenovano »respiratorna filozofija«.

V starih kulturah in religijah sveta, ki so živele v naravnem okolju, je vdihani/izdihani zrak, poznan pod imeni *ruah*, *aér*, *psyche*, *pneûma*, *prāṇa*, *sās*, *jabān*, *qi/ki*, *ik'*, *mana*, *silā* in drugimi, veljal za svetega. S propadom starodavnih kozmoloških shem, zlasti na Zahodu, so se snovni in elementarni označevalci, kot so »*psyche*«, »*zrak*« in »*dih/sapa*«, kmalu utrdili v nova, metafizično utemeljena koncepta »*duše*« in »*duha*«. Te spremembe so zmanjševale pomen dihanja kot danosti človeškega in

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<sup>1</sup> Po angleškem prevodu: »*Of what is this is? Of air.*» Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, angl. prev. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999; prvič objavljeno pod naslovom *L'oubli d'air chez Martin Heidegger*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1983), 5.

<sup>2</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 137.

drugih teles. Zahodna filozofija je postala zgodba o moški prevladi ter pozabi telesa in njegovega življenjskega diha kot ene njegovih poglavitnih značilnosti. Postplatonske zahodne tradicije filozofije so postopoma razduhovile *pneumo* in ponotranjile dihanje kot abstraktno in nesnovno kategorijo tega/subjekta/duha. Dihanje kot *materialni* temelj našega obstoja so spremenile v različne metafizično podkrepljene in umetno »poduhovljene« esence, zdaj popolnoma ločene od telesa.

Dihanje je tesno povezano tudi z atmosferskim razmišljanjem. Vsa živa bitja neizogibno bivajo v nekem ozračju, ozračja ali atmosfere pa tvorijo elementarne prostore-čase, katerih moč in spremembe lahko vsakodnevno fizično občutimo na sebi. Vsi smo del različnih atmosferskih ovojev in vse svoje življenje doživljamo njihove pozitivne in negativne vidike. Vsa dihajoča bitja potrebujejo za dihanje svoj lasten, svoboden prostor – ovoj ali atmosfero, v kateri jih nič ne omejuje in ki si je nihče in nič ne more lastiti. Okoli živega dihajočega bitja se dihanje oblikuje v zračno plast, imenovano elementarna atmosfera, in *biti-v-zraku* je najbolj prvinska oblika našega bivanja-v-svetu. Kot pravi David Kleinberg-Levin, je »dihanje naš prvi nauk – tihi nauk – v življenju, ki ga so oblikujejo soodvisnosti, kontinuitete, odnosi, dajanje in prejemanje.«<sup>3</sup>

Zanimivo, da je to pozabljeno materialno genealogijo diha prepoznal že Karl Marx, ko je v svojih *Ekonomsko-filozofskih rokopisih* izjavil, da je »človek, ki izdihuje in vdihuje vse sile narave«, vidik človeškosti, ki ga zgodovina radikalno pozablja.<sup>4</sup> S to gesto je Marx – prvič v zgodovini filozofije – v filozofsko tradicijo vpeljal nov, politično angažiran način razmišljanja o dihu. Filozofska misel 19. stoletja je doživela pomembno inovacijo s Feuerbachovim korenitim restrukturiranjem filozofije religije in teologije. Ludwig Feuerbach je leta 1841 preroško zapisal, da je treba njegovo filozofijo razumeti kot nekakšno dihalno hidroterapijo oziroma pnevmatično vodno zdravstvo (*pneumatische Wasserheilkunde*)<sup>5</sup> – v kateri je posebno prioriteto dal zraku in vodi. Izrazil je tudi mnenje, da moramo iskati pot nazaj k naravi in naši elementarni senzibilnosti, in pozval, naj

<sup>3</sup> Lenart Škof in Petri Berndtson, ur., *Atmospheres of Breathing* (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), 10.

<sup>4</sup> *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ur. R. Tucker (New York in London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 115.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Bistvo krščanstva*, prev. F. Jerman in B. Kante (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1982), 58.

se človek znova poveže z »naravo«, njenimi elementi in s svojim pozabljenim ontološko-ekološko-materialnim bitjem. Feuerbach je pod elementi, enako kot predsokratiki, pojmoval vodo, zrak, ogenj in zemljo. Nazadnje je William James kot prvi zahodni mislec v svojih *Esejih o radikalnem empirizmu* pod vprašaj postavil odnos med duhom in dihom z izjavo: »Tisti ‚jaz mislim‘, za katerega Kant trdi, da mora moči spremljati vse moje predstave, je ‚jaz diham‘, ki jih dejansko spremlja.«<sup>6</sup> Jamesova trditev, da mora biti dih epistemološki izvor našega izkustva, je ključnega pomena za respiratorno filozofijo in ima daljnosežne posledice.

Ukvarjanje z zrakom lahko spodbudi senzibilnost za notranji dih, pa tudi za najrazličnejše dihalne položaje ali dispozicije drugih živih bitij v njihovih dihalnih okoljih ali atmosferah. Lahko tudi poraja potrebo po odkrivanju pozabljenih plasti telesnih občutij in raziskovanju z njimi povezanih naravnih in etičnih bližin. Bodoče filozofije religije bi zato morale postati bolj občutljive za zrak, dih in dihanje. Osrednji cilj te tematske številke je prav opozoriti na bolj skrite, pozabljene ali manj znane vidike dihalnih pojavov v naravnih okoljih in življenjskih svetovih, ki jih vsi skupaj naseljujemo.

\* \* \*

V tej posebni številki *Poligrafov* je predstavljenih deset izvirnih interpretacij zraka in diha v različnih religijskih in filozofskih kontekstih, od židovskega in islamskega mysticizma do religijske in filozofske respiratorne misli v krščanstvu ter znotraj azijskih kontekstov v hinduizmu in zen budizmu. Prispevki se posvečajo tudi zraku in naravnim elementom v okviru slovenskega naravoverstva in filozofske antropološke tradicije moderne dobe. Zbirka člankov ne nazadnje predstavlja tudi nove pristope k respiratorni filozofiji religije, ki jih sodelujoče avtorice in avtorji nakazujejo s svojimi pronicljivimi elaboracijami filozofije diha pri mislecih, kot so Avguštin, Franz von Baader, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, María Zambrano, Luce Irigaray in Giorgio Agamben.

Lenart Škof

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<sup>6</sup> William James, *Essays on Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976), 19.



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# AIR AND BREATHING IN MEDIEVAL JEWISH MYSTICISM

Michael Marder

Just as the body is constructed in this world from the interweaving of four elements, taking form in this world, so is the spirit formed from the interweaving of four spirits existing in the Garden of Eden. [...] And were it not for these four spirits, which are the airs of the Garden, the spirit would not be formed at all (*Zohar* 2:13b; v. 4, p. 66).

Air in the *Zohar*, the masterpiece of “medieval Jewish mysticism, myth, and esoteric teaching,”<sup>1</sup> is polysemic. It involves breath or the highest level of the soul (*nešamah*); wind or spirit (*ruah*; also occasionally translated as breath); airborne earth in the form of dust, water as vapor, and chemical substances as aroma (*reyah*); the fleeting, short-lived breath (*havel*); the aura, of which light is a faint trace... Along with fire and water, it is considered to be that through which the world was created. As Rabbi El’azar says: “Come and see: By breath [*b’ruha*] the blessed Holy One made the world, and by breath it is sustained [*uve-ruha mitqayyama*] – the breath of those studying Torah, especially the breath of schoolchildren” (*Zohar* 1:47a; v. 1, p. 265).<sup>2</sup> Then, “the mystery of this breath of children becomes voice, spreading through the world, and they are the guardians of the world [*neturey ‘alma*], guardians of the city” (*Zohar* 2:39a; v. 4, p. 185). On a par with the dark spark and the primordial drop, breath is at the origin of the world. Despite its apparent volatility or motility and its ephemeral character, it also

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Green, “Introduction,” in *The Zohar*, Pritzker Edition, vol. 1, trans. Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> All the citations from the *Zohar* refer to *The Zohar*, Pritzker Edition, 12 vol., trans. Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

serves to sustain, to guard and to protect everything created through it. Spanning creation and the continued existence of the world, the pneumatics of breath and/as spirit also straddles the divide between God and schoolchildren, in keeping with the singular, living, and exceptionally fragile foundations of being, which the *Zohar* locates in the figure of the *zadiq*, the righteous one.<sup>3</sup>

The nucleus of the idea that God created the world through breath may be found in Psalms 33:6 – “By the word of YHVH the heavens were made, by the breath of his mouth all their host” – and in *Sefer Yeẓirah* 1:9 that tracks the “ten *sefirot* [divine emanations, MM] of nothingness” back up to “the one breath of the living God [*eḥad ruah Elohim ḥayyim*]”<sup>4</sup> – not with *creatio ex nihilo*, but with *deus ex nihilo*. There, the composition of “the holy breath,” *ruah ha-qodeš*, is revealed as “voice, and breath, and speech [*qol’ ve-ruah ve-dibur*].” To be a holy, animating breath, *ruah* must resound with voice and speech, or, to put it in Greek, the essential dimensions of *logos*. In the Zoharic “Midraš Ha-Ne’lam,” Rabbi El’azar (who pays close attention to the pneumatic underpinnings of the world) explains that “by a single letter was the world created – without speech” and adds: “Now this implies that by ה (*hē*) the world was created, with one letter – literally” (ZH 2d; v. 10, p. 4)<sup>5</sup>. The letter bespeaking the potency of *binah* and, to a lesser extent of *šekinah*, is the only one that recurs in the tetragrammaton, reminding us of the irreducible doubling in and at the origin, the doubling that denies the origin its simplicity and self-identity and that, from the get-go, exiles the origin from itself. This may explain the beginning of the enigmatic verse 1:10 in *Sefer Yeẓirah*: “Two: breath from breath [*štayim ruah me-ruah*].” But the question is: how and why does *hē* connote breath?

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<sup>3</sup> This is an inversion of the assertion made in the Babylonian Talmud, “The world endures only for the sake of the breath of schoolchildren” (BT *Sabbat* 119b). Citations from the Babylonian Talmud refer to *The Babylonian Talmud*, The William Davidson Edition, available at <https://www.sefaria.org/texts/Talmud>.

<sup>4</sup> *Sefer Yeẓirah: The Book of Creation*, trans. Aryah Kaplan (San Francisco, CA, and Newburyport, MA: Weiser Books, 1997), 68; translation modified.

<sup>5</sup> Volume ten of the *Zohar* includes supplementary materials that are conventionally quoted as ZH.

In a subtle polemic with the earliest known kabbalistic text,<sup>6</sup> Rabbi El'azar subtracts speech and voice from the world-creating letter, since *hē* has no proper sound, except that of breath itself, an exhalation. The holy breath is reduced to nothing but breath. As such, it wafts close to the “ten *sefirot* of nothingness.” But, in being itself, it is already more than itself, given that breath consists of air and water: *hevel' it'avid be-ruḥa u-maya* (*Zohar* 2:39a; v. 4, p. 185). And it is a nothing that makes all the difference when, for instance, thanks to the addition of *hē*, *elim* (gods) are converted into *Elohim*,<sup>7</sup> a word that, though written in the plural, is one of the names of the God of monotheism, or when Abram is renamed Abraham. The exhalation of *hē* expands and makes room where there hasn't been any: between other letters, between elements, between worlds. Air is the element of expansiveness. It gives room without occupying any; it lets be. Whatever else it means, *hē* also signifies *this*.

The expansiveness of air is palpable in the description of the pillars of breath, supporting the world: “On seven *havalim*, breaths, the world subsists – namely on seven pillars [*‘amudin*], supports of the world, corresponding to the seven heavens [...]. Just as there are seven heavens, there are others adjoining them, expanding, issuing from them. Similarly, there are other breaths, expanding, issuing from these” (*Zohar* 2:10b; v. 4, pp. 44–45).<sup>8</sup> The seven breaths are, obviously, the seven *sefirot* from *binah* through to *šekīnah*, from the upper *hē* to the lower, from the first *hē* of the Tetragrammaton to the second. They are the metamorphoses

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<sup>6</sup> This polemic has a broader scope than may appear at first glance, since the *Zohar* refuses to confer the originary status on any one element, while, as Scholem observes, in *Sefer Yeẓirah*, this status belongs to air: “From the first *Sefirah* comes forth, by way of condensation, ‘one Spirit from another’; that is first the primal element of air, and from it, issuing one after the other as the third and fourth *Sefirot*, water and fire.” Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Dorset Press, 1987), 24.

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi El'azar again: “It is written: ‘Who is like you among *elim* (gods), o YHVH (Exodus 15:11) – that is able to create the world? Indicating that *elim*, gods, could not create the world, until the blessed Holy One took one letter from his name – the letter *hē* – and with it the world was created; this letter expanded into *Elohim* and his name *Elohim* was inscribed. Concerning this we have learned: With *hē* he created them” (ZH 4a; v. 10, p. 14).

<sup>8</sup> The signature expression of Qohelet (or Ecclesiastes), *hevel' havalim*, futility of futilities, is reinterpreted by the authors of the *Zohar* as “breath of breaths.” As in many other cases, the most ephemeral, denigrated, and negative becomes the most essential, enduring, and positive.

of the seven branches of the cosmic tree, the tributaries of the river of emanations, or the seven letters of light. The uniqueness of this rendition of the *sefirot* is that they are, simultaneously, supportive pillars and expanding realms. The pillars are not static and they only perform their task of sustaining the world well to the extent that they do not remain the same, do not stay still (to be sure, the same may be said about the growing branches of a tree, the tributaries of a fast-flowing river, or the burning letters). Swelling with divine exhalation, they make room and accommodate all within it. Literally aerodynamic, these *'amudin* support the world by proliferating, by birthing further breaths, reiterating *ad infinitum* the basic operation cryptically described in *Sefer Yeẓirah* as “two: breath from breath.” The breath of life persists in its circulation, sharing, and increasing; instead of dwindling away, or dissipating in an entropic process, it grows. Such is the axiom of mystical sustainability.

The support provided by breath is unstable in the substantive sense of stability. Moreover, the pillars of air are a part of the elemental whole, which they internally interconnect and interrelate. “Fire, water, air, dust – interconnected, interlinked, indivisible [*ve-itqašran da be-da*]. [...] Though all four supernal sides that we have mentioned are interlinked, all of them sustaining above and below, what sustains the world the most is *ruah*, for thereby all exists [*qiyuma de-‘alma yatir ruah, be-gin de- kola qayyma*]” (*Zohar* 2:24b; v. 4, pp. 87-88). The pillars of air, as imagined by the authors of the *Zohar*, are flexible and pliable; they are the spiritual-elemental ties of the elemental whole, the ties that hold the world together and, by holding it together, uphold it. Neither above nor below (and both above and below), *ruah* sustains the world from within by articulating the elements amongst themselves and by lending them configurations that are propitious to the continuation of finite existence. It embodies the relational and ecological conception of elementality.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In *The Star of Redemption*, Rosenzweig writes that “in Creation, the definite was created on the background of its indefiniteness, through the paired action of the two articles.” Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 253. As we can see here, the indefinite is not only the background of creation but its ongoing “support structure.”



Pillars of air will resurface several times in the *Zohar*. According to the interpretation of “*Lek lekā*,” “when the blessed Holy One created the world, he made the heavens of fire and water commingled as one, but they did not congeal. Afterward, they congealed and endured through supernal spirit [*ruḥa*]. Thence he sowed the world to stand upon pillars, those pillars standing only through that spirit. When the spirit disappears, they all quiver and tremble, the world quakes [*uve-šā’ata de-hahu ruḥa istalaq kulhu merafefin ve-za’in ve-’alma irtat*]” (*Zohar* 1:77a; v. 2, p. 2). These lines, too, contain an allusion to *Sefer Yeẓirah*, where the creator converts nonexistence into existence by carving “great pillars from air that cannot be grasped [*‘amudim gdolim me-avir še-eino nitfas*]” (2:6).<sup>10</sup> The elusiveness of these aerial pillars (and of the atmospheric grounds for life) within the scope of an appropriative grasp – including a *conceptual* grasp – goes hand in hand with the spiritual consistency they lend to the primordial commingling of fire and water. Just as the earth quakes when its seemingly firm foundations give way under our feet, so the world shakes when spirit is on the verge of breathlessness. Such worldquakes are more devastating than earthquakes, because they both result from and aggravate the discombobulation of spirit, of the largely invisible yet also material bonds tying together diverse elements, beings, and the world (or worlds).

The mediations that air generates between water and fire, or between *hesed* and *gevurah*,<sup>11</sup> yield *ruaḥ šelim*, a perfect or a complete spirit (*tif’eret*).<sup>12</sup> Between the primordial spark and the drop “issued

<sup>10</sup> *Sefer Yeẓirah*, 131.

<sup>11</sup> “Come and see: Air and east. East – hot and wet. Air – hot and wet, therefore embracing two sides. For fire is hot and dry, water is cold and wet; air is hot and wet: the aspect that is hot grasps fire, the aspect that is wet grasps water. So it harmonizes between them, mediating the conflict of water and fire” (*Zohar* 2:24a; v. 4, p. 84). Pneumatic mediation of fire and water also complicates the straightforward attribution to air and fire “the power of the heavens.” David Mevorach Seidenberg, *Kabbalah and Ecology: God’s Image in the More-Than-Human World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 217.

<sup>12</sup> In turn, Marla Segol points out that “air and fire are tied together with the biblical proof-text: ‘he makes his angels winds, his servants fire’ (Ps. 104:4).” Marla Segol, *Word and Image in the Medieval Kabbalah* (London and New York: Palgrave, 2012), 51. In and of itself, however, the *sefirotic* drama of *hesed* and *gevurah* replays, at another level, the opposition of *hokmah* and *binah*, but the upper dyad is not unified below; the co-belonging of the upper *sefirot* is only obscurely indicated in *keter* above.

*ruah šelim*, so those two sides turned into one; it was placed between them [*mi-beynayhu*] – they were crowned with one another. Then *šelim*, peace, prevailed above, peace below, and the rung stabilized” (*Zohar* 1:87a; v. 2, p. 55). The place of spirit, of breath, of air is in-between, which means that the spiritual foundation of the world, the “pillars of air” that support it, are in also in the middle. Worldquakes are the outcomes of the erasure or the erosion of the middle, of the breathing space and time in-between. Without the middle, existence suffocates. And, conversely, the completion of spirit is not a teleological accomplishment, but the ongoing activity of shuttling and mediating, of spanning and bridging. In Hebrew and Aramaic, such completion is conceptually and etymologically related to peace (*šalom/šelim*), an association that the authors of the *Zohar* could not overlook. Thus, the possibilities of both strife and harmonization are present in kabbalistic cosmology, where the conflict between opposite sides is only occasionally quelled when they are revealed as two sides of the same “thing.”

Since Jacob personifies *tif’eret* and, therefore, the atmospheric reconciliation of water and fire, *hesed* and *gevurah*, his designation as “a consummate [*šelim*] man, for he dwells in two supernal dwellings, consummating this side and that” (*Zohar* 1:167b, v. 3, p. 12) is justified. While, horizontally, he completes the triad of the patriarchs, vertically, Jacob dwells with *binah* and *šekinah*, or Leah and Rachel, respectively.<sup>13</sup> The perfection, the consummate nature, and the peacefulness of Jacob, of *tif’eret*, or of the *ruah*-aspect of air are achieved at the price of their split identity, of dwelling “in two supernal dwellings” at once, of being exiled from “one side” by the act of dwelling in the other. Spirit itself, conceived as breath rhythmically moving from exhalation to inhalation and back, is this exile on the underside of spirit’s work of binding, linking up, and forging connections.

The non-self-coincidence of the intermediary spills over into a conflict that provides sufficient traction for world-creation. The spirit or the wind of God hovers over the dark abysses swept with “another wind,” *ruha ahera*, blowing from below, from the depths of the void. Subsequently, “the blessed Holy One struck wind against wind and created

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<sup>13</sup> *Zohar* 1:167a; v. 3, pp. 12–13, n86.

the world [*bataš ruḥa be-ruḥa u-vara 'alma*]" (*Zohar* 2:34b; v. 4, p. 154). The intermediary itself, split in or against itself, cannot be mediated. One airmass clashes with another, allowing the world to appear in the midst of this spiritual-elemental standoff, which parallels the cosmogonic blowing of spark against spark, or, *mutatis mutandis*, the generative separation of the lower from the upper waters. Behind the peaceful façade of mediation, the frictions and tensions of the divided middle (divided, above all, against itself) are unabating. However, rather than the dead-heat of two identities confronting one another, divisions inhering in the non-self-identical foster the process of becoming.<sup>14</sup>

The mediatory function and the middle position of air *qua ruah* holds, as well, for the soul. In the psychic order, it is the second of three layers of the "fragrant garments [*levuša*]" of days: "One garment: worn by *ruah* in the terrestrial Garden of Eden. One – most precious of all: worn by *nešamah* within the bundle of life [...]. One, an external garment: existent and non-existent, visible and invisible. This is worn by *nefeš*, and she goes roaming through the world" (*Zohar* 1:224b; v. 3, p. 351).<sup>15</sup> Between the highest and the lowest, the most ethereal and the animal kinds of soul bound with the body ("visible and invisible"), *ruah* occupies the structural position of *thumos* (spiritedness) in the psychophysiology that Plato lays out in *The Republic*. Nevertheless, the quasi-political hierarchy of the Platonic arrangement is disrupted in *Zohar*, where *ruah* is interposed, cloth-like, between the other two kinds of soul, bringing or stitching together the highest and the lowest in such a way that the latter depends on the former and the former on the latter. The layering of psychic garments is, in and of itself, indicative of the importance of their surfaces in the overall arrangement. But what, precisely, is gained (or lost) in this multilayered image of the soul?

<sup>14</sup> In this sense, Hegel's dialectics, and particularly the two *Logics*, are congruent with the dynamics of the *Zohar*.

<sup>15</sup> This view seems to be the inverse of Christian mysticism, where it is the body that is the garment of the soul. Hence, Hildegard of Bingen writes: "The body is truly the garment of the soul, which has a living voice [*corpus vero indumentum est anime, que vivam vocem habet*], and so it is proper for the body, in harmony with the soul, to use its voice to sing praises to God." Hildegard von Bingen, *Hildegardis Bingensis Epistolarium*, first part, I–XC, ed. L. Van Acker, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 91 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 64.

There is no authentic psyche, the wearer that *is* the soul “itself.” Their layering of the garments replicates the dynamics of light that enwraps itself in itself, its previous shells transformed into new kernels, or into extensions of the same kernel. But, all in all, the soul is more intimately related to breath than to light, its “fragrant” garments also made of “days,” of time, of the duration of breath lingering on. In this vein, Rabbi Bo concludes his interpretation of Numbers 15:31 – “That soul shall be surely cut off” – by saying: “Well, it is like the breath that emerges out of a person’s mouth, unable to rise even up to his eyes but immediately disappears. So, the creaturely soul [*nefeš*] is like that breath which is immediately cut off from the mouth and disappears, never seen, as though it never was” (ZH 11a; v. 10, p. 75). Rav Huna confirms: “What is this labor of vanity [*hevel*: also breath, MM]? It is the creaturely soul, which will be annihilated and cut off, like the breath that comes out of the mouth – which is vanity” (ZH 11b; v. 10, p. 78).

The soul entwined with a living body is the breath with the shortest duration possible: it drifts off and away, disappearing as soon as it emerges, now and again erasing this very emergence (“as though it never was”) in its disappearance. The thread of time, with which this layer of fragrant psychic garments is sewn, is marked by radical discontinuity, the fleetingness of an instant incapable of projection into the future, because it is disconnected from the ancient stream of the coming world. On the contrary, *nešamah* is the “divine soul [that] is in his [a person’s, MM] nostrils” (ZH 22a; v. 10, p. 246). Rather than escaping from one’s mouth, as *nefeš* does, it is enduring breath, the divine breath, dwelling in the nostrils and allowing a finite living being to participate in infinite vitality. Despite the rhythms of respiration with alternating inhalation and exhalation, this soul does not leave the body it animates, lodged as it is “in” a person’s nostrils.

Between these two durations and sources of vitality, *ruah* mediates. Comparing the body to the earth, Rabbi Abbahu sees in the act of creation “the radiance of spirit [*zohar ha-ruah*] hovering over the body to revive it, illuminating its darkness” (ZH 16a; v. 10, p. 149). Neither inhabiting a living body in the manner of *nešamah* nor getting cut off from it after the fashion of *nefeš*, *ruah* hovers over the body (including the body of the earth). From close proximity, it dispenses light and

breath, the radiance of fire and the expansiveness of air. The vagaries of the soul, the drifting of breath and its ephemeral nature, are constrained and held in check thanks to the “hovering” of the animating *ruah* over the body it cares for and persistently reanimates.

Regardless of the mediating activity of the middle psychic layer, the three garments of the soul belong to distinct spatial and temporal constellations. Breath is not gathered in itself; it is not identical to itself, tending closer to or further away from the body and its various organs (the mouth, the nose...), the earth, and the elemental manifold. In its vertical ascents or descents, moreover, it is not driven solely by the larger scheme of onto-theological reality, but, in a bottom-up determination, by human conduct.

*On the one hand*, “when actions prove worthy below, and a person contemplates the service of the Holy King, the act of righteousness [*ma’aseh ha-zedaqah*] that he performs turns into a breath [*hevel*] above. And there is no breath without voice – rising, crowned above, becoming an advocate before the blessed Holy One” (*Zohar* 2:59a; v. 4, p. 314). Breath travels, traversing long distances (not only of the physical variety) and metamorphosing from an act into a higher breath and then into a “crowned voice.” And since Qohelet bemoans the vanity/breath (*hevel*) that flutters “under the sun,” this reading situates the crowned breath “above the sun” – “the act of righteousness is different, for it is above the sun” (*Zohar* 2:59a; v. 4, p. 314), which is, incidentally, the *sefirah tif’eret* – in a tacit reference to Plato’s “good beyond being,” itself analogous to the sun. Becoming “a holy breath,” it is “a seed sown by a person in that [other] world” (*Zohar* 2:59a; v. 4, p. 315).

*On the other hand*, the errancy of breath is the upshot of futile endeavors, marrying the two senses of *hevel*: breath and futility. This breath “goes drifting through the world [*ve-azla ve-šatat be-’alma*]. And when the person’s soul departs, that breath whirls it through the world [*hevel’ megalgla leyh*] like a stone in the sling” (*Zohar* 2:59a; v. 4, p. 315). An exilic breath drifts and whirls through the world without acquiring a body, a voice, a place of its own, or the promise of a future seminal potency or potentiality. It frustrates the mediations of spirit, spirit *as* mediation, the middling breath that acts as a buffer zone between creaturely and divine vitalities. Such a breath, which is nothing other than

breath and that does not translate itself into an act, into a voice, and ultimately into the good, “is the breaking of spirit [*re’ut ruah*], for it breaks the spirit, rising and falling in the world” (*Zohar* 2:59a; v. 4, p. 315). It leaves no chance for the mediatory, remedial, mending work of spirit, nor does it care about its disunion from the body, roaming the earth as a specter.

The *Zohar* thus presents its readers with two versions of the exile of air, if not of the exile that is air. First is the non-identity and fecund divergence of air or breath from itself, its splitting into three fragrant garments, and its transformations into something *other* – voice, seed, an angelic advocate... Second is the perpetually itinerant air or breath, roving aimlessly, reduced to the purity of its identity and cut off from the mouth that exhaled it. In traditional theodicy, the successive historic exiles of the Jewish people were seen as the second kind of exile, which, more than a divine punishment, rendered visible a dearth of righteous acts, the dearth of which was a logical expression or consequence. Could it be that the overall negative experience of exile surreptitiously and incrementally nourished the first, fecund, interpretation? And what happens when this new interpretation touches upon the elements, air above all? Is our exile from the atmosphere and even from the breath that fills our lungs with suffocating smog a case of alienation from the ubiquitous element that envelops and indwells us? Does it not boast a more affirmative dimension?

“Airing” our exegesis of the kabbalistic approach to air a little, let’s contemplate for a moment the simple exile of air from itself in the case of the earth’s atmosphere. Vegetal and animal respirations are the inverse of one another: plants exhale O<sub>2</sub>, while animals exhale CO<sub>2</sub>. Due to these divergent effects of the living, joining the mix of other gases such as ozone, methane, or nitrous oxide, the atmosphere is *constituted* by the exile of air. To the extent that pneumatic exile is propitious to the fragile conditions of possibility for life, it is not utter errancy; rather, it transpires within certain limits. The aggravation of animal respiration by the techno-body of industrial humanity annuls these limits. Emanating from the masses of long-dead plants and animals that have been incinerated for the sake of momentary energy release, a lethal breath shorn of a body, a voice, or a place of its own whirls through the world.

This second exile of air testifies to the breaking of spirit, the untying of delicate bonds conducive to life. Deep strata of the earth thrown into the atmosphere erase the mediations that are at the core of spirit and confound what is above and what is below, leading to an immediate collapse of the elemental whole.

To return to *Zohar*, when a secret (i.e., mystical) word of wisdom ascends, it finally presents itself before the Ancient of Days. “At that moment, the Ancient of Days inhales the aroma of that word and it pleases him more than anything” (*Zohar* 1:4b; v. 1, p. 26). It is worth noting that the Hebrew *reyah*, smell or aroma, is derived from the same root as spirit, *ruah*.<sup>16</sup> It is the spirit of the word in its airy materiality that ascends and that emits a fragrance. The passage further intimates that the divine sensorium is replete with an olfactory sense, capable of discerning and taking pleasure in the fragrance of the word. Shortly, we will examine the details and structure of the nose of God as it is depicted in *Zohar* in order to appreciate the kabbalistic take on air and breath. But prior to that, it is necessary to note how the inhaling of aroma by the Ancient of Days is not the end of its atmospheric journey: afterwards, the mystical word of wisdom “flies, ascending and descending, and is transformed into a sky. So, each and every word of wisdom is transformed into new skies, the innovated skies [*šamayim ḥadašim*, *šamayim meḥudašim*],” and “all other [non-mystical] innovated words of Torah...stand before the blessed Holy One, then ascend and are transformed into ‘earths of the living [*arẓot ha-ḥayyim*]’ (Psalms 116:9)” (*Zohar* 1:4b-5a; v. 1, p. 26).<sup>17</sup>

There are, then, multiple skies and earths, airy expanses and substantial supports, countless worlds created by words after the initial creation of the world. Rather than merely traversing the atmosphere, or journeying from the physical to a metaphysical dimension of existence,

<sup>16</sup> In addition to this etymology, the overpowering smell of aromatic herbs heated by the summer sun in the French Occitan and in Southern Spain, where the *Zohar* was compiled, must have had a strong impact on this olfactory conception of spirit.

<sup>17</sup> Compare this to the *Zohar* 1:33b (v. 1, p. 207): “By the word of YHVH the heavens were made – the heavens below, fashioned by the word of the heavens above through a breath generating a voice reaching that river flowing forth, whose waters never cease. By the breath of his mouth all their host – all those below endure by the breath, namely, the word.”

the mystical word of wisdom *becomes* a new atmosphere for reading, acting, thinking, and being, as indispensable as the air one breathes. It contributes to the ramifying growth of *tif'eret*. Conventional interpretations of the Torah, situated lower on the *sefirotic* tree, form new substrata for existence, “earths of the living,” corresponding to the territories of *šekīnah*. Taken together, the air/skies and the earths formed by words of exegesis indicate that creation is not a one-time event and that it does not depend on the *incipit* of the demiurge alone. The creation of worlds in speech, through and by means of words, requires breath, which is then coupled with voice, but the breath itself births more air – indeed an entire new sky. This creation also entails a body, the density of the underlying with its organs of articulation, an earthy heaviness that nevertheless also rises as words that “ascend and are transformed into ‘earths of the living’.” The proliferation of worlds is, therefore, both elemental and logological; whether old or new, a world is the elemental mutation of a word.

Within the divine sensorium, the nose that picks up the aroma of mystical words of wisdom is described in *Zohar*’s “Idra Zuta,” “The Small Assembly” that purports to record the teachings Rabbi Šim’on gave on his deathbed. The nose, situated above the revealed *sefirot*, belongs to the face of the concealed God triangulated through *keter*, *hokmah*, and *binah*. “The nose. In this nose, through the nostril of an armoire within [*be-nuqba de-fardašqa*], blows the breath of life [*ruḥa de-hayyey*] to *Zē’ir Anpin* [the revealed *sefirot*, MM]. And in this nose, in the nostril of an armoire, is suspended ם (*hē*), sustaining another *hē* below. This breath issues from the concealed brain and is called ‘breath of life.’ [...] This nose is life on all sides – complete joy, tranquility, health” (*Zohar* 3:289a; v. 9, p. 782).<sup>18</sup>

The divine nose exhales the breath of life, which is, in turn, inhaled by and kept in the nostrils of all finite creatures for the duration of their existence and flows incessantly through the *sefirotic* network. The inver-

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<sup>18</sup> The highest and lowest mirror each other, even when it comes to this suspension of everything in the medium of breath or air. While the *sefirotic* tree from *binah* to *šekīnah* is suspended in the nose of the concealed divine face, the stones of the primordial void (*bohu*) are “suspended in the air [*avira*] – sometimes suspended in the air, sometimes concealed on a cloudy day, generating water from the abyss to nourish *tohu*” (*Zohar* 1:16a; v. 1, p. 120).



sion of exhaling and inhaling between the nose of the concealed God, on the one hand, and the revealed divinity and creaturely life, on the other, is akin to the relation between vegetal and animal breath, the former animating the latter. In addition, the breath of life is not channeled from the lungs, but from the “concealed brain” – *keter* – and it passes through the divine nostril, compared to an armoire (*fardašqa* as a variation on the rabbinic term *pardisqin*, which is, for its part, a corruption of the Greek *purgiskos*, “cupboard” or “cabinet”<sup>19</sup>). The nostril is both a chamber and a passage, the place where the encounter between God’s olfaction and words of wisdom takes place. It marks a porous boundary between the inner and the outer, the concealed and the revealed, whence life is dispensed. It is a dwelling for the two dwellings, the two figures of divine ecology, *binah* and *šekinah*, the *hē* above and the *hē* below suspended in the nostril. Since this sublime armoire contains the place-giving emanations of God, can we safely conclude that what eternally occurs here, in the holy of holies of esoteric wisdom presumably related by Rabbi Šim’on just before his death, is the ultimate totalization and unification of all that is?

As a matter of fact, as the mystical account unfolds further, it becomes evident that the divine nose and divine nostril are not identical. Of nostrils, there are two, as Rabbi Šim’on casually remarks. The remark itself is prefaced by a cryptic, *prima facie* unrelated reflection of *rešit*, the beginning: “*Alef* on its own is called *rišon*, first [...]. In *alef* is concealed and hidden what is not known. When this *alef* is joined to another place, it is called *rešit*, beginning. If you say that it is joined – no; rather, it is revealed in it, illuminating it” (*Zohar* 3:294a; v. 9, p. 823). The beginning is not the first, because it is preceded by the genuine but utterly unknowable first, *alef* illuminating the beginning without, itself, appearing. And Rabbi Šim’on leaves implicit another splitting of the beginning, namely the commencement of the text of *Berešit* not with *alef* but with *bet*, which corresponds to the number 2. The beginning is not just multiple and variously preceded, but also doubled or redoubled.

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<sup>19</sup> *Zohar* 3:289a; v. 9, p. 782, n46.

The same is true for the two nostrils and two noses of God: “The nose of *Zē’ir Anpin*,” Rabbi Šim’on observes in an argumentative leap from a lengthy reflection on the beginning, “ – enhancement of the countenance; the whole face is thereby recognized. This nose is unlike the nose of the Holy Ancient One, concealed of all concealed; for the nose of the Ancient One is life of life for all [*ḥayyim de-ḥayyim le-ḳola*] – from its two nostrils, breath of life for all [*ruḥin de-ḥayyin le-ḳola*] and life for all [*ḥayyin le-ḳola*]” (*Zohar* 3:294a; v. 9, p. 823). “The life of life for all,” *ḥayyim de-ḥayyim le-ḳola*, presents itself as a term of gathering and totalization, of a meta-vitality that animates everything and everyone said to be alive. Even in the expression itself, however, life is redoubled (not to mention the irreducibly plural form of the word for life, *ḥayyim* or *ḥayyin*, in Hebrew and Aramaic). The reference to the two divine nostrils distributes this life of life between the “breath of life for all” and “life for all,” between spirit taken in its airy, pneumatic or pneumatological sense and the actual, including past and future, vitality of the ensemble of the living. On the same level of divine countenance, the two nostrils accommodate the inspiring and the inspired, the source (which will have always been preceded, if only by itself in its unrevealed aspect) and the destination, the animating and the animated. This doubling retrospectively clarifies the assertion “[t]his nose is life on all sides – complete joy, tranquility, health”: “life on all sides” is not the absolute where all the sides amount to one no-side, but a many-sided physiological-spiritual process of respiration.

Besides the two nostrils of the same divine nose, there are two noses: one pertaining to the concealed God; the other, to the revealed. “The nose of the Holy Ancient One is *arik*, long and extended, so he is called *erek apayim*, long-nosed, long-suffering. This nose, however, is *zē’ir*, short; and when smoke begins, it comes out hurriedly and judgment is executed” (*Zohar* 3:294a; v. 9, p. 824). The short-tempered, fiery nose of the revealed God is quick to pass judgment, and it is appeased by the “soothing aroma,” *reyah ha-niḥoah*, of burnt offerings (*Zohar* 3:294a; v. 9, p. 823).<sup>20</sup> The medium of the revealed divine olfaction is fire; that

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<sup>20</sup> See also *Zohar* 3:289a; v. 9, pp. 782–783: “[J]udgment depends upon the nose; and it is written *Smoke rose from his nostrils* [...] The root of wrath depends upon the nose.”

of the concealed God is air. Other interpreters (notably, Rav Hamnuna Sava) attribute this difference to the two nostrils of the same divine nose: “From one [nostril], smoke and fire; from the other, tranquility and beneficent breath – for it includes right and left” (*Zohar* 3:294a; v. 9, p. 825). Be this as it may, the two noses or nostrils – that is to say, the vertical or the horizontal doubling of olfactory organs – correspond, roughly, to the animal and vegetal breaths, whether with regard to the involvement or noninvolvement of combustion or with regard to the distinction between anger and tranquility.

The physical and the metaphysical realities are, then, brought together in the nexus of the aroma and spirit (*reyah* and *ruah*), and the aromas run the gamut from volatile biochemical substances to acts. Upon descending from the ark, Noah made a burnt offering of thanks to God. The pleasing or soothing aroma, *reyah ha-nihoaḥ*, discussed by Rabbi Šim'on invokes this very smell of the first sacrifice after the Flood in Genesis 8:21 and, furthermore, includes Noah's name in the description of the aroma as pleasing or soothing, *nihoaḥ*. Rabbi Yehudah notes in “Midraš Ha-Ne'lam”: “Three aromas ascended before him [before God, MM]: the aroma of the offering, the aroma of his prayer, and the aroma of his deeds. No aroma in the world was as pleasing to God as that aroma” (ZH 22d; v. 10, p. 255). The smells that present themselves before the divine sensorium are 1) sensations, 2) words (of prayer), and 3) deeds. Words are the hinges, mediating between the sensory and the active dimensions of the aromatic offering; the right actions articulate the material and the spiritual aspects of air: *reyah* and *ruah*. Reaching the left nostril or the nose of God's lower countenance attuned to smoke and burning, the three aromas reaffirm the middling and mediatory activity of spirit. And, in spite of this, they preserve the non-identity of air, to the extent that their mediations take place under the aegis of the revealed God alone.

The non-identity of air is not only spatial but also temporal. As we have seen, at the creation of the world, light (אור, *or*) is what remains of auratic air (אוויר, *avir*).<sup>21</sup> Light is deficient air, air that has undergone

<sup>21</sup> The light gathered in “the primordial point” “is concealed mystery, an expansion expanding, bursting from the mysterious secret of the hidden supernal aura [or “air,” אוויר (*avir*) MM].

the subtraction of something essential, something that, signified with the letter ם (*yod*), refers to divine wisdom (*hokmah*) or, further still, to the dark spark of *buzina d'qardinuta*. So, light is the remains of air, but air, too, is the remains of air, for, just as primordial light was reserved and hidden from the world, so was primordial air: "That father is spirit treasured away in the Ancient of Days. In him was concealed this air, absorbing the spark that issued from the lamp of adamantine darkness" (*Zohar* 3:292b; v. 9, p. 810). Like everything else, air is subdivided into the concealed and the revealed; the Ancient of Days, *keter* or *ein-sof*, becomes a capsule of sorts for air that is "treasured away," even as the air that remains animates existence and interconnects the world. That the pneumatic foundations – the pillars of the world – are not purely originary follows, therefore, both from their intermediary nature as relational ties and from their being remnants of the concealed spirit. In this way, air makes its contribution to the kabbalistic ecology of remnants.

Not just formally but actively as well, the movements of air occupy themselves (indeed, are stubbornly preoccupied) with refuse. Concerning Genesis 1:2b – "And a wind of God [*ve-ruah Elohim*] hovering over the face of the waters" – it is said that "once this wind blew, one fine film clarified from that refuse, like filthy froth flying off, clarified, refined again and again, till that filth is left [*ad de-ištaer*] lacking any filth at all" (*Zohar* 1:16a; v. 1, p. 119). The wind hovering over the face of the waters precipitates a series of elemental discernments within the waters themselves, clarifying, refining, and separating refuse from non-refuse. Whatever remains of each of these operations still includes refuse, all the way down to the final refinement "till that filth is left lacking any filth at all." The goal of the successive purifications eventually yielding the matter and form appropriate to creation is not the ideal of

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[...] After the primordial point, ם (*yod*), emerged from it into being it manifested upon it, touching yet not touching. Expanding, it emerged; this is אור (*or*), light, remaining [*d'ištaer*] from אויר (*avir*, air, or aura), the light that already was. This endured, emerged, ascended, was treasured away..." (*Zohar* 1:16b; v. 1, pp. 123-4). In the Lurianic doctrine, the world-creating contraction of the infinite (*tsimtsum*) results "in the creation of 'vessels' (*kelim*) in which the divine essence that remained in primordial space is precipitated out: at first this takes place still hylally, in the vessel called 'primordial air' (*avir kadmon*), but subsequently it assumes a clearer form in the vessel called 'primordial man' (*Adam Kadmon*)."<sup>1</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 130. It is thus reasonable to assume that the *avira* of the *Zohar* corresponds to the Lurianic *avir qadmon*.

purity but “filth without filth,” the minimal version of the remains. Nor is it the case that *ruah* plays a wholly active role in the purification of water; their elemental engagement is mutual. As the water was purified, the “wind clarified [*ivrir ruah*], and embraced in its mystery was the sound of sheer silence” (*Zohar* 1:16a; v. 1, p. 119). Hand in hand with the water’s transformation into filth without filth, the air is transmuted into voice without voice; *ruah* is rid of the voice but not of sound, retaining “the sound of sheer silence” – or that of breath.<sup>22</sup>

The tensions between identity and non-identity (of air, among other things) are concentrated in the variously sealed or burst open enigma of *keter* / *ein-sof*. The infinity that lends this *sefirah* one of its names (*ein-sof*) is where, having ascended to it, “all becomes one” (*Zohar* 1:16b; v. 1, p. 124). Moving in the other direction, with the creation of light as a leftover of the aura or air, “*ein-sof* burst out of its aura [*baqa’ me-avira*], revealing this point ’ (*yod*)” (*Zohar* 1:16b; v. 1, p. 124). The dehiscence of *ein-sof* prompts the watery, fiery, or airy flux of emanations to spill over and travel to the rest of the *sefirot*. This is the moment of a cosmic breath that commences its respiratory rhythms, exhaling for the first time at the edge of the knowable, the representable, the conceivable. *Nota bene*: the *Zohar* does not insist on the initial unity of *ein-sof*; rather, it is only by ascending to it that “all becomes one.” The opposite vector of descent begins with two: the tearing, cleaving, breaking open or breaking through (*baqa’*) of the aura, the parting of air, its dehiscence. The unity of the point ’ (*yod*) that concretizes in the transition from *ein-sof* to *hokmah* is disclosed within this cleft, against the backdrop of the two (or more) into which the first *sefirah* has burst. The identity of breath is reconstructed, ever so partially, in the upward journey of the elements. In their downward rush, non-identity reigns supreme.

Since the aura (*avira*) always presents itself as already cleaved, light and air are the remnants of a non-existent unity, of nothing in fact, seeing that the ten *sefirot* are of nothing: *ein*, the prefix of *ein-sof*, of

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<sup>22</sup> This point (namely, that within the nascent ecology of the remnants or leftovers *ruah* is voice without voice) is confirmed by what follows the already cited passage: “*Ruah*, wind, is a voice hovering over *bohu*, empowering and conducting it with whatever is needed” (*Zohar* 1:16a; v. 1, p. 120). Plus, as Rabbi El’azar notes: “A silent voice is the sublime voice, from which all voices issue” (*Zohar* 1:210a; v. 3, p. 289).

the in-finite. Everything and everyone that and who remains in post-auratic reality commemorates the nothing in the wake of which they have emerged and endured – for a while. Identity and non-identity form only one facet of the inherently contradictory nature of air, at once volatile and enduring, suspended and grounding, divisible and indivisible, interlacing and initiating.

The very place of air is indeterminate when examined from the kabbalistic perspective. Whereas, according to its innermost dynamics, breath tends upward, this tendency is tempered by the pronouncement that “whether on this side or that, the breath that we have mentioned is actualized and empowered on earth [*hevel’ na’asah ve-ittaqaf ‘al ha-arez]*” (*Zohar* 2:10b; v. 4, p. 46). Breath, as the instantiation of spirit traceable all the way up to *ein-sof*, becomes truly effective solely here-below, in the realm of *šekinah* and everything extending down from it. This is the breath that animates and ensouls – that, having delivered itself from the infinite to the finite, is entwined with the body. Only in this finitude does it gain power and actuality. The cleft, from which it was exhaled, is reiterated, realized each time anew but with indelible differences, in every event of ensoulment, in a living and livable world. The upward striving of unencumbered breath is moderated by its realization here-below.

The indeterminacy of place is further exacerbated by the shifting directionalities of wind, the environmental hypostasis of *ruah*, which is not exempt from the principles of the motility of atmospheric air-masses. Wind can blow from four different directions, themselves tacitly associated with distinct *sefirot*. “When the east wind rouses to flow into the world, whoever is walking on the way and attunes his spirit to this matter – at that hour, all the blessings with which he is blessed are fulfilled” (*ZH* 13b; v. 10, p. 106). Accompanied by the angel Michael, the wind rousing from the east derives from the upper *sefirot*, in light of the fact that the entire *sefirotic* tree extends from *ein-sof* in the east to *šekinah* in the west. The airborne flow of blessings is another name for the flux of *mazzala*, although here it is endowed with an unrestrictedly positive meaning. This is the “proper,” or the properly metaphysical, vector of spirit, but it is counterbalanced by three other vectors that question the unidirectional causality prevalent in metaphysical systems.

It is also limited in time: a morning wind, it prevails at the beginning of the day, which variously refers to a millennium or to the entire limited duration of the world's existence. The spatial indeterminacy of air is riveted to time determinations, its *whence* indissociable from its *when*.

The wind blowing from the west emanates from *šekīnah*. "The west wind blows from the middle of the day until the night, and with it 465 breezes flow forth from the fountain treasury – causing plants, trees, and crops to thrive. It has been taught: an angel is empowered from the middle of the day until the night – named Raphael; he is appointed over the west" (ZH 13b; v. 10, p. 107). The west wind, emanating from *šekīnah*, which is also the earth, is fecund: it stimulates plant growth. Its fecundity sends a plethora of blessings back up in the shape of "plants, trees, and crops," and has a curative effect, hinted at by the name of the angel in charge of this wind, Raphael, or "God heals."<sup>23</sup> The spirit of healing is, therefore, vegetal; flying in the face of the *sefirotic* flow, it is exuded by the earth, precisely as *the spirit of the earth*.

In turn, "the south wind blows from the beginning of the night until midnight, and with it 275 breezes flow forth from that beloved treasury, invigorating the earth and warming the cold. An angel is empowered over it – named Uriel; he is appointed over the south, in that wind" (ZH 13b; v. 10, p. 108). In serifotic cartography, the south corresponds to *hesed*, with the warmth of compassionate love responsible for the unfreezing of the sea of *šekīnah* and moderating the excessive rigor of judgment (also occasionally concentrated in *šekīnah* and most relevant to *gevurah*). Here, the kabbalistic interpretation clashes with the Talmudic reading of the south wind as harsh: "And the south wind is harsher than all of them [*ve-ruah dromit qaša mi-kulan*], and were it not for the angel called Ben Netz, who stops it from blowing even harder, it would have destroyed the entire world" (BT *Gittin* 31b). Aware of this incongruity, the authors of the *Zohar* attempt to reconcile two significations of this wind (no doubt, affected by their own embeddedness in the climates of Southern France and Spain), when they relate that, when it is blowing, "the wicked are judged in the fire of hell" (ZH

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<sup>23</sup> The allusion is explicitly spelled out further down in the same passage, with the invocation of "the angel empowered over healing acts" (ZH 13b; v. 10, p. 107).

13b; v. 10, p. 108). But, while the addition accords with the Talmudic text, it refutes the derivation of the south wind from *hesed*. Speaking in the elemental terms of fire, the apparent contradiction is, nevertheless, resolved once it is stated that the warmth invigorating the earth may also scorch it – that having been just right, the heat may grow excessive. Far from the global spread of compassionate love, global warming is the “harshest” in the 21st century, and it is life-giving if it follows on the heels of an Ice Age.

The north wind, emitted by *gevurah*, “blows at midnight and the blessed Holy One enters, all the spices and all the trees in the Garden of Eden emit their fragrance – singing in his presence” (ZH 13b; v. 10, p. 109).<sup>24</sup> Returning to the nexus of *ruah* and *reyah*, of spirit and aroma, and succeeding all the other winds, the north wind carries a bouquet of their curative, growth-promoting, and warmth-giving properties. Such a gathering of the four winds (or at least of their effects) is temporary; it will dissolve at the break of the following day. The fragrance of “all the spice and all the trees” that it calls forth is the ascent of *ruah* as *reyah* in the form of a song – a voiceless, silent song, mediated by airborne biochemical plant substances. In addition to being tasked with passing severe judgment, *gevurah* is the *sefirah* of separation, distinction, and discernment, which is why it promotes the fine discernments of the melodic language of plants. Reminiscent of the voice without voice of *ruah* itself, this language similarly comprises “the sound[s] of sheer silence,” albeit a silence that sings, aromatically. On the precipice of undergoing future displacements, the place of spirit is provisionally determined from the north as a green song, sung mystically and silently in the dark, at midnight.

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<sup>24</sup> A peaceful vision of the north wind stands in sharp contrast to Ezekiel’s vision, which is fundamental to the *merkavah* mysticism: “I looked and saw a windstorm coming out of the north – an immense cloud with flashing lightening and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal” (*Ezekiel* 1:4; *Torah, Nevi’im, K’tuvim* (Jerusalem: Hotza’at Koren, 1994)). Likewise, it radically diverges from a prior statement in the *Zohar*: “When the north wind [*ruah zafon*: *ruah* also means “spirit,” MM] blows, waters congeal – no longer flowing out, no one watered – since judgment impends and the cold of the north freezes water. When the south wind [*ruah darom*] arouses, waters warm – their ice melting away – so they flow. Then all are watered [*itšaqyan kola*]” (*Zohar* 1:161b; v. 2, pp. 402-3).



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FROM RESPIRATION TO  
*FLESHPIRATION*:  
A MERLEAU-PONTIAN  
JOURNEY INTO RESPIRATORY  
PHILOSOPHY AND  
RESPIRATORY RELIGION  
WITH JESUS, ST. PAUL,  
CLAUDEL, AND  
MERLEAU-PONTY

P e t r i   B e r n d t s o n

Introduction: What Does One Wish to Say  
when Speaking of God?

In this article, I will introduce a new word, a neologism. The discovery of this neologism takes place in dialogue with Jesus, Saint Paul, Paul Claudel and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This new word or new name is “*fleshpiration*.” It is a word in which I intertwine in a paradoxical manner, for example, what St. Paul calls *life according to the flesh* and *life according to the Spirit*. The text will invite the reader into a wondrous adventure from life according to the spirit to respiration and from respiration to *fleshpiration*. The most important figure in this dialogue is Merleau-Ponty as the methodological context that this dialogue takes place in is primarily inspired by him.

In this article, I will weave the tissue of *fleshpiration* using the following six key text excerpts from Jesus, St. Paul, Claudel and Merleau-Ponty.

1. "God is Spirit and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).<sup>1</sup>
2. "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (*Romans* 8:5).
3. "[...] we live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).
4. "[...] the spirit is respiration"<sup>2</sup> (Paul Claudel, *Commentaires et exégèses*).
5. "Being [...] is the flesh"<sup>3</sup> (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*).
6. "What is called 'inspiration' should be taken literally: there is really and truly inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being"<sup>4</sup> (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Spirit").

My philosophical exploration of these excerpts will take place in dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy. In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy "God," "spirit," "flesh," "respiration," and "Being" are all themes that appear and intertwine with each other. As the notion of God plays such a crucial role in my article, I want to immediately address the methodologico-interpretative attitude of how I will approach the question of God. I take my main inspiration from Merleau-Ponty, who speaks of how to encounter, as a philosopher, the question of God and the relations between the human and God.

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<sup>1</sup> The biblical references throughout this article are from *Holy Bible: New International Version* (NIV) (Palmer Lake: Biblica, 2011). If I have made alterations to the translation of NIV, I have always done them in dialogue with *The Greek New Testament: Produced at Tyndale House Cambridge* (THGNT) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Claudel, *Commentaires et exégèses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 72.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 270.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'Esprit* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1964), 31–32. In French, this quotation runs as follows: "*Ce qu'on appelle inspiration devrait être pris à la lettre: il y a vraiment inspiration et expiration de l'Être, respiration dans l'Être.*" See also the English translation: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, eds. and trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 358. See my detailed interpretation of this respiratory phrase in Petri Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Respiratory Primacy of Being* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), 76–98.

[T]he question for a philosopher is not so much to know *if* God exists or does not exist, if the proposition *God exists* is correct or incorrect, as to know what one understands by God, what one wishes to say in speaking of God.<sup>5</sup>

Following Merleau-Ponty's guidance, my task is not to argue for or against the existence of God. Instead of this kind of argumentative attitude, my task is to try "to know what [Jesus, St. Paul, Paul Claudel and Maurice Merleau-Ponty himself] understand by God" and "what [they] wish to say in speaking of God." My reading of these thinkers is radically different compared with what we are used to within Christian culture, academic scholarship or even within contemporary philosophy, which, notwithstanding, has shown new interest as of late, for example, in St. Paul outside of theological contexts.

To better understand what Merleau-Ponty means with his philosophical interrogation of God, it is helpful to listen to the following brief conference<sup>6</sup> exchange between Ernst von Schenck, the Chair of the session Jeanne Hersch, and Merleau-Ponty.

*Von Schenck*: Is it possible to deal with the problems within a philosophy without bringing in the term "God"?

*Merleau-Ponty*: If there is a philosophy, it would be just that.

*Chair (Jeanne Hersch)*: Then it is possible to do it with others without bringing in the term "God." Is it possible to discuss other problems with other men, believers or not?

*Merleau-Ponty*: For me, philosophy consists in giving another name to what has long been crystallised under the name of God.<sup>7</sup>

Only if the philosopher understands what the author or speaker means by God, is the philosopher able to try to give "another name to what has long been crystallised under the name of God." In his magnum opus *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty defines the philosopher as "a perpetual beginner," which means that "he accepts

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<sup>5</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Texts and Dialogues: On Philosophy, Politics, and Culture*, eds. Hugh J. Silverman and James Barry (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1992), 66.

<sup>6</sup> The conference where this exchange took place was "Knowledge of Man in the Twentieth Century," Rencontres Internationales of Geneva, September 8–14, 1951.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, eds. and trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 239–240.

nothing as established from what men or scientists believe they know.”<sup>8</sup> “Philosophy is bored with [these] established”<sup>9</sup> views about the world. In the case of interpreting the meaning of God and religion, the various ready-made interpretative traditions, for example, theistic (Catholic, Protestant, etc.), atheistic and academic ways of thinking are all part of what Merleau-Ponty, as a perpetual beginner, chooses not to accept because none of these traditions begin from the beginning and all of them narrow the philosopher’s free vision. Merleau-Ponty would agree with Edmund Husserl: “A true beginning, [is] achieved by means of a radical liberation from all scientific and prescientific traditions.”<sup>10</sup>

The philosopher’s way of being as a perpetual beginner is Socratic: “he knows that he knows nothing.”<sup>11</sup> The Socratic art of philosophy is the philosophical attitude of “not-knowing,”<sup>12</sup> that is, the lived experience of “wonder before the world.”<sup>13</sup> This also means, according to Merleau-Ponty, that “philosophy is an ever-renewed experience/experiment of its own beginning” and “that it consists entirely in describing this beginning.”<sup>14</sup> From a religious perspective, the beginning has been God and Merleau-Ponty’s words “philosophy consists in giving another name to what has long been crystallised under the name of God” need to be understood in this sense. It means that philosophy as a perpetual return to the beginning is constantly seeking new names with which to describe this beginning. The beginning for the beginner is a perpetual return to this experience of wonder before the world. The world as a perceptual world is, for Merleau-Ponty, the beginning, that is, “the foundation that is always presupposed by all rationality, all value and

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<sup>8</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), lxxviii.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la philosophie et autres essais* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1953 and 1960), 59.

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 199.

<sup>11</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. John Wild and James Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la philosophie*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxvii.

<sup>14</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxviii.

all existence.”<sup>15</sup> This means that all phenomena have their beginning or foundation within the experience of the “perceived world.” In relation to the theme of this article, the following question quite naturally arises: how would the phenomenon of God, religion and all forms of religious ways of life and values have their beginning or foundation within the experience of the perceived world?

When Merleau-Ponty says that “philosophy consists in giving another name to what has long been crystallised under the name of God,” he means, in my interpretation, that we could find the meaning of God within our experience of the perceptual world. He does not want to destroy God or religion; he “only tries to bring [these notions] down to earth,”<sup>16</sup> that is, to the level of our lived human experience. This means that “religion [is] returned to its sources and to its truth,”<sup>17</sup> to its beginning in which it is “not separated from experience.”<sup>18</sup> The experiential sources and truth of religion are to be found in “the concrete relationships of men with each other and with nature.”<sup>19</sup> The philosopher, as a perpetual beginner who explores the questions of God and religion, wishes to return continuously to wonder at the experiential beginnings and sources of religious life. In his text “Faith and Good Faith,” Merleau-Ponty gives perhaps one possible example of what could it mean if religion is brought “down to earth” in this experiential manner.

The meaning of the Pentecost is that the religion of both the Father and the Son are to be fulfilled in the religion of the Spirit, that God is no longer in Heaven but in human society and communication, wherever men come together in His name. Christ’s stay on earth was only the beginning of his presence in the world [*le commencement de sa présence dans le monde*], which is continued by the Church.<sup>20</sup>

If Merleau-Ponty, as a perpetual beginner, is seeking to give another name to what has been traditionally named as God, then in this quota-

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<sup>15</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 90.

<sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 90.

<sup>17</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 127.

<sup>18</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 103.

<sup>19</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 127.

<sup>20</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 177.

tion, he is not yet sufficiently radical as he still speaks here within the context of religion and God. What could this task of “giving another name” mean? I suggest that we can begin to understand what this could mean in relation to St. Augustine. In his text “True Religion,” St. Augustine says that the true religion means “directing ourselves with their [i.e., the holy angels’] help towards the one God, and [...] binding (*re-ligantes*) ourselves tightly to him alone (which is what religion is said to get its name from).”<sup>21</sup> Where does the word “religion,” according to St. Augustine, “*get its name from*”? The word “religion,” that is, the Latin *religio*, gets its name from the verb *religare*, which means “to re-bind tight or re-fasten.” With this etymology, St. Augustine writes: “So let our religion, then, bind us tight to the one almighty God [*religet ergo nos religio uni omnipotenti Deo*].”<sup>22</sup>

Merleau-Ponty returns to the same source as St. Augustine, that is, to the source where religion “gets its name from,” but he gives it “another name,” that is, a name that is not in any explicit way part of some traditional ready-made religious or theological vocabulary. For Merleau-Ponty, in relation to these words of St. Augustine, the fundamental question would be “what [St. Augustine] wishes to say in speaking of God” and of religion. In my interpretation, the answer would be the experience of “binding ourselves tightly” to something immensely larger than us, to something that we essentially belong to. “[P]hilosophy consists in giving another name” to St. Augustine’s words. For Merleau-Ponty, it is not, in the first place, fundamentally religion that is concerned with the question of binding, but philosophy itself. Merleau-Ponty *names* this question of “binding” as the *fundamental theme* of philosophy. Merleau-Ponty, for example, says that the fundamental “theme [of philosophy is] the umbilical bond that binds it always to Being”<sup>23</sup> or that “[t]here is a unique theme of philosophy, the *nexus* [bond/link], the *vinculum* [the connecting band of tissue] ‘Nature’–

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<sup>21</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: On Christian Belief*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City Press, 2005), 103 and 17.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 107.



Man'–'God.'"<sup>24</sup> This is to say, in other words, that "[p]hilosophy is already there in a recognition of [...] '*omou en panta*' [all things are together] [...]. It is this philosophy of the interconnection of everything that we attempt to create."<sup>25</sup>

When I said earlier that, according to Merleau-Ponty, the beginning or the source for the philosopher as a perpetual beginner is the experience of the perceptual world, it is important to understand that it is this "umbilical [perceptual] bond that binds" all things together and that creates the "interconnection of everything." Of this binding, Merleau-Ponty writes: the philosopher "must seek in the world itself the secret of our perceptual bond with it."<sup>26</sup> Merleau-Ponty calls our binding to the world "the mystery of the world."<sup>27</sup> "[T]o philosophise is to seek,"<sup>28</sup> that is, to be in a perpetual state of not-knowing or wonder before this "secret" perceptual "umbilical bond that binds" us with Being. In his late phenomenological ontology, Merleau-Ponty names this secret or mysterious binding as the fundamental theme of philosophy most famously with the name of "flesh" as a "tissue"<sup>29</sup> or "connective tissue"<sup>30</sup> that makes it possible that "*omou en panta*" (all things are together). In relation to "flesh," as the new name, Merleau-Ponty says: "What we are calling flesh [...] has no name in any philosophy."<sup>31</sup>

In the following exploration, I will show how this fundamental theme of philosophy as the binding or interconnectedness of everything, that is, as the mystery of the flesh, is intertwined with the fundamental phenomenon of respiration and renamed with my neologism "*fleshpiration*." I will also show how we enter into the atmosphere of

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<sup>24</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, trans. Robert Valier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 204.

<sup>25</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Possibility of Philosophy: Course Notes from the Collège de France, 1959–1961*, trans. Keith Whitmoyer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2022), 37–38.

<sup>26</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxxv.

<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy*, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 132.

<sup>30</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 130n1.

<sup>31</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 147 and 139.

*fleshpiration* through a respiratory interpretation of Jesus's, St. Paul's, Claudel's and Merleau-Ponty's concepts of God.

### The Respiratory Journey's Interpretative Starting Point: Claudel's "Spirit is Respiration"

My interpretative starting point in my journey toward the discovery of the new name of *fleshpiration* is Claudel's idea that "the spirit is respiration."<sup>32</sup> If one takes this idea that "the spirit is respiration" seriously, it radically transforms how one reads and interprets the *Bible*. The interpretative atmosphere of "the spirit is respiration" is "a mutation"<sup>33</sup> of the Judeo-Christian culture as it can lead us, in my opinion, to a new "culture of respiration."<sup>34</sup> In his *oeuvre*, Claudel offers us many new interpretative paths that can lead our understanding of religious or spiritual life to something that we could possibly begin to call a respiratory mutation in biblical exegesis, as well as a respiratory binding to God. In my article, I wish to know what Jesus and St. Paul are possibly trying to say when they speak of God by

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<sup>32</sup> Claudel, *Commentaires et exégèses*, 72. Claudel is not alone with his idea that "the spirit is respiration" as, for example, Denis Edwards and Donald Gelpi understand "the Spirit as the *Breath of God*" and as "the Breath of Life." Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of the Creator Spirit* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 2–3. Edwards also writes: "In the Scriptures, the Spirit first appears as the breath of life, God's breath." Denis Edwards, *Human Experience of God* (New York and Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 52. According to Gelpi, in the *Bible*, the Hebrew "ruah" and the Greek "pneuma," which are traditionally translated as "spirit," should be translated as "breath." In his book *The Divine Mother*, Gelpi says that he has "chosen to call ['ruah' and 'pneuma'] the Holy Breath rather than the Holy Spirit." Donald Gelpi, *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 11.

<sup>33</sup> I am not using this word in a scientific sense of genetics, but as Merleau-Ponty uses it in its etymological sense as "change" or "alteration." Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 368; and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology: Including Texts by Edmund Husserl*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 53.

<sup>34</sup> I have borrowed this expression from Luce Irigaray, *Why Different? A Culture of Two Subjects: Interviews with Luce Irigaray*, trans. Camille Collins (New York: Semiotext(e), 2000), 179. In Irigaray's words: "The forgetting of breathing in our [Western] tradition is almost universal." Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, trans. Stephen Pluháček (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 77. One of the deepest dimensions of this forgetting of breathing in our tradition is that we have almost universally forgotten in our religious life and tradition that "the spirit is respiration."

reading, especially Jesus's phrase "God is Spirit..." (John 4:24) and St. Paul's sentence concerning the life "according to the flesh" and the life "according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:5). I read these phrases within the Claudelian atmosphere of "the spirit is respiration," as well as within Merleau-Ponty's philosophical atmosphere of wonder at and not-knowing the meaning of God. The first Claudelian respiratory step is that these sentences of Jesus and St. Paul will be mutated into respiratory sentences. In the case of Jesus, this means that I initially transform the traditional wording of John 4:24 "God is Spirit and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" into the following form: "God is Respiration and his worshipers must worship in the Respiration and in truth." As one can observe, the only thing that I have done to the words of Jesus is to change the word "spirit" into "respiration" as Claudel says: "the spirit is respiration." With this same Claudelian respiratory interpretative logic, I can also transform Paul's sentence (Romans 8:5) to state: "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live according to the Respiration have their minds set on what the Respiration desires."

Now one can easily ask whether I am just blindly or randomly following this suggestion of Claudel and creating something nonsensical or whether I am just following a certain kind of interpretative tradition and immediately discard the philosophical attitude of a perpetual beginner. Have I immediately lost the philosophical principles that I laid out in the beginning of this article by following Claudel dogmatically? I am not blindly, randomly or dogmatically following Claudel. I am indeed following his guidance, but only because it makes sense etymologically for the philosopher as a perpetual beginner who tries to understand what Jesus and St. Paul "wish to say in speaking of God" and tries to discover "another name to what has long been crystallised under the name of God." Let me explain why following Claudel makes sense.

## A Respiratory-Etymological Journey with *Spiritus*, *Pneuma* and *Ruach* and the Respiratory Creation of Humanity

Claudel's "the spirit is respiration" (*l'esprit, c'est la respiration*) is a discovery of a perpetual beginner. The English word "spirit" and the French word "*esprit*" both come from the Latin *spiritus*, which originally means "breathing, breath." It is a derivative of the verb *spirare* meaning "to breathe, to blow." In the original Greek *Gospel of John*, Jesus's words "God is Spirit" are "*pneuma o theos*" and Paul's original Greek wording of "according to the Spirit" in Romans is "*kata pneuma*." The Greek word *pneuma* originally means "breath, movement of air, wind, and finally air,"<sup>35</sup> and it derives from the verb *pnein* "to blow, to breathe." In the *Vulgate*, the Greek *pneuma* is translated as "*spiritus*." After Claudel in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, Jacques Derrida writes of *pneuma* and *spiritus* that there is "the immense semantics of breathing, of inspiration or respiration, imprinted in Greek [*pneuma*] or Latin [*spiritus*]."<sup>36</sup>

There are many examples<sup>37</sup> showing that the respiratory and aerial meanings of the word *pneuma* are essential dimensions of its semantic

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<sup>35</sup> F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York: New York University Press, 1967), 160–161. See also Clint Tibbs, *Religious Experience of Pneuma: Communication with the Spirit World in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2012), 307.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 99. Even if it is true that there is "the immense semantics of breathing [...] imprinted in Greek and in Latin," it is also true that many writers do not seem to take this seriously in their studies concerning our *spiritual* dimension of being. Even if these writers notice these respiratory origins of the spirit, they often see them as "less originary" (Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 99) compared to other features of our spiritual being. A perfect example of this is Martin Heidegger. Luce Irigaray investigates Heidegger's forgetting of air and breathing in her book Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> To have a brief insight into "the immense semantics of breathing [...] imprinted in" *pneuma*, it is good to know, for example, that the root word of *pneumon*, a Greek word meaning "lungs," is *pneuma*, and from *pneumon* derives the word "pneumonia" as "inflammation of the lungs." In addition to this, *pneuma* is also, for example, the root of the word *pneumatikos*, meaning "of wind, of air," from which comes the English word "pneumatic," meaning "of the wind, belonging to the air, relating to the spirit." The word "pneumatic" is used, for example, in connection to tyres. A "pneumatic tyre" is a tyre inflated with air. See Petri Berndtson, "Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Phenomenologico-Ontological Interpretation

field, and that these root meanings have not been lost, even in contemporary English discourse. This can make one wonder why it is that all the biblical traditions translate *pneuma* either as “Spirit” or as “Ghost,” and never with any of the possible respiratory or aerial notions.<sup>38</sup> These etymological considerations would mean that we could interpret Jesus’s words “*pneuma o théos*,” which are traditionally translated as “God is Spirit,” either as “God is respiration,” “God is breath,” “God is wind” or “God is air.” Even if this would be an improvement on the previous translations, it is important to say that these translations are still within the traditional scheme as their structure is “God is ...” Contrary to all of these translations, in his 2013 translation of the *Gospel of John* into French, Jean-Yves Leloup pointed out that the translation of “*pneuma o théos*” is not literally “God is breath/Spirit/respiration,” but in French “*Souffle, le Dieu*,”<sup>39</sup> which would translate into English as “Breath, the God.” It is not only Leloup who interprets these words of the *Gospel of John* in this manner as the Vulgate already translated “*pneuma o théos*” as “*Spiritus est Deus*” – that is, as “Spirit/Breath/Respiration is God.” But this is a rarity as all the major translations of John 4:24, for example, in English, French, German, Spanish and Italian, fall under the structure “God is ...” in their translations. All the major translations say: “God is Spirit” (English), “*Dieu est Esprit*” (French), “*Gott ist Geist*” (German), “*Dios es Espíritu*” (Spanish), and “*Dio è Spirito*” (Italian). To interpret Jesus’s “*pneuma o théos*” in the spirit of Merleau-Ponty, Claudel and Leloup either as “Breath, the God” or as “Respiration, the God” is a step toward the experience of *fleshpiration*. It is important to understand that in the same breath, we can also interpret “*pneuma o théos*” to say “Wind, the God,” “Air, the God,” and “Spirit, the God.”

In the biblical tradition, both *pneuma* and *spiritus* are translations of the Hebrew *ruach*<sup>40</sup> of the *Old Testament*. Yet again the Hebrew

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of the Barbaric Conviction of We Breathe Air and a New Philosophical Principle of Silence of Breath, Abyss of Air” (PhD. diss., University of Jyväskylä, 2018), 226–228.

<sup>38</sup> Berndtson, “Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing,” 227.

<sup>39</sup> Jean-Yves Leloup, trans., *L’Évangile de Jean* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2013), 268.

<sup>40</sup> Gelpi writes of *ruach* that it is “a Hebrew word for breathing, for air in motion; its English equivalent in this text [Gelpi’s book *The Divine Mother*] is Breath.” Gelpi, *The Divine Mother*, 244. Traditionally the word *ruach* is translated almost universally as “spirit” and not as “breath” or “air in motion.”

*ruach*<sup>41</sup> means “breath” and “wind” as well as “spirit.” It is important to notice, as Adriana Cavarero has pointed out: “The term *ruach* indicates above all breath.”<sup>42</sup> In the very beginning of the *Old Testament*, “the Spirit/Breath/Wind (*ruach*) of God” is mentioned as “the Breath/Wind/Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). This means that from the very beginning of the *Bible*, God is essentially connected with *ruach* (breath, wind, and spirit). In addition to this, the creation of the human being as the starting point of humanity in Genesis is essentially a respiratory creation as it says: “the LORD God who formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [*ruach*], and the man became a living being/soul [*nephesh*]” (Genesis 2:7). And in the reverse manner, according to *The Book of Job*, “if [...] [God] withdrew his spirit and breath [*ruach*], all humanity would perish together and mankind would return to the dust” (Job 34:14–15).

In addition to the Hebrew word *ruach*, the word *nephesh* has a deep respiratory meaning in Genesis 2:7. According to linguist and rabbi Ernest Klein, the primary etymological meaning of *nephesh* is “breath, breath of life.” The other meanings of this word are “soul,” “person, human being” and “self.” Etymologically, the term *nephesh* is derived from the term *naphash*, meaning “to blow, to breathe.” In relation to Klein’s etymological study of the term *nephesh*, Róbert Bohát writes: “etymology and lexicography agree that [*nephesh*] is ‘a living, breathing being’, ‘a breather’ in short.”<sup>43</sup> In his book *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, theologian Hans Walter Wolff ponders the meaning of the word *nephesh* in Genesis 2:7. In his view, *nephesh* in this verse of the *Old Testament* should “[c]ertainly not [be translated as] soul.” Instead of “soul,” Wolff emphasises “breath” as he writes: “*Nephesh* is designed

<sup>41</sup> Derrida, *Of Spirit*, 100.

<sup>42</sup> Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 20. See also John R. Levison, *The Spirit in First-Century Judaism* (Boston and Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 63–64.

<sup>43</sup> Róbert Bohát, “‘My Soul Knoweth Right Well’: the Biblical Definition of Soul (heb. ‘*nefes*,’ Gr. ‘*psyche*’) and the Epistemology of Embodied Cognition – an Ancient Source of a Modern Concept?,” in *The Soul in the Axiosphere from an Intercultural Perspective*, vol. 1, ed. Joanna Jurewicz, Ewa Masłowska, and Dorota Pazio-Włazłowska (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 167.

to be seen together with the whole form of man, and especially with his breath; moreover man does not have *nephesh*, he is *nephesh*, he lives as *nephesh*.”<sup>44</sup> In addition to this, Etan Levine relates Genesis 2:7 explicitly to air as he writes: “human life derived from the air when God ‘blew into his nostrils the breath of life.’”<sup>45</sup>

With the help of these etymological investigations, I can now give one possible interpretation of Genesis 2:7 as the beginning of humanity provided that one also understands that the Hebrew word *adam* (“man”) originated from *adamah* (“ground” or “earth”). This interpretation runs as follows: “God formed man (*adam*) as an earthling of the dust of the ground/earth (*adamah*), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life that is His breath/air/wind/spirit (*ruach*); and man (*adam*) as an earthling became a living, breathing being, that is, a breather (*nephesh*).”

As Wolff said, “man does not have *nephesh*, he is *nephesh*, he lives as *nephesh*,” and this would mean, in my interpretation, that according to Genesis 2:7, the human being does not have a breath, but is at the most primordial level a breathing being and lives as a breather, as one who breathes. This respiratory way of being, which derived from “the common air”<sup>46</sup> (*ruach*) when God “blew into his nostrils the breath of life,” is the fundamental root experience of human existence. This train of thought goes together well with Claudel who thought that if we take seriously what the *Bible* says about creation as the beginning of human beings, then it means that “[t]he whole character of man is within respiration.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, all questions of humanity without exception need to be understood within the atmosphere of respiration and within a human being’s respiratory binding to God. All other dimensions of the human being exist within the atmosphere or realm of respiration. In Genesis 2:7, the breath is the beginning, the root

<sup>44</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 10.

<sup>45</sup> Etan Levine, *Heaven and Earth, Law and Love* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 12.

<sup>46</sup> William Glen Moncrief, *Soul: Or the Hebrew Word Nephesh and the Greek Word Psuchen* (Edinburgh: William Laing, 1864), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Claudel quoted in Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, “La ‘Co-naissance’: Merleau-Ponty et Claudel,” in *Merleau-Ponty aux frontières de l’invisible*, eds. Marie Cariou, Renaud Barbaras, and Etienne Bimbenet (Milan: Associazione Culturale Mimesis, 2003), 271n118.

and the atmosphere of human existence and it connects or binds us to God as “respiring God” or “God who breathes”<sup>48</sup> in a most intimate and elemental manner.<sup>49</sup>

### The Intertwining of *Pneuma* and God: Jesus and St. Paul

#### *Pneuma* and the God of Jesus

If Jesus’s words “*pneuma o théos*” are translated literally as “Breath, the God” (“Breath [is] the God”) within the guidance of Leloup, Claudel and etymological evidence, then what could it be that Jesus wishes to say when speaking of God? I suggest that Jesus wishes to express that breathing or respiration is the most fundamental reality that we are connected with, and thus it is also the most important thing in one’s life and the life of the community, as well as the most fundamental way of being. For this reason, it could be that Jesus says in the synoptic Gospels, as well as in the *Gospel of Thomas*, that there is only one sin that will never be forgiven: this “eternal sin” is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit/Respiration (*pneuma*) (see Mark 3:28-29; Matthew 12:31-32; Luke 12:10; Thomas 44). What is the opposite lifestyle to blasphemy against the Holy Respiration? Jesus gives his answer to this in John 4:24 after the words “Respiration [is] the God.” His answer is that the “worshippers [of God] must worship in the Breath [*en pneumatī*] and in truth.” According to Jesus, to know what God is, is to know what Respiration is – and to know what Respiration is, is to worship in Breathing. But what does it mean to worship in the Breath? What kind of practice does Jesus have in mind?<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Paul Claudel quoted in Saint Aubert, “La ‘Co-naissance,’” 271n118.

<sup>49</sup> David Abram writes of this as follows: “breath [...] is the most intimate and elemental bond linking human to the divine; it is that which flows most directly between God and man.” David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 239.

<sup>50</sup> One can wonder whether Jesus’s respiratory practices of worship could be something similar, for example, to the Eastern Christian practice of *hesychasm*, the Sufi practice of *dhikr* or the respiratory practices of Yoga (*pranayama*) and Buddhism (*anapanasati*). Perhaps somewhat similarly to John 4:24, for some Sufi groups’ spiritual practice, i.e., “worship is observance of



First of all, I suggest that when Jesus defines Breath as the God, one needs to understand it in the context of Genesis 2:7. Jesus's "*pneuma o théos*" could be a radicalisation of the phrase "God who breathes" or "respiring God" (Genesis 2:7), who gave us the breath of life and who keeps us perpetually alive with each and every breath. So what could it mean to "worship in the Breath/Respiration"? I suggest that this respiratory worship is essentially related to Jesus's teaching of "the first and greatest commandment": "Love LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27). These words are originally from Deuteronomy 6:5. The word "soul" in the *New Testament* Gospels is *psyche* and in Deuteronomy 6:5, the Hebrew *nephesh*. The word *psyche* is normally translated as "soul or psyche," but the word originally "means breathing, breath"<sup>51</sup> and it derives from the verb *psycho* "to breathe."<sup>52</sup> If "Breath is the God," then Jesus teaches people to *love Breath as the God with all one's heart and with all one's soul/breath (psyche, nephesh) and with all one's mind*. But it is important to remember that in Genesis 2:7, one becomes a living being or a living soul (*nephesh*) when God breathes the breath of life (*ruach, pneuma*) into a human being. What we learned earlier is that, in the first place, according to Wolff, "man does not have *nephesh*, he is *nephesh*, he lives as *nephesh*" and this word should "[c]ertainly not [be translated as] soul." As *nephesh*, I am neither "a living being" nor "a living soul," but "a breathing being," that is, "a breather." In connection to this respiratory creation of a human being as a breathing being or as a breather, Claudel said that "the whole character of man is within respiration."

This would mean that all the dimensions of a human being are respiratory in the sense that one is *nephesh* (a breathing being, a breather) or *psyche* (a breathing being). This means that whatever is meant by

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the breaths." See J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 195.

<sup>51</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Heraklit*. 1. *Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens*. 2. *Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos* (Gesamtausgabe 55), ed. Manfred S. Frings (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann GmbH, 1979), 281.

<sup>52</sup> Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 32. See also Edward S. Casey, *The World on Edge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 97.

the words “*with all one’s heart and with all one’s soul and with all one’s mind,*” the essential factor is that they are all within respiration, that is, within a breathing being. They are thus, in the first place, respiratory in nature, that is, one’s heart is a respiratory heart, one’s soul is a respiratory soul, and one’s mind is a respiratory mind. Jesus’s first and greatest commandment can now be understood as the commandment to love Breath as the God with the whole of one’s respiratory being, that is, with all the dimensions of one’s being, which are all, to use Claudel’s expression, within the “milieu of the divine respiration.”<sup>53</sup> If the first and greatest commandment is interpreted in this kind of respiratory manner, it might just mean exactly the same as what Jesus says in the *Gospel of John*, that we need to worship Breath as God in the Breath and in truth (John 4:24).

#### St. Paul’s Life According to *Pneuma*<sup>54</sup>

Now let us move to St. Paul’s phrases: “[t]hose who live according to the flesh [*kata sarka*] have their minds set on what the flesh [*sarkos*] desires; but those who live according to the Breath/Spirit [*kata pneuma*] have their minds set on what the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*pneumatos*] desires” (Romans 8:5), and “we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). I will interpret these within the atmosphere of Genesis 2:7, Claudel’s “the spirit is respiration” and *pneuma* as breath. To “live according to the flesh” and to “live [...] by sight” are synonymous expressions. Also, to “live according to the Breath/Respiration/Spirit” and to “live by faith” are synonyms. In order to understand what St. Paul is saying with these two sentences, let us begin with Romans 1:25 in which he states the human condition and situation in simple terms: there is “the truth about God” and the “lie” about God. This “lie” is equal to “sin.” In Paul’s view, the fundamental question of life is: do we

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Claudel quoted in Bernard Hue, *Rêve et réalité dans Le Soulier de satin* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2005), 142n94.

<sup>54</sup> I have investigated St. Paul within the respiratory and aerial atmosphere in a subsequent article, Petri Berndtson, “The Temple of the Holy Breath as the Place of Conspiracy Between the Respiratory Body and the Space of Open Air,” in *Art and Common Space*, eds. Anne-Karin Furunes, Simon Harvey, and Maaretta Jaukkuri (Trondheim: NTNU, 2013).

live in the realm of God's truth or not? If we do not live in that divine realm, our life is sinful. To exchange "the truth about God for a lie" means that in one's life, one worships and serves the "created things rather than the Creator [God] – who is forever praised" (Romans 1:25).

According to Paul, we always worship and serve something in our lives. It is impossible not to direct one's focus toward something. The question is where do we direct our desires and interests? That is, what do we "worship and serve"? For Paul, the only two possibilities are either to direct our desires toward the created things in the world or the Creator/God.<sup>55</sup> In other words, this choice between the created things and the Creator is what Paul elsewhere calls the choice between life according to the flesh and life according to the Spirit/Respiration. In life according to the flesh, we worship and serve the created things, that is, the earthly (*adamah*) realm. Instead of this, in life according to the Respiration/Breath/Spirit, we worship and serve the Creator as the respiring God. We live *pneumatically* or spiritually in the respiratory manner of the word. In Romans 8, Paul says the following about this choice:

Those who live according to the flesh [*kata sarka*] have their minds set on what the flesh [*sarkos*] desires; but those who live according to the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*kata pneuma*] have their minds set on what the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*pneumatos*] desires. The mind governed by the flesh [*sarkos*] is death, but the mind governed by the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*pneumatos*] is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh [*sarkos*] is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh [*sarki*] cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh [*sarki*] but are in the realm of the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*pneumati*], if indeed the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*pneuma*] of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*pneuma*] of Christ, they do not belong to Christ (Romans 8:5–9).

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<sup>55</sup> This choice to serve either the created things or God is already part of Jesus's teaching as he says: "No one can serve two masters. [...] You cannot serve both God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13). And if, for Jesus, Breath is the God, then one cannot serve both Breath as God and mammon. We noticed earlier that in John 4:24, Jesus speaks of worshipping in the Breath/Spirit.

Similarly in Galatians 5, Paul says:

For through the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*pneumati*] we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. [...] So I say, walk by the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*pneumati*], and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Breath/Respiration/Spirit [*pneumatōs*], and the Breath/Spirit [*pneuma*] what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other (Galatians 5:5, 16–17).

So according to Paul, there are two radically different lifestyles or atmospheres of living that are contrary to each other. They are opposite ways of being. We can either worship and serve the created material things or the Creator/God – that is, “live according to the flesh” or “live according to the Breath/Respiration/Spirit.” These are the only two atmospheres of living. Life according to the Breath/Respiration/Spirit is essentially connected to faith as Paul says “through the Breath/Respiration/Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.” Faith is connected to what is invisible as in Hebrews, Paul says, “faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). For Paul, the other way to express the proper way of existing between “according to the Breath/Respiration/Spirit” and “according to the flesh” is to say: “we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). So we live by faith or according to the Breath in contact with “what we do not see,” that is, with the invisible. Didier Franck describes in an insightful manner Paul’s idea of life “according to the flesh” in which “we live [...] by sight” as a way in which our eyes serve and worship the created visible earthly things in the world as follows:

The flesh is [...] coextensive with natural visibility [...]. Paul’s phenomenology makes the flesh into the very being of the visible. However, the flesh not only characterizes the body such as it sees itself, but also as in the midst of what it sees. The wisdom of the *logos*, the wisdom of the world sought by the Greeks, is a wisdom “according to the flesh,” opposed to the grace of God. The flesh is thus the body inasmuch as it refers to itself and to the world; in short, to the extent that it turns away from God.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Didier Franck, *Nietzsche and the Shadow of God*, trans. Bettina Bergo and Philippe Farah (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 44.

As the opposite way of being, life “according to the Breath/Respiration/Spirit” in which “we live by faith” is connected to “what we do not see” and this is not intertwined with the Greek “wisdom of the *logos*, the wisdom of the world,” that is, the wisdom of the eyes, but rather with what Paul calls in the Corinthians “God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden” (1 Corinthians 2:7). As it is hidden, it is “what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard.” What is hidden, according to Paul, is what “God has revealed to us by his Breath/Respiration/Spirit. The Breath/Respiration/Spirit investigates everything and the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:7–10). Colossians 1:15 speaks of God as “the invisible God.” In connection to this Pauline tradition of the divine hidden wisdom and mystery of “the depths of God” and “the invisible God,” it is important to mention that outside of this Pauline tradition, there is the Johannine tradition, which also emphasises that “no one has ever seen God” (John 1:18 and 1 John 4:12).

Merleau-Ponty’s “Inspiration and Expiration of Being,  
Respiration within Being”

My intention is to read Merleau-Ponty’s “Eye and Spirit” in a similar manner as I have previously read Jesus’s and Paul’s words within the atmosphere of Claudel’s “the spirit is respiration.” This means that I will read “Eye and Spirit” essentially as a text concerning “Eye and Respiration.” Within this Claudelian atmosphere, Merleau-Ponty’s text interrogates the Pauline themes of life according to the eye and life according to the Spirit/Respiration even if Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis is definitely on the former way of life. In relation to these themes, it is important to emphasise the obvious fact about Merleau-Ponty’s text that it is named “Eye *and* Spirit” and not “Eye *or* Spirit.” The meaning of the conjunction “and” is that Merleau-Ponty does not make a clear distinction between life according to the flesh and life according to the Respiration/Spirit in the way St. Paul does. It also means that one does not have to make a decision on which one chooses – either life according to the eye as flesh or life according to the spirit as respiration. It is not only that I will read “Eye and Spirit” in dialogue with Claudel, but, in my opinion, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is deeply inspired by Claudel’s thinking and

this Claudelian influence is profoundly felt in “Eye and Spirit.” Within the interpretative context of “the spirit is respiration,” the most important sentence of “Eye and Spirit” as *eye and respiration* airs:

What is called “inspiration” should be taken literally: there is really and truly inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that one no longer knows who/what sees and who/what is seen, who/what paints and who/what is painted.<sup>57</sup>

Let us begin by wondering about the possible meaning of the opening words of this sentence: “what is called ‘inspiration’ should be taken literally: there is really and truly inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being.” What would it mean to take the word “inspiration” literally? Traditionally, this word has not been taken literally, but mostly in a metaphoric sense as “artistic inspiration,” “creative inspiration,” “divine inspiration” or “biblical inspiration.” The meaning of artistic inspiration or creative inspiration is a sudden moment of creativity in artistic production when a new innovation, idea or vision strikes the mind of the artist, poet or designer. Biblical inspiration or divine inspiration means that the human writers of the *Bible* were guided by God as the *New Testament’s 2nd Epistle to Timothy* states: “All scripture is inspired by God [*theopneustos*]” (2 Timothy 3:16).

Earlier, in connection with Claudel’s “the spirit is respiration” (*l’esprit, c’est la respiration*), it was already mentioned that the English word “spirit” and the French word “*esprit*” both come from the Latin *spiritus*. The word *spiritus* is a derivative of the verb *spirare* meaning “to breathe, to blow.” The word “inspiration” similarly comes from *spiritus*. In “inspiration,” the word “spiration” is conjoined with the prefix “in-”. The word “spiration” is obsolete nowadays, but it was used around the 16th century meaning the “action of drawing the breath.” Also, the Middle English verb “spire” is obsolete itself even if the word is still in use with the same prefix “in-” as “inspire.” The word “spire” meant “to breathe.” Both of these words, “spiration” and “spire,” came etymologically from the Latin *spirare*. This means that the literal meaning of “inspiration” is “the action of drawing the breath in” and “inspire” is

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<sup>57</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L’Œil et l’Esprit*, 31–32. See also the English translation: Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 358.

“to breathe in.” Now as there is no inspiration without expiration, this would mean that the word “expiration” should also be taken literally in this Merleau-Ponty’s quotation. The prefix “ex-” means “out” and thus the literal meaning of “expiration” is “the action of drawing the breath out” and literally the verb “expire” means “to breathe out.”

In addition to this, Merleau-Ponty speaks of “respiration within Being.” I suggest that the word “respiration” also needs to be taken literally. And as the prefix “re-” means “again, anew, once more, back,” then “respiration” could possibly mean in the same breath, all at once “the action of drawing the breath again,” “the action of drawing the breath anew,” “the action of drawing the breath once more,” and “the action of drawing the breath back.” If respiration means “the action of drawing the breath back,” then where is it drawn back to? In his *Nature* lectures, Merleau-Ponty very briefly says that respiration is “always recommenced (*toujours recommencée*).”<sup>58</sup> Thus, I would say that respiration is perhaps the action of drawing the breath back to the space and time where it recommences itself, where it begins again and again and again. This also means that the meaning of the verb “respire” is “to breathe again,” “to breathe anew,” or “to breathe back” in space and time.

What about the word “Being” in this phrase concerning “inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being”? The ultimate ontological questions are: what is Being? What is the meaning of Being? What does it mean “to be”? When Merleau-Ponty speaks of “Being” in his late ontological thinking, I suggest that he could be interpreted as speaking in a paradoxical manner in the same breath about the flesh and God. Could it really and truly be that the word “Being” names both “flesh” and “God” as I earlier quoted Merleau-Ponty’s words “philosophy consists in giving another name to what has long been crystallised under the name of God”? Let us first speak of the relationship between Being and the flesh. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes in a surprising and cryptic manner: “Being [...] is the flesh.”<sup>59</sup> But what does this mean? Does it mean that the flesh and Be-

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<sup>58</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Nature: Notes Cours du Collège de France* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995), 61.

<sup>59</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 270.

ing are synonyms? Esteemed Merleau-Ponty scholars Renaud Barbaras and Gary Brent Madison speak of the intertwining of Being and the flesh in the following ways. In the words of Barbaras: for Merleau-Ponty, “Being makes sense only as flesh.”<sup>60</sup> Madison says: “the flesh is [...] a ‘prototype of Being,’ [...] it is in fact Being itself [...] The flesh is Being qua Opening. Under the concept of flesh [...] Merleau-Ponty is thinking Being.”<sup>61</sup> If “Being makes sense only as flesh,” then it would mean that, for Merleau-Ponty, “inspiration and expiration of Being” and “respiration within Being” “make sense only as flesh.” Could we then say as Being is the flesh that there is really and truly inspiration and expiration of the flesh, respiration within the flesh?

If one tries to interpret the meaning of “inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being” within the ontological atmosphere where Being is the flesh, then one needs to interrogate what respiratory expressions like *inspiration and expiration of the flesh* and *respiration within the flesh* could mean. What could it mean to say, following Barbaras, that “inspiration and expiration of Being” makes sense only as flesh and that “respiration within Being” makes sense only as flesh? If we take inspiration, expiration and respiration literally within the ontological atmosphere of flesh, then we could say that these words of Merleau-Ponty state that there is really and truly an action of drawing the breath in (breathing-in) and of drawing the breath out (breathing-out) of the flesh, as well as the action of drawing the breath again within the flesh or the action of drawing the breath back within the flesh.

But what is this ontological flesh that Merleau-Ponty speaks of? In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty says that the flesh is the “ultimate notion.”<sup>62</sup> He also says that “reversibility [...] defines the flesh.”<sup>63</sup> The flesh as the phenomenon of reversibility is actually “the fundamental phenomenon” and the “ultimate truth.”<sup>64</sup> Let us remember Merleau-

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<sup>60</sup> Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 319.

<sup>61</sup> Gary Brent Madison, *The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: A Search for the Limits of Consciousness* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1981), 177.

<sup>62</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 140.

<sup>63</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 144.

<sup>64</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 155.



Ponty's words: "For me, philosophy consists in giving another name to what has long been crystalised under the name of God." The flesh truly sounds like that new name, as Merleau-Ponty says: "What we are calling flesh [...] has no name in any philosophy."<sup>65</sup> The flesh sounds like a "God [who] is no longer in Heaven" as He has been brought "down to earth" and thus He is "not separated from experience." Like God, the flesh is the "ultimate notion," "fundamental phenomenon" and "ultimate truth." As "God [...] is everywhere"<sup>66</sup> and as "[t]he Spirit is everywhere,"<sup>67</sup> similarly "the flesh [...] radiat[es] everywhere."<sup>68</sup> As "God" is "eternal"<sup>69</sup> and "forever,"<sup>70</sup> so is "the flesh [...] here and now [...] forever."<sup>71</sup> Within "the religion of the Spirit," God comes down to earth and is "in human society and communication, wherever men come together in His name." Similarly in the *name* of "the flesh," we may recognise the "domain" that is "between" all human beings as "their means of communication."<sup>72</sup> In the name of the flesh, this communication takes place as the fundamental phenomenon of reversibility.

What does Merleau-Ponty mean by the fundamental phenomenon of reversibility? According to him, "[t]he [...] reversibility is the idea that every perception is doubled with a counter-perception, [...] is an act with two faces, one no longer knows who speaks and who listens. [There is] speaking-listening, seeing-being seen, perceiving-being perceived circularity – *Activity = passivity*."<sup>73</sup> In relation to these words, one can observe that the respiratory phrase of "Eye and Spirit" spoke of the flesh as reversibility: "there is really and truly inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that one no longer knows who/what sees and who/what is seen, who/what paints and who/what is painted." We can describe this

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<sup>65</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 147; and see also 139.

<sup>66</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 266; Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 363.

<sup>67</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*, 177.

<sup>68</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 142.

<sup>69</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 116–117.

<sup>70</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 375.

<sup>71</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 142.

<sup>72</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 135.

<sup>73</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 264–265.

fleshy reality of reversibility as a “strange system of exchanges”<sup>74</sup> or a “hidden,” “unlimited,” and “strange domain.”<sup>75</sup> It is a latent depth dimension in which the typical or normal “roles between [the subject and the object, between the perceiver and the perceived, between the painter and the painted, etc.] switch”<sup>76</sup> in a way that creates a totally different way of being compared to what we are used to. We no longer know what is what as our normal dualities like subject-object, inner-outer, profound-superficial, active-passive, visible-invisible, etc. are unhinged and thus the strange domain of the flesh as reversibility leads us into the philosophical state of not-knowing and wonder. The question is, how is it possible that there can be such a strange system of exchanges between the seer and the seen or the painter and the painted? Earlier, we mentioned that the flesh is the means of communication between the seer and the visible. Let us next interrogate how the flesh makes this communication possible and how Merleau-Ponty’s life according to the eyes relates to St. Paul’s ideas about living by sight.

### Merleau-Ponty’s Life According to Flesh and the Wisdom of the Eye

Now that we have discovered that “Being [...] is the flesh” as the “unlimited” “strange domain” called reversibility, which is a “strange system of exchanges,” and that Being or “universal dimensionality” is a new name for God, we must continue our interrogation of what it could mean when Merleau-Ponty says that “one no longer knows who/what sees and who/what is seen.”<sup>77</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is a phenomenological interrogation of perception. It is very rare for Merleau-Ponty to speak of the phenomenon of breathing in his philosophical examinations.<sup>78</sup> Most of the time, he forgets breathing as a

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<sup>74</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 355.

<sup>75</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 140.

<sup>76</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 358.

<sup>77</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *L’Œil et l’Esprit*, 31–32. See also the English translation: Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 358.

<sup>78</sup> My study Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Respiratory Primacy of Being* is devoted to exploring Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of breathing. I investigate

phenomenological theme. In those rare moments when he remembers breathing, he says highly interesting and important things about it. But what he never forgets is the phenomenon of seeing as throughout his phenomenology of perception, this is the most emphasised dimension of perception. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty defines philosophy as the process of “relearning to see the world.” Some fifteen years later, the opening words of *The Visible and the Invisible* emphasise the phenomenon of seeing: “We see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulas of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher – the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute ‘opinions’ implicated in our lives.”<sup>79</sup> The dominant theme of “Eye and Spirit” is the interrogation of the wisdom of the eye. The painters are the masters of this wisdom. For Merleau-Ponty, the wisdom of the eye as a philosophy of vision “is what animates the painter [...] in that instant when his vision becomes gesture, when, in Cézanne’s words, he ‘thinks in painting.’”<sup>80</sup> In “Eye and Spirit,”

[t]he painter’s world is a visible world, nothing but visible: a world almost mad, because it is complete though only partial. Painting awakens and carries to its highest power a delirium which is vision itself, since to see is *to have at a distance*; painting extends this strange possession to all aspects of Being, aspects which must somehow be made visible in order to enter into painting.<sup>81</sup>

Now if we read Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy within St. Paul’s perspective, we can say that it is a sinful project in which he exchanges “the truth about God for a lie.” Merleau-Ponty “lives by sight” as he celebrates the painters as the masters of the eye. As “the painter’s world” is nothing but “devotion to the visible world,”<sup>82</sup> the painters, and Merleau-Ponty along with them, worship and serve the “created things rather than the Creator [God]” (Romans 1:25). As such, Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy

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Merleau-Ponty’s remarks about breathing that are scattered around throughout his *oeuvre*. He never elaborated on these respiratory remarks and the community of Merleau-Ponty scholars has almost universally forgotten them.

<sup>79</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 3.

<sup>80</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 367–368.

<sup>81</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 357.

<sup>82</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 70.

is almost entirely a project of what Paul means by life according to the flesh. It is in a certain sense true that Merleau-Ponty's flesh for the most part goes hand in hand with how Franck described Paul's notion of the flesh: "The flesh is [...] coextensive with natural visibility [...]. Paul's phenomenology makes the flesh into the very being of the visible. [...] The flesh not only characterizes the body such as it sees itself, but also as in the midst of what it sees." Merleau-Ponty also describes the flesh with the notion of visibility as he calls the flesh "one Visibility"<sup>83</sup> or "one universal visibility."<sup>84</sup> He writes, for example, "it is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because one anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, one vision in general."<sup>85</sup> What is here named as "one Visibility" or "one vision in general" is a "primordial property that belongs to the flesh."<sup>86</sup>

In Merleau-Ponty's case, things are never as clear and distinct or black and white as the Pauline perspective makes them out to be. One can already see this in the titles of his last texts. The titles are not "Eye or Spirit" nor *The Visible* or *the Invisible*, but "Eye and Spirit" and *The Visible* and *the Invisible*. This is truly important. In the Merleau-Pontian context, one does not have to make a choice between life according to the eye and life according to the spirit or between worshipping the visible world and worshipping the invisible God. We have already indicated this as we have discovered that in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ontology, "Being," "the world," "the flesh," and "God" are deeply intertwined and so are also "eye" and "spirit," as well as "the visible" and "the invisible." In a sense, we could say that they are intertwined in a reversible manner. A very revealing example of this intertwining is how Merleau-Ponty describes his notion of the flesh in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that doubles them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but the possibility, the latency, and the *flesh* of things [*chair des choses*]. If we turn now back to the seer, we will find that this is no analogy or vague

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<sup>83</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139.

<sup>84</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 145.

<sup>85</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 185. I have altered the translation of Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 142.

<sup>86</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 142.

comparison and must be taken literally. The gaze, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things.<sup>87</sup>

If we read these words carefully, we can notice that Merleau-Ponty's flesh refers to a different sphere than Paul's flesh. For Paul, according to Franck, all visible things (my body as a visible thing and things in the world) are the flesh. But surprisingly, for Merleau-Ponty, the flesh is not any kind of visible thing. It is the latent, hidden or secret "tissue" that sustains and nourishes the visible things. It is that which makes visible things possible as visible things. The flesh is "between" all colourful and visible things. Merleau-Ponty calls visible things "alleged [...] visibles" as they do not have existence in our experience without the flesh. Perhaps it could be said that what Merleau-Ponty means by flesh is what makes possible that which Paul means by flesh.

Phenomenologically speaking, the visible things are not independent of the flesh. In the above quotation, Merleau-Ponty writes: "The gaze, we said, envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things." Here, the words "we said" refer to something that Merleau-Ponty said a few pages earlier. In these earlier words, he writes: "we could not dream of seeing [things] 'all naked' because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh."<sup>88</sup> Visible things are "alleged" things as we can never see them "all naked," that is, independently, on their own and without the latent, secret or hidden flesh as the strange and unlimited domain that constantly envelops and clothes them and thus makes them visible. Later, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty says the following about this: "the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication."<sup>89</sup> So the flesh between the seer and the thing constitutes the visibility of the thing. In order for the thing to become a visible thing, it needs to be clothed by and within the tissue of the flesh, which "is [...] the] means of communication" between the seer and the thing. In "Eye and Spirit," Merleau-Ponty almost repeats this quotation of *The Visible and the In-*

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<sup>87</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 132–133.

<sup>88</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 131.

<sup>89</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 135.

*visible* with the difference that this time he speaks of “the thickness of water” instead of “the thickness of flesh.”

When through the thickness of water I see the tiled bottom of the pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections; I see it through them and because of them. If there were no distortions, no ripples of sunlight, if I saw without this flesh, the geometry of the tiles, then I would stop seeing the tiled bottom as it is.<sup>90</sup>

In this example, it is “the fleshy water,”<sup>91</sup> “water as flesh,”<sup>92</sup> or “the flesh of water”<sup>93</sup> as “the *flesh* of things” that makes one see the things. In this example, the thing is “the tiled bottom of the pool.” When the thickness of flesh is the element of water, it means that *to see according to the flesh* is *to see according to the element of water*.<sup>94</sup> In relation to this, Miika Luoto insightfully says the following about Merleau-Ponty’s structure of perception: “before opening us to *what* we perceive, perception in fact opens us to that *with which* or *according to which* we perceive.”<sup>95</sup> The “*what*” is the thing and “*with which* or *according to which*” is the elemental flesh or the elemental tissue.

As the latent “*flesh* of things” is the “perception of *elements* (water, air ...)”<sup>96</sup> – that is, life according to which we perceive things – then, in my view, we must say that in our everyday life, it is not “the flesh of

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<sup>90</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 371.

<sup>91</sup> This expression is from Leonard Lawlor, *Early Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012), 166 and 167. See also in connection to “the flesh of the water” in “Eye and Mind” Lawlor’s other book *The Implications of Immanence: Toward a New Concept of Life* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 82.

<sup>92</sup> This expression is from Galen A. Johnson, *The Retrieval of the Beautiful: Thinking Through Merleau-Ponty’s Aesthetics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>93</sup> This expression is from Johnson, *The Retrieval of the Beautiful*, 33.

<sup>94</sup> Merleau-Ponty says: “Rather than seeing it I see according to it, or with it.” Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 355.

<sup>95</sup> Miika Luoto, “Approaching the Untouchable: From Husserl to Merleau-Ponty,” in *Figures of Touch: Sense, Technics, Body*, eds. Mika Elo and Miika Luoto (Tallinn: Academy of Fine Art, 2018), 116.

<sup>96</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 218. Of this elementality of the flesh, Merleau-Ponty writes: “we must think [the flesh ...] as an element” “in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire [...]. The flesh is [...] an ‘element’ of Being.” Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 147 and 139.

water” or “water as flesh,” but the “aerial tissue”<sup>97</sup> (Gaston Bachelard’s notion) as the flesh of air, the thickness of air or *air as flesh* that is most commonly between the seer and the visible thing as “their means of communication.”<sup>98</sup> Most of the time in our everyday existence, the visible things that we see are clothed in the “hidden or latent”<sup>99</sup> aerial “connective tissue,” which is invisible. The aerial tissue or elemental air as flesh is the universal dimensionality, milieu or atmosphere of our life that connects and binds us and all things together. In that sense, we could say that the flesh is one single whole in which, to use a Pre-

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<sup>97</sup> This notion of “aerial tissue” (*tissu aérien*) is from Gaston Bachelard, *L’Air et les Songes: Essai sur l’imagination du mouvement* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1943), 298. In this book on the element of air, Bachelard rethinks and reimagines the world within the elemental context of air and through this process, he transforms everything into “aerial phenomena.” In addition to “aerial tissue,” he speaks, for example, of “aerial world,” “aerial imagination,” “aerial travel,” “aerial psychology,” “aerial freedom,” “aerial poetry,” “aerial joy,” and “aerial ethics.” About the Bachelardian use of the notion of aerial, see, for example, my articles Petri Berndtson, “Cultivating a Respiratory and Aerial Culture of Hospitality,” in *Borders and Debordering: Topologies, Praxes, Hospitableness*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik, Eduardo Mendieta, and Lenart Škof (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 165–180; Petri Berndtson, “Aerial and Respiratory Atmospheres of Avicenna’s Flying Person,” *Poligrafi* 26, no. 103/104 (2021): 131–151, <https://doi.org/10.35469/poligrafi.2021.292>.

In my interpretation, Bachelard’s elements (air, water, earth and fire) had a major influence on Merleau-Ponty’s “ultimate notion” of the flesh. With this view, I follow, for example, Edward S. Casey, Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, Glen Mazis, Eileen Rizo-Patron and Richard Kearney. See Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 461n73; Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Du lien des êtres aux éléments de l’être: Merleau-Ponty au tournant des années 1945–1951* (France: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2004), 267; Glen Mazis, *Merleau-Ponty and the Face of the World: Silence, Ethics, Imagination, and Poetic Ontology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016), 255–270; Eileen Rizo-Patron, “Introduction: Bachelard’s Living Philosophical Legacy,” in *Adventures in Phenomenology: Gaston Bachelard*, eds. Eileen Rizo-Patron with Edward S. Casey and Jason M. Wirth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 4; Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 207n12.

<sup>98</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre briefly mentions that “the warmth of air” and “the breath of the wind” can be understood experientially in terms of flesh as he writes: “In my desiring perception I discover something like a *flesh* of objects. My shirt rubs against my skin, and I feel it. What is ordinarily for me an object most remote becomes the immediately sensible; the warmth of air, the breath of the wind, the rays of sunshine, etc., all are present to me in a certain way, as posited upon me without distance and revealing my flesh by means of their flesh.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), 509.

<sup>99</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 249.

Socratic expression, “all things are together” (*omou en panta*).<sup>100</sup> In this aerial whole as the flesh, “we are made” of “common tissue”<sup>101</sup> that is a latent or secret aerial tissue. This means that “perception is not first a perception of *things*, but a perception of [...] [invisible elemental] air”<sup>102</sup> as the fleshy air that makes it possible to have perceptual access to visible things. This invisible and secret aerial tissue as a perception of air is the “fundamental experience”<sup>103</sup> *according to which* we perceive visible things.

With our newly discovered interpretation of Being as the flesh of air (the latent or secret aerial tissue, the “aerial world”<sup>104</sup>), let us interpret anew Merleau-Ponty’s respiratory phrase “there is really and truly inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that one no longer knows who/what sees and who/what is seen, who/what paints and who/what is painted.” In this interpretation, we can initially say that there is “really and truly”<sup>105</sup> a reversibility of inspiration (the action of drawing the breath in) and expiration (the action of drawing the breath out) of the hidden flesh of air, latent aerial tissue or the invisible aerial world. If “action and passion [are] so slightly discernible that one no longer knows who sees and who is seen,” this also means that the action of drawing the breath in cannot easily be differentiated from the passion of drawing the breath in and similarly the action of drawing the breath out cannot easily, if at all, be separated from the passion of drawing the breath out. This means that one no longer knows who or what breathes in and who or what is breathed out, nor who or what breathes out and who or what is breathed in.

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<sup>100</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 217. See also, for example, Rajiv Kaushik, *Art and Institution: Aesthetics in the Late Works of Merleau-Ponty* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 68–69; and William S. Hamrick and Jan Van der Veken, *Nature and Logos: A Whiteheadian Key to Merleau-Ponty’s Fundamental Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 73. The Pre-Socratic *omou en panta* is the principle of Anaxagoras. Both Plato and Aristotle refer to this Anaxagorean principle, see also Plato, *Phaedo* 72c and Aristotle, *Physics* 187a30.

<sup>101</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 203.

<sup>102</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 218.

<sup>103</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 110.

<sup>104</sup> Bachelard, *L’Air et les Songes*, 195.

<sup>105</sup> Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing*, 82 and 96n1.



Earlier I referred to Merleau-Ponty's remark: "*Activity = passivity*." In this remark, Merleau-Ponty goes as far as to equate activity and passivity within the fundamental phenomenon of reversibility. In relation to this theme of "activity = passivity," Merleau-Ponty writes: "Philosophy has never spoken – I do not say of *passivity*: we are not effects – but I would say of the passivity of our activity [...] it is not I who makes myself think any more than it is I who makes my heart beat."<sup>106</sup> Similarly, it is not I who makes myself breathe. It was never my choice to take a first breath as a newborn. Even now, with each and every breath that I take, the question of who actually breathes is highly complex. There are moments when I breathe consciously and voluntarily in such a way that I can control the rhythm and depth of my breathing. This is only possible if I truly concentrate my awareness on my breath.

Most of the time, my consciousness is focused elsewhere than my breathing, which means that my respiratory activity is deeply passive, i.e., autonomic at least from the perspective of my active will and consciousness. Even during the conscious action of breathing, there are plenty of passive aspects of this activity that Merleau-Ponty calls "the passivity of our activity." I did not choose my breathing body, for example – that is, that I have nostrils and a mouth with which I am able to draw air in and release it out. I did not choose what kind of respiratory organs I have. Neither did I choose the constant structure of breathing as a dual movement of inspiration and expiration, nor did I choose that we breathe the elemental atmosphere of air and that there is this invisible immensity of air perpetually surrounding us with each and every inhalation and exhalation. As we are engulfed by this aerial immensity, we do not need to look for air to breathe as we do for other goods and services like food, clothing, shelter, etc. One of the major differences, for example, compared to eating and drinking is that we can be without them for quite long periods, but we can only remain alive for a very brief period of time without breathing. In addition to these dimensions, breathing is not a private affair as we breathe together with one another. We constantly share the common air that we breathe.

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<sup>106</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 221.

Merleau-Ponty's Fundamental Themes within  
Milieu of *Fleshpiration*: Paradox of Being  
and Binding Together

I have repeated quite a few times during this article Merleau-Ponty's words: "philosophy consists in giving another name to what has long been crystallised under the name of God." This other name, for the late Merleau-Ponty, is the flesh of which he said that "there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it."<sup>107</sup> It is a name that binds all things together. The fundamental "theme" of philosophy, according to Merleau-Ponty, is this theme of "binding" or "*vinculum*." It is in his respiratory phrase concerning "inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being" that, in my opinion, Merleau-Ponty gives us a seed that radicalises the name "flesh" into what I call "*fleshpiration*." The name "*fleshpiration*" names a radicalised beginning of philosophy. In a somewhat similar manner as in the words inspiration, expiration and respiration, where the prefixes in-, ex-, and re- are combined with the word "spiration," the words "flesh" and "spiration" are combined in this neologism. It is a name in which I intertwine in a paradoxical manner the life according to the flesh and the life according to the Spirit. For St. Paul, these two lifestyles fundamentally oppose each other as the one worships the created visible things and the other the invisible Creator/God. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is not based on either-or oppositions or dichotomies. His "philosophy of interconnection of everything" is the interrogation of the "initial paradox[es]"<sup>108</sup> of life. The word "paradox" means that which is "contrary to the common opinion, belief or expectation." In relation to this, a paradox can be understood as a statement that seems absurd but is still true. In comparison to Paul who understands the flesh and the Spirit as Respiration, the sight and the faith, or the visible and the invisible as mutually exclusive opposites, Merleau-Ponty understands all of them in a paradoxical manner as intertwined and mutually inclusive. For example, Merleau-Ponty says the following about the relation between the visible and the invisible: "the

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<sup>107</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 139.

<sup>108</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, 354.

invisible is not the contradictory of the visible [...] the in-visible is the secret counterpart of the visible, it appears only within it.”<sup>109</sup> If we interpret the invisible as the aerial tissue or the fleshy air and the visible as visible things, then we can say that the invisible flesh of air is the secret counterpart of the visible things. As the secret counterpart of the visible, the aerial tissue is the flesh of things that clothes all things in its aeriality. This aerial clothing that embraces all things, Merleau-Ponty also calls “upholstering”<sup>110</sup> around and between the visible. If in St. Paul, the flesh is related to the visible and the Spirit to the invisible, then within the Merleau-Pontian context, the Spirit as Respiration is related to the in-visible flesh of air or aerial tissue that surrounds each and every breathing being and visible thing. Life according to the eyes/sight connects us with the visible things by means of the fleshy air. Life according to the Spirit as Respiration as *fleshpiration* gives us immediate (without mediation) respiratory access to the flesh of air. Merleau-Ponty’s “inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being” refers to perpetual reversibility as a strange exchange between fleshy air and various modalities of breathing.

*Fleshpiration* expresses the fundamental experience of the reversibility of respiration and Being as the flesh of air, which Merleau-Ponty expresses when he says: “there is really and truly [...] respiration within Being.” In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty states the fundamental ontological truth: “we are within Being.”<sup>111</sup> If one intertwines “we are within Being” and “respiration within Being,” the wonderful sentence arises “we are respiration within Being,” which expresses the respiratory ontological truth. As Being is the flesh, then this same fundamental truth could be expressed by saying “we are *fleshpiration*.” As I suggested earlier, my neologism “*fleshpiration*” names a new beginning of philosophy for the perpetual beginner who always wishes to “recommence everything.”<sup>112</sup> I suggest that the ontological truth “we are respiration within Being” that the word “*fleshpiration*” names is the new beginning that challenges and radicalises Merleau-Ponty’s previous

<sup>109</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 215.

<sup>110</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 272.

<sup>111</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 128.

<sup>112</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 130.

beginning of the perceived world as life according to sight. The respiratory world or “we are respiration within Being” would be the new “foundation that is always presupposed by all rationality, all value and all existence.”

This would mean that all phenomena have their beginning or foundation within the experience of “we are respiration within Being” or, as Claudel said based on the biblical respiratory creation of humanity, that “the whole character of man is within respiration.” We can interpret Claudel’s “respiration” in his sentence as synonymous with what he elsewhere calls the “milieu of the divine respiration.” The word “milieu” literally means “middle place.” Claudel’s respiratory definition of humanity could be stated as follows: *the whole character of man is within the milieu of the divine respiration*. In connection to the Hebrew tradition, it was earlier stated that *ruach*, as the breath of God, could be understood as the common air. The milieu as the middle place or the middle of the divine respiration or the common air in Merleau-Pontian terms of the flesh could be interpreted, for example, as the fleshy air (the thickness of the flesh, the thickness of the air) between the seer and the seen. In relation to these respiratory and aerial trains of thought, the new beginning could be also taken from Jesus’s “*pneuma o théos*” as “Breath [is] the God” or “Air [is] the God,” and thus it could be combined with Merleau-Ponty’s words: “philosophy consists in giving another name to what has long been crystallised under the name of God.” Here, it is important to remember that Jesus does not say that “God is Breath” (John 4:24) as he is saying something different, which means that, in my opinion, he is already “giving another name” to that which has traditionally been named as God. His new name is “Pneuma” (Breath, Wind, Air, Spirit). I suggest that this new name or word is placed in the famous context of the *Gospel of John*, which says: “The Word became flesh and made his/its dwelling among us” (John 1:14). If this Word or Name is the Name that Jesus gave, that is, “*pneuma o théos*,” then we could say that the Word or the Name as “Breath/Respiration” and/or “Air” became flesh, which would mean in my Merleau-Pontian context that “Breath/Respiration” and/or “Air” became, in a reversible manner, *fleshpiration*.

In the early part of this article, I quoted these words of Merleau-Ponty:

The meaning of the Pentecost is that the religion of both the Father and the Son are to be fulfilled in the religion of the Spirit, that God is no longer in Heaven but in human society and communication, wherever men come together in His name. Christ's stay on earth was only the beginning of his presence in the world [*le commencement de sa présence dans le monde*], which is continued by the Church.

Merleau-Ponty is expressing the idea of religious life, which has been brought "down to earth" and that is no longer "separated from experience." Now if one reads these words within the Claudelian context of "the spirit is respiration," as I have cultivated throughout this article, Merleau-Ponty would be speaking of *the religion of the Respiration*. *The meaning of the religion of the Respiration would be that "respiring God" or Breath as God would no longer be in Heaven but in human society and communication, wherever people come together in His name.* In relation to this, it is worth remembering that the etymological meaning of religion, according to St. Augustine, was "to bind or fasten" and thus "religion [...] bind[s] us tight to the one almighty God." If this etymology is taken seriously, then the religion of the Respiration transforms into a *binding* or *fastening of the Respiration* and this goes together with Merleau-Ponty's fundamental theme of the philosophy of *nexus* or *vinculum* as "a philosophy of the interconnection of everything" that binds everything to "inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being," that is, to *fleshpiration*.

### Merleau-Ponty's New Hidden Respiratory God?

For Merleau-Ponty, "philosophy consists in giving another name to what has long been crystallised under the name of God." Within the atmosphere of these words, I want to say that very few readers of Merleau-Ponty know that *Phenomenology of Perception* contains some surprising clues or seeds connected to what could be called the beginning of a new religion of respiration (respiratory religion) or a new philosophy of respiration (respiratory philosophy). In this new respiratory religion or new respiratory philosophy, we are all bound tightly to one

respiring God as “the hidden god”<sup>113</sup> or one respiring Being. We are, according to Merleau-Ponty, all *calling with our breath this respiring God or respiring Being* before we wish to fall asleep and sleep only becomes possible if we are able to establish communication with it in a deep and reversible manner. Merleau-Ponty gives a new name to this God or Being: “some immense exterior lung.”<sup>114</sup> We gain access to this communicative reversibility through “some immense exterior lung” by breathing in a certain way as a call of breath. I suggest that Merleau-Ponty’s *respiratory call* has similarities to Jesus’s idea that the “worshippers must worship in Respiration” as “Respiration [is] the God” and to St. Paul’s idea that “Breath/Respiration” reveals the mysterious “depths of God” as “the invisible God.”<sup>115</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s respiratory call is a form of worship and service in Respiration. He writes about this respiratory call and “some immense exterior lung” as follows:

I lie down in my bed, on my left side, with my knees drawn up; I close my eyes, *breathe slowly*, and distance myself from my projects. But this is where the power of my will or consciousness ends. Just as the faithful in Dionysian mysteries invoke the god by imitating the scenes of his life, I too *call forth the visitation of sleep by imitating the breathing and posture of the sleeper*. [...] Sleep “arrives” at a particular moment, it settles upon this imitation of itself that I offered it, and I succeed in becoming what I pretended to be: that unseeing and nearly unthinking mass.<sup>116</sup>

[S]leep arrives when a certain voluntary attitude suddenly receives from the outside the very confirmation that it was expecting. *I was breathing slowly and deeply to call forth sleep, and suddenly, one might say, my mouth communicates with some immense exterior lung that calls my breath forth and forces it back, a certain respiratory rhythm* desired by me just a moment ago, *becomes my very being*, and sleep intended until then as a signification, suddenly turns into a situation.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 211.

<sup>114</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 219.

<sup>115</sup> Karl Rahner speaks of sleep in religious terms. According to Rahner, there is “such a thing as a theology of sleeping,” which includes, for example, “welcoming sleep in a prayerful way.” Karl Rahner, *The Mystical Way in Everyday Life*, trans. Annemarie S. Kidder (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010), 183.

<sup>116</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 166. My emphasis.

<sup>117</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 219. My emphasis.

Nobody in the academic community, except myself, has tried to investigate what this “immense exterior lung” and respiratory call could be about and whether it could have a connection with Merleau-Ponty’s other respiratory phrasing of “inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being.”<sup>118</sup> Merleau-Ponty himself never elaborated on what these notions could be about and the potential further implications of this immense lung as the respiratory God or respiratory Being. As we can observe, these quotations have quite a few religious references as Merleau-Ponty speaks of “faithful,” “Dionysian mysteries,” “invoking the god,” and “confirmation.” In addition to these references, just before or after these quotations Merleau-Ponty also refers to “the sacrament,” “an operation of Grace,” “the real presence of God,” and “the communion.”<sup>119</sup> The process of falling asleep in the communicative guidance of “some immense exterior lung” can be interpreted as “an operation of Grace”<sup>120</sup> and respiratory communication or communion with this immense lung could be interpreted as “the real presence of God.”

Merleau-Ponty’s brief descriptions of falling asleep are great examples of what respiratory reversibility as *fleshpiration* could be as a phenomenon between the one who imitates “the breathing [...] of the sleeper” and “some immense exterior lung,” because in this betweenness, one no longer knows who or what breathes in, who or what is breathed in, who or what breathes out and who or what is breathed out. And as *one no longer knows*, one has entered the milieu of mystery and philosophy, the milieu of recommencement as the art of not-knowing and wonder. As it is this immense exterior lung that takes over my life in this process of falling asleep, we could say within the Pauline context that falling

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<sup>118</sup> In the two chapters, “Merleau-Ponty’s Return to ‘Some Immense Exterior Lung’ and the Possibility of the Primacy of Breathing” and “The New Ontologico-Respiratory Principle ‘There is Really and Truly Inspiration and Expiration of Being,’” I investigate Merleau-Ponty’s thinking concerning the relations between the respiratory call, “some immense exterior lung” and “inspiration and expiration of Being, respiration within Being.” Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing*, 46–65 and 76–98.

<sup>119</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 166–167 and 219.

<sup>120</sup> See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the Collège de France (1954–1955)*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), 142.

asleep could be interpreted as a form of life according to the Spirit, that is, *kata pneuma* or *pneumon* (lung) (perhaps during sleep, we find life according to this immense lung). We could say roughly that our circadian rhythm makes all of us righteous in the Pauline perspective during the night when we close our eyes and fall asleep, giving us access to life according to the Respiration/*pneumon*/immense lung, and makes us sinful during the day as we open our eyes and live according to the sight focusing on and worshipping the visible created things.

What kind of new religion could be a religion (etymologically binding as a bond, *nexus* and *vinculum*) of Respiration/Spirit in which the hidden and invisible god, or perhaps better expressed as “some immense exterior lung,” is “no longer in Heaven but in human society and communication”? It is a religion or philosophy as binding in which we perpetually communicate in a respiratory manner with some immense exterior lung that is interpreted as the aerial tissue (air as the elemental flesh) and in this respiratory binding, it is this communication with this invisible and secret immense lung between all of us as the “means of communication” (flesh) and as the shared common air that makes possible our human community, society and culture without any hierarchies as each and every one of us has immediate access to it. Merleau-Ponty relates this immediate communicative access to the immense exterior lung to “an operation of Grace” and “the real presence of God” as “the hidden god.” This strange system of respiratory and aerial communication or communion, in its ceaseless reversibility between respiration and fleshy air, is what my new word or name “*fleshpiration*” defines as it weaves its invisible tissues around and through visible things. At least during each night, as well as during the day if I am lucky enough to realise *pneuma* as the God, I am *born again* as a *pneumatic self* in respiratory, or dare I say *fleshpiratory*, communication or communion as Merleau-Ponty says: “a certain respiratory rhythm [organised by some immense exterior lung ...] becomes my very being.” I suggest that as, according to Merleau-Ponty, the fundamental theme of philosophy is the interconnection or binding of everything as the common flesh/tissue of which we are all made, it would be the experiential *life according to some immense exterior lung* (*kata pneuma, pneumon*) as *fleshpiration* that we would take as the new point of departure to create



this philosophy in a totally and radically new manner. One of the first tasks of this new respiratory enterprise would be to explore the relation between the respiring God of Genesis 2:7 and the immense exterior lung in the name of *fleshpiration*.

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# INTENTIO SPIRITUS: THE MATERIALIST, PNEUMATOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF INTENTION IN AUGUSTINE

Alberto Parisi

O luce eterna che sola in te sidi,  
sola t'intendi, e da te intelletta  
e intendente te ami e arridi!  
(Dante)<sup>1</sup>

Today, the concept of intention is said and thought to have nothing to do with air. A catchword of 20th-century Western philosophy, positively or negatively, intention takes a central role in numerous continental as well as analytic traditions, as a fundamental element of conscious, subjective life. Stripped to the essentials, today intention can have two meanings, whose lines of delimitation are blurred: (1) famously in the phenomenological tradition – but this meaning is prevalent also outside it – it stands for the most basic characteristic of consciousness, which is always already intending, namely *directed towards*, an object;<sup>2</sup> (2) in ordinary language, on which analytic philosophy bases itself, it stands for the voluntary, futural purposes and designs of humans, something strictly related to the will.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “O’ eternal light that alone in yourself lie, / yourself only intend, and by yourself understood / and intending yourself love and smile to.” Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno, 3 vol. (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1968), vol. 3, “Paradiso XXXIII,” 423–424.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, ed. Stephan Strasser (Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1963), 70–72; Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7–42.

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. “intention.” The most famous 20th-century work, which reawakened the problem of intention for Analytic philosophy, is G. E. M. Anscombe’s *Inten-*

The history of this term too, or its possible genealogy, on which scholars have been debating without pause for almost seventy years, does not mention breath in the slightest. It goes something like this: the two aforementioned ideas of intentionality have a common origin, namely the *intentio* of Medieval Scholasticism (in the case of Husserl, the mediator is, as most people in this tradition know, the psychologist Franz Brentano).<sup>4</sup> Yet, in Scholasticism, *intentio* was not a univocal term and they were aware of it.<sup>5</sup> For example, Alain de Libera and Rémi Brague have stressed a fascinating side of this story, namely that, among their various uses of *intentio*, the Scholastics also used this word to translate *ma'na*, the Arabic term used by Ibn Sinna (Avicenna) to talk about the concept in the mind.<sup>6</sup> But before this shift took place, through Islamic philosophy, the story goes that the Scholastics received the fundamental meaning of *intentio* from one Church Father in particular: Augustine. It is with Augustine, it has been argued, that the origins of intention can be found.<sup>7</sup> It is in Augustine's *intentio animi* that

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*tion*, followed by Donald Davidson's studies: G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957); Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Kieran Setiya, "Intention," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Winter 2022 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/intention/>.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent, complete account of the history of the different meanings of the term intention in European culture see Alain de Libera, "Intention," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. Steven Rendall et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 500–511.

<sup>5</sup> See in this regard Jean-Luc Solère, "Tension et intention: Esquisse de l'histoire d'une notion," in *Questions sur l'intentionnalité*, eds. Lambros Couloubaritsis and Antonin Mazzù (Bruxelles: Éditions OUSIA, 2007), 115.

<sup>6</sup> De Libera, "Intention," 505–506; Rémi Brague, "*Intentio* and *ma'na*," in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. Steven Rendall et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 506.

<sup>7</sup> "The couple 'intention'/'attention' (which corresponds also to the English 'directedness') was attested, in exemplary fashion, in St. Augustine's analysis of visual sensation." De Libera, "Intention," 502. Many are the studies that traced the modern European concept of intentionality back to Augustine. The first was Herbert Spiegelberg, "Der Begriff der Intentionalität in der Scholastik, bei Brentano, und bei Husserl," *Philosophische Hefte* 5 (1936): 75–91. The idea has then been discussed implicitly or explicitly many times: Jean Rohmer, "L'intentionnalité des sensations chez Saint Augustin," in *Augustinus Magister: Congrès international augustinien, Paris 21–24 Septembre 1954*, vol. 1, ed. Fulbert Cavré (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1954), 491–498; Sofia Vanni Rovighi, "La fenomenologia della sensazione in Sant'Agostino," *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scholastica* 54, no. 1 (1962): 18–32; Richard Sorabji, "From Aristotle to Bren-

one can find intention as the ability of the soul to turn itself towards things or towards itself, which is to say to turn one's attention to something; it is with Augustine that this same idea becomes a synonym for that faculty of the soul on which he, later in his life, founded his whole theology, namely the will.

Nowhere in this story does air or breath make an appearance. But is this really the case? In this article, I do not wish to argue this genealogy to be wrong, but rather to claim that it has stopped too early and that, at the same time, it has underestimated the larger historical and philosophical context – a pneumatological one<sup>8</sup> – in which Augustine was writing and in which he developed his conception of intention.

Indeed, on the one hand, in the last century Augustine scholars have not stopped at Augustine's text but have rather tried to discover where Augustine's *intentio* itself came from, unearthing new information that is pivotal for the whole history of intention but which is not usually taken into consideration. What has been found is that Augustine's *intentio* could derive from the Ancient Stoic concept of *τόνος* (*tonos*, tension or tone), the material tension or vibration of the spirit foundational to Stoic gnoseology and psychology.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, these scholars have also conducted their research without paying attention at all to the importance air and breath played in Augustine's works.<sup>10</sup> All of them have worked as if in the dark in

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tano: The Development of the Concept of Intentionality," in *Supplementary Supplement: Aristotle and the Later Tradition*, eds. Henry Blumenthal and Howard Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 227–260; Victor Caston, "Connecting Traditions: Augustine and the Greeks on Intentionality," in *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*, ed. Dominik Perler (Boston: Brill, 2001), 23–48; Solère, "Tension et intention," 77; Victor Caston, "Intentionality in Ancient Philosophy," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, eds. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Fall 2008 Edition, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/intentionality-ancient/>.

<sup>8</sup> Against Christian theological practice, which uses the term pneumatology for the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, in my work I use *pneumatological* (from the Ancient Greek πνεῦμα, *pneuma*, namely breath) to define any discourse that assumes the spirit and the soul to be as corporeal as the rest of reality and understands the spirit primarily as air, breath, voice, smells and every other aerial phenomenon, such as wind, breeze, storms, etc.

<sup>9</sup> Rohmer, "L'intentionnalité," 497; Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 43–45; Solère, "Tension et intention," 59–90.

<sup>10</sup> My work here follows a new research movement that has been rediscovering and exploring the importance of air and breath in philosophy, as well as in the most diverse disciplines and

regard to Gerard Verbeke's conclusion, in his *L'évolution de la doctrine du Pneuma du stoïcisme à saint Augustin* from 1945, that it is with Augustine that the *pneuma* or *spiritus* becomes, in the history of European culture, finally spiritualised, which means completely detached from material air.<sup>11</sup> A new study of Augustine's texts, which seriously considers both the pneumatological context in which Augustine (and the Stoics) wrote and the extant, although unheeded, studies of the origins of *intentio* in the Stoic concept of *tonos*, will show that air and breath played a role in the history of intention, and a central one at that.

As it is well known, the foundational event of Augustine's philosophy and theology is the discovery of the *libri platonici*, the Neo-Platonist books he read around 386 CE, probably in Marius Victorinus' translation.<sup>12</sup> Or rather, the discovery to which Augustine arrived thanks to them: the immaterial nature of God and the soul. Everything we read by Augustine has been thought and written after this original event and Augustine's whole philosophy can be read as a concatenated series of arguments in favour of this fundamental thesis. If this statement is clear and has been clear for many centuries, what this study will show is

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cultures. To give a few fundamental references: Yuho Hisayama, *Erfahrungen des ki – Leibessphäre, Atmosphäre, Pansphäre: Eine transkulturelle Phänomenologie der Sphären* (Baden-Baden: Karl Alber, 2014); Lenart Škof, *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015); Magdalena Górska, *Breathing Matters: Feminist Intersectional Politics of Vulnerability* (Linköping: Linköping University, 2016); Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson, eds., *Atmospheres of Breathing* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018); Lorenzo Marinucci, *Forms of the Wind: Air and Atmosphere in Modern Japanese Aesthetics* (PhD Diss., Università di Roma "Tor Vergata," 2019); Petri Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Respiratory Primacy of Being* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Verbeke's conclusion is that the final transformation of the *spiritus* into something completely immaterial takes place with Christianity, which brings together the immaterialism typical of Neo-Platonism and the conception of the *pneuma* they found in the Judeo-Christian scriptures. Indeed, as Verbeke shows, the word *pneuma* in Neo-Platonism still has a material meaning, whose most fascinating development can be found in Synesius' conception of the imagination in his treatise on dreams. Gérard Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma, du stoïcisme à s. Augustin* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1945), 489–510; Synesius, *On Prophecy, Dreams and Human Imagination: Synesius, De insomniis*, eds. Donald A. Russel and Heinz-Gunther Nesselrath (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, *Conf.*, VII.9.13; see also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 70–92. Note: references for Augustine's texts cited in this essay and their English translations can be found in the abbreviation section preceding the bibliography.



1) the central role played in this process by the word and the concepts of *intentio* and 2) that this very process coincided with the “spiritualisation of the spirit”<sup>13</sup> – in Verbeke’s terms – or in other words, with the rejection of materialist, pneumatological theories, in which Augustine himself used to believe earlier in his life. To prove that the soul or God were immaterial meant for him to prove that they were not something like a breath pervading the whole body or the whole world in a corporeal manner with a certain material intention.

As I will show, it is always through *intentio*, in a way or another, that Augustine demonstrated the immateriality of the soul or even – but the two problematics are strictly correlated – the nature of the One and Triune God. It is by making of *intentio* a synonym of *attentio* first and *voluntas* later that Augustine was able to prove the immateriality of perception and thought, namely soul and God, which just meant to prove that soul and God are not breath.

Thus, having shown that intention in Augustine is the concept that allows the spirit to become immaterial, thus bringing to conclusion the “spiritualisation of the spirit,” I will take seriously the genealogical theory according to which Augustine’s *intentio* is said to descend from the Ancient Stoic *tonos*, to show that this is not exactly the case. Augustine’s *intentio* had to do fundamentally with the Stoic *tonos* but not in the way critics have argued. Augustine was not borrowing the term *intentio* from the Stoics but, rather, he was stealing it, repurposing it to his own spiritualist ends. This is the reason why, after him, no Stoic, materialist, or pneumatological account of *intentio* was anywhere to be found.

Thus, Augustine’s *intentio*, unexplainable through any Neo-Platonist precedent – in fact, there are no direct Neo-Platonist correspondents to it – betrays the underlying presence of another conception of *intentio*, a materialist, pneumatological conception, which Augustine knew and to which perhaps he even subscribed before his conversion to Neo-Platonism and then to Christianity, but of which we have lost almost every trace. I will conclude by pointing to some of these traces, in view of a future reconstruction of the material intention of the spirit.

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<sup>13</sup> Verbeke, *L'évolution de la doctrine du pneuma*, 3.

## Augustine's Early Treatises as Anti-Pneumatological Texts

Augustine's early dialogues and treatises are indispensable for this research because they testify to Augustine's early enthusiasm after his conversion, first to Neo-Platonism and then to Christianity, for the immaterialist thesis. Thus, they reveal somewhat more clearly than later works certain theoretical enemies Augustine never stopped fighting: namely, materialist theories and often materialist theories of a very specific kind. Indeed, if we take the titles and objectives of his two early works on the soul this becomes immediately clear. To prove that the soul is immortal, as he wishes to do in his *De immortalitate animae* (*On the Immortality of the Soul*), and that the soul has no extension, as he does in the *De quantitate animae* (*On the Quantity or Magnitude of the Soul*), he simply aims to disprove that the soul is or can be a body. The two texts are just a collection of counterarguments against the subtle and probably at the time pervasive theories of the materialists.<sup>14</sup>

Judging from the texts in question, the materialist theories of the soul that must have attracted the most interest at the time are two and both had a long tradition: 1) the Pythagorean, musical conception of the soul as the *harmonia* of the body, at times confused with the Aristotelian conception of the soul as the *form* of the body;<sup>15</sup> and 2) the Stoic but also generally Ancient Greek and Judaic idea that the soul was just a breath (*spiritus*), or even a wind (*ventus*), where the latter ratifies even more the identity between corporeal breath within human beings and the spirit outside them.<sup>16</sup> Yet both theories must have been in some way connected in a world that understood music, and not wrongly, as a fundamentally aerial or pneumatic phenom-

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<sup>14</sup> The fact that all of Augustine's texts, both the early ones and less explicitly the later ones, as well as many other texts from the same period, such as Mamertus' *De statu animae*, set out every time to reject materialist theories and, in particular, the theory that the soul is just a breath prove how pervasive these conceptions must have been at the time. Claudianus Mamertus, *De statu animae*, in *Opera*, ed. August Engelbrecht (Vienna: C. Geroldi filium, 1885), 1.7. See also Tertullian, *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani De anima*, ed. J. H. Waszink (Leiden: Brill, 2010), par. 5–10; also in Hans von Arnim, ed., *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, 4 vol. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1924), II. 773; 784 (hereafter referenced as SVF).

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *Im. an.*, 2.2.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 4.6.

enon.<sup>17</sup> Augustine, whose conversion to Platonism taught him one, irrevocable tenet, namely that the soul and God are immaterial, tries to disprove both of these theories in the two texts respectively.

It is in his *De quantitate animae*, however, that Augustine reveals his counterarguments to be strictly connected to his response to certain specific materialist theories, namely pneumatological ones. In the *De immortalitate animae*, to prove that the soul was immortal meant disproving that the soul could simply be a harmony of the body and therefore be or depend on a body. Instead, at the beginning of this dialogue on the *quantity or magnitude* of the soul, to prove that the soul has no extension, which for Augustine is like saying that it is something immaterial, means to disprove all those theories that claim the soul to be just a breath, or even a wind:<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The two theories are strictly identified and associated with the Stoics and the Epicureans in passage 26.13 from Alexander of Aphrodisias's *De anima*: "In contrast, the soul would be a harmony, or a harmonious composition of certain bodies, for those who make the soul out of a specific kind of mixture and composition of things. This group includes the Stoics, who claim that the soul is breath composed in a certain way from fire and air. It also includes the Epicureans [...]" Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On the Soul* [*De anima*], ed. and trans. Victor Caston (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 26.13; also in *SVF*, II.786. But the connection is made powerfully explicit by Cicero, in a passage from the *Tusculanae*: "Others however identify soul [*animus*] and breath [*anima*] as we Romans practically do [...] Zeno the Stoic holds the soul to be fire. Now the views I have mentioned, that the soul is heart, brain, life or fire are those ordinarily held: the remaining views are as a rule peculiar to individual thinkers, just as philosophers of old held individual views long ago, but nearest in date to our time there was Aristoxenus, musician as well as philosopher, who held the soul to be a special tuning up of the natural body [*ipsius corporis intensionem quondam*] analogous to that which is called harmony in vocal and instrumental music; answering to the nature and conformation of the whole body, vibrations of different kinds are produced just as sounds are in vocal music." Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. John Edward King (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), I.19; see also Solère, "Tension et intention," 62. Regarding the relation of music to air: "This is to be expected, since sound is a movement of air." Aristotle, *De anima*, ed. and trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 420c. "For sound is a continuous tuning [*τάσις*] of air which, after it is taken around inside the objects making the beatings, follows through to the outside and therefore, according to how much force there might be in the greater tension of those objects through which the beats are made, is made both smaller and higher." Ptolemy, *Harmonics*, trans. and ed. Jon Solomon (Leiden: Brill, 2000), I.3.8.

<sup>18</sup> English translations of Latin texts can be found in the abbreviation section preceding the bibliography. However, some translations might have been modified to better convey the contextual meaning of the passages.

E. Undoubtedly my view is that it is impossible for bodies to be without these three dimensions.

A. What is that? Can you think of these three dimensions existing anywhere except in bodies?

E. I do not see how they can be elsewhere.

A. Therefore, you think that the soul is simply a body?

E. If we admit that even the wind [*ventus*] is a body, I cannot deny that the soul seems to be a body, for I think it is something like the wind.<sup>19</sup>

To think that the soul is like the wind, like a moving breath, means to think that the soul is a body with certain physical dimensions, and this is what this treatise is about to disprove. The *De quantitate animae* is an anti-pneumatological text.

### The Soul-Body Problem as a Problem of Mixture

Augustine's main argument for the immateriality of the soul in this dialogue has clear Neo-Platonist undertones. To disprove that the soul has no physical extension he turns to the power of memory and reason, and claims the soul must have no extension for us to perceive and think.<sup>20</sup> Put simply, if perceptions and thoughts – what the soul eminently produces and is made of – were corporeal, then how could someone think of or remember things that are much bigger than oneself? However, such an understanding of the soul creates the fundamental problem of the difference or rather of the chasm between soul and body. More than Augustine's complicated and lengthy study of geometry from this dialogue, which he takes to resolve this issue and only partially, we are interested in the theory that he is rejecting and that did not present this problem. Rather, the pneumatological, materialist theory that Augustine is attacking resolved it through its own un-

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<sup>19</sup> “E. Prorsus non dubito corpora omnia his carere non posse. / A. Quid illud? Potes cogitare ista tria non esse nisi in corporibus? / E. Non intellego quomodo alibi esse possint. / A. Ergo animam non putas esse aliud quam corpus? / E. Si etiam ventum corpus esse confitemur, negare non possum corpus mihi animam videri: nam tale aliquid eam esse cogito.” Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 4.6.

<sup>20</sup> This is the Neo-Platonist counterargument that, besides the theory of mixture, aimed to reject the Stoic conception, a development of Aristotle's theory of perception, according to which when perceiving, the *animus* received a physical imprint of the objects perceived. Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 8–23.

derstanding of the soul as a form of *temperatio*, to use Augustine's term from the *De immortalitate animae*:<sup>21</sup> to understand the soul as a breath or a wind means to understand the soul as itself a body pervading the body of the human being and thus mixed with it. As Jean Pépin has shown in a famous essay, although rather implicitly, Augustine is here following the Neo-Platonist Porphyry in trying to disprove the Stoic theory that soul and the body form a corporeal mixture.<sup>22</sup>

The Stoic theory is worth repeating, even if it does not appear explicitly in Augustine's text. Taking inspiration from the Aristotelian account of different kinds of unity in bodies, the Stoics proposed their own updated catalogue.<sup>23</sup> The simplest one counts three kinds of mixtures: 1) juxtaposition or connection, when two or more substances are juxtaposed to one another without losing any of their own qualities, like in a heap of grain or sand; 2) fusion, namely when two or more substances blend together to such a point that none of their original qualities are left and a completely different substance is created, as in the case of medicaments; and finally, 3) a proper mixture, namely when two or more substances penetrate one another completely without losing their own qualities, since one would be able to separate them again, as in the case of a mixture of water and wine, which can be separated thanks to a sponge imbibed with oil.<sup>24</sup>

It is on the basis of such an understanding of mixture that the Stoics justified their conception of the soul as breath. The soul is able to penetrate or diffuse completely through the body like wine and water do, in a mixture. In the words of Alexander of Aphrodisia in whose version we have received this Stoic theory:

They employ as clear evidence that this is the case: the fact that the soul which has its own substantiality, just like the body that receives it, is diffused [διήκειν] throughout the whole of the body while preserving its substan-

<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *Im. an.*, 10.17.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Pépin, "Une nouvelle source de saint Augustin: le ζήτημα de Porphyre *Sur l'union de l'âme et du corps*," *Revue des Études Anciennes* 66, no. 1–2 (1964): 56–89.

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *On Coming-To-Be and Passing-Away (De generatione et corruptione)*, ed. and trans. H. H. Joachim (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), 327b–328b.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De mixtione*, published as *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Stoic Physics*, ed. and trans. Robert B. Todd (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 216.1–218.1; also in *SVF*, II.473.

tiality in the mixture with it (for there is nothing in the body possessing the soul that does not partake of the soul).<sup>25</sup>

Since mixtures exist in nature, then the Stoics believe they can envision the relationship between soul and body as the relationship between two bodies that they call a mixture. The soul remains the soul while being completely diffused through the body.

And this is precisely the theory Augustine is here trying to disprove. First, there is the famous example, already discussed by Pépin,<sup>26</sup> of the soul filling the body like a waterskin: “A. Now, you do not think your soul exists anywhere except in your body, do you? / E. No, I don’t. / A. Is the soul inside the body only, like the contents of a waterskin, so to say, or only on the outside, like a covering, or do you think it is both inside and outside [*et intrinsecus et extrinsecus*]?”<sup>27</sup> This image can be found in one of Porphyry’s Σύμμικτα ζητήματα (*symmikta zetemata*) on the union of body and soul, which have been reconstructed.<sup>28</sup> Pépin links such an analogy to Democritus and Epicurus through a further reference he found in a doxographical passage by Iamblichus, which mentions the theory according to which the soul “is disseminated and present in the body like the wind is in a waterskin (ἐνεστιν ἡ ψυχὴ τῷ σώματι καθαπερὶ ἀσκῷ πνεύμα)” in conjunction with the Democriteans.<sup>29</sup> And yet, then Pépin goes on to explain that this specific ζήτημα (*zetema*) of Porphyry rejects the Stoic theory of mixture and the possibility that soul and body could be two bodies mixed together, where the first body is understood exactly like *pneuma*, a breath or a wind.<sup>30</sup> But besides this important analogy, Augustine himself goes on to discuss the issue in terms extremely similar to the ones we read in Alexander.

Indeed, the problem is a bit later in the treatise presented by Augustine as a problem of *distentio* which, as we will see, is used by him

<sup>25</sup> Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De mixtione*, 217.32; also in *SVF*, II.473.

<sup>26</sup> Pépin, “Une nouvelle source,” 64–67.

<sup>27</sup> “A. Sed numquidam animam tuam putas esse nisi in corpore tuo? / E. Ita puto. / A. Intrinsecus tantum, ut tamquam utrem impleat an tantum forinsecus velut tectorium an et intrinsecus et extrinsecus eam esse arbitraris?” Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Heinrich Dörrie, *Porphyrios’ “Σύμμικτα ζητήματα”: Ihre Stellung in System und Geschichte des Neuplatonismus nebst einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten* (München: Beck, 1959), 80.

<sup>29</sup> Pépin, “Une nouvelle source,” 65. My translation.

<sup>30</sup> Pépin, “Une nouvelle source,” 92–94.

alternatively with the term *diffusio*, and brings us back to Alexander's formulation: "Then, if the soul is distended [*distenditur*] through the space of the body, why does it not have quantity? If, however, it is not distended [*distenditur*], how does it feel all over anything that strikes it?"<sup>31</sup> That the soul distends through the whole body and has, therefore, physical dimensions and is, hence, a body is the materialist theory Augustine is trying to disprove and the one founded on the Stoic conception of mixture. But if the soul does not distend through the body, if it is not a body itself – and Augustine is aware that his theory comes up short here – the question becomes: how can the soul sense and perceive everywhere and throughout the body, namely wherever the body is touched? Through his rejection of the materialist and pneumatological theory of the soul, which is based on the aforementioned conception of mixture, Augustine has become aware of the issue his and every dualism have to confront: the soul-body problem.

Augustine will try to resolve this issue by giving a new account of sensation that is particularly complicated and not worth exploring in detail for two reasons: 1) he will give a sounder and more advanced version of this argument in his *De musica*, which we are going to discuss in the next section; and 2) because towards the end of this dialogue Augustine must almost give up all of his preceding arguments when confronted with the materialist counterexample of the centipede. According to this counterargument, if we take a centipede and we cut it physically in half or more parts, each part goes on living like nothing has happened and, therefore, the soul seems to divide itself with the body.<sup>32</sup> As I said, faced with such a straight-forward dilemma, Augustine almost gives up, but he thinks a particular analogy can here come in help: the analogy of signifier and signified.

Unable to prove in any way that the soul does not get split or cut with the body in which it is contained, Augustine decides it is time to try something completely different to explain how the soul is in the body. He turns to language. How is it that sound and meaning relate

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<sup>31</sup> "Deinde, si per spatium sui corporis anima distenditur, quomodo nullius quantitatis est? Si autem non distenditur, quomodo sentit ubique pungentem?" Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 62–64; on the centipede, see O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy*, 28–29.

to each other in the words we use? Augustine claims that if one analyses these elements with enough attention, what we find is that meaning and sound are to words, what soul and body are to human beings. They are two completely different entities, of which one, the meaning (or the soul), always precedes the other; it can exist without the other in the mind; and indeed, it exists without dimensions, unlike sound or voice, which are divisible in time.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, there are some words that, like the centipede, can be divided and still have meaning. Augustine gives the example of the Latin word “*lucifer*,” the morning star, which can be split into two words, and each of them still has a meaning in Latin, “*luci*” and “*fer*.” Then, what the analogy shows is that it is the voice that is extended in time and can be divided and not the meaning. When the word is split into two words, the two words still have meaning but the original meaning has not been split. There are instead two different meanings. But then this implies:

For, the soul did not occupy a place, but held the body which the soul itself moved. Just as the meaning of a word, without being extended in time [*non distenta per tempus*], animated, so to speak, and filled out all the letters that take up slight intervals of time [to pronounce].<sup>34</sup>

In other words, Augustine believes to have shown, although only by analogy, that the soul-body problem can be solved, without the need for any conception of material mixture: the meaning and the soul are not distended (*distenti*), physically diffused in time and space or in the body but rather *govern* it in some way. It is only in his *De musica*, which he started around the same time of these dialogues but revised much later, that he would find a solution to the soul-body problem in a new account of sensation, in which *intentio* plays the central role.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 66.

<sup>34</sup> “*Non enim locum ipsa, sed corpus quod ab eadem agebatur, tenebat: sicut illa significatio non distenta per tempus, omnes tamen nominis litteras suas moras ac tempora possidentes, velut animaverat atque compleverat.*” Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 68.

<sup>35</sup> *Intentio* is not absent from these early treatises and dialogues, but its role is not as clear yet. Therefore, I have preferred to leave these uses aside in this article in order to avoid confusion.



## *Intentio* as Attention: Augustine's Solution to the Soul-Body Problem

Augustine's theory of sensation is, from the beginning, an answer to the problem of the relationship between body and soul. And this is the reason why when Book VI of the *De musica* gives an account of sensation, it seems to begin where Augustine had left off in his *De quantitate animae*. There, he had claimed that the soul is not distended physically throughout the body – which means mixed with it – but rather governs it. The meaning of this expression had, however, remained obscure. Here, instead, Augustine has found a better explanation to it: *intentio*. The formulation that follows has attracted much attention and sparked a wide debate, perhaps because to the reader of the *De musica* it sounds almost out of context and, thus, hard to decipher.<sup>36</sup> And yet read as a follow-up to Augustine's reflections in his previous treatises, its meaning is clear enough:

For I think the body is animated by the soul only by the intention of the doer [*intentione facientis*]. Nor do I think it is affected in any way by the body, but it acts through it and in it as if the body was a divine subject of its domination.<sup>37</sup>

The soul is in the body by dominating it, by governing it, not by being affected by it. And all this Augustine summarises with the expression "*intentione facientis*" – the only way through which the soul ani-

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<sup>36</sup> The debate developed around François-Joseph Thonnard and Guy Finaert's comment that the text here is hard to read and the expression *intentione facientis* could be translated both as "*dans un but d'activité*" ("in the purpose of an action") and in a more creationist or theological fashion as "*selon l'intention du Créateur*" ("according to the intention of the Creator"). Although the two underlying conceptions are certainly related, the second interpretation is here out of context, as most critics now agree. See also editors' note 78 in Augustine, *Dialogues Philosophiques: La musique; De musica libri sex*, eds. Guy Finaert and François-Joseph Thonnard (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1947), 378–380; Rohmer, "L'intentionnalité," 494; Vanni Rovighi, "La fenomenologia," 20–21. A fundamental summary of the debate is in Ubaldo Pizzani, "*Intentio* ed escatologia nel sesto libro del *De musica* di S. Agostino," in *Interiorità e intenzionalità in S. Agostino: Atti del I° e II° Seminario Internazionale del Centro di Studi Agostiniani di Perugia*, ed. Luigi Alici (Roma: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1990), 43.

<sup>37</sup> "*Ego enim ab anima hoc corpus animari non puto, nisi intentione facientis. Nec ab isto quidquam illam pati arbitror, sed facere de illo et in illo tamquam subiecto divinitus dominationi suae.*" Augustine, *Mus.* VI.9.

mates the body is through “the intention of the doer,” namely through the intention of the soul itself.

At this point, the temptation would be to read this term anachronistically and superimpose onto it the contemporary meaning of intention, reducing it to the wilful purpose of the soul. But we need to resist such an urge, not because it might be wrong in the long run, but because it might obscure the larger context in which Augustine made use of this word. Indeed, we could still doubt this *intentio* to be related in any way to the anti-pneumatological argumentation of the earlier *De quantitate animae*. The two texts might seem too distant, or a link to be missing. Why would Augustine himself not explicitly formulate his argument the way we are sketching it here: the soul is not in the body as a physical distention but rather animates it only through its intention? And yet in a later letter to Jerome (from around 415 CE) about the origin of the soul, this is precisely how Augustine summarised his own view:

Furthermore, if it is a characteristic of a body to occupy space with a certain length, width and height, and for it to be so placed or moved that it fills a larger space with the larger part of itself, and a smaller space with a smaller part, and for the part to be less than the whole, then the soul is not a body. For the soul extends through the whole body to which it imparts life, not by a diffusion in space [*non locali diffusione*] but by a certain life-giving intention [*quadama vitali intentione*]; it is wholly present in every smallest part, not less in smaller parts and more in larger ones, but in one place more intent, in another more relaxed [*alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius*], yet wholly present in each and all parts.<sup>38</sup>

Augustine’s *De musica* continues the anti-materialist and anti-pneumatological argumentation of the *De quantitate animae*. To claim that the soul is in the body as *intentio* is to disprove that the soul is itself a body, a breath or a wind that is distended or diffused throughout the

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<sup>38</sup> “Porro si corpus non est, nisi quod per loci spatium aliqua longitudine, latitudine, altitudine ita sistitur vel movetur, ut maiore sui parte maiorem locum occupet, et brevior brevior, minusque sit in parte quam in toto, non est corpus anima. Per totum quippe corpus quod animat, non locali diffusione, sed quadam vitali intentione porrigitur: nam per omnes eius particulas tota simul adest, nec minor in minoribus, et in maioribus maior; sed alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius, et in omnibus tota, et in singulis tota est.” Augustine, *Ep.*, 166.4.

body. But then what is this *vitalis intentio* (or this *intentio facientis*)? The expression “*alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius*” immediately strikes an intent reader as worth analysing and it could prove helpful in answering our question. Indeed, “*alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius*” seems to be a calque of an expression common in classical musical treatises to indicate the tending and relaxing of the voice.<sup>39</sup> But it is not in this sense that Augustine uses it but rather, this musical expression becomes in his theory of sensation a synonym of *intentio*.

In fact, circling back to his *De musica*, there Augustine argues that an analysis of sensations explicates how the soul is in the body as *intentio*. After clarifying that the soul is not affected by the body in any way but rather dominates it through its own *intentio*, he goes on to explain how sensing therefore happens: our sense organs are touched by external objects, but these objects do not touch our soul; rather, our soul can become more or less attentive to them:

In short, it seems to me the soul, when it senses something in the body, is not affected in any way by it, but rather it becomes more attentive [*attentius*] to its own affections, and these functions which are felt as easier when in accordance with their object or more difficult if not, are not unknown to the soul: and this whole process is what is called sensing.<sup>40</sup>

The expression from letter 166, “in one place more intent, in another more relaxed [*alicubi intentius, alicubi remissius*]” was here expressed, quite tellingly, with “rather it becomes more attentive [*sed in eius passionibus attentius agere*].” When we sense something, our soul does not suffer any change (*pati* – *passionibus*), but rather it can become more or less attentive to these passions, it is more or less intended in them.

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<sup>39</sup> “It is by the raising, lowering or inflexion of the voice [*intentio vocis, remissio, flexus*] that the orator stirs the emotions of his hearers, and the measure, if I may repeat the term, of voice or phrase differs according as we wish to rouse the indignation or the pity of the judge.” Quintilian, *The institutio oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. Harold Edgeworth Butler, 4 vol. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920–1922), I.10.25. “Because contracting [*intentio*] the chord causes higher noises, relaxing [*remissio*] it lower ones.” Boethius, *De institutione musica*, ed. Giovanni Marzi (Roma: Istituto italiano per la storia della musica, 1990), IV.5.

<sup>40</sup> “*Et ne longum faciam, videtur mihi anima cum sentit in corpore, non ab illo aliquid pati, sed in eius passionibus attentius agere, et has actiones sive faciles propter convenientiam, sive difficiles propter inconvenientiam, non eam latere: et hoc totum est quod sentire dicitur.*” Augustine, *Mus.*, VI.10.

*Intentio* has here become *attentio* and this is what differentiates the soul from the body, while at the same time keeping them together: the first, immaterial, can turn to the other, can attend to the other, material. And it is precisely in this mystical sense that sensation is then read by Augustine. If to sense is to direct our attention towards our sense organs and therefore towards the material world, then to reach God one needs to avoid sensation, avert one's own attention from matter and turn it towards God.<sup>41</sup> When one hears something, one simply intends oneself spiritually towards the material sense organs. But in this way the external, material world, voices and sounds, lose all meaning and what comes first is always the immaterial interiority. It is therefore Augustine that makes of intention a dematerialising and desonouring of life.

### *Intentio* as Will: the Inclusive Exclusion of the Pneumatological Theory of the Soul

Everything changes in Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*. The arguments used by Augustine in this case are not very different from those already analysed in this article and yet they present a fundamental difference: in response also to the pneumatological nature of the biblical account of the creation of the human being through God's breath, Augustine has here completely absorbed parts of the pneumatological theories he was trying to disprove. After disproving that the soul could be made of one of the two passive natural elements, namely earth or water, Augustine turns once again to air, the element to which the *flatus*, God's breath, also belongs. His rejection is as extreme as usual, but this time we are introduced to another side of the argument, which was missing in the previous iterations. This time the possible corporeal nature of the soul as a breath diffused or distended (*distentio* or *diffusio*) through the body is not simply denied in favour of a spiritual *intentio*. Such a pneumatological theory of distended breath is rather accepted but confined to the level of the body; it is excluded by being included, which means however that for the first time we have a precise and detailed description of what such a pneumatological theory would look like.

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<sup>41</sup> Augustine, *Mus.*, VI.12–14. See also Pizzani, “*Intentio* ed escatologia,” 49–50.

Augustine ascribes such a theory to some anonymous medical doctors, but many of the ideas in question can be traced back to earlier Stoic theories, which had developed in parallel to medical theories.<sup>42</sup> What the “doctors” have shown is that the human body is not made only of earth and water, the passive elements, but also of a certain quantity of air that, contained in the lungs, is then diffused (*diffunditur*) by the heart throughout the body thanks to the veins called arteries.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, precisely like in the case of the Stoic *pneuma*, some of this air is mixed with fire, which gives it some form of heat and luminosity.<sup>44</sup> And it is through this luminous air that – the doctors have shown and Augustine deems pivotal to retell – we are able to sense anything at all: if we are able to see through our eyes is because rays of this luminous air reach from our brain through our eyes to the objects we perceive; if we are able to hear, taste and smell is because little pipes bring this air from the brain to the sense organs; if we are able to feel what we touch is because through other canals air is diffused everywhere in our body (*per cuncta membra diffundant*).<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to his early arguments for the immateriality of the soul, Augustine’s genius in the *De Genesi ad litteram* is to have absorbed the very pneumatological theory he was, from the beginning, trying to re-

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<sup>42</sup> In regard to Augustine’s medical knowledge see editors’ note 34 in Augustine, *La genèse au sens littéral en douze livres / De genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, eds. Paul Agaësse and Aimé Solignac (Paris: Declée de Brouwer, 1972), 710–714; as well as Gustave Bardy, “Saint Augustin et les médecins,” *Année Théologique Augustiniennes* 13, no. 3 (1953): 327–346. Indeed, the relationship between the Ancient Greek medical pneumatic school and the Stoics is still matter of debate. Even if we are prone to accept Max Pohlenz’s claim that the Ancient Stoics actually developed certain ideas they found in the medical theory of their time, such as the fundamental role of the *pneuma*, we cannot exclude that Stoic and medical theories then kept influencing each another, as the cases of both Seneca and Galen show. Max Pohlenz, *Hippokrates und die Begründung der wissenschaftlichen Medizin* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1938), 30–80; Max Pohlenz, *Die Stoa: Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948), 82–85; Frédéric Le Blay, “Pneumatism in Seneca: An Example of Interaction between Physics and Medicine,” in “Greek” and “Roman” in Latin medical texts: studies in cultural change and exchange in ancient medicine, ed. Brigitte Maire (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 63–76.

<sup>43</sup> Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.13.20.

<sup>44</sup> SVF, II.442; 443; 841.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.13.20

ject.<sup>46</sup> Now air is said to play a fundamental role in perception or even in every movement of our body. And yet it has nothing to do with the soul because of *intentio*, or as we read here for the first time, because of something that seems for Augustine to be intrinsically linked to *intentio*, namely *voluntas*. The materialists are right, without air there would be no possibility of any contact with the world outside, no possibility of movement, and yet this air is not the soul: “And the air, which is infused [*infusus*] through the nerves, obeys the will in order to move the limbs, but is not itself the will.”<sup>47</sup> This formulation is fascinating: indeed, *infusus* corresponds here to *intentus* if, as we have observed numerous times, *diffusus* corresponds to *distentus*. And in the Latin tradition the *nervi* are what first and foremost “intend,” as Augustine claims in his *De quantitate animae* and could have read also in Lactantius.<sup>48</sup> Here we begin to observe – although it has been happening all along – how Augustine must avoid using *intentio* in a certain traditional, inherited sense, to salvage it for his own ends. And indeed, when we will to move our body, air is infused in our nerves and is put in tension so as to let our limbs move according to our will. But this air is not our soul, it is not the will itself, our will is something different from this tension: it is *intentio*.

Even the theory of mixture is now approved and re-interpreted as part of his own spiritual understanding of the soul. We are told for the

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<sup>46</sup> In light of this, it will be necessary to update Verbeke’s account of the development of pneumatology. If, as he claims, Augustine is indeed the first one for whom the *spiritus* becomes the immaterial spirit, he was able to achieve this only by re-including on another level the earlier materialist understanding of *pneuma*.

<sup>47</sup> “*Et aer, qui nervis infusus est, paret voluntati, ut membra moveat, non autem ipse voluntas est.*” Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.25. It cannot be stressed enough how pivotal this formulation will be for the following millennia of European history.

<sup>48</sup> Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 38–39. Also in Lactantius: “What of Aristoxenus who denied that there is any soul at all, even while it lives in the body? Just as in lyres a pleasing sound and melody is effected by a straining of the strings [*intentione nervorum*] which musicians call harmony, so in bodies the power of sensing comes to be from the union of the inward parts and the strength of the members.” Lactantius, *Divinarum Institutionum Libri Septem*, eds. Eberhard Heck and Antonie Wlosok, 4 vol. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005–2011), VII.13.2; also in Boethius, *De institutione musica*, I.28. See also Solère, “Tension et intention,” 61–68. In their etymological dictionary, Alfred Ernout and Alfred Meillet cite “*nervi*” (nerves) as one of the main objects of the verb *intendo*. Alfred Ernout and Alfred Meillet, eds., *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2001), s. v. “tendō.”

first time that *intentio* is a response to the problem of mixture, because it makes possible a new kind of incorporeal mixture, which no longer has nothing to do with air:

Since the soul is not of a bodily nature, nor does it fill the body as its local space, like water filling a waterskin or a sponge, but in wonderful ways it is mixed [*commixta*] into the body it animates, and with its incorporeal nod [*incorporeo nutu*], so to say, it powers or steers the body with a kind of intention [*quadam intentione*], not with any material engine [*non mole*] – how much less, I am saying, is this “nod” of its will [*nutus voluntatis*] the subject of local movement itself, in order to move the body locally, when it moves the whole body through its parts, and only moves some parts locally through others which it does not move locally!<sup>49</sup>

The soul is in a mixture with the body but a mixture of a new kind, a distention based on the incorporeal, immaterial ability that Augustine calls “a certain *intentio*” (*quadam intentione non mole*) or will (*nutus voluntatis*).

In order to prove the difference between body and soul, which has now become explicitly a difference between air and soul, Augustine’s argumentation rejoins his earlier ones and turns explicitly to the power of the soul he calls *intentio*, the ability of the soul to direct oneself towards something or even will something:

For indeed that the soul is one thing and a different one these, its bodily services, or instruments, or tools (or whatever else they may more suitably be called) becomes clear from this further evidence: very often it turns itself away vigorously from everything else with a forceful intention of thought [*cogitationis intentio*], and it is unaware of the many things before its wide open and perfectly healthy eyes; and if the intention is greater [*si maior intentio est*], while walking along he may suddenly stop – withdrawing the commanding nod [*imperandi nutum*] from the ministry of motion by which the feet were being set in motion. However, if his intention of thought [*cogitationis intentio*] is not quite intense enough to stop him in his tracks, but is still such that it is not free to nudge that middle part of the brain which mediates the body’s

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<sup>49</sup> “Cum anima non sit natura corporea, nec locali spatio corpus impleat, sicut aqua utrum sive spongiam; sed miris modis ipso incorporeo nutu commixta sit vivificando corpori, quo et imperat corpori, quadam intentione non mole: quanto magis, inquam, nutus ipse voluntatis eius non per locum movetur, ut corpus per locum moveat, quando totum per partes movet, nec aliquas loco movet nisi per illas quas loco non movet?” Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VIII.21.42.

movements, he sometimes forgets both where he is coming from and where he is going, and without noticing it passes the homestead he was making for – having nothing wrong with the nature of his body, but his soul has been called away to some other matter.<sup>50</sup>

The fact that the human soul has an *intentio*, namely that it can be both distracted from, as in this case, or intensely focused on and attentive to something which is not its body proves that the soul is something different from the body it controls and from the instruments it uses, namely air. As we know from Augustine's analysis of sensation in his *De musica*, when perceiving something, the soul does not suffer anything. The object perceived or the very sense organs through which the object reaches the soul do not touch the soul in any way. Rather, it is the soul that can direct its own intention towards them or away from them. But now we know that this means directing, or intending, air towards or away from them.

What Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* shows with the utter clarity, compared with the previous texts analysed, is not that *intentio* in Augustine is a calque of the pneumatological concept of *tonos* developed by the ancient Stoics,<sup>51</sup> but rather that *intentio* is in Augustine precisely and from the beginning the opposite of the material, aerial *tonos*, namely an anti-pneumatological concept that allows the split between *aer* and *spiritus*. It is right here with such a use of *intentio* that the *flatum* becomes *spiritus*, a term as ambiguous as the former and yet one Augustine is ready to transform into what we still call "the spirit:"

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<sup>50</sup> "Namque aliud esse ipsam, aliud haec eius corporalia ministeria, vel vasa, vel organa, vel si quid aptius dici possunt, hinc evidenter elucet, quod plerumque se vehementi cogitationis intentione avertit ab omnibus, ut prae oculis patentibus recteque valentibus multa posita nesciat; et si maior intentio est, dum ambulabat, repente subsistat, avertens utique imperandi nutum a ministerio motionis qua pedes agebantur: si autem non tanta est cogitationis intentio, ut figat ambulanti loco, sed tamen tanta est ut partem illam cerebri mediam nuntiantem corporis motus non vacet advertere; obliviscitur aliquando et unde veniat, et quo eat, et transit imprudens villam quo tendebat, natura sui corporis sana, sed sua in aliud advocata." Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.26.

<sup>51</sup> No one has made such extreme claims, but this is the strawman some supporters of the Neo-Platonist Augustine, such as Stéphane Toulouse, have built on the suggestions of Rohmer, O'Daly and Solère, among others. Rohmer, "L'intentionnalité," 497; O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy*, 43–45; Solère, "Tension et intention," 126–128; Stéphane Toulouse, "Influences néoplatoniciennes sur l'analyse augustinienne des *visiones*," *Archives de Philosophie* 72, no. 2 (2009): 235–237.



What we are saying is that whatever the soul is, it is neither one of these four well-known elements, which are manifestly bodies, nor is it what God is. But you cannot state better what it is than by saying that it is the soul or spirit of life. The reason for adding “of life,” you see, is that this air [*aer*] too is often called spirit [*spiritus*].<sup>52</sup>

Through the expression *spiritus vitae*, spirit of life, Augustine tries to delimit a space for the immaterial spirit that *intentio* has made possible.

### Augustine's Neo-Platonist Account of the Trinity as a Rejection of the Materialist Theory of Mixture

What we discover in Augustine's *De Trinitate*, perhaps one of Augustine's most important texts, is that *intentio* does not stop playing a role once we move from the soul to that purely immaterial spirit that he takes God to be. But rather it plays a role that is as foundational and one that Western culture has perfectly internalised. When we talk about intention nowadays, it is almost impossible to disentangle this concept from that of the will, with which it seems to coincide. As we will see, such a coincidence was thought for the first time by Augustine in his *De Trinitate* and it can be read as the conclusion of the process of dematerialisation of the spirit that from *intentio* led to *attentio* and finally to *voluntas* (and love), and which this article has been tracing all along. The point for Augustine will be to show that the true life, of human beings and of everything, namely God, has absolutely nothing to do with the external, material world, even more than one could imagine by looking at the phenomenon of perception, as he had done in his earlier works: God, the Trinity, is the most interior, the most self-sustaining substance that exists, a transcendental subject that lives of and in itself.

The aim of the last seven books of Augustine's *De Trinitate* is to clarify the mystery of the Trinity, namely how God could be a Trinity or, according to the well-known formula: three single persons in one

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<sup>52</sup> “*Nam et nos dicimus, quidquid anima est, non esse horum quatuor notissimorum elementorum, quae manifesta sunt corpora; sed neque hoc esse quod Deus est. Quid sit autem, non dicitur melius quam anima vel spiritus vitae. Ideo enim additur, vitae, quia et iste aer plerumque dicitur spiritus.*” Augustine, *Gn. litt.*, VII.30.

substance. It will be impossible to understand Augustine's arguments about the Trinity and their implications, unless we understand that this was for Augustine, and for the Church Fathers before him, first and foremost a metaphysical conundrum. The metaphysical question is: how is it possible that three entities can coexist in a single substance, namely how can they coincide with one another, and at the same time be each one a different "person?" As Wolfson has shown, the Church Fathers had interpreted this problem from the beginning in a similar fashion to the mystery of the incarnation and the related problem of the two natures of Christ, namely as a problem of "mixture."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the Fathers had found in ancient philosophy a wide array of discussions on this theme, the same we have already partially discussed: first in Aristotle, who had been the first to give a catalogue of different kinds of "unities;" and then in the Stoics, who on a very specific kind of mixture had founded their whole philosophy – not just their psychology, as we saw in the first part of this article, but their cosmology as well, as Alexander of Aphrodisia had already noticed.<sup>54</sup>

As Pépin demonstrated in the conclusion to the article already cited, the case here is analogous to the already discussed one of the relationship between soul and body.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, as we saw in the first part of this article, while the Stoics understood it as a mixture, namely as a complete interpenetration and *distentio* of two bodies, Augustine, following the Neo-Platonists and Porphyry in particular, read it as a relationship of *intentio* between the incorporeal soul and the corporeal body. But this time what is at stake is the possibility of an immaterial version

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<sup>53</sup> "As to what is meant by these terms and also how the mystery of triunity is to be solved, Augustine's discussion of the subject betrays the influence of Aristotle's discussion of the various kinds of relative unity and of the use made of it by earlier Fathers in their dealing with the mystery of triunity." Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of The Church Fathers*, vol. 1, *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 350. Most recently, Alain de Libera has come back to this problem; Alain de Libera, *Naissance du sujet* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2016), 257–269.

<sup>54</sup> "For their theory of blending does not rely on something else, but their views on the soul depend *on it*, and their notorious Fate and their universal Providence gain conviction in this way if indeed their [theory] of principles and God, as well as the unification and sympathy of everything depend on it; for the God that pervades matter is all of these things for them." Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Stoic Physics*, 226.34–227; *SVF*, II.475.

<sup>55</sup> Pépin, "Une nouvelle source," 92–107.

of precisely what the Stoics had imagined and believed to be able to prove with empirical evidence: namely, that two bodies can penetrate each other completely (expressed with the noun ἀντιπαρέκτασις (*anti-parektasis*) or the verb χωρέω (*choreo*) or περιχωρέω (*perichoreo*)) without each of them losing its own qualities, like water and wine when mixed. The Greek Fathers called this interpenetration of different immaterial substances in one immaterial essence very aptly *perichoresis*, one of the terms, as Wolfson noted, used by the Stoics to refer to the interpenetration that took place in what they called mixtures and which in Latin will be translated as *circumincessio*.<sup>56</sup> And it is the possibility of this immaterial *perichoresis* that Augustine's *De Trinitate* wants to make possible, once again through *intentio*, although in a metamorphosed form.

But proving that an interpenetration of immaterial substances is possible appeared to be much harder than proving that an interpenetration of bodies is, or perhaps just as hard if we remember that Augustine rejected the second theory, at least after his conversion. While the Stoics could turn to physical, empirical examples, to prove that bodies actually penetrated each other without losing their own nature, we seem to be at a loss in regard to immaterial substances. In Book VII, Augustine makes this confession: he goes over three well-known analogies that had already been used to understand the relationship between essence and persons inside the Trinity and shows that none of them works.<sup>57</sup> Each of them leads to a different heresy. It is impossible, he claims, for humans to understand this specific mixture because everything we perceive and imagine is material and corporeal, it has dimensions, while God, the Trinity, has no dimensions. But then, Augustine's innovation, which he takes once again from the Neo-Platonists – Plotinus this time – is to claim that an empirical example exists but is detached from everything

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<sup>56</sup> Wolfson, *Philosophy of The Church Fathers*, 418–433; August Deneffe, “Perichoresis, circumincesso, circumincesso: Eine terminologische Untersuchung,” *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 47, no. 4 (1923): 497–532; de Libera, *Naissance du sujet*, 283–295.

<sup>57</sup> The first one is that the essence would correspond to a genus and the persons to different species; the second that they would correspond respectively to a species and different individuals; and the third one that one could understand the essence as the common matter or substance from which the three persons are formed, like in the case of some gold from which three statues are formed. Augustine, *Trin.*, VII.9–11.

material. An analogy, or an image he will say, of the way the Trinity works can be found in the immaterial doings of the human mind itself.

It is not then by any chance that this final stage of the process would immediately betray its own Neo-Platonist underpinnings and the final, explicit conversion of *intentio* into a full-fledged and fully traceable Neo-Platonist concept: βούλησις (*boulesis*) or *voluntas*. As Ernst Benz once showed, Augustine's trinitarian exploration can be read as a Christian reading of Plotinus' *Enneads* VI.8, a version of which Augustine could have read already in Marius Victorinus, the Neo-Platonist philosopher and then converted Christian, in whose translation Augustine probably read the *libri platonici* leading to his conversion.<sup>58</sup> In *Enneads* VI.8, Plotinus reached the speculative peak of his philosophy by trying to understand in which way the One, the supreme principle, worked. His answer was that the One is the Absolute Good and it is beyond being and life, and it is therefore indefinable through any category or attribute of this world, like in every proper negative theology. Yet by using the analogy of the human mind through the particle οὐν ("as if," which in Augustine becomes *quasi*),<sup>59</sup> he discerned in the One three activities that are actually one: as the Absolute Good, the One contemplates, wills and loves itself as the absolute good, and these three activities are one; because as soon as it contemplates itself, it also knows itself as the Absolute Good and it also wants to be itself, and therefore it loves itself.<sup>60</sup> For Plotinus, the One is a self-contemplating mind that,

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<sup>58</sup> Pépin argues that the model is not Plotinus but Porphyry. Yet Benz's evidence is quite solid. Here it must be noticed that Benz's work is almost completely absent from any Augustine bibliography. This has implied a general delay in understanding the role Augustine has played in the invention of the Western concept of *voluntas*. Ernst Benz, *Marius Victorinus und die Entwicklung der abendländischen Willensmetaphysik* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1932), 289–309. Albrecht Dihle also confirms Benz's argument. Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of the Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 123–129.

<sup>59</sup> See for example, Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.11. On the οὐν, see Benz, *Marius Victorinus*, 289–293.

<sup>60</sup> "Theoretical intellect, that is, primary Intellect is in this way up to itself, since its function is never up to something else. On the contrary, it reverted entirely towards itself and its function, lying itself in the Good with no deficiency and fulfilled, living in a way in conformity to will. Its will is intellection, but it is called 'will' because its [activity] accords with Intellect. So-called will imitates what is in accord with Intellect, for will wants the Good, while thinking lies truly in the Good. Intellect, then, possesses what will wants, and, when will attains it, will becomes intellection." Plotinus, *The Enneads*, ed. Loyd P. Gerson, trans. George Boys-Stones et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), VI.8.6. "It is borne in a way inside itself,

therefore, wills and loves itself, with no need for an outside. This image of the human mind can be read, according to Augustine, as an image of the Divine Trinity: three persons in one essence.

All these different argumentative steps are present, although at different moments and in a different order, in Augustine's *De Trinitate*. If Plotinus had already undertaken the task of interpreting the One as an entirely interior life, self-sufficient and self-sustaining through its capacity for contemplation, will and self-love, similar to the human mind, Augustine's innovation, central to our research, goes even deeper by grounding such a process more profoundly in the psychology of the human mind.<sup>61</sup> Just as his psychology was founded on the rejection of the possibility that soul and body could be a mixture of two bodies, the soul as breath and the body itself, so his theology is based on the rejection of God as a material mixture and the proof that something like an immaterial mixture is possible. And the second argument depends *in toto* on the first one. For Augustine, the Trinity is a trinity of *mens*, *amor* and *notitia*, a mind that loves and knows itself, or more clearly a trinity of memory, intelligence and will, a mind that is certain to always be remembering, comprehending and willing at the same time, only because the mind is first of all a trinity of memory, things remembered and *voluntas*, which in turn is based on the even more material trinity of vision, object seen and *intentio*. It is through this innovation that the process of the dematerialisation of the spirit and of *intentio* finally takes place and *intentio* as *voluntas* can come to coincide with the totally immaterial Holy Spirit itself.

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as though loving itself, in the pure radiance, being itself that which it loved, that is, it has made itself exist, if indeed it is persisting activity and the most loved thing, like Intellect. But Intellect is the result of actuality; hence, the Good is that, too, but not of anything else. It is, therefore, the result of its own activity. It is, therefore, not as it is accidentally; rather, it is as it itself acts." Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.8.16.

<sup>61</sup> This is the reason why Augustine's *De Trinitate* has also been read as a psychological treatise, which also explains why its concepts had such an influence on most psychological theorising in the European tradition.

The Dematerialisation of the Spirit:  
The Central Role of *Intentio* as *Intentio* and *Voluntas*  
in Augustine's Account of the Trinity

To read the second part of Augustine's *De Trinitate* means to appreciate for the first time the central role that Augustine's theory of sensation played from the beginning in his conception of God: the way in which, from the beginning, his understanding of perception made possible not only the immateriality of the human soul, as we already saw, but also the immateriality of God Himself. And this immateriality, the negation of any corporeal mixture, depends on *voluntas*, a direct equivalent of *intentio* in the soul-body relationship – the two have become at this point synonymous, as we already saw in his *De Genesi ad litteram*. Indeed, Augustine's whole attempt to reach an image of the Divine Trinity – just an image because God is completely unreachable – is based on the possibility of God's similarity to the human being, which Augustine had found in Plotinus but that he read in Christian terms through the scriptural assumption of the *imago dei*: the human being was created in the image of God.<sup>62</sup> This similarity allowed the possibility for a *regressus* to God in terms of trinity, according to which starting from the trinity that Augustine believed to be intrinsic to the *homo exterior*, the human being in his relation to the external world, one could reach a better understanding of the trinity of the *homo interior*, the spiritual mind of the human being, and therefore of the Divine Trinity itself. It is in this way that *intentio* came to play a role, and a central one at that, in the nature of God Himself.

Therefore, in Book XI of his *De Trinitate*, we find out, as part of this process, that the theory of sensation we read in Augustine contained from the beginning some form of trinity.<sup>63</sup> When we perceive some-

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<sup>62</sup> At other times, Augustine claims that the whole of nature must be similar in some way to God since He created it. Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.8.

<sup>63</sup> On the passages on the *homo exterior* in the *De Trinitate* see Carla Di Martino, "Il ruolo della *intentio* nell'evoluzione della psicologia di Agostino: dal *De libero arbitrio* al *De Trinitate*," *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 46, no. 2 (2000): 188–196, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.REA.5.104821>.

thing there are always three elements:<sup>64</sup> 1) the object one sees; 2) the *visio*, namely what one actually sees in one's mind once the sense organs have been informed by the object outside; and 3) most importantly, the *intentio animi*, "*quod in ea re quae videtur quamdiu videtur sensum detinet oculorum*," namely what keeps the sense organs fixed on the object seen.<sup>65</sup> This is the first, most sensible, most corporeal trinity that one can find in the *homo exterior* and yet one that, as we already know, is not completely corporeal. Augustine specifies more than once that this trinity has an interesting characteristic, typical of the *homo exterior*, namely the three elements are not part of the same substance, they are not of the same nature. Indeed, the object seen and the sense organ belong to two different bodies, unless we are perceiving our own body. But, most importantly, as we know, the *intentio animi*, unlike the other two elements, is not corporeal in any way, but rather belongs to the *animus* and only to the *animus*. And it is this *intentio*, which already in this discussion is called, at times, *voluntas*,<sup>66</sup> that remains a constant of all the trinities Augustine will analyse and that hides a power which cannot be underestimated: the *vis copulandi*, the ability to bring together and unify different things, indeed to mix them, which if powerful enough, it becomes or can be called "*amor aut cupiditas aut libido*" (love or cupidity or lust).<sup>67</sup> In other words, the first trinity already shows, although as a possible negative capability as well, the further possibilities of *intentio*: *intentio* is *voluntas*, and therefore love, or bad love.

The second trinity that Augustine finds in the *homo exterior* is the trinity of *cogitatio* (thought) or memory. Once the *intentio animi* that had brought together the object seen and the organ of sense is directed somewhere else, the image produced does not disappear completely but

<sup>64</sup> The sense in question does not matter, but Augustine takes the example of vision, as he had done in his *De Genesi ad litteram*.

<sup>65</sup> Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.3–5.

<sup>66</sup> "Since this is so, let us recall how these three, though differing in nature, may be mixed together [*contemperentur*] into a kind of unity, namely, (i) the form of the body that is seen, (ii) its image impressed on the sense, which is vision, or the sense informed, and (iii) the will of the soul [*voluntas animi*] which directs the sense to the sensible thing and keeps the vision itself fixed upon it. [...] The third, however, is proper to the soul alone, because it is the will." Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.5.

<sup>67</sup> Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.5.

gives rise to a similar image in our memory. The presence of this image in our memory makes possible the second trinity, the trinity of *cogitatio*: when we think of something, what happens is that 3) our will – *intentio* has now officially become *voluntas*, but at other times it will still be referred to as *voluntatis intentio*<sup>68</sup> – directs itself towards the 1) image in our memory, giving rise to a new form of 2) interior vision, what we call *cogitatio*, thought, because the three are brought together (*coguntur*) by the force of the will (*coactus*).<sup>69</sup>

There is, however, a fundamental difference between the first and the second trinity of the *homo exterior*, according to Augustine: in the latter case, the three are of the same substance. They all belong this time to the *animus*.<sup>70</sup> Sensible bodies have been left behind. And yet it is still of their traces that we are thinking, meaning that the will can still turn towards the corporeal world and be lost in it. This trinity is much closer to that of God because it takes place completely inside an immaterial substance, and yet it still preserves some form of relationship to the outside world, which has a further implication: like in the case of the trinity of perception, in this case too there can be countless trinities; every time we perceive or think of something, a new trinity is taking place, which is another way to say that our will can change.<sup>71</sup> But this is not the case for God.

Therefore, Augustine claims, the image of the Divine Trinity in the human being cannot be found in the *homo exterior*, still completely similar in its workings to animals and beasts, but in the *homo interior*, in the human being as mind. What has hardly been noticed is that what remains constant in this shift from *exterior* to *interior*, from beast to human, is *intentio*.<sup>72</sup> The difference between beast and human is that, while both have *intentio*, the animal does not seem to be able to direct it wherever it wishes. Unlike animals, the human mind has the ability to direct one's own intention away from the external world or anything

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<sup>68</sup> Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.7.

<sup>69</sup> Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.6.

<sup>70</sup> Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.6–7.

<sup>71</sup> Augustine, *Trin.*, XI.7.12–8.13.

<sup>72</sup> On the transformation of *intentio* into *voluntas* in this case, see Di Martino, “Il ruolo della *intentio*,” 196–197.



that has to do with the external world, towards itself, and therefore towards the unchangeable truths the mind contains.<sup>73</sup> And it is precisely this process that Augustine describes in order to reach that trinity of the mind that he believes to present, although only partially, the clearest picture of the Divine Trinity.

It is here that Augustine finds something very similar to Plotinus: when the mind turns towards itself in search of itself in order to understand the way it works, it means that the mind already wills or loves itself, which according to Augustine are the same thing. But if the mind wills or loves itself, it means that it must in some way already know itself, otherwise it would not be able to turn towards itself and will and love itself.<sup>74</sup> Whenever we look at the mind intending itself, if such a term is at this point allowed, we find a trinity according to Augustine: the trinity of *mens*, *amor* and *notitia* (mind, love and knowledge). And what is so peculiar about this trinity, in comparison to the ones of the *homo exterior*, is that in this case the three elements are three different elements while really just being one single substance, since each one is inside the other two:

And so each exists in itself. But they are mutually in each other in such a way that the mind that loves is in the love, and love is in the knowledge of him who loves, and knowledge is in the mind that knows. And so each one is in each two, because the mind that knows and loves itself is in its own love and knowledge; and the love of the mind that knows and loves itself is in the mind and in its knowledge; and the knowledge of the mind that knows and loves itself is in the mind and in its love; because it loves itself as knowing and knows itself as loving. And for this reason, each two are also in each one, because the mind that knows and loves itself is in the love with its knowledge in the knowledge with its love, since the love itself and the knowledge are also together in the mind that loves and knows itself. But we have shown above, how all are in all, since the mind loves itself as a whole, and knows itself as a whole, and knows all its love, and loves all its knowledge, when these three are perfect in respect to themselves. These three, therefore, are in a marvelous manner inseparable from one another; and yet each of them is a substance,

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<sup>73</sup> Augustine, *Trin.*, XII.2.

<sup>74</sup> Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.2.3–3.8.

and all together are one substance or essence, while the terms themselves express a mutual relationship.<sup>75</sup>

It is not surprising that Augustine tries to show once again that this trinity has nothing to do with the material mixtures one can appreciate in nature. Right before the previous passage in Book IX, he uses examples taken directly from the debate on mixture, which he probably found in Porphyry. One could, Augustine wonders, consider this trinity of *mens*, *amor* and *notitia* as three parts of a single substance. It would be like a beverage made of water, wine and honey, in which each ingredient pervades the whole mixture and yet there are three different substances. This is the classic Stoic example, with the addition of a third ingredient to have a trinity. But this example does not work, according to Augustine. The difference is that while wine, water and honey create a single new substance but are not that single substance any longer, in the case of the trinity of the mind, and therefore of the Divine Trinity too, these three substances stay three different substances while sharing one single essence, namely while becoming one single thing. What Augustine is doing here, following the Neo-Platonist precedent, is to deny the possibility of what the Stoics called mixture on a material level to make it possible on the immaterial one. This is the reason why Augustine can explicitly claim: that there is here no mixture whatsoever, in the Stoic sense.

But in these three, when the mind knows itself and loves itself, a trinity remains: the mind, its love, and its knowledge; and there is no confusion through any commingling [*nulla commixtione confunditur*], although each is a

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<sup>75</sup> “*Ita sunt haec singula in se ipsis. In alternis autem ita sunt, quia et mens amans in amore est, et amor in amantis notitia, et notitia in mente noscente. Singula in binis ita sunt, quia mens quae se novit et amat, in amore et notitia sua est; et amor amantis mentis seseque scientis, in mente notitiae eius est; et notitia mentis se scientis et amantis in mente atque in amore eius est, quia scientem se amat, et amantem se novit. Ac per hoc et bina in singulis, quia mens quae se novit et amat, cum sua notitia est in amore, et cum suo amore in notitia; amorque ipse et notitia simul sunt in mente, quae se amat et novit. Tota vero in totis quemadmodum sint, iam supra ostendimus cum se totam mens amat, et totam novit, et totum amorem suum novit, totamque amat notitiam suam, quando tria ista ad se ipsa perfecta sunt. Miro itaque modo tria ista inseparabilia sunt a semetipsis, et tamen eorum singulum quidque substantia est, et simul omnia una substantia vel essentia, cum et relative dicantur ad invicem.*” Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.8.

substance in itself, and all are found mutually in all, whether each one in each two, or each two in each one. Consequently, all are in all.<sup>76</sup>

In the trinity of *mens*, *amor* and *notitia*, Augustine has found the trace of an immaterial *unio inconfusa*.

It is now worth remembering that in his *De quantitate animae*, Augustine had turned to linguistic theory in order to prove the immaterial relationship that the soul entertained with the body, claiming that the soul is in the body like the immaterial meaning is in the materially distended signifier. He does the same in his *De Trinitate*, merging his Neo-Platonist reaction to the Stoic theory of mixture and his own Christian understanding of the Son as *Logos* or *Verbum* of the Father. The possibility of an immaterial mixture such as the trinity of *mens*, *amor notitia*, which corresponds directly to the Divine Trinity, where the *mens* is God, the *notitia* the Son and *amor* the Holy Spirit, finds thus further confirmation in Augustine's conception of the *verbum mentis*. According to Augustine, when one turns his mind towards itself and begins that process of self-knowledge and self-love that leads to God, this process always takes place "in language":

The true knowledge of things, thence conceived, we bear with us as a word [*verbum*], and beget by speaking from within; nor does it depart from us by being born. But in conversing with others we add the service of our voice [*ministerium vocis*] or of some bodily sign to the word that remains within, in order to produce in the mind of the listener, by a kind of sensible remembrance, something similar to that which does not depart from the mind of the speaker. Thus there is nothing that we do through the members of our body, in our words and actions, by which the conduct of men is approved or disapproved, that is not preceded by the word that has been brought forth within us. For no one willingly [*volens*] does anything which he has not spoken previously in his heart.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> "At in illis tribus, cum se novit mens et amat se, manet trinitas: mens, amor, notitia; et nulla commixtione confunditur, quamvis et singula sint in se ipsis, et invicem tota in totis, sive singula in binis, sive bina in singulis. Itaque omnia in omnibus." Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.8.

<sup>77</sup> "Atque inde conceptam rerum veracem notitiam, tamquam verbum apud nos habemus, et dicendo intus gignimus; nec a nobis nascendo discedit. Cum autem ad alios loquimur, verbo intus manenti ministerium vocis adhibemus, aut alicuius signi corporalis, ut per quandam commemorationem sensibilem tale aliquid fiat etiam in animo audientis, quale de loquentis animo non recedit. Nihil itaque agimus per membra corporis in factis dictisque nostris, quibus vel approbantur vel im-

The result is that a silent word is generated within the mind. And this word is very different from the words one can express through one's voice, gestures, or other corporeal signs, because this word never leaves one's mind and precedes all those possible corporeal expressions.<sup>78</sup> Actually, it is this word that makes those material words possible and in turn what makes this interior, immaterial word of knowledge possible is the love or rather the will with which it is generated: "Love [*amor*], therefore, as a means, joins our word with the mind from which it is born; and as a third it binds itself with them in an incorporeal embrace, without any confusion [*sine ulla confusion*]. [...] The word that has been conceived and born is one and the same when the will [*voluntas*] rests in the knowledge of itself; this happens in the love of spiritual things."<sup>79</sup> It can be a will directed towards the external world or towards God, it can be *cupiditas* or *caritas*. But in any case, it is this will or love that binds together mind and word, that allows the mind to generate that interior word, and this is how God the Father generates the Son, his Word, in and through his own Spirit:

So in some such way we also see the Trinity that is God, because there by our understanding we also behold Him, as it were, speaking, and His Word, that is, the Father and the Son, and the Love preceding from them and common to both, namely, the Holy Spirit?<sup>80</sup>

With Augustine's *De Trinitate*, we enter a new realm altogether: the realm of the spirit. Everything that has to do with the senses, with the

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*probantur mores hominum, quod non verbo apud nos intus edito praevenimus. Nemo enim aliquid volens facit, quod non in corde suo prius dixerit.*" Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.12.

<sup>78</sup> On the relationship between voice and word in Augustine see also John T. Hamilton, *Philology of the Flesh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 69–71.

<sup>79</sup> "*Verbum ergo nostrum et mentem de qua gignitur, quasi medius amor coniungit, seque cum eis tertium complexu incorporeo, sine ulla confusione constringit. [...] Conceptum autem verbum et natum idipsum est, cum voluntas in ipsa notitia conquiescit, quod fit in amore spiritualium.*" Augustine, *Trin.*, IX.12–13.

<sup>80</sup> "*Ita videmus etiam trinitatem deum quia et illic intellegendo conspiciamus tamquam dicentem et verbum eius, id est patrem et filium, atque inde procedentem caritatem utrique communem, sanctum scilicet spiritum?*" Augustine, *Trin.*, XV.6.10. On the linguistic side of Augustine's trinitarian arguments and the role of *intentio/voluntas* in it, see Giorgio Santi's pivotal contribution. Giorgio Santi, "Interiorità e *verbum mentis*," in *Interiorità e intenzionalità in S. Agostino: Atti del I° e II° Seminario Internazionale del Centro di Studi Agostiniani di Perugia*, ed. Luigi Alici (Roma: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1990), 133–143.

material and external world has lost here most of its meaning and become just the very first step of a possible return of the human being to God. However, what we discover in Augustine's *De Trinitate* is also how profoundly his conception of *intentio* penetrated his own philosophy as well as his most important theological notions, thanks to a new metamorphosis. Through a new, fascinating innovation, which we already partially observed in his *De Genesi ad litteram*, *intentio* shifts here from *attentio* to, first, *voluntas* and then love. But what is as important for us is that by studying this shift, we understand for the first time how *intentio* could come to be coupled, in the rest of the history of Western philosophy and culture, with the notion of will. By becoming *voluntas* and *amor*, *intentio* brings to an end the process of dematerialisation of the spirit, which had begun in Augustine's early works: the soul and the spirit have nothing to do with air any longer. The Trinity, whose image Augustine finds in the mind of the human being, is a completely immaterial and spiritual substance thanks to its will and love. In loving itself, or in other words in willing itself, God or the mind is completely present to itself, without necessity for an outside. In linguistic terms, God is his own interior word, the Son, generated by an act of will in his own immaterial voice, the Holy Spirit.

The Intention of the Spirit: Traces of *Intentio*  
as *Tonos* in Augustine's and Earlier Texts

What we have done in this article is to show that Verbeke was right: Augustine was the one to bring to conclusion the process of the dematerialisation of the spirit. But what he had not noticed is that the way Augustine was able to reach that conclusion was through the concept of *intentio*. In his works, *intentio* is always an anti-pneumatological concept, which coupled with other concepts such as *attentio* and *voluntas* (or even *amor*) creates the possibility for an immaterial realm that Augustine called the Spirit.

And yet, *intentio* in Augustine remains for many reasons a mystery. The stunning amount of secondary literature on the topic too does not seem to be able to reach an agreement on the origin and meaning of such a powerful concept, which penetrates Augustine's works from

beginning to end. The dilemma arises from the fact that *intentio* seems to be a fully Neo-Platonist concept: as it was shown, most of the arguments in which *intentio* makes an appearance can be easily traced back to a Neo-Platonist line of argumentation. And yet, there does not seem to be in the Neo-Platonist texts that have been handed down anything like *intentio*, neither in Ancient Greek nor in Latin.<sup>81</sup> In the last seventy years, since the debate on *intentio* has begun, numerous corresponding terms have been proposed – ῥοπή (*rhopé*; “inclination”), ἐπιστρέφειν (*epistrephēin*; “turning”), προσέχειν (*prosechein*; “turning one’s attention to”), προσοχή (*prosoché*; “attention”), but also τάσις (*tasis*, “stretching”) and ἐπίτασις (*epitasis*; “stretching”) – but none of them seems to be able to explain completely what *intentio* is doing here.<sup>82</sup> In all the cases proposed, the Neo-Platonist influence on Augustine’s use of *intentio* is clearly distinguishable and still something escapes it.

Perhaps the most fascinating theory regarding the origin of *intentio* in Augustine is the one introduced for the first time by Jean Rohmer in the 1950s and popularised in the 1980s by the influential work of Gerard O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind*.<sup>83</sup> According to these critics, *intentio* would be in Augustine the Latin translation of the Stoic, materialist concept of τόνος (*tonos*, namely tension or tone), on which the Stoics based their whole philosophy.<sup>84</sup> Indeed if the Stoics believed that the soul as breath (*pneuma* or *spiritus*) was in the body as physically distended and mixed to it, they also believed in an opposite movement, which they deemed characteristic of the spirit in general, namely its *tonos*. According to the Ancient Stoics, it was this *tonos*, this internal tension of the air, that gave life to everything in the cosmos: the spirit,

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<sup>81</sup> “Although the local presence of soul to body is variously expressed by Plotinus and Porphyry, there is no term among those most commonly used in their writings that can be compared with Augustine’s use of *intentio* here.” O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy*, 44.

<sup>82</sup> ῥοπή was proposed by Pépin and προσοχή is the recent suggestion of Stéphane Toulouse. Pépin, “Une nouvelle source,” 89; Toulouse, “Influences néoplatoniciennes,” 239.

<sup>83</sup> Rohmer, “L’intentionnalité,” 497; O’Daly, *Augustine’s Philosophy*, 43–45.

<sup>84</sup> Even though this is well known in the secondary literature, the role of the *tonos* in Stoic philosophy has been mostly underplayed, not unlike their materialist pneumatology. This situation is due to an overall favouring of a mere ethical reading of this philosophical school, which has lasted almost two millennia. Unfortunately, I won’t be able to explore this further in this essay.

of which the soul is only a specific kind, was not just distended in bodies but also intended, keeping them together and even allowing movement, life.<sup>85</sup>

However, such a lineage theory was and is easily disproved. Using as evidence for the most part a single correspondence between *tonos* and *intentio* in the Stoic and in Augustine's theory of vision, which we also studied in the context of his *De Genesi ad litteram* and his *De Trinitate*, the theory in question underestimates the complexity and equivocity of the term *intentio*, as well as the clear differences that exist between Augustine's theory of vision and the Stoic one.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, as this paper has also shown, Augustine's use of *intentio*, in his theory of vision, sensation or otherwise, is eminently and undeniably Neo-Platonist. And yet, it is also profoundly related to the pneumatological theory of *tonos* to which these critics have surreptitiously alerted us, and in ways that deserve an explanation.

The fact that *intentio* in Augustine is always an anti-pneumatological concept used by him to deny any form of corporeal distention and mixture, so as to make it possible on the immaterial level, suggests that Augustine is explicitly responding to the theory of the *tonos*. We could even go as far as to claim that he is explicitly rejecting something like a materialist theory of *intentio*. Once one reads *intentio* in Augustine in the (anti-)pneumatological context we have delimited, it is hard not to think that there could be behind *intentio* another meaning, perhaps a meaning that Augustine himself used to employ and embrace before he even became *Augustinus*. Perhaps the most surprising fact about this hypothesis is that Augustine himself tells us so in a fascinating appearance of *intentio*, in another explicitly pneumatological context, which has unfortunately received no particular attention. At the beginning of Book VII of his *Confessions*, Augustine describes his beliefs regarding God and the soul before his conversion, first to Neo-Platonism and then to Christianity, before he became the only Augustine we know. At the time, he confesses to God, he was completely unable to imagine a

<sup>85</sup> SVF, II.439–462. David E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), 136–184.

<sup>86</sup> The latter is Toulouse's main complaint against such a theory. Toulouse, "Influences néo-platoniciennes," 233.

substance which he could not perceive by his own eyes. And therefore, he was not able to imagine a God that was not material. But it is worth lingering on Augustine's choice of words:

Hardly had they been dispersed when in the flash of an eye they had regrouped and were back again. They attacked my power of vision and clouded it. Although you were not in the shape of the human body, I nevertheless felt forced to imagine something corporeal [*corporeum*] occupying space [*per spatia locorum*] either infused [*infusus*] in the world or diffused [*diffusus*] outside the world through infinite spaces.<sup>87</sup>

Augustine was able to understand that God was not like a human being, what pagans used to believe, and yet could imagine Him only in corporeal terms either *infusum* in the world or *diffusum* through every space, two terms that we have shown to be used as synonyms for *intensus* and *distensus* and to derive from the Stoic theory of mixture and the materialist cosmology related to it.

Indeed, such a link to pneumatology is confirmed right after. Trying to further specify the image of God he entertained before his conversion, Augustine claims:

I conceived even you, life of my life, as a large being, permeating infinite space on every side, penetrating the entire mass of the world, and outside this extending in all directions for immense distances without end; [...] thus I thought that you permeate not only the body of heaven and air and sea but even earth, and that in everything, both the greatest and the smallest things, this physical frame is open to receive your presence, so that by a secret breath of life [*occulta inspiratione*] you govern all things which you created, both inwardly and outwardly [*intrinsicus et extrinsicus*].<sup>88</sup>

God is here a material God that, through some form of mixture, penetrates and pervades matter and, through some "*occulta inspira-*

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<sup>87</sup> "Et vix dimota in ictu oculi ecce conglobata rursus aderat et irruebat in aspectum meum et obnubilabat eum, ut quamvis non forma humani corporis, corporeum tamen aliquid cogitare cogerer per spatia locorum sive infusum mundo sive etiam extra mundum per infinita diffusum." Augustine, *Conf.*, VII.1.

<sup>88</sup> "Ita etiam te, vita vitae meae, grandem per infinita spatia undique cogitabam penetrare totam mundi molem et extra eam quaquaversum per immensa sine termino [...]. sic tibi putabam non solum caeli et aeris et maris sed etiam terrae corpus pervium et ex omnibus maximis minimisque partibus penetrabile ad capiendam praesentiam tuam, occulta inspiratione intrinsicus et extrinsicus administrantem omnia, quae creasti." Augustine, *Conf.*, VII.1.2.



tionem,” namely as a corporeal breath, manages and controls everything through a double movement, towards the inside and towards the outside (*intrinsicus et extrinsicus*). The latter is the expression Augustine used in a passage from the *De quantitate animae* to describe the materialist theory he was rejecting.<sup>89</sup> As some critics have argued, such a conception of God seems to reflect more a Stoic monistic understanding of God, than the dualistic account proper of Manichaeism, which we know from other works by Augustine.<sup>90</sup> But even if we doubt that this passage could count as evidence for a possible straightforwardly Stoic period in Augustine’s life, it is impossible to deny that the supposedly Manichean ideas depicted here are imbued with Stoic concepts to which Augustine had been exposed in some way.

But what matters the most for us is that in between these passages, Augustine does not only confess to his pre-conversion, Stoic-imbued materialism, but he himself gives a reason for it: surprisingly, *intentio*.

So my heart had become gross, and I had no clear vision even of my own self. I thought simply non-existent anything not extended in space or diffused or concentrated or expanding [*per aliquanta spatia tenderetur vel diffunderetur vel conglobaretur vel tumeret*], and which does not possess, or is incapable of possessing, such qualities. Indeed, my eyes were accustomed to these kinds of forms and those kinds of images my heart used to inhabit; and I did not see that the intention [*intentionem*] by which I formed these images was not such a thing, though it could not form them unless it were some great thing.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> “A. Now, you do not think your soul exists anywhere except in your body, do you? / E. No, I don’t. / A. Is the soul inside [*intrinsicus*] the body only, like the contents of a waterskin, so to say, or only on the outside, like a covering, or do you think it is both inside and outside [*et intrinsicus et extrinsicus*]?” Augustine, *Qu. an.*, 7. The same exact expression can also be found in Philo, to describe the double pneumatic force of the soul, a central tenet of Stoic psychology. *SVF*, II.802.

<sup>90</sup> Augustine, *Le confessioni*, ed. Maria Bettetini (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), 675. The point was made quite powerfully by Charles Baguette. However, J. J. O’Donnell rejected Baguette’s theory, but his arguments do not seem strong enough. Charles Baguette, “Une période stoïcienne dans l’évolution de la pensée de saint Augustin,” *Revue d’études augustinienes et patristiques* 16, no. 1–2 (1970): 47–77; Augustine, *Confessions*, ed. J. J. O’Donnell, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 392.

<sup>91</sup> “Ego itaque incrassatus corde nec mihimet ipsi vel ipse conspicuus, quidquid non per aliquanta spatia tenderetur vel diffunderetur vel conglobaretur vel tumeret vel tale aliquid caperet aut capere posset, nihil prorsus esse arbitrabar. Per quales enim formas ire solent oculi mei, per tales imagines ibat cor meum, nec videbam hanc eandem intentionem, qua illas ipsas imagines formabam, non

The reason why he understood God materially, he tells us, is because he understood his own soul materially, which means as something that is stretched (*tenderetur*) or distended and diffused (*diffunderetur*). But most importantly, he understood his own soul materially because he was not able to differentiate his own *intentio* from the very things he perceived, which is to say that he understood his own *intentio* as a material movement.

What this passage reveals to us is that Augustine's anti-pneumatological conception of *intentio*, as he developed it against the materialist theories of the Stoics, following the Neo-Platonists, came to replace and erase a previous theory of *intentio* that has gone almost completely lost. According to this theory, the soul as material breath had both a material *distentio* and a material *intentio*, it was both corporeally distended in the body but also corporeally intended, and it was this material *intentio* that made sensation and movement possible. And the same was true for God. Indeed, what the scholars who supported the hypothesis of the kinship between the Ancient Greek *tonos* and the Latin *intentio* in Augustine never noticed is that there are Latin precedents for such a translation. To give just one example, Seneca describes God thus in his *Ad Helviam*:

Believe me, this was the action of the great creator of the universe, whoever he may be, whether an all-powerful God, or incorporeal Reason contriving vast works, or divine Spirit [*divinus spiritus*] diffused in all things from the smallest to the greatest with uniform intention [*aequali intentione diffusus*], or Fate and an unalterable sequence of causes clinging one to the other.<sup>92</sup>

Among the various conceptions of God that a late Stoic such as Seneca can contemplate, there is still the pneumatological one he inherited, according to which God is a breath that is diffused in everything with equal intention.

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*esse tale aliquid; quae tamen ipsas non formaret, nisi esset magnum aliquid.*" Augustine, *Conf.*, VII.1.2.

<sup>92</sup> "Id actum est, mihi crede, ab illo, quisquis formator universi fuit, sive ille deus est potens omnium, sive incorporalis ratio ingentium operum artifex, sive divinus spiritus per omnia maxima ac minima aequali intentione diffusus, sive fatum et immutabilis causarum inter se cohaerentium series." Seneca, "De Consolatione ad Helviam," in *Moral Essays*, trans. John W. Basore, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 8.3.

And even if Augustine is said to have never explicitly cited Seneca in his *oeuvre*, one begins to doubt that he did not know the Senecan expression just cited, when he wrote, in another letter from the later years:<sup>93</sup>

If I have been successful in treating of these matters, in proportion to my strength and by the Lord's help, when you set yourself [*te extendis*] to think of God everywhere present and everywhere wholly present, not distributed in different places as if by the stretching of physical mass [*distentione diffusum*], turn your mind from all corporeal images such as it is wont to fashion. That is not how we think of wisdom or justice or, finally, of love, of which it is written: "God is Love."<sup>94</sup>

This is another of the many Augustinian texts that reject the conception of God (and soul) as a distended, material breath. But we see here how the Senecan formula "*intentione diffusus*" has become "*distentione diffusum*," because *intentio* has been moved to the immaterial level, expressed here by the verb *extendere*, which one can find often coupled with *intentio* in other passages.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> This is Hagendahl's conclusion in his famous, still authoritative study. Harald Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics*, vol. 2 (Gothenburg: Elander, 1967), 569–584. However, there is new material to take into consideration. See Ilona Opelt, "Seneca bei Augustinus," in *Congresso Internazionale su s. Agostino nel XVI Centenario della Conversione, Atti I* (Rome: StudEphAug, 1987), 363–70.

<sup>94</sup> "*Haec si pro viribus nostris, quantum Dominus adiuvit, rite tractavimus; quando Deum ubique praesentem, et non spatiis distantibus, quasi aliqua mole vel distentione diffusum, sed ubique totum cogitare te extendis, averte mentem ab omnibus imaginibus corporum, quas humana cogitatio volvere consuevit. Non enim sic sapientia, non iustitia, non sic denique caritas cogitatur, de qua scriptum est: Deus caritas est.*" Augustine, *Ep.*, 187.41.

<sup>95</sup> The most famous one from *Confessions*, Book XI: "Because your mercy is more than lives' (Ps. 62: 4), see how my life is a distention in several directions [*ecce distentio est vita mea*]. 'Your right hand upheld me' (Ps. 17: 36; 62: 9) in my Lord, the Son of man who is mediator between you the One and us the many, who live in a multiplicity of distractions by many things; so 'I might apprehend him in whom also I am apprehended' (Phil. 3: 12–14), and leaving behind the old days I might be gathered to follow the One, 'forgetting the past' and moving not towards those future things which are transitory but to 'the things which are before' me, not stretched out in distraction [*non distentus*] but extended in reach [*sed extensus*], not according to distention but according to intention [*non secundum distentionem, sed secundum intentionem*]. So I 'pursue the prize of the high calling' where I 'may hear the voice of praise' and 'contemplate your delight' (Ps. 25: 7; 26: 4) which neither comes nor goes." Augustine, *Conf.*, XI.29.39. On the relationship between *intendere*, *attendere*, and *extendere* in Augustine, see Gerard O'Daly, "Time as *Distentio* and St. Augustine's Exegesis of *Philippians* 3, 12–14," *Revue d'Études Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 23, no. 3–4 (1977): 265–271.

Considering the almost complete disappearance of such a materialist meaning of *intentio* in the centuries that follow until our very day, we can only make hypotheses about how well-known such a materialist understanding of *intentio* was before Augustine. However, there are traces that show that it could have been as popular and pervasive as the pneumatological theories Augustine's philosophy came to replace. Perhaps the most fascinating example of such an obscure situation can be found in a letter exchange between Marius Victorinus and Arianus Candidus written around 360 CE, to which a young Pierre Hadot dedicated his first academic article.<sup>96</sup> This letter preserves some of the very few existing traces of a particular form of heresy that developed in the 4th century CE among some followers of the Monarchian Sabellus, such as Photinus and Marcellus of Ancyra. These thinkers spoke of the Trinity in terms of *typus*, a medical term that indicated the rhythmic movement of expansion and contraction. In the words of Arianus Candidus, who describes such a heresy:

Some say that generation from God is close to what is called *typum*. In fact, God is Spirit. And furthermore, the Spirit sometimes intends [*intendit*] its own nature and at other times it resides in itself. This kind of movement they call *typum*. What does that imply, then? Out of this kind of movement suddenly emerges a certain being-son [*filietas*] and this is generation from God.<sup>97</sup>

As Hadot has shown, this Monarchian heretical movement understood the Trinity itself in Stoic terms. For them, God was *spiritus*, but this time in the sense of a vivifying breath. And what they believed to be characteristic of air is that air intends itself. Like Augustine, they argued that it is through intention that the generation of the Son in the Father takes place. But this *intentio* stood for the material tension of the material *pneuma*, the materially sonorous voice of God. Augustine's philosophy came to replace and erase this theory, as well as most

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<sup>96</sup> Pierre Hadot, "Typus: Stoïcisme et Monarchianisme au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle d'après Candide l'Arien et Marius Victorinus," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 18 (1951): 177–187.

<sup>97</sup> My translation. "*Dicunt quidam generationem esse a deo iuxta nominatum typum. Deus enim Spiritus est. Spiritus autem naturam suam nunc intendit, nunc in semet ipsum residit. Istius modi motum typum nominant. Quid deinde vero? Ab istius modi motione repente erumpit filietas quaedam et haec est generatio a deo.*" Cited in Hadot, "Typus," 178. See also D. H. Williams, "Monarchianism and Photinus of Sirmium as the Persistent Heretical Face of the Fourth Century," *Harvard Theological Review* 99, no. 2 (2006): 201–204, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816006001209>.

materialist precursors. Before Augustine, intention had intrinsically to do with breath.

## Conclusion

This paper has sought to broaden our understanding of the concept of intention in the philosophical discourse, by proposing a new reading of what are considered its origins in the works of Augustine. While traditionally, intention has been examined in isolation from pneumatological considerations, this study contends that a pneumatological framework is crucial to comprehending Augustine's development of *intentio*. By delving into the pneumatological context in which Augustine and the Stoics operated, and by reevaluating the overlooked origins of *intentio* in the Stoic concept of *tonos*, I have illuminated the pivotal role played by air and breath in the history of intentionality.

Furthermore, this investigation has revealed that *intentio* serves as a linchpin in Augustine's overarching argument for the immateriality of God and the soul, a thesis that characterises everything he wrote after his conversion first to Neo-Platonism and then to Christianity, which in turn means everything available to us. Through a meticulous analysis of *intentio*'s evolution in his works from *attentio* to *voluntas*, I have demonstrated that this concept served as the fulcrum for the historical process Verbeke called the "spiritualisation of the spirit." If as Verbeke had argued, it is with Augustine that the dematerialisation of the spirit and its separation from anything related to air finally reached its conclusion, this was only possible thanks to the new meaning he attributed to *intentio*. This move consisted in an epochal conceptual shift, which inaugurated the forgetfulness of any pre-Augustinian Stoic materialist accounts of *intentio*.

In conclusion, I have therefore claimed that Augustine's *intentio* should not be seen as a mere continuation of the Stoic *tonos*, as some scholars have argued, but rather as an appropriation of it for Augustine's own spiritualist purposes. And yet, at the same time, Augustine's *intentio* unveils for us this very layer of materialist, pneumatological intentionality, a dimension that is at work underneath his spiritualist conception and that has largely eluded modern scholarship. I have found

its traces in texts by Seneca, as well as in now-lost 4th-century Christian heretical theories. As we look ahead, it is imperative to recognise and reconstruct this materialist intention of the spirit, offering a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the historical and philosophical development of intention, both before and after Augustine. Indeed, this material intention did not completely disappear from the European tradition, but survived in other forms and contexts as the shadow of Augustine's hegemonically proliferating legacy. This study invites further exploration into the intricate interplay between pneumatology, materialism and intentionality, ultimately enriching our comprehension of this fundamental philosophical concept.

### L I S T   O F   A B B R E V I A T I O N S   O F   R E F E R E N C E S a n d   E d i t i o n s   U s e d

The following abbreviations are used for the specified texts and their translations when one is provided:

Augustine, *Conf.*

*Confessionum libri* (*Confessions*)

Augustine. *Confessionum libri XIII*. Edited by Martin Skutella, H. Juergens, and W. Schaub. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1969.

Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Augustine, *Ep.*

*Epistulae* (*Letters*)

Augustine. *S. Augustini Epistulae*. Edited by Alois Goldbacher. Vienna: Tempsky, 1911.

Augustine. *Letters*. 6 volumes. Washington: The Catholic University Press, 1951–1989.

Augustine, *Gn. litt.*

*De Genesi ad litteram (On the Literal Meaning of Genesis)*

Augustine. *La genèse au sens littéral en douze livres / De genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*. Edited and translated by Paul Agaësse and Aimé Solignac. Paris: Declée de Brouwer, 1972.

Augustine. *On Genesis: On Genesis: A Refutation of the Manichees; Unfinished Literal Commentary on Genesis; The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. Edited by John E. Rotelle and translated by Edmund Hill. New York: New City Press, 2002.

Augustine, *Im. an.*

*De immortalitate animae (On the Immortality of the Soul)*

Augustine. *De immortalitate animae / Die Unsterblichkeit der Seele: Zweisprachige Ausgabe*. Edited and translated by Christian Tornau. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2020.

Augustine. *The Immortality of the Soul; The Magnitude of the Soul; On Music; The Advantage of Believing; On Faith in Things Unseen*. Translated by Ludwig Schopp et al. Washington: Catholic University Press, 2002.

Augustine, *Mus.*

*De musica (On Music)*

Augustine. *De musica*. Edited by Martin Jacobsson. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017.

Augustine. *The Immortality of the Soul; The Magnitude of the Soul; On Music; The Advantage of Believing; On Faith in Things Unseen*. Translated by Ludwig Schopp et al. Washington: Catholic University Press, 2002.

Augustine, *Qu. an.*

*De quantitate animae (On the Quantity or Magnitude of the Soul)*

Augustine. *De quantitate animae / The measure of the soul: Latin text, with English translation and notes*. Edited and translated by Francis E. Tourscher. Philadelphia: The Peter Reilly company, 1933.

Augustine, *Trin.*

*De Trinitate (On the Trinity)*

Augustine. *De Trinitate Libri I-XII*. Edited by W. J. Mountain. Turnhout: Brepols, 1968.

Augustine. *De Trinitate Libri XIII-XV*. Edited by W. J. Mountain. Turnhout: Brepols, 1968.

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SVF.

*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta (Fragments of the Ancient Stoics)*

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# N A F A S : B R E A T H O N T O L O G Y I N R U M I ' S P O E T R Y

Z a h r a R a s h i d

The Irigarayan proposition to bridge dichotomies through breath extends to the so-called divide between Eastern and Western Philosophy. And it makes sense to look to the East for inspiration in a philosophy of breath, since many Eastern traditions, including Buddhism and Sufism, include breathwork in their somatic practices. In my paper, I wish to show how Rumi – a 13th century Muslim theologian and Sufi – used breath or *nafas* in his Persian poetry to outline how breathing is an originary phenomenon.

Jelaluddin Rumi lived in Konya, in modern-day Turkey, and was ranked as one of the most prestigious scholars in his city. His life took a turn on meeting Shams of Tabriz, who became his spiritual companion and mentor. After this point, Rumi turned to poetry to express his ideas to his students in his instated spiritual order – the *Mevleviye* – and to his wider audience. My paper will take a few samples of his poetry to demonstrate how breath connotes a newness through the “gift” of life that it endows upon us, and how this creative, endowing and primal nature of breathing is linked to an openness to the Divine Other and to others. This in turn will help us develop a respiratory ontology that aims to conceive of dualities through a new interrelated perspective and does not pitch each against the other.

## Embodied Rituals in Sufism and Eastern Cultures

As a preliminary, it is important to situate breathing within the larger economy of Sufi practices that formed Rumi’s background. Sufism is considered the mystical tradition of the Islamic world, with variations stretching across Central Asia, South Asia and North Africa.

It is worth noting that Sufism, as a tradition, even though it stakes its claim to authority through the ethical-legal sources of revelation in Islam, has arguably imbibed several different traditions in its process of development. The origins of Sufism and its practices have remained an important debatable issue within academia, whereby scholars such as Arthur John Arberry argue that it originated within the religion of Islam,<sup>1</sup> and Duncan B. Macdonald<sup>2</sup> and Reynold A. Nicholson<sup>3</sup> posit that the seeds of Sufism are within Islamic thought, while others insist on demonstrating its syncretic roots. The latter consisted historically of comparative theorists who speculated regarding Christian influences on Sufi thought,<sup>4</sup> or regarded Sufism as “far from being a natural or inevitable growth in Islam [...] on the contrary, a direct infiltration from an Indian source.”<sup>5</sup> This approach and its adherents, referred to as “externalists” by Nile Green,<sup>6</sup> placed an emphasis on locating the origins of Sufism within other cultures and traditions. Given both sides of the debate, Lloyd Ridgeon argues that it is important for anyone exploring the development of Sufism to remember that such “vertical” explorations of origins might not hold as much value as “horizontal” explorations “in which individuals and movements are embedded at any historical moment disclose valuable details related to the development of Sufism.”<sup>7</sup>

Depending on which region we refer to, historically, Sufi practitioners have integrated local indigenous practices, symbols, and ideas. Much of this could be attributed to the local and communitarian outreach of

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur John Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London, UK: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Duncan B. Macdonald, *Aspects of Islam* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1911), 184.

<sup>3</sup> Reynold A. Nicholson, “A Historical Enquiry Concerning the Origin and Development of Sufism, with a List of Definitions of the Terms ‘Šūfī’ and ‘Taṣawwuf,’ arranged chronologically,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 38, no. 2 (1906): 304, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25210250>.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Smith, *Studies in Early Mysticism in the Near and Middle East* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications, 1995), v.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Charles Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), viii.

<sup>6</sup> Nile Green, *Sufism: A Global History* (Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 26.

<sup>7</sup> Lloyd Ridgeon, “The Origins of Sufism,” in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 4.

Sufi orders and figures. For example, Nile Green established that Sufi personalities in India, before the 19th century, carried significance for both Hindus and Muslims regardless of their religious identification.<sup>8</sup> Even in other earlier contexts such as the Middle Eastern regions where Islam originated, he argues elsewhere that Muslims in these areas were outnumbered by Christians and these regions were more “thoroughly Christianized than even Western Europe at this time.”<sup>9</sup> As a result, it comes as no surprise that, “the Middle East Fertile Crescent was a landscape of churches, monasteries and saintly shrines [...] Tombs of Christian saints and prophets were recognised as Muslim pilgrimage centres.”<sup>10</sup> However, rather than framing this as a question of Sufism’s syncretic roots, Green encourages us to think of “small-scale allegiances based on the face-to-face reciprocity of protection and devotion”<sup>11</sup> at play, which enabled Sufism to carry weight among followers of different religious traditions in India, and in other regions where Islam spread, as has been noted earlier in the example of the Middle East. Therefore, he concludes: “From a universalising Sufism based on written theories of mystical abstraction, we have come to a localizing Sufism based on human bodies in emotional contact.”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, given the localising nature of Sufism that has been witnessed historically, it comes as no surprise to find heavy Indian or Buddhist influences standing out in Sufi discourse, given that there was contact, communication and correspondence between these cultures. Such influences can be charted across many somatic rituals that mark the relationship that Eastern cultures cultivate with embodied existence. Such as the ritualistic movement of *sama*’ in Sufism, which Schimmel compares to other dance rituals in “primitive” cultures.<sup>13</sup> Much like the other bodily rituals in indigenous cultures, *sama*’ also aims at cultivating a certain form of embodiment for enabling its spirituality. As

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<sup>8</sup> Nile Green, “Making Sense of ‘Sufism’ in the Indian Subcontinent: A Survey of Trends,” *Religion Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008): 1057, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2008.00110.x>.

<sup>9</sup> Green, *Sufism*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Green, *Sufism*, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Green, *Sufism*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Green, *Sufism*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalaloddin Rumi* (London, UK: East-West Publications, 1980), 219.

S. H. Nasr notes, this ritual has in fact been described by Sufi masters as a “spiritualization of the body and the corporealization of the spirit.”<sup>14</sup> This cultivation of embodiment, with direct attention paid to the body, was what attracted many Western phenomenological thinkers who emphasised experiential reality. Such as Luce Irigaray, who proposed turning to “Eastern teachings” for a “return to the cultivation of sensible perception”<sup>15</sup> or Merleau-Ponty who began his anthology *Les Philosophes célèbres*, with “Two Indian Philosophers” and “Two Chinese Philosophers.”<sup>16</sup>

However, considering the prevalence of such rituals and customs across various Eastern cultures, it becomes difficult to delineate where they originated and how. Even if the origin is determined, this does not imply that the culture or tradition integrating practices from other traditions was not experimenting with it in order for it to take on a new form. As I would argue, the two explanations of the origins of Sufism need not be at odds with each other; external influences could very well be shaping a tradition but its own impetus for growth and evolution might alter the course as well. As Stepaniants claims:

While Sufism was subject to external influences as much as the whole of Islam, and was doubtless influenced by various non-Islamic schools, it would be more reasonable to consider Sufism as a product of Muslims’ spiritual evolution.<sup>17</sup>

Even though she prioritises one explanation over the other, my purpose in quoting her is to demonstrate that both factors were at play in the historical development of Sufism.

In the case of breathwork, which is found in many indigenous cultures, we can also argue that Sufism’s internal and external influences combined to constitute these practices. Far from positing a transcen-

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<sup>14</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1987), 128.

<sup>15</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*, trans. S. Pluháček (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002), 56.

<sup>16</sup> Jin Y. Park and Gereon Kopf, “Introduction: Philosophy, Nonphilosophy, and Comparative Philosophy,” in *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*, eds. Jin Y. Park and Gereon Kopf (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2009), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Marietta Stepaniants, *Sufi Wisdom* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1994), 14.



dental principle that unifies or brings together all such practices, and portraying Sufism in abstract universal terms, I will instead make the case that each culture and tradition holds its unique place in the broad spectrum of breathing practices. Of course, as we employ methods of comparison, we will encounter similarities and underlying logics that unite each practice, but even then, the historicity of each culture would beg us to not deracinate it from its original context. Its historicity, for our purposes of navigating a respiratory philosophy, may add more richness to the depths we seek to explore.

### Breathing, Breathwork, and Sufism

Turning to the Sufi practice of breathwork, as we begin to explore the heritage that Rumi was a part of, one fact stands out that is common across other Eastern cultures. That is the absence of any textual form of breathwork instructions. This can largely be attributed to the presence of instruction in oral forms and mainly relying on the master-disciple relationship. This means that instructions were passed on from generation to generation without any textual sources at our behest to understand the content that was transferred. However, this changed at the turn of colonialism, when local cultures also turned to print to disseminate their ideas in the wake of foreign hegemony. As Nile Green has noted with respect to the South Asian region under British imperialism:

Print, then, stood at the centre of the transformation of an earlier ecumene in which the symbolic capital of certain forms of knowledge had been guarded through the social barriers presented by traditions of secrecy and controlled initiation.<sup>18</sup>

What had been transmitted across generations through proper channels of direct contact with a spiritual master, was laid open for the public through the arrival of print media.

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<sup>18</sup> Nile Green, "Breathing in India, c. 1890," *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no. 2–3 (2008): 5, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X07003125>.

Notwithstanding the lack of textual sources centred on breathwork, we still find replete references to breath and breathing even in pre-colonial Sufi discourse. We begin to see the significance these enjoyed in Sufi discourse when we pay attention to the linkages it carried with the Divine, the ultimate beloved on the Sufi path to gnosis. According to the Sufis, the first human ever, Adam, was created when the Divine blew into him. They refer to a verse from the Holy Scripture for Muslims, which states: “And I Blew into it my *ruh*.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, another prophetic saying attributes life being “blown” into the foetus by an angel, during gestation at a prescribed time.<sup>20</sup> Since the Sufis believed that the source of life or sustenance for our earthly bodies lies in the Divine Breath, they viewed each breath as a special reminder of connecting to the Divine. A belief that, as we shall see later in our discussion, has strong repercussions for how breath is viewed as a “gift.” This notion of attaching value and significance to breath was upheld throughout the tradition. Even earlier Sufi scholars such as Sahl Tustarī, who resided in Basra in the 9th century, have noted the import of breath and breathing. His commentary on the Muslim’s Holy Scripture is known to be one of the first Sufi exegeses of Divine Revelation, which was later compiled into a text by his disciples. While explaining the verse: “God takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that have not died, in their sleep” (39:42), he claims that it is the “subtle breath [*nafas laṭīf*]” from

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<sup>19</sup> *Quran*, 15:29. I have not translated *ruh* in this verse, which is employed in the Sufi tradition to refer to the spiritual side of each human’s entity. In this verse, it has been attributed to the Divine, relating how He put life into Adam after creating him. Verses from the *Quran* are available online, see *Quran*, online Tanzil – Quran Navigator, accessed October 23, 2023, <https://tanzil.net>.

<sup>20</sup> This prophetic saying is recorded in *Sahih Muslim*, Book of Predestination, Chapter on the creation of a human in the mother’s womb and the writing of their sustenance, death, deeds and their blessedness or wretchedness. The relevant portion of the saying is: “Indeed each of you is put together in the womb of their mother in 40 days, then they become a clot of congealed blood for a similar period, and then a piece of flesh for a similar period. Thereafter, God sends an angel, and he is ordered to write four things. It is said to him: ‘Write their deeds, their sustenance, their death and whether they will be blessed or wretched.’ Then he breathes the *ruh* into him...” Depending on how the text is read, it can be translated as I have done above, though another reading could be: “Then the *ruh* is breathed into him,” which does not attribute the action to the angel. Nonetheless the event of spiritual life being breathed into the foetus remains. See Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Naysaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, accessed October 19, 2023, <https://sunnah.com/muslim>.

the spiritual self that enables a person to live after they awaken from sleep,<sup>21</sup> pointing towards the role that breath played in Sufi discourse even in pre-modern times.

Later, when Sufi scholars systematically brought their ideas into print in the postcolonial era, breathing and breathwork remained an integral part of their discourse. As Nile Green notes, a book entitled *Asrar-e-Dervish* (or *The Secrets of the Mystic*) detailed Sufi breathing and visualisation techniques.<sup>22</sup> This book stands out because it draws connections between breathing and the wider universe. The author describes different methods of breathing under differing circumstances, which ranged from “ensuring a safe journey” to “meeting a king.”<sup>23</sup> Clearly, for the Sufis the breath serves as a bridge between a person's embodied consciousness and the world it directs its consciousness towards. Similarly, another Sufi manual by the renowned South Asian Sufi, Haji Imdad Allah teaches methods of breath control or *pas anfas*. He even teaches a breathing technique that enables a student to mystically breathe the breath of their spiritual master.<sup>24</sup> Again, the breath serves as a door or window of opportunity that opens our consciousness towards the other, an underlying theme that will be noticed in Rumi as well.

In sum, it was against this background of Sufi instruction and veneration of breathing and breath that Rumi may be situated to fully understand the sense he created through his metaphorical poetry on breath.

### A Breathing World: Newness, Creativity and Change

The first instance of his poetry that I would like to cite speaks to his readers about the possibilities of creativity and change that each new breath carries. He says:

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<sup>21</sup> Sahl b. Abd Allah al-Tustarī, *Tafsir al-Tustarī*, trans. Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2011), 171.

<sup>22</sup> Green, “Breathing in India,” 8.

<sup>23</sup> Green, “Breathing in India,” 9.

<sup>24</sup> Green, “Breathing in India,” 14.

جان ما را هر نفس بستان نو  
 گوش ما را هر نفس دستان نو  
 ماهیانیم اندر آن دریا له هست  
 روز روزه گوهر و مرجان نو  
 تا فسون هیچ کس را نشنوی  
 این جهان کهنه را برهان نو

My life is a new garden with every breath,  
 My ears hear a new story with every breath  
 We are the fishermen of that sea  
 that brings forth a new pearl every day  
 So that you do not listen to any other's person narrative  
 And grant new demonstration to this ancient world <sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, the newness and creativity of a changing world that Rumi is speaking of is characteristic of any ontology that defines change as the basis of existence. Several differing ontologies may base this on processes or temporality or any other concept, but Rumi chooses to tie this to breath and breathing. It is breath that relates to the adoption of a "new demonstration" for an "ancient world." I am not proposing that the other aforementioned themes in the ontology of change are not present in his poetry, but my point is to highlight the importance given to breath amongst these themes, showing how Rumi deftly interweaves breath into his poetic ontology.

Furthermore, this possibility for creativity and change is based on an openness to the world, or a *being-in-the-world* in Heideggerian terms. Clearly, every breath brings with it a new garden to witness and a new story to hear. This shows how Rumi draws our attention to our consciousness and the relations it enjoys with the world it inheres in by placing the possibilities for our consciousness within the nexus of our embodied perceptions.

To understand this openness to the world, we may employ the argumentation at work in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Merleau-

<sup>25</sup> Jelaluddin Rumi, *Diwan e Shams*, ghazal no. 2228, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://ganjoor.net/moulavi/shams>. Author's own translation.

Ponty's philosophy, even though it was a continuation of his predecessors' (Husserl and Heidegger) project, is integral for the purposes of our paper because of his differing contribution to dialectical phenomenology where man is the dialectical junction between *pour soi* and *en soi*.<sup>26</sup> He made a difference by putting forth a dialectic that accounted for the subjectivity of the subject and the objectivity of the world. His earlier works, such as *Phenomenology of Perception*, focused on the grounding of perceptual and other modes of consciousness within the body and the system of "self-others-world" that it is embedded in.<sup>27</sup> Later on in his life, Merleau-Ponty wanted to develop an ontology that could "re-formulate what the traditional correlation between the object and the subject [...] does not adequately express."<sup>28</sup> *The Visible and the Invisible*, one of his last works, presents a flesh ontology that explicates reality as a mesh of relations. As he himself explains:

my body [...] is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are incrustated into its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body.<sup>29</sup>

Even in this explication of an ontology, Merleau-Ponty does not leave behind the emphasis on embodiment that he began with.<sup>30</sup> Rather, as Glen Mazis believes, his philosophy begs us to

<sup>26</sup> Scott Warren, *The Emergence of Dialectical Theory: Philosophy and Political Inquiry* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 103.

<sup>27</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 69.

<sup>28</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Merleau-Ponty in Person: An Interview with Madeleine Chapal, February 17, 1958," in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, eds. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 386–387.

<sup>29</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 125.

<sup>30</sup> It is important to clarify a misunderstanding that could arise for some readers due to Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the body. This misunderstanding chiefly results from a conventional perspective in observing thinkers and their works through traditional debates of philosophy such as materialism and idealism. Briefly stated, his project brought forth a conception of a body that was not strictly materialist. He was able to do so by incorporating the subjectivity of the body's consciousness with its world's objectivity. It would be reductionist to assume that his conception of a body translated to a materialist understanding, especially since he referred to such formulations as a "corpse body." On the other hand, to assume that Rumi stood on

leave behind the notion of a contained body – a corpse-body, as he calls the notion of body as object – and to see embodiment as the way we are inextricably caught up in relations with all that is, and we, our embodiment, are nothing more and nothing less.<sup>31</sup>

Rumi's poetic words, through their openness to the ever-changing world around them, beckon us towards this mesh of relations that our embodiment is inextricably linked to. Therefore, understanding Rumi and his breathing as a chance to appreciate the countless possibilities that each breath offers in relation to an embodied engagement with the world around us, enables us to realise how each inward breath connects us to the outward world. By doing so, he can create room within his poetic ontology of a world that breathes with us, and each breath offers a new possibility of locating our embodied existence in this mesh of relations that we refer to as the outward world. This ushers in the potential for newness, change, and creativity because thanks to our interconnectedness with the world, we are emplaced in, we may breathe in new experiences.

### The Gift of Breath: Sufi Conscious Breathing

Another striking feature of his metaphor, which is grounded in the Sufi discourse of holding breath as a form of Divine sustenance as ex-

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the opposite end of the spectrum of materialism would also be a disservice to his thought. I've aimed to establish how Sufism and its practices grounded themselves in the material body, and my work has precedent in the works of other Sufi studies scholars such as S. H. Nasr (*Islamic Art and Spirituality*), Scott Kugle (*Sufis and Saints' Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality and Sacred Power in Islamic Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007)) and Shahzad Bashir (*Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011)). This can be observed in several Sufi rituals such as breathwork and especially in the spiritual order initiated by Rumi that formally incorporated *sama'* as a somatic ritual. Despite Rumi and Merleau-Ponty's differing contexts, the philosophical questions of materialism and idealism (among others that they faced) were similar, and even though their approach to these questions might be based in differing grammars, it can still be studied through a unifying critical lens that appreciates their similarities and differences.

<sup>31</sup> Glen Mazis, "The Flesh of the World is Emptiness and Emptiness is the Flesh of the World, and Their Ethical Implications," in *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*, eds. Jin. Y. Park and Gereon Kopf (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2009), 184.

plained earlier, is the endowing nature of breath. As can be seen in this next example:

ای ز در رحمت هر نفسی نعمتی  
 زان هم رحمت، فرست جانب ما رحمتی  
 ای به خرابات تو، جام مراعات تو  
 داده بهر ذره نوع دیگر عشرته،  
 هر نفسی روح نو، بنهد در مرده  
 هر نفسی لاج نو، بخشد بی مهلتی

O you, in whose mercy every breath is a blessing  
 As all of this mercy, send your mercy towards me  
 O you, through your taverns, and through the wine of your consideration  
 You grant a new life to a particle  
 Every breath is a new life put in the dead,  
 Every breath is a new relief granted without respite<sup>32</sup>

Rumi's address to his Divine Beloved and his engagement with them not only shows us the openness to the other or to the world, as we had discussed earlier, but it also brings out the nurturing, endowing, granting or gifting nature of breath. Perhaps one may turn to Luce Irigaray, who has expounded upon this aspect of breath.<sup>33</sup> She termed it a gift from the mother to the child. To highlight the importance of this gift, she speaks of how the mother gives her breath, or rather shares it with

<sup>32</sup> Rumi, *Diwan e Shams*, Tarji'at no. 14.

<sup>33</sup> A link to Irigaray's philosophy is important because, as a scholar, she herself purported turning to "Eastern teachings" to bridge the gaps in Western philosophy. Her own work was informed by her engagement with her Yoga practice, which certainly differs from Rumi's Sufism but its approach segues into the underlying philosophy of non-duality found in Sufi doctrines of Divine Unity. This dialogue between Rumi's poetics and Irigaray's philosophy does not imply deracinating the former from his context as long as one consciously mediates the linkages between both, while being aware of the tools employed in this dialogue. For any scholar who is approaching a historical figure embedded in a unique socio-historical context, the recognition of one's tools is probably more important than being able to accurately recognize the said socio-historical context. I say this because each scholar is carrying their own tools and, therefore, claims that their tools have led them to "the" context of the historical person can be a scientifically inaccurate claim.

her foetus, enabling them to survive. In a way, she “passes on physical and metaphysical existence to the other.”<sup>34</sup>

In a similar vein, Rumi feels his breath is a gift from the Divine Beloved, who by granting another breath to a body, grants a new life in a way. To the extent that Rumi recognises the vitality of the Beloved’s breath as sustenance for existence and claims:

نفسی یار شرابم نفسی یار کبام

The breath of the Beloved is my drink, the breath of the Beloved is my food.<sup>35</sup>

This metaphorical poetry then evokes in the reader a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation for the next breath that awaits them, inevitably opening the door to conscious breathing.

Unconscious breathing on the other hand, as Irigaray lamented, is merely a replication of gestational breathing: “After birth, whoever does not breathe, does not respect his or her own life and takes air from the other, from others.”<sup>36</sup> Rather for her, it is merely a form of “vital breath” that keeps us alive and not yet anything spiritual,<sup>37</sup> as Emily A. Holmes explains: “In a way, the individual is not yet fully born – he exploits the breath of others because he breathes unconsciously, without acknowledging the gift of air.”<sup>38</sup>

The appreciation of breath in Rumi’s poetry in fact does the opposite. It creates a sense of reverence for the Divine Gift of Breath and in turn marks it as a respectable exchange on both sides, which means that it is not merely a “taking” of air on our side but an auspicious acceptance. This introduces conscious breathing, which in Irigarayan terms, takes us from vital breathing to spiritualised breathing.

<sup>34</sup> Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 81.

<sup>35</sup> Rumi, *Diwan e Shams*, ghazal no. 162.

<sup>36</sup> Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 76.

<sup>38</sup> Emily A. Holmes, “The Gift of Breath: Towards a Maternal Pneumatology,” in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, eds. Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), 37.



## The Gift of Existence and the Primacy of Breathing

Another feature that stems from the endowing nature of breath is the primacy of breathing. In fact, this is directly linked to the gift of breath, because as breath denotes bringing into existence for Sufis, it becomes an originary phenomenon. This can be understood via phenomenologists such as Irigaray and Merleau-Ponty, who emphasise how primal breathing is and how that indicates its deep-rootedness in any discourse on existence. The former achieves this by detailing how breath is “the first autonomous gesture of the living human being” because it is the first action that the foetus takes without their mother.<sup>39</sup> This “autonomous gesture” not only reveals to us our primordial openness to the world as we inhale and exhale the air “outside” of us but also brings forth the primacy of our subjectification as it commemorates the beginning of our worldly life. Škof and Holmes aptly summarise:

Breath is also a primal cosmological and biological phenomenon, which precedes all ethical and socio-political reflection – it is “breath” that can provide the human community with its first and primal experience and act of communication, that is, of the being-in-the-world-with-others mode. But even more importantly – it is precisely through breath that humanity has its most natural access to the phenomenon of life.<sup>40</sup>

Merleau-Ponty has referred to this aspect of the primordial nature of breathing in various parts of his works. The first instance is when he notes in “The Child’s Relations with Others”:

At the beginning of the child’s life [...] the body is already a respiratory body. The whole respiratory apparatus gives the child a kind of experience of space. After that, other regions of the body intervene and come into prominence.<sup>41</sup>

Clearly, he acknowledges how crucial, essential and primary breathing is in our study of existence by pointing out that respiration provides

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<sup>39</sup> Irigaray, *Between East and West*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes, “Towards Breathing with Luce Irigaray,” in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, eds. Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), 7.

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Child’s Relations with Others,” in *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 122.

a sense of space for a child and it is only once they have grown up that other forms of interaction with the world such as perception step in. Similarly, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, he quotes the example of falling asleep as a removal of consciousness from the surrounding world it is embedded in: “During sleep, on the other hand, I hold the world present to me only in order to keep it at a distance, and I revert to the subjective sources of my existence.”<sup>42</sup> The “subjective sources” referred to here are not any transcendental form of existence, but rather our very embodiment, as has been analysed by Berndtson as well.<sup>43</sup> This is why, for Merleau-Ponty, our embodied consciousness even in the state of sleeping, remains connected to the world. He makes a similar case for dreaming, regarding which he claims: “[...] the world obsesses us even during sleep, and it is about the world that we dream [...]”<sup>44</sup> He even argues for reflecting on how certain dreams are related to “concomitant respiratory states”<sup>45</sup> and thus:

We must understand how respiratory or sexual events, which have a place in objective space, are drawn away from it in the dream state, and settle in a different theatre. But we shall not succeed in doing so unless we endow the body, even in the waking state, with an emblematic value. Between our emotions, desires and bodily attitudes, there is not only a contingent connection or even an analogical relationship [...]<sup>46</sup>

Through the analysis of the relatedness of dreaming and breathing, he explains how our embodied consciousness remains embedded in the world, even in our sleeping state, showing that these “subjective sources” of our existence are primordial for us. He explains:

In this sense the sleeper is never completely isolated within himself, never totally a sleeper [...] But what, in the sleeper [...] makes possible a return to the real world, are still only impersonal functions, sense organs and language

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<sup>42</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 331.

<sup>43</sup> Petri Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Respiratory Primacy of Being* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2023), 48.

<sup>44</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 341.

<sup>45</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 331.

<sup>46</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 331.

[...] Sleep and waking [...] are not modalities of consciousness or will, but presuppose an “existential step.”<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, in a way, he is also able to demonstrate the primary nature of breathing for our consciousness, because it is amongst our “anonymous alertness of the senses” – the “last link” to the world, which makes “waking up a possibility.”<sup>48</sup> Sleep then is essentially a primordial connection with the world. That is why he described breathing as the sleeper’s respiration via “some great lung outside myself,” as he claimed:

I am breathing deeply and slowly in order to summon sleep, and suddenly it is as if my mouth were connected to some great lung outside myself which alternately calls forth and forces back my breath. A certain rhythm of respiration, which a moment ago I voluntarily maintained, now becomes my very being, and sleep, until now aimed at as a significance, suddenly becomes a situation.<sup>49</sup>

Essentially then, the primordial nature of breathing paves the way for an ontology that attributes great significance to our connection or embeddedness in our surrounding world.

Take, for instance, the following words of Rumi, which speak to us regarding the gift of breathing and how that relates to our primary existence:

یک دمی مرده شو از جمله فضولی ها ببین  
 هر نفس جان بخشی، هر دم مسیحا آسای  
 یک نفس در پرده عشقش چو جانت غسل کرد  
 هیچو مریم از دمی بینی تو عیسی زایی

For one moment (or breath) become dead to all that is futile and see  
 Every breath will grant life to you and become an Isa  
 For one breath, wash yourself behind the veil of love  
 Like Maryam, through (the miracle of) breath you will witness giving birth to an Isa<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 190.

<sup>48</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 190.

<sup>49</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 246.

<sup>50</sup> Rumi, *Diwan e Shams*, ghazal no. 2807.

Notice especially the usage of the symbology of Maryam and Isa, or Mary and Jesus, which compels the reader to attach the gift of breath to birth and subsequently to our primary form of existence. For just as Jesus granted a new life to others through his breath, and Mary was granted Jesus in the form of an angel breathing into her, it becomes clear to the reader that not only is existence tied to Divine Breath but it is also constituted through it. Rumi manages all of this by cultivating a deep regard for breathing in his readers, which demonstrates how essential breath is and how primary for existence. Moreover, it is this primal mode of breathing that connects us to the Divine Other and to others because we receive this gift from them. In an Irigarayan and Merleau-Pontian sense, this conveys the notion of being embedded in this world and intrinsically connected to it, a concept that enjoys importance in Rumi's Sufi scheme of breathing.

### Breath: the Bridge Between the Finite and Infinite

I have expounded upon the creative, endowing, and primal nature of breathing with the last subsequently emphasising our interconnection with this world. Finally, I would like to end with a verse by Rumi that brings together all the themes by focusing on how each new breath is a reminder of our finite existence. This is because once breath leaves our body, our life ends. However, it also points towards the infinite possibilities it houses with the change that a new breath brings. This merging of the finite and infinite is what Rumi points towards by saying:

باد نفس، مر سینه را زانده صیقل، مم زند  
گریک نفس گیرد نفس مر نفس را آید فنا

The wind of breath through grief polishes my heart  
If I take a breath, it annihilates another breath<sup>51</sup>

There is grief upon the passing of a breath, but this breath polishes the heart bringing newness and change because of one resounding fact: even though I have lost something, I have gained something else. Notice

<sup>51</sup> Rumi, *Diwan e Shams*, ghazal no. 26.

how Rumi explicates the finiteness of each breath and implicates it with the new breath, which annihilates the previous one but brings a newness with it. He does so through the concept of *fana*, usually translated as “self-annihilation” – the central feature of Sufi discourse that aims to negate any notion of an “I” that can hinder a Sufi on their path.<sup>52</sup> The Sufi journey may be qualified as a quest where any illusion of a “self” is left behind. The goal of *fana*, as Chittick explains, is: “Man’s existence, or ego, or selfhood, call it what you will, must be annihilated so that he can attain to his true self, which is his existence and ‘subsistence’ within God.”<sup>53</sup> In a sense then, the aim of *fana* is to decentre subjectivity and place the individual Sufi within a network of interrelations inhabited by the Sufi, their world and the Divine Beloved, so that they arrive at a conscious realisation “that everything he is derives absolutely from God.”<sup>54</sup> This objective of annihilating the self can be traced in other Eastern philosophies as well, as Berndtson claims regarding the spiritual practice of *zazen* by Zen masters who cultivate mindful breathing to experience “nothing.”<sup>55</sup> In the same vein, Sufi masters aim for *fana*, which marks a complete transformation. It becomes a fertile ground for the renewal or rebirth of the Sufi, who emerges in *baqa* (or self-subsistence with the Divine), its “correlative term.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Some might object that for Rumi and the Sufis of his time, *fana* meant negating all wrong conceptions of our self to attain the “true” self and this does not imply any relation between the inner and outer as I have outlined. There does not seem to be any contradiction between these interpretations as all incorrect conceptions of the self could inevitably be external (social or cultural) judgements or perceptions that one must shed on the Sufi journey. Therefore, even in this understanding, *fana* is bridging the internal and external worlds of the Sufi. However, it is important to note that any notion of a “true” self does not downplay the importance of the body because that again takes us back to the idealist/materialist categories of Modern Western Philosophy, whereby we are identifying Rumi as an idealist ignoring the material body. Rumi’s Sufism defies these categorizations and I have repeatedly made this point in my paper through my emphasis on embodied rituals being a core of Sufi ideas and practices.

<sup>53</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983), 179.

<sup>54</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 179.

<sup>55</sup> Petri Berndtson, “The Possibility of a New Respiratory Ontology,” in *Atmospheres of Breathing*, eds. Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2018), 30.

<sup>56</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, 179.

This merging of the finite and infinite, through this realisation of our finite existence that carries infinite possibilities in *fana* and *baqa*, is in effect a merging of dualities. A merging that reminds us of the interiority and exteriority accompanied by breathing, for when I inhale external air and then exhale my internal air, it reflects Irigaray's statement: "I bear the other within me."<sup>57</sup> The relating of inner-outer dichotomies through breath is a case presented by James Morley as well. He studies breath control practices in yoga and claims that the aim of these exercises is to maintain a relationship between the inside and outside. In his words, breath control is "the concrete experience of the body as a relation between inside and outside."<sup>58</sup> Blurring the boundaries of our conceptual categories, breathing becomes a powerful tool in any ontology or philosophy that seeks to describe reality.

That is why, for Irigaray, the air becomes "a clearing for appearing and disappearing, for presence and absence."<sup>59</sup> According to Berndtson, Irigaray radicalises the Heideggerian clearing (*Lichtung*) and fashions air as the space where Being manifests itself through presence and absence.<sup>60</sup> This implies that air becomes the "universal dimensionality" and our embodiment is therefore a "respiratory openness" towards the clearing of air.<sup>61</sup>

Similarly, for Sufis such as Rumi who emphasised cultivating conscious breathing, their insistence on paying attention to breath was informed by their acceptance of how vital it was to bridge the gap between the inside and the outside. Once we realise the universal dimensionality of the air we breathe, it actualises the possibility of what Sufis practice as conscious breathing and what is termed as spiritual breathing by Irigaray. Subsequently, our myopic notions of self, inner, interior or other, outer, exterior are shaken up and replace our existing self-certitude and self-centredness with an ambiguous space of interconnections that un-

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<sup>57</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London, UK: Continuum, 2008), 43.

<sup>58</sup> James Morley, "Inspiration and Expiration: Yoga Practice Through Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of the Body," *Philosophy East and West* 51, no. 1 (2001): 76, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2001.0013>.

<sup>59</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>60</sup> Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology*, 91.

<sup>61</sup> Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology*, 92.

derlie our reality. This is, I believe, the true potential of Rumi's work and his service in developing a respiratory ontology.

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# THE SOMAESTHETICS OF HEAVINESS AND HARA IN ZEN BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Geoffrey Ashton

## The Breath of Buddhist Meditations

The earliest meditative practice of Buddhism may well have been *ānāpānasati* (“mindfulness of breathing”), the value of which consisted in its developing serene concentration (*samatha* or *samādhi*) and insight into the true nature of reality (*vipassanā*).<sup>1</sup> Within many traditional Buddhist contexts, this came to involve a close coordination of *ānāpānasati* and *vipassanā*.<sup>2</sup> Here the practitioner typically begins with

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<sup>1</sup> *Ānāpānasati* means “mindfulness” or “awareness” (*sati*) of “breathing” (*ānāpāna*). The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (*The Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing*) is the 118th discourse in the *Majjhima Nikāya* of the Pāli Canon (also known as the *Tipiṭaka*). It attributes *ānāpānasati* to the Buddha and refers to it as the core liberating practice of early Buddhists. Section 2 of the *sutta* describes how the Buddha observes the breath while sitting beneath a tree: “Breathing in long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in long’; or breathing out long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out long.’ Or breathing in short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in short’; or breathing out short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out short.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.’” *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 118.

*Samatha* or *samādhi* is typically rendered as “serenity,” “concentration,” or “absorption” (as we will see later). *Vipassanā* (literally, “special” [*vi-*] “seeing” [*passanā*]) means “insight.”

<sup>2</sup> *Ānāpānasati* was believed to be especially conducive to yielding insight into the true nature of things, and thus became closely associated with another form of meditation frequently referred to by traditional Buddhists: *vipassanā*. This is evident in the *Satipatthāna Sutta* (the 10th discourse of the *Majjhima Nikāya*), the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (the second “basket” or *piṭaka* of the Pāli Canon), and the *Visuddhimagga* (the 5th century text of Buddhaghosa that stands as the most influential treatise on traditional Buddhist meditation outside of the *Tipiṭaka*). In recent centuries, several “modern” Theravāda Buddhists (especially in Burma, Thailand, and

*ānāpānasati*. With eyes closed, he or she passively observes the breath at the tip of the nostrils and then expands their awareness to sensations in other areas involved in nasal respiration.<sup>3</sup> After concentrating the mind through this exercise, the practitioner takes up *vipassanā*: they survey the various sensations of the body, starting from the crown of the head and working their way down to the toes, and then moving back up in the reverse direction.<sup>4</sup> While these sensations can be externally oriented (e.g. the sense of the skin touching one's shirt), they can also be internal (the sensation of one's heartbeat, the feeling of muscle fastened to ligaments and bones, the sense of various mental and emotional phenomena). But whatever sensation it is that one encounters, the *vipassanā* meditator treats sensations as impermanent and lets them go once they arise. This is meant to facilitate a fluid, continuous movement across the field of sensations: even if one encounters an uncomfortable feeling, their attention does not linger on the sensation.<sup>5</sup> The concern to

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Sri Lanka) re-interpreted core Buddhist texts (in particular, the *Satipatthāna Sutta*, the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, and the *Visuddhimagga*) with an eye to enhancing the significance of *vipassanā* ("insight") over *samatha* or *samādhi* (serenity, concentration). While such developments are indeed creative revisions of early Buddhist meditative practice, they nonetheless take place within the Theravāda frame. For this and related reasons, I refer to these modern adaptations as still within the fold of "traditional Buddhism." For more on this, see Robert H. Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42, no. 3 (1995): 228–283, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3270219>.

<sup>3</sup> In contrast with breath retention and other practices of yogic *prāṇāyāma* (which regulate breathing), in *ānāpānasati* one simply becomes aware of how breathing is happening in itself. Typically, one feels sensations of coolness on the ingoing breath and warmth on the outgoing breath. After some time with this, one then directs awareness to sensations in adjacent areas involved in respiration: inside of the nostrils, at the top of the upper lip, and the whole triangular area from the top of the nose to the top of the upper lip. This is prescribed by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu and S. N. Goenka, among others. For more details on this, see Buddhādāsa, *Getting Started in Mindfulness with Breathing: Accessible, Beginning Steps for Ordinary People*, trans. Santikaro (Bangkok: The Buddhādāsa Indapañño Archives and Liberation Park, 2015); also consider William Hart, *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S. N. Goenka* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> This body scan might move in the following order: crown of the head, skin around the skull, face, ears, neck, right shoulder to right fingers, same with the left, front torso, back of the torso, right hip, thigh, knee, calf, ankle, foot, toes, same with left. I again refer the reader to Buddhādāsa, *Getting Started in Mindfulness*; and Hart, *The Art of Living*, for sample instructions concerning this method.

<sup>5</sup> If a certain location has been overlooked, is experienced as cloudy, quiet, or numb, or displays a gross, impenetrable thickness, then the practitioner may go back and attend to such areas. But it is important that one's attention does not become fixated such that the given

avoid fixation holds throughout the exercise. Aside from gently shifting one's attention from the breath to the next adjoining part of the body, the practitioner does not intervene in, critique, or react to the character of their breathing, the quality of a given sensation, or the content of thoughts and emotions – one does not even try to make sense, as it were, of these sensations. Importantly, though, it is the breath that remains the grounding phenomenon of *vipassanā*: the traditional Buddhist meditator begins with and regularly returns to observing the breath (especially when the mind wanders, becomes distracted, or gets engrossed by a painful sensation).<sup>6</sup>

As the practitioner develops facility with these exercises, the breath softens, the senses sharpen, the body scan becomes more fluid (one eventually surveys the body in a single breath cycle), and one experiences *samādhi* – an experience of concentration or absorption, including even the nondual awareness of the body and mind in a singular, unified body-mind sensation.<sup>7</sup> But of course, this is a distinctly Buddhist practice, and so its ultimate goal is to alleviate suffering. For the Buddha, we suffer not just because accidents happen (one stubs their toe or gets a cold); suffering is more subtle and ubiquitous than physical pain.

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sensation overpowers their attention and generates new *samskāras* (especially the mental traces of anger and aversion). For this reason, the meditator should first strengthen their awareness, equanimity, and concentration before attending to “stuck” areas. Prematurely doing so can not only disrupt the flow of the body scan, it can have damaging consequences. Goenka gives attention to this at Hart, *The Art of Living*, 69–80.

<sup>6</sup> Some attention is given to this in a study of the meditative practice recommended by Buddhadasa in Geoffrey Ashton, “Losing my Mind and Loving Mosquitoes, Crickets, and other Jungle Inhabitants: Reflections on Field Research and its Frustrations at a Buddhist Meditation Retreat in Southern Thailand,” in *At Home and In the Field: Ethnographic Encounters in Asia and the Pacific Islands*, eds. Suzanne S. Finney, Mary Mostafanezhad, Guido Carlo Pigliascio, and Forrest Wade Young (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 278–284. Goenka gives even more explicit attention to this in his teachings. For this, see S. N. Goenka, *Discourse Summaries* (Onalaska, WA: Pariyatti Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> The association of mind-body nondual realization with some sort of liberating awareness is given little to no attention in early Buddhist texts. However, more modern applications of *ānāpānasati* and *vipassanā* have been known to elicit such experiences. Much of this is based on my own first-hand experiences and personal conversations with practitioners. For a documented account of this, consider the discussion concerning how to practice Buddhist meditation toward the realization of mind-body nondualism available at: Michael W. Taft, “How to Do Nondual Vipashyana,” *Deconstructing Yourself*, June 4, 2021, <https://deconstructingyourself.com/how-to-do-nondual-vipashyana.html>.

We suffer because our lived reality does not conform to how we think it ought to be – either because things change in ways that we would not prefer (what the Buddha calls “the suffering of change”) or because reality does not conform to the habituated conditions that we impose on it (“the suffering of conditioned states”).<sup>8</sup> Buddhist meditation attempts to remedy this by training the mind to let go of the *ought* and allow things to show themselves *just as they are*, as given to the senses and prior to language. From this, the Buddha articulated the following *negative* insights, that is, insights into *the way things are not*. Things are irreducible to distinction between mind and matter, purified of the need to be seen in any particular or predetermined way, and empty of mineness or self (everywhere the Buddha looks for the “I” or self, he finds only its absence). Such realizations were seen to have tremendous practical value: that which the Buddha calls *dukkha* (suffering, misery, dis-ease) loses its power to capture one’s attention.<sup>9</sup>

As Buddhism spread throughout Asia, its theoretical and practical philosophies adapted to the presuppositions of new cultural arenas. The emergence of Japanese Zen Buddhism exemplifies this. In keeping with its Buddhist roots, Zen is fundamentally concerned with alleviating suffering and outlines a way of life where meditative practice occupies a central place. But there are nuanced differences between the meditations devised in traditional Buddhism and the form of “seated meditation” (*za-zen*) widely taken up by Zen Buddhists. Zen and *zazen* thrived in Japan largely because they were able to recast Buddhist concerns in a way that successfully accommodated East Asian ways of be-

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<sup>8</sup> The Buddha refers to these as *vipariṇāma-dukkha* and *saṃkhāra-dukkha*, respectively; see Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (London: The Gordon Fraser Gallery, Ltd, 1978), 19.

<sup>9</sup> As the 5th century Theravāda Buddhist monk, Buddhaghosa wrote: “Mere suffering exists, but no sufferer is found; The deeds are, but no doer is found” (*Visuddhimagga*, 513; quoted at Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 26). This statement does not deny that suffering takes place. It simply means that phenomena as they appear before the senses, including phenomena that induce the experience of suffering, do not originally show an “I” who stands as the owner of that suffering. The skilled practitioner still experiences uncomfortable sensations *as uncomfortable*. But because he has disciplined his attention to phenomena without fixating his attention on those arisings, and because he has recognized that the sufferer is not ultimately real but instead is a derivative, conventional reality, then suffering-inducing phenomena are not binding in any ultimate sense. Rahula offers further analysis along these lines at *What the Buddha Taught*, 73.

ing in the world (those of Confucianism and Daoism, in particular).<sup>10</sup> Focusing upon developments within Japanese Rinzai Zen, this paper examines how *zazen* redeploys the body, sensation, and breath in terms of an explicitly somaesthetic orientation.<sup>11</sup> In short, the Zen meditator learns how to face suffering by developing three features of a somaesthetics that are generally not emphasized in traditional Buddhism: the postural form of the body, the capacity to perceive weight, and above all, the performance of breathing from the lower belly or *hara*.

### The Weight of Suffering

In order to appreciate the differences between more traditional Buddhist practices (including modern *Theravāda Buddhisms*) and those of Zen, let us situate Zen in the context of Buddhism's core theme: suffering. With the first Noble Truth, "All this is suffering" (*sarvam idam duḥkham*), the Buddha believed that he was speaking to a universal human concern. But Zen may not share the same presuppositions about suffering as did the Buddha.

Since this essay is enframed by the English language and its tacit philosophical assumptions, let us first consider some attitudes toward suffering that run deep in Western languages and cultures. Largely due to the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition, in the "Western world" we take for granted the value of light and lightness over the dark and heaviness. In order to lead a life of religious, epistemic, and moral truth, we are often taught to step out of the darkness and "into the light" (e.g. the light of God), to resolve the obscurity of misunderstanding and have things "come to light" (the light of reason), and to stand upright away from the depravity of vice (original sin) and "take the

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<sup>10</sup> Among other things, Zen integrated Confucian notions of relational personhood and authoritative conduct (*ren*), and Daoist theories of *chi* (vital energy) and practices of inner alchemy (*neidan*). A sequel paper in progress explores these themes further as they pertain to *zazen*. An excellent study of this is provided by Peter Herschok, *Chan Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> For the sake of brevity, this paper uses the term "Zen" to refer to Rinzai Zen, with a focus on the Tenryū-ji (beginning 14th century) and Chōsei Zen (21st century) lineages.

high road” of virtue.<sup>12</sup> By following such a program, we can more fully enjoy the lightness, levity, and love that stem from our higher (often construed as divine) nature.

For an illustration of this, consider Van Gogh’s painting, “Miners’ Wives Carrying Sacks of Coal” (shown in Figure 1). Here we find a group of women burdened by heavy bags of coal. Each of them is hunched over (some at almost 90 degrees) as they walk along a dark, barren, snow-covered path. They are depicted as passive, powerless victims forced to undergo overbearing work conditions. Note how the woman in the left part of the painting looks back, seeming to express a world-weariness and general sense of dis-ease. The painting conveys the heavy weight of suffering: to suffer is to bear a burden (physical, mental, spiritual) and continue on without much choice.

The etymology of “suffering” corroborates this interpretation of van Gogh’s painting.<sup>13</sup> The word is comprised of two Latin parts: the prefix “*sub*” (meaning “under,” “below,” “beneath” [e.g. submarine] and “secondary” [e.g. “subordinate”]), and “*ferre*” (meaning “to carry,” “to endure,” “to bear” [e.g. a “ferry” or transport ship]). Put simply, to “suffer” means to be made to under-go, endure, or feel oneself beneath a burden that one must bear or carry.

Understanding suffering in these terms gives clues to the meaning of *duḥkha* – the Sanskrit term commonly translated into English as “suffering.” *Duḥkha* (*dus* + *kha*) often gets rendered as “having a bad axle,” where *dus* connotes “bad,” “difficult,” and *kha* means “axle hole.”<sup>14</sup> This

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<sup>12</sup> Such phrases are well-known to natural English speakers, and their latent presuppositions typically run deeper in those speakers enculturated in arenas that have been influenced by Judeo-Christian values. To give one example, consider a passage from the Gospel of John (1.4-1.9): “In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John [...] He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.” John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (La Habra: CA: The Lockman Foundation, 2006), 1539–1540.

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to my colleague, Tom Cavanaugh, for bringing Van Gogh’s painting to my attention, as well as for his interpretation of this painting in terms of the etymology of “suffering.” I also thank Gordon Greene for his comments on the possible meanings of “Miners’ Wives Carrying Sacks of Coal.”

<sup>14</sup> “*Dus*” changes to “*duḥ*” as a regular feature of sound combinations (*sandhi*) in Sanskrit: the “s” changes to a “ḥ” (*visarga*) when the following syllable begins with a “*kh*.” Meanwhile, the





Figure 1: Vincent van Gogh, “Miners’ Wives Carrying Sacks of Coal,” 1882, Watercolor, Paper (Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands).<sup>15</sup>

presumably refers to the discomfort of riding in a cart with a bad axle caused by one of its wheels having an off-center hole.<sup>16</sup> But some scholars interpret *duḥkha* differently, including the renowned Sanskritist, Mon-

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Pāli spelling is *dukkha*, where the “*dus*” morphs into “*duk*” according to the *sandhi* rules of the Pāli language. Pāli is a Middle Indo-Aryan language that was used by the Buddha and which would become the language of the Buddhist Pāli Canon (*Tipiṭaka*) and the liturgical language of Theravāda Buddhism.

<sup>15</sup> Image available at “Vincent van Gogh: Paintings, Drawings, Quotes, and Biography,” accessed November 30th, 2023, <https://www.vincentvangogh.org/miners-wives-carrying-sacks-of-coal.jsp#>.

<sup>16</sup> Winthrop Sargeant (who may have been a better song writer and musician than a scholar of Sanskritic philosophies), writes: “The ancient Aryans who brought the Sanskrit language to India were a nomadic, horse- and cattle-breeding people who travelled in horse- or ox-drawn vehicles. *Su* and *dus* are prefixes indicating good or bad. The word *kha*, in later Sanskrit meaning ‘sky,’ ‘ether,’ or ‘space,’ was originally the word for ‘hole,’ particularly an axle hole of one of the Aryan’s vehicles. Thus, *sukha* [...] meant, originally, ‘having a good axle hole,’ while *duḥkha* meant ‘having a poor axle hole,’ leading to discomfort.” Winthrop Sargeant, *The Bhagavad Gita* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), 303.

ier Monier-Williams.<sup>17</sup> He argues that *duḥ-kha* originally meant *dus-sthā*. “*Dus*” is not controversial: it is the original syllable. More difficult to discern is that the “*kha*” of “*duḥ-kha*” derives from “*√sthā*,” meaning “to stand.” Monier-Williams calls attention to how the writing of “*kha*” (ख) appears nearly the same as for the verbal root, “*√sthā*” (स्था). Due to phonological changes in the development of Sanskrit (so goes the argument), the writing of “*dus-sthā*” (दुस् - स्था) changed to “*duḥ-kha*” (दुः- ख), at which point the initial literal denotation became concealed. This suggests a different grounding in lived experience for the meaning of *duḥkha*: “standing badly,” “an improper manner of standing,” or “difficult to stand.” In other words, suffering has a visceral basis: bad posture. The “difficulty in standing” (*duḥ-kha*) that one observes with the women depicted in Van Gogh’s painting might thus be seen as a direct physical manifestation of their suffering (*sub-ferre*). *Duḥkha* results not from having ridden in an imbalanced chariot, but from standing poorly underneath a heavy burden.<sup>18</sup>

India’s most famous philosopher of suffering is the Buddha, and he seems to view *duḥkha* in a like-minded way. In speaking to his disciples, the Buddha relates *The Parable of the Raft*:

Oh monks, a man is on a journey. He comes to a vast stretch of water. On this side the shore is dangerous, but on the other side it is safe and without danger [...] There is no bridge for crossing over [...] It would be good therefore if I would gather grass, wood, branches and leaves to make a raft, and with the help of the raft cross over safely [...] Having crossed over and got to the other side, suppose that man should think: “This raft was of great help to me [...] It would be good if I carry this raft on my head or on my back wherever I go.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1899), 483.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, the meanings of the Sanskrit term *duḥkha* (or the Pāli *dukkha*) are more nuanced and varied than one single interpretation can capture, including my own. I do not pretend to achieve an exhaustive analysis here, and I would welcome comments about precisely how early Buddhists understood this term. For now, I emphasize that my intention here is just to open space for a philosophical reconsideration of the meanings of *duḥkha*. To this end, I hope that this etymological analysis helps to disclose previously hidden shades of meaning.

<sup>19</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 11–12. I use Rahula’s reference to this parable, given in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya*.

The Buddha then asks rhetorically: “What do you think, oh monks? If he acted in this way, would that man be acting properly with regard to the raft?” He answers his own question: “No, sir [...] It would be good if I beached this raft on the shore, or moored it and left it afloat [...] In the same manner, oh monks, I have taught a doctrine (*dharmā*) similar to a raft – it is for crossing over, and not for carrying.”<sup>20</sup>

The “dangerous,” near side of the shore represents a life of suffering (*duḥkha*), whereas the far shore connotes the experience of *nirvāṇa* (Sanskrit; Pāli: *nibbāna*). More than simply a description of two ways of being, this parable summons us to cross over to the other side of the water by taking a particular attitude toward *duḥkha*: let it go. The Buddha is so intent upon this that he calls us to let go of all things, including his own teachings – even the *dharmā* can become a burden that pulls us down into suffering. He exhorts his disciples at the end of *The Parable of the Raft*: “You, oh monks, who understand that the teaching is similar to a raft, should give up even good things (*dharmā*); how much more then should you give up evil things (*adhammā*).”<sup>21</sup>

In support of this radical call, the Buddha articulates a practical psychology of craving or thirst (*tṛṣṇā*). Craving is a primary cause of suffering because it binds our present feelings, thoughts, and actions to the past.<sup>22</sup> For example, suppose that I am entrapped by anger toward my neighbor, who damaged my fence last month and refuses to fix it. Meditations such as *ānāpānasati* and *vipassanā* were designed to remedy this. The practitioner becomes aware of presently arising sensations, e.g. the inbreath at the entrance to the nostrils, the physical sensation of the skin in contact with one’s shirt, the mental sensation of a memory. Craving may take place with respect to these sensations, thus giving rise to thoughts such as “The feeling of this shirt on my skin is uncomfortable, and so I want to remove it,” or “The memory of my neighbor’s

<sup>20</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 12. This passage uses the Pāli spelling, *dharmā*, to denote the teachings of the Buddha. The Sanskrit term is *dharma*.

<sup>22</sup> The Buddha identifies three forms of craving (Sanskrit: *tṛṣṇā*; Pāli: *taṇhā*): *kāma-tṛṣṇā* (craving for sensual pleasures), *bhāva-tṛṣṇā* (craving for existence), and *vibhāva-tṛṣṇā* (craving for non-existence). Paul Williams and Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2002), 43–44.

actions makes me angry, and so I want to sue him.” However, by disciplining one’s attention, one notices how thirst takes place separate from and subsequent to the earlier sensation (of the shirt on one’s skin, of the memory of one’s neighbor, etc.).<sup>23</sup> From this clear awareness of the temporal gap between the two moments, the meditator learns to distinguish the arising of a given sensation and the manifestation of craving with respect to that sensation.<sup>24</sup> This opens up a certain psychic distance from thirst: firmly rooted in the presently arising feeling itself, the meditator discovers the ability to not react to sensations. In turn, the craving gets deprived of its fuel. This does not eliminate unpleasant sensations from ever taking place again (I may continue to experience frustration with respect to the memory of my neighbor’s actions); but having disciplined the felt need to react to sensations, one steadily extinguishes that which feeds unhealthy modes of emotional response (forms of craving such as anger) and the exacerbation of suffering. Put differently, the meditator learns how to shed the weight of the past, and as a result, becomes free to experience present happenings more clearly.

Zen agrees with the Buddha’s general message. But it does not adhere to some values that the parable takes to be self-evident. Consider that the Buddha relates the journey toward “the other shore” as an individual endeavor, and that his raft (i.e. the *dhamma*) is meant to be “beached on the shore, or moored and left afloat.” He is not to use it for returning to the near shore and traversing back and forth. Above all, the raft is “not [meant] for carrying.”<sup>25</sup> I draw attention to this for

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<sup>23</sup> Importantly, sensation and thirst arise sequentially, not in synchronicity – otherwise, the Buddha’s analysis of the arising of suffering in terms of a sequence of causes and effects would have no value. Rahula explains: “It is this ‘thirst’, desire, greed, craving, manifesting itself in various ways, that gives rise to all forms of suffering and the continuity of beings. But it should not be taken as the first cause, for there is no first cause possible as, according to Buddhism, everything is relative and inter-dependent. Even this ‘thirst’, *tanhā*, which is considered as the cause or origin of *dukkha*, depends for its arising (*samudaya*) on something else, which is sensation (*vedanā*), and sensation arises depending on contact (*phassa*), and so on and so forth goes on the circle which is known as Conditioned Genesis (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).” Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 29. The various spokes in this conditioned wheel of suffering and their sequential, causal interrelations are related in several early Buddhist texts. For more on this, see Henry Clark Warren, *Buddhism in Translations* (New York: Atheneum, 1963), 90.

<sup>24</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 72–74.

<sup>25</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 12.

two reasons. For one, it illustrates differences in theorizing the *bodhisattva* ideal. Theravāda Buddhism generally views the *bodhisattva* as an exceptional (and thus, rare) individual who is resolved upon becoming a Buddha, whereas Mahāyana widens the *bodhisattva* path, making it available to all persons.<sup>26</sup> Mahāyana Buddhism also associates this ideal with a spontaneously arising compassion: its *bodhisattva* strives to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of *all* beings, not just themselves. *The Parable of the Raft* does not portray such a notion of the *bodhisattva*: in saying that the boat should be docked at the far shore, and thus not used to ferry across other seekers of *nirvāṇa*, the Buddha emphasizes that each of us must realize *nirvāṇa* for ourselves and through our own efforts, not for the sake of another or by riding on the backs of others' achievements.

A second difference between traditional Buddhist and Zen attitudes follows upon the first, and it echoes the above connotation of *dukkha* (suffering) as standing poorly beneath a weight. Since for the Buddha, one's own enlightenment does not depend on saving others, then there is no need to carry or hold onto the raft. Going further, not only is it unnecessary for a Buddha to shoulder this burden (since he has already arrived to the far shore), the weight of the raft impedes the way forward. It threatens to drag him down into darkness and deprive him of *nirvāṇa*, enlightenment, or that liberating sense of *being filled with* or *made into light* – where light signifies both shining (or illuminating) and being less heavy (such as when one levitates or just experiences levity in general).<sup>27</sup>

Based on this, it certainly would *not* “be good if I carry this raft on my head,” the Buddha suggests.<sup>28</sup> But is it not possible to be under what one carries (*sub-ferre*) without exhibiting suffering? Must the weight of things entail standing badly (*dus-sthā*) and aggravating compulsive pat-

<sup>26</sup> This individualism is in keeping with prevailing Indian views of liberation: spiritual pursuits were widely seen to be private, personal affairs. For more on this, see Jeffrey Samuels, “The Bodhisattva ideal in Theravāda Buddhist Theory and Practice: A Reevaluation of the Bodhisattva-Śrāvaka Opposition,” *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 3 (July 1997): 399–415.

<sup>27</sup> For more on the etymology of “light” and “enlightenment,” see Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1780–1783.

<sup>28</sup> Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 12.

terns of action and re-action (*karma*)? Consider the long-time practice still evident in many rural, non-Western cultures, where one carries a heavy basket of food or other items on their head. In Figures 2–4, these women stand beneath a weight but show no sign of suffering. Contrary to the depressed, caved-in bodies depicted in van Gogh’s painting, these women carrying baskets exhibit a certain ease, grace, and vitality. Presumably, they do not personify suffering because their motor and sense organs are not passive in the face of suffering. Instead of just witnessing the sensation of heaviness and letting it fall by the wayside, they acutely feel the weight of things and coordinate their bodies with a view to actively receiving weight, allowing it to drop directly into and through their bodies.



Figures 2–4: Three women carry baskets on their head, and the weight drops through them.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Fig. 2: Indian woman carrying basket on her head on a beach after fish sale, Morjim, March 11, 2013 in Goa India (Shutterstock/alexnika). Fig. 3: Indian woman in Tanjore in the Tamil Nadu region of southern India (Shutterstock/Steve Allen). Fig. 4: Indian woman walking on the fog street in Varanasi, India with the basket on the head (Shutterstock/Anastasiia Gooz).

These three women carry three baskets. The correlative to this in Pāli is “*ti-piṭaka*” (lit. “three baskets”) – a term that, as noted above, also refers to the authoritative teachings of the Buddha (i.e. the Pāli Canon). Most likely, these women never carried or studied the *Tipiṭaka* of Buddhism. Traditionally, only men were taught the “Three Baskets” of the Buddhist Canon, while women (perhaps more so than men) were tasked with carrying ordinary baskets.<sup>30</sup> But might the experience of ferrying beneath the weight of ordinary baskets have taught them about suffering in other ways? People living in industrialized countries stopped carrying baskets on their heads long ago. The Industrial Revolution replaced this practice with more efficient transport machines (e.g. motorized carts) and corresponding skills (driving cars, learning how to fix cars), all of which enabled us to transport ourselves here and there while levitating over the landscape.<sup>31</sup> But have we since forgotten how to *sub-ferre*, to stand beneath things? And did we forget how to suffer just as we forgot what it’s like to dwell in the dark or to carry things on our heads?

### *Zazen* and the Somaesthetics of *Hara* Breathing

According to Zen, suffering is a psycho-physical phenomenon that affects the mind through the physical body.<sup>32</sup> By training the body to stand beneath the weight of things in the right way, one can ameliorate the problem of suffering, including mental suffering. To this end, Zen envisions the body as somatic (that is, as both a living and lived body) and has developed a regimen of somaesthetic practices that center around the experience of heaviness.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The three “baskets” or primary sections of the *Tipiṭaka* include the rules of monastic life (Pāli: *vinaya*), the sermons of the Buddha (*suttas*), and the philosophical and psychological analysis and interpretation of Buddhist doctrine (*abhidhamma*).

<sup>31</sup> For an interesting study on this and related topics, see Peter Adey, *Levitation: The Science, Myth and Magic of Suspension* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Reaktion Books, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Recall the above note: by “Zen,” I refer to the Rinzai Zen lineage known as Chosei Zen, which traces itself back to Tenryū-ji (beginning 14th century).

<sup>33</sup> Somaesthetics is broadly concerned with the following: (1) the aesthetic experience and usage of the body (*soma*) as a somatic body, that is, as living, sentient, and purposive; (2) a multi-disciplinary study that coordinates theoretical, empirical and practical approaches to

In demonstrating how the orientation of Zen is somaesthetic, consider that Buddhists frequently take the most ordinary activities of life – how to sit, walk, eat, bathe, breathe – and transform them into spiritual exercises. This is evidenced in traditional Buddhist practices, which are largely concerned with bodily perception and the traces of *karmic* or intentional action that get lodged in the lived, i.e. somatic, body. But such exercises were typically viewed as mental practices.<sup>34</sup> Just notice the manner in which the Theravāda Buddhist meditator (dressed in the yellow robe) in Figures 5–6 sits with a comfortable, though somewhat slumped over, posture. In *ānāpānasati* and *vipassanā*, the core sitting exercises for such monks, the presented form of the body is not emphasized, and the practitioner is explicitly directed to *not* regulate or perform the acts of sensing and breathing in any particular way. Body, sensation and breath are merely objects of passive awareness. By contrast, see how the Zen monk on the right (depicted in two im-

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the somatic body; and (3) fostering capacities for bodily presentation, perception, and performance. My understanding of somaesthetics primarily follows the work of Richard Shusterman. For more on this, I recommend Richard Shusterman, *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Rahula discusses this: “This mindfulness of awareness with regard to our activities, taught by the Buddha, is to live in the present moment, to live in the present action... Here in this form of meditation, you haven’t got to perform any particular action in order to develop mindfulness, but you only have to be mindful and aware of whatever you may do... you have only to cultivate mindfulness and awareness always.” Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 72–73. Arguably, the most important text on meditation from the Buddhist canon is the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (“The Discourse on the Establishing of Mindfulness”) which recounts “four applications of mindfulness [that] are the one and only way by which beings become pure.” *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 49; quoted in Edward Conze, *Buddhist Meditation* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969), 25. The *Visuddhimagga*, meanwhile, tells us that “without mindfulness, the mind may not be upheld or checked.” *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 49; quoted in Conze, *Buddhist Meditation*, 28). Contemporary examples abound that show the significance of Buddhist mindfulness in theory and practice. Consider the methods prescribed by the Thai Buddhist monk, Buddhadasa, for practitioners at Wat Suan Mokh. The theoretical and practical dimensions of *ānāpānasati* and *vipassanā* as recommended at Wat Sun Mokh are discussed in Ashton, “Losing my Mind and Loving Mosquitoes, Crickets, and other Jungle Inhabitants.” For these reasons, Buddhist meditation is often associated with “mindfulness meditation.” Paul Griffiths offers a slightly different perspective on mindfulness. His rendering of mindfulness as “a paradigm case of observational analysis” highlights this practice as active and engaged. Paul Griffiths, “Indian Buddhist Meditation,” in *Buddhist Spirituality: Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, Early Chinese*, eds. Takeuchi Yoshinori et al. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), 51.



ages) sits erect and tall, yet relaxed. Similar to traditional Buddhists, his seated practice is designed to yield concentration (*samādhi*) and insight (*vipassanā*) into the nature of existence. However, *zazen* incorporates physical posture, sensation, and breath into a somaesthetic regimen.



Figures 5–6: A Theravāda Buddhist meditator (left) and a Zen Buddhist meditator (center, right).<sup>35</sup>

*Zazen* posture gives central importance to the presented form of the body. Consider these three basic instructions for how to display one's body:

1. Draw in the chin just enough so that the crown of the head is at the highest point of the body.
2. Maintain an erect but relaxed spine position. There should be a natural but not pronounced bend of the lower back. While this curve is not completely eliminated, one should avoid sticking one's behind out and back.

<sup>35</sup> Fig. 5 authored by sasint, available at <https://pixabay.com/photos/buddhist-monk-sitting-meditation-1807526/>. Fig. 6 shows the Zen practitioner, Kodo Sawaki (accessed on October 15, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/kodo.sawaki/photos/a.589521497748862/5821570837877209/>).

3. Find your energetic center of gravity in the *hara* (Japanese for “lower belly”). This is key: in Zen, the *hara* is one’s energetic and spiritual core. When properly engaged, it stabilizes the psycho-physical (or somatic) body as a being-in-the-world: pressure, tension, and contact with the world get registered and absorbed in the lower belly.<sup>36</sup>

Having accomplished these three instructions, the head should stack directly onto the shoulders, the shoulders should stack onto and drape off of the spine, and the torso should drop into the *hara*.

The second pillar of *zazen* is bodily perception, namely, the perception of gravity working on the body. In order to establish and maintain right posture, one needs to constantly scan the sensations of the body, not unlike in *vipassanā*. In *zazen*, however, one scans for a specific sensation: the pull of gravity. Furthermore, the meditator actively judges sensations according to a discernible criterion: proper alignment of the body within one’s gravitational field. One seeks out unnecessary muscle contractions – such as those for keeping oneself upright, or just parts of the body that hold residual tension – and then attends to these misalignments. This often begins with sensing the weight of the head: if the head is in the wrong relationship to gravity, then it will jut too far forward, and as a result, the muscles of the neck and upper back cannot relax (since these will engage in order to keep the head from falling forward and pulling the torso with it). When this becomes a habit (a *saṃskāra* or somatic trace), then the shoulders will routinely hold tension and assume an unnecessarily high default position. Accordingly, one task of the *zazen* meditator is to inspect the body for areas of tension and make postural adjustments that bring the body into natural alignment with the Earth. When the practitioner achieves proper alignment, they are able to calmly perceive the pull of gravity working on

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<sup>36</sup> For more details on how Buddhists of the Chosei Zen tradition practice *zazen*, see the prescriptive comments given by the 20th century Japanese Zen Master, Omori Sogen in Hosokawa Dogen, *Omori Sogen: The Art of a Zen Master* (London: Routledge, 2011), 36–63. Sogen writes from within the Tenryu-ji lineage and anticipates the formulation of Chosei Zen. The instructions and rationale described here continue to be practiced by monastic and lay people of the Chosei Zen community. For more recent elaborations on these instructions for *zazen* practice, I direct the reader to the Chosei Zen website: “Chosei Zen,” accessed October 15th, 2023, <https://choseizen.org/>.

all physical and mental phenomena of the somatic body, such that the weight of these manifestations drops directly into the *hara*.<sup>37</sup>

Performing breathing in a particular way is the third pillar of *zazen*. The inhalation gets drawn into the lower belly (*hara*), while the chest and shoulders disengage from the act of respiration. As the *hara* fills with air, one scans the body for the sense of gravity, identifies holding patterns, gently makes postural adjustments (tucking the chin, rolling the shoulders back and out, etc.), and allows the weight of the body to sink into the *hara* and pass through to the pelvic floor. Importantly, this does not involve actions that we would ordinarily consider to be “mental”; the instruction is not to first imagine the breath sinking into the belly, such that it then suddenly happens. Rather, this is a physical performance: by coordinating the inhalation with subtle postural adjustments and the scan for sensations of weight, more space opens for the breath to sink deeper toward the pelvic floor.

These three instructions for developing the somatic body are not merely sequential, as if first one presents correct posture, then one perceives the body in a gravitational field, then one inhales. They are dynamically interrelated in a regimen of learning how to stand (or sit) well beneath the weight of things. From this, one can go about life without embodying suffering, even though the body-mind always already finds itself weighed down. But does the Zen way of experiencing gravity merely help one to bear, endure, or survive the challenges of life? Can this somaesthetic approach help to positively enrich one’s life?

### Awakening the Somatic Body through Gravity and Grief

Suffering is not to be avoided in Zen. To the contrary, the inquiry into suffering as an embodied experience is what leads one to *nirvāṇa* or awakening. This is mostly in keeping with its Buddhist roots. But Zen conducts this inquiry while remaining directly beneath the weight

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<sup>37</sup> It bears noting that our thoughts, feelings, and emotions have weight. Consider the sensations of love and grief: typically, one experiences love as light-weight, whereas grief is much heavier. I further explore this later in the essay.

of things, and it does so because the experience of heaviness helps to awaken the somatic body.

In order to demonstrate this, consider some linguistic relationships. The following English words are etymologically derived from a common Latin ancestor, *gravis*, meaning “heavy” or “weighty”: “gravity,” “gravy,” “grain,” “gravel,” and “grief.”<sup>38</sup> The link between “gravity,” “gravy,” “grain,” and “gravel” is not a stretch: these things are heavy, they settle into small cracks at the bottom of things, they are susceptible to gravity.<sup>39</sup> Less apparent is the link between gravity and grief. In sorting this out, note that “grief” shares an even closer kinship with the word aggravation than it does with “gravity.” “Grief” derives from “*gravis*” by way of the Latin terms *gravare* (“to weigh down”) and *aggravare* (*ad* + *gravare*, or “to make heavier,” “to *add* or increase in oppressiveness”). A grievance can easily turn to aggravation, especially if an already hurtful situation gets worse or exacerbated by additional misfortune (such as when one suffers an “insult to injury”). In English, we have words like “hot-headed” to refer to people in the grip of aggravation and anger. Heat rises, one’s face might even turn red, when a grievance gives way to anger. Grief would appear to occur a little lower in the somatic body, closer to the heart or mid-chest area. English phrases corroborate this: when one grieves or feels sad, then one might say, “I suffer from heart-ache,” or “My heart feels heavy.” What’s more, grief appears first, and then seems to elevate in the body when something gets added onto the initial grievance.

But is this the natural movement of grief? Does grief still elevate in the body if nothing extra (Latin “*ad*”) increases the initial grievance (“*gravare*”? Derived from the “*gravis*” cluster of terms and meanings, all of which share the meaning “heavy,” “grief” has the sense of “getting us down.” But how far down does that feeling drop? I suggest that grief

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<sup>38</sup> Partridge, *Origins*, 1324–1327.

<sup>39</sup> “Gravity,” of course, refers to weight or downward acceleration. “Gravy” means “a heavy sauce, stew,” and comes from *gravis* by way of some intermediate terms, including the Latin *granum*, meaning “seed, grain.” “Gravel,” meanwhile, evolves through the Old French word *gravele*, meaning “sand” or “small stones.” The French *grave* appears to be a misspelling of Latin *granum*, while the English term *grave* is more closely related to “carve” and “engrave” (by way of their shared basis in the Old English *grafan*, “to dig, dig up; engrave, carve, chisel”) than it is to “gravity.” Partridge, *Origins*, 1324–1327.

initially manifests lower in the body than the heart – at least as low as the belly, such as when one says “My stomach is tied up in knots” or “I feel sick to my stomach” upon learning of a significant loss. However, we tend to forget or disregard this sensation, misplace it in the heart, and surround it with a fortress of aggravation. (Tension in the shoulders, the jaw, the muscles around the eyes, and the fists can signal this much.) But this dis-ease results not from the design of grief itself; something else gets added onto it, namely, craving, or the felt need to do something about the grievance.<sup>40</sup>

The emergence of aggravation from grief can be situated in the sequencing of traditional Buddhist meditative experience. Recall that, in this context, the practitioner attempts to become aware of the gap between the initial sensation (i.e. that of a grievance) and the subsequent arising of craving with respect to that sensation (i.e. anger or aggravation). In becoming aware of the distinction between awareness of a grievance and thirsting to act upon that awareness, one begins to develop the ability to let go of craving. By disciplining the felt need to react to the sensation of grief, one exhausts little-by-little the mode of intentionality known as aggravation. For many traditional Buddhists, this is what it means to face the suffering of grief: to feel grief just as it is, without aggravation manifesting afterwards.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Phenomenologists call this felt need “intentionality”: consciousness or awareness invariably is about or directed toward something. The Buddha likewise recognizes this. But he does not take the intentional structure of consciousness to be the cause of suffering or that which gets added onto a grievance. We do not suffer because we sense a displeasing object – or at least, though one might experience ordinary suffering due to disagreeable sensations, this is not the cause with which the Buddha is concerned. Recall that the Buddha’s practical philosophy is primarily oriented toward the second and third forms of suffering, both of which resist the way things really are: the suffering of change (*vipariṇāma-duḥkha*) and the suffering of conditioned states (*saṃskāra-duḥkha*). The root cause of these modes of suffering is that which arrests our awareness or fixates its relationship to things. This is precisely why craving is a cause of suffering. We can respectively understand the three varieties of craving – *kāma-tṛṣṇā* (craving for sensual pleasures), *bhāva-tṛṣṇā* (craving for existence), and *vibhāva-tṛṣṇā* (craving for non-existence) – in terms of fixation on pleasure and the obsession that compels a fight or flight response. See Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Rahula speaks to this: “there is a way of practicing mental development (‘meditation’) with regard to all our sensations or feelings, whether happy, unhappy or neutral. Let us take only one example. You experience an unhappy, sorrowful sensation. In this state your mind is cloudy, hazy, not clear, it is depressed [...]. First of all, you should learn not to be unhappy about your

The problem, then, is not so much *that grief happens* but *how we carry grief*. Buddhism widely recognizes that we cannot eliminate those external conditions that give rise to grievances. But in contrast with the Buddha's methods, Zen undertakes not just a phenomenological description of *what it's like to experience grief* (and other sensations) in the body; it engages in practical experimentation with how the somatic body carries grief. Where we feel grief largely hinges upon how we hold our grief.

Here is an alternative description of the feeling of grief, as given by the 21st century Zen master, Gordon Greene: "I was with my mother when she died, and I can still feel the sensations of just sitting silently at her bedside for the thirty minutes before my sister arrived in the room. I felt drained of all thought. Every part of me sagged, felt pulled toward the floor. Draining and sagging are gravity at work. Gravity and grief as one."<sup>42</sup> What Greene describes can be experienced first-hand through intensive *vipassanā* practice: after several days of repeating the body-scan exercise, thought-patterns become calm, the senses become highly acute, and the meditator is prone to experience the body and mind in terms of a unified sensation. However, for Greene this intensified, singular body-mind realization happened through trained attunement to a specific sensation: that of heaviness, gravity, or grief. Grief is like gravy, grains, and gravel: it is meant to sink. But it often does not because our sensory and motor organs are susceptible to becoming arrested by the felt need to protect the one who suffers. Fixated by the object of grief and the "I" who supposedly endures the grief, the body-mind relinquishes its ability to consciously feel, breath into, and stand beneath the grief.

So how do we remedy this seeming incapacity to let go of grief? For Greene, allowing grief to drop is more so a physical ability than a men-

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unhappy feeling, not to be worried about your worries. But try to see clearly why there is a sensation or a feeling of unhappiness, or worry, or sorrow. Try to examine how it arises, its cause, how it disappears, its cessation [...]. It is the same with regard to all sensations or feelings [...]. Here is no attitude of criticizing or judging [...]. It is simply observing, watching, examining [...]. Thus you become detached and free, so that you may see things as they are." Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 73–74. Likewise, the experience of grief is to be had just as it is.

<sup>42</sup> Gordon Greene, "The Weight of Suffering," *Gordon Greene* (blog), April 24, 2018, <https://gordongreene.org/2018/05/02/the-weight-of-suffering/>.

tal one. Grief (and other varieties of suffering) arrests us due to psycho-physical distortions and misalignments with respect to gravity. But we can foster the ability to perceive and breathe into grief, and assume a posture that allows grief to drop. He attributes success in this respect to having developed *hara* (lower belly). Greene explains:

In order for that [dropping of grief] to happen, numerous muscles throughout the body need to “wake up” and to relax. For muscle tissue to wake up, it needs to feel the pull of gravity. That process of feeling the work of gravity throughout the body takes a great deal of time because of the ways in which we identify with our habits. For the most part we are not aware that the ways we hold our body in the gravitational field are based on neuromuscular habit. This means that literally we don’t feel gravity in the majority of the muscles in our bodies. At least we don’t feel that gravity until we are struck by grief, or we train intensely in Zen.<sup>43</sup>

This diagnosis echoes traditional Buddhist (even pan-Indian) thinking about the interrelation between action, habit, and re-action. The repeated performance of intentional actions (*karma*) produces habit traces (*saṃskāras*) that get lodged in the somatic body; habit traces bind the person to rebirth (*saṃsāra*) into craving (*trṣṇā*) from moment to moment; and rebirth into craving induces one to compulsively react to one’s environment. But there is a way out of this cycle – and a way out that does not require one to abandon the agency of the body or to escape the heaviness of suffering. By developing one’s posture, sense faculties, and breathing, one can stand with confidence directly beneath the weight of things and allow it to drop through their body. Moreover, this is not just a defense tactic. The weight of anything, including the weight of grief, can be positively used to sink into one’s ground and awaken the somatic body from the slumber of countless lives of habituated being-in-the-world.

### *Zazen and the Alchemy of Hara Breathing*

The most powerful tool of Zen is a practical philosophy of respiration that centers around the *hara*. Considered just in terms of the inha-

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<sup>43</sup> Greene, “The Weight of Suffering.”

lation, breathing from the *hara* is not unlike diaphragmatic respiration. Both offer a corrective to thoracic or chest breathing: when the breath comes from the chest area, one's oxygen intake is compromised, karmic residues get lodged in the area surrounding the heart, one feels cut off from the lower body, and there is a diminished sense of groundedness (both physically and mentally). By engaging the lower abdomen during the inhalation, the *hara* expands (not unlike how a bellows functions), one's oxygen intake improves, the heartbeat slows, one's blood pressure stabilizes, and weight is allowed to sink. But *zazen* gives unique emphasis to the exhalation – and this is where the concepts of *hara* and *hara* breathing get distinguished from those of lower belly and diaphragmatic breathing, respectively. The lower abdomen remains expanded while exhaling, as it gently pushes down into the pelvic floor and widens outward. This happens naturally in some actions, such as coughing: the breath literally exits from the mouth, but an energetic movement explodes down and outward through the belly. The exhale of *hara* respiration can be thought of as a slow-motion cough. Through a long, steady, complete outbreath, one drives the exhale into the *hara*, gently contracts the muscles around the anus, and slightly tucks the hips (*koshi*) in order to create an unimpeded channel that tunnels down through the pelvic floor. Indeed, this is an activity that requires training (humans do not naturally exhale in this way). But it awakens our natural vital energy, produces lift through the crown of the head, and even helps to alleviate the suffering of others.

Referencing the mechanisms of a piston engine is instructive (see Figure 7–8). A piston engine is typically a heat engine that uses one or more reciprocating pistons to convert pressure into energy through a rotating motion. The engine consists of a fixed cylinder and a moving piston. The expanding combustion gases push the piston in a downward, circular motion, this rotation creates an ignition that generates power, and this power gets conducted along a vertical channel. In many ways, this is similar to the workings of breath and posture in *zazen*: the inbreath draws air into the lower belly, the outbreath circulates this air while maintaining air pressure in the lower belly, and this, in turn, maintains a sense of connection to one's ground while igniting an intense heat or focused energy that extends upwards, permeates the body,



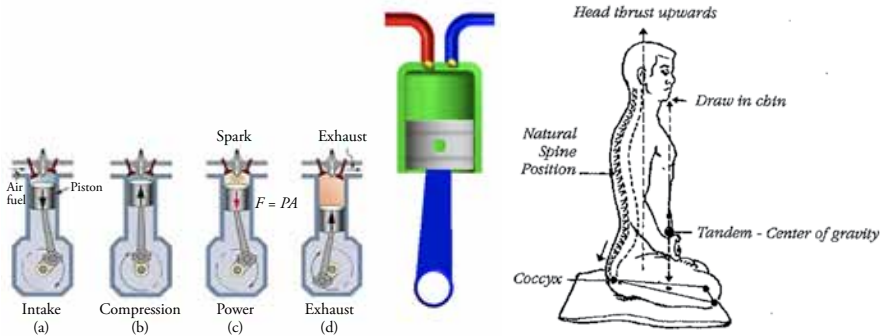


Figure 7–8: Rotating movements ignite heat in a piston engine and *hara* breathing.<sup>44</sup>

and spreads throughout one's environment. Through repetition of these respiratory movements, an intense but soft power becomes concentrated in the lower belly.

Indian *yogis* have long referred to this creative, heated energy as “*tapas*,” and they frequently link it to the Vedic god Agni, the god of fire whose name is cognate with English “ignite.”<sup>45</sup> Neither mere material nor just mental (as if the mind were free-floating separate from the body), this heat is psycho-physical; it is nondual, vital energy itself. From within the lower belly, a small kernel of supple, dynamic energy

<sup>44</sup> For more on images gathered in Figure 7 and my very simple explanation of a reciprocating piston engine, see here: “How Pistons Work: A Detailed Look at Types, Functions, and Mechanisms,” *Marinerspointpro*, accessed October 15th, 2023, <https://marinerspointpro.com/piston-working-functions-materials/>. Figure 8 is taken from Omori Sogen, *An Introduction to Zen Training: A Translation of Sanzen Nyumon*, trans. Dogen Hosokawa and Roy Yoshimoto (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 41.

<sup>45</sup> *Tapas* comes from the Sanskrit word for “to heat, to burn, to give out warmth” (the verbal root, “*tap*”). First appearing in *Rg Veda* 10.154.5, *tapas* has long been associated with the Vedic god of fire, Agni (himself often considered a great *tapasvin* or “possessor of *tapas*”). It later became associated with the ascetic practices of Jainism and Buddhism, as well as variations on the theme of an eight-limbed *yoga* (where *tapas* is frequently associated with the *niyamas*, such as its meaning “self-discipline” in the *Yoga Sūtras*). In tantric yoga traditions, meanwhile, this heat takes on more dynamic meanings associated with the power (*śakti*) to be cultivated through inner alchemical practices. For more on these topics, see Walter O. Kaelber, “*Tapas*, Birth, and Spiritual Rebirth in the *Veda*,” *History of Religions* 15, no. 4 (May 1976): 349–350, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1062153>.

becomes concentrated and expands outward along vertical and horizontal planes, radiating outward in the shape of something like a bubble. Zen, of course, speaks the language of the alchemical traditions of East Asia: in place of *tapas*, its vocabulary is that of *ki* (Chinese “*chi*”). The longer and more deliberately that one practices *hara* breathing, the stronger one’s *ki* (psycho-physical, vital energy) becomes. When performed well, this respiratory practice allows the meditator to enter a deep *samādhi*, a state of relaxed concentration. Importantly, though, *zazen* is more so an inner alchemical practice of energy cultivation than it is a contemplative practice.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, while *samādhi* indeed develops certain epistemological and psychological powers (e.g. the ability to focus one’s mind or attention), we should prioritize the ontological meaning of *samādhi* as a nondual *absorption* into the environment. One’s being (the Greek “*ont-*” of “ontology”) as a discrete “I,” self, or mind that stands over and against the world melts away through a merging with the absolute self, mind, or body of the universe.<sup>47</sup> However one terms it – *tapas*, *ki*, *chi*, psycho-physical, vital, nondual energy – the heat that animates the body and enables digestion and other metabolic processes is the same fire that dissolves illusions that linger in the holding patterns of the heart and the head, such as the illusion that the mind and body are two, or that self and other are separate.

Having fed the lower belly through repeated, disciplined breathing – not unlike how one feeds a wood burning stove with firewood and just enough air – the *hara* becomes tender, hot, and expansive with *ki*. As noted above, the inbreath is associated with sinking: it attunes one to the sensation of gravity at every square inch of the body. But the meditator does not literally sink to the floor like a wet noodle. Each outbreath drives a gravity-countering force upwards, such that vital energy swells and rises through a subtle channel. Greene explains what

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<sup>46</sup> If interested to explore this further, consider the parallels between Omori Sogen’s account of Zen training in *An Introduction to Zen Training* and Robin Wang’s study of the inner alchemy of Daoist *neidan* practice in *Yinyang: The Way of Heaven and Earth in Chinese Thought and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Sogen writes: “Zen is to transcend life and death (all dualism), to truly realize that the entire universe is the ‘True Human Body,’ through the discipline of ‘mind and body in oneness’.” Sogen, *An Introduction to Zen Training*, 93.

happens when our weight “passes through to the ground without being ‘held’ by muscles in-between [...] we use that weight to teach us the breath and the posture needed to carry that weight [...] Just enough use of muscle and bone to hold that weight, but no more than necessary. And a use of breath that drives the countering lift. The gravity of grief is countered by the lift.”<sup>48</sup>

Importantly, the vertical extension that Greene describes applies only to the subtle body. The gross, physical body yields to the pull of gravity, steadily releasing the holding patterns that get “‘held’ by muscles in-between,” while the soft, steady, extended push of the outbreath establishes a base from which vital energy grows skyward.

As this happens, the belly (Sanskrit *garbha*) awakens as a womb (*garbha*) that is pregnant with animating life-force.<sup>49</sup> This corrects misrepresentations of Buddhism as life-denying. For clues to why Westerners misconstrued this, consider some forgotten cultural practices that affirm life through a process of negation. For millennia people have gone to the theater to watch tragedy unfold, even though they already know the ending and have no intention of preventing it from happening all over again. Why is this? Certainly, it is not because we enjoy watching others suffer. More likely, we want to grieve but do not know how, especially when the world assaults our injuries with added insults. The theater offers a safe space where we can let our guard down; our shoulders, heart, and tears can sink to the floor, and we can re-connect to source, namely, the Earth. As Aristotle observes, grief conjoined with fear is especially suited for experiencing *catharsis* or an “emptying out” that has the effect of cleansing and rejuvenating the heart. Not coincidentally, here are some other cathartics (and now I use the term cathartic in the medical sense): seeds (e.g., psyllium seed husks) and grains, both of which derive from the Latin *granum*, were traditionally ingested in order to accelerate the emptying out of waste material and poisons from the digestive tract. When used in the right way, the members of

<sup>48</sup> Greene, “The Weight of Suffering.”

<sup>49</sup> The same Sanskrit term, *garbha*, means both “belly” and “womb.” Not unlike in Japanese Zen, this suggests that, across Indian *yoga* traditions, the belly is a womb of vital, life-giving energy. Related to this etymological analysis, the English “pregnant” is a meaning of the Latin *gravid*, which is cognate with *gravis*. See Partridge, *Origins*, 1324–1326.

the *gravis* family (gravy, gravel, grains) are instruments of healing precisely because they negate, cancel, and empty. They remove obstacles to the somatic body returning to life. Likewise, grief can serve as an agent of *catharsis* by accelerating the work of gravity upon the grip of the emotions. And the key to allowing the experience of grief to heal is, above all, breathing. A tender, calm, long exhale allows things to empty downward and out while transfiguring weight into lift and death into subtle life. The secret to levity – and indeed, to life – is gravity, and gravity works in many ways.

Like any other performance, *hara* breathing is social. In virtually all Zen communities, *zazen* is to be practiced with eyes open. And for much of Japanese Rinzai Zen, meditators sit facing inward toward each other.<sup>50</sup> This shows the Mahāyana Buddhist emphasis on the *bodhisattva* path. Zen meditators sit, sense, and breath with and for each other. They develop their powers of bodily presentation (or posture), perception of gravity, and the performance of respiration in order to address the suffering of all sentient beings – starting with just those beings who are facing them during *zazen*. This gets conveyed by the final *gravis* term to be examined here: *gravitas*. *Gravitas* means “dignity,” “influence,” “solemnity,” “depth of personality,” and “weight.” It often signifies confidence, authenticity, seriousness of purpose, and poise. From a Zen perspective, the poise of *gravitas* requires some clarification. Poise should not be psychologized at the expense of neglecting the body. Recall Newton’s law of universal gravitation: all objects (even the smallest particles) attract other things by virtue of their mass. Newton articulated a sophisticated formula for determining how this force of attraction operates. But he studied gravitation between merely physical, insentient objects, not embodied, living ones. The workings of *gravitas* between somatic bodies are more complicated. In this sphere, *gravitas* alludes to the quality of someone’s psycho-physical presence (*kiai*), a presence that elicits in others a sense of respect, trust, and safety, and which viscerally registers in the body as calm, groundedness, and ease.

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<sup>50</sup> This is not the case in all Zen communities. In many instances, meditators sit away from each other and facing a wall. For more on how Chosei Zen training involves sitting inward toward each other, see “Chosei Zen.”

Speaking from his experience as a hospital chaplain and medical school faculty member, Greene explains how *zazen* transforms grief into something like *gravitas*:

This phenomenon – standing up against the weight of suffering – is significant to me for two reasons. One reason is about learning a more effective form of *zazen*. As you learn to push up from the hips, through the back and the neck, with the crown of the head then pushing toward the ceiling, your senses become more open and your exhalations become longer. If you instead simply sit there like a rock – all gravity and no countering lift – then your thoughts rather than your breath will dominate the experience and your *zazen* never comes alive. The second reason is a more public one. For many people whose work is to alleviate the suffering of others – whether physical, emotional, or spiritual – one of the toughest skills is to learn how to face that suffering without it becoming a burden of your own. For example, you might be someone who works to ease the suffering of a woman not unlike the miner's wife that van Gogh painted. If you become bent over with the weight of her burden – coal or sadness – then all of my experience as a hospital chaplain suggests that you won't be of much help to her. Instead, whatever words might be spoken with that woman, I would want to also be showing her what's possible in her own body. I can show her what it means to let the weight of that load – physical, emotional, spiritual – flow through me as efficiently as possible.<sup>51</sup>

*Gravitas* educes from others an inexplicable confidence in the workings of the universe – a confidence that does not hinge upon hope for a better, more agreeable world, but which results from the well-developed sensation of that which always already grounds and supports us: gravity. One person's *gravitas* helps others to feel the weight of suffering without producing habits of reaction that arrest their attention and prevent them from seeing things just as they are.

### Conclusion

In closing, recall the perplexing term that the Buddha invokes to describe the experience of awakening: *nirvāṇa*. Not unlike the members

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<sup>51</sup> Greene, "The Weight of Suffering."

of the *gravis* family, *nirvāṇa* is best understood in terms of negation.<sup>52</sup> Warning us against positive attributions of meaning to the word, the Buddha and later Buddhist logicians speak of *nirvāṇa* in terms of a radical emptiness – an emptiness so extreme that it is empty of emptiness itself. This is not a nihilistic assertion. Rather, it is a call to prevent us from turning *nirvāṇa* into a manifest object or presented reality that could in turn elicit craving. The more direct translation of *nirvāṇa* as an “extinguishing” or “blowing out” expresses this. In several passages, the Buddha likens *nirvāṇa* to extinguishing a flame, where the flame represents that which fuels our suffering.<sup>53</sup> This suggests that the quest for *nirvāṇa* is one of endarkenment – a blowing out of that which lights up any given experience as if that singular experience were ultimately true. This is not to reject descriptions of *nirvāṇa* as an experience of profound illumination, levity, or lightness of being. But for much of Rinzai Zen, this realization is to be had through awakening the somatic body to its original condition – a condition that transcends the dualities of pain and pleasure, body and mind, self and other, life and death. Two other, internally related polarities that should be added to this list are those of light and dark, and levity and heaviness. In Zen, the path to awakening the body-mind proceeds through the dark, and our best guides through endarkenment are things heavy, such as gravity, grief, and the weight of suffering.

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<sup>52</sup> Rahula comments: “A negative word need not necessarily indicate a negative state. The Pāli or Sanskrit word for health is *ārogya*, a negative term, which literally meanings ‘absence of illness’. But *ārogya* (health) does not represent a negative state. The word ‘Immortal’ (or its Sanskrit equivalent *amṛta* or Pāli *amata*), which also is a synonym of *nirvāṇa*, is negative, but it does not denote a negative state. The negation of negative values is not negative. One of the well-known synonyms for *nirvāṇa* is ‘Freedom’ (Pāli *Mutti*, Skt. *Mukti*). Nobody would say that freedom is negative. But even freedom has a negative side: freedom is always a liberation from something which is obstructive, which is evil, which is negative. But freedom is not negative.” Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 38.

<sup>53</sup> Closely related to this, *nirvāṇa* is also often associated with the extinguishing of three “fires” that bind us to rebirth (*samsāra*) into craving. These three fires are typically identified as passion, aversion, and ignorance. See Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 65.

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# NEW “INSPIRATIONS” IN PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Pier Francesco Corvino

The spirit, literally, is the breath; but figuratively, it is the temperament or disposition of man and all other breathing animals.

(Abner Kneeland)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In this paper, we will discuss the human nature problem through an ecological, eco-critical, and non-reductionist (or integral) perspective. We call this perspective “inspiratory,” echoing the interpretive framework proposed by Lenart Škof in his recent writings on the “ontology of breathing.” This may appear *prima facie* to be an attempt to rehabilitate a philosophical standpoint in anthropology, which is not an entirely incorrect impression. Nevertheless, the general intent of this contribution is to fill a significant gap in contemporary ecological debate.

In the last few decades, especially within human ecology, the concept of human nature has often been limited to an ecologically and chronologically restricted set of properties.<sup>2</sup> However, looking at the network of interrelations that has emerged between human ecology and public debate in recent times, such an approach appears to be inadequate. The

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<sup>1</sup> Aber Kneeland, preface to *A philosophical dictionary; from the French with additional notes, both critical and argumentative*, by Voltaire, trans. and ed. Aber Kneeland (Boston: J. P. Mendum, 1836), lii.

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction, see Maria Kronfeldner, *What's Left of Human Nature? A Post-Essentialist, Pluralist, and Interactive Account of a Contested Concept* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018).

current climate crisis has indeed driven human and political ecology to extensively interpret reality, burdening it with considerable responsibility. In response, methodologies that combine prescriptive, descriptive, and predictive traits have been progressively developed within these disciplines, seldom embracing the broader framework of “ecological wisdom.” This “wisdom” can be described as a set of theories urging decision-makers to pursue prudent actions within contextual ecological practices and urging researchers to restructure their own architectures, employing – at least theoretically – non-technocratic, indigenous, theological, and philosophical resources.<sup>3</sup> In light of the above, we assume here that a philosophical definition of human nature may be a *desideratum* of “ecological wisdom.”

The immediate correlate of this definition is a new anthropological model, which is quite distant from the past theoretical attempts to define human nature in terms of “depth” (psychoanalytic) and “surface” (psychological, physical, sociobiological).<sup>4</sup> This model is rooted in both a strong commitment to the explanatory capacity of philosophy, the historical-critical and eco-critical examination of sources, and an archaeological excavation within 19th-century continental anthropological debate.

Within this grounding operation, we also drew the following distinctions: for *human nature*, we designed a set of human characteristics that are perceived as persisting core aspects of our existence; for the adjective *ecological*, we added that this set of characteristics should present the relationship between human beings and the environment, and, in a more speculative distinction, we implied that these characteristics should represent what immediately binds human nature to Nature itself. Furthermore, for *eco-critical*, we associated the theoretical findings of this anthropology with the practical aims of “ecological wisdom,” and for *non-reductionist* or *integral*, we compel our anthropology to avoid the double *cul-de-sac* of anthropocentrism or biocentrism. Lastly, for *inspiratory*, we provided a comprehensive meaning to the aforemen-

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<sup>3</sup> See for ex. Rose Roberts and Lewis Williams, eds., *Radical Human Ecology: Intercultural and Indigenous Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> I take this distinction from Gordon Wheeler, *Gestalt Reconsidered: A New Approach to Contact and Resistance* (Cambridge: GIC Press, 1991), 203.

tioned adjectives, associating our interpretive framework with the "ontology of breathing" of Lenart Škof.

### From the Ontology of Breathing...

As we have mentioned, our primary theoretical source is Lenart Škof's "ontology of breathing," which is grounded in the idea that everything that exists should be primarily considered as a "breathing body." The act of breathing thus becomes a proper philosophical object and the spontaneous and shared process of oxygen assimilation reveals itself as the shrine of a new ethics. We already take part in a "breathing atmosphere," but we are not consciously inhabiting it; we need to conceive and experience the act of breathing as an "autonomous, active and conscious breathing gesture."<sup>5</sup>

To enact this "living spiritual becoming," respiratory ontology has critically reviewed the Western philosophical and cultural tradition, addressing some key issues and locating philosophical antecedents. For example, in the somatological features of Feuerbach's anthropology, Škof found the cornerstone of "a new field" of research, which can be situated at the turn of philosophy and anthropology. On this very field, he built the "ethical anatomy of the body,"<sup>6</sup> which can be defined as a pragmatic cross-perspective that unifies the physiological and philosophical aspects of breathing, while serving as grounding for philosophy. Its stance is literally groundbreaking, inasmuch as it grafts the dimension of Nature (with a capital N) into the "otherwise merely solipsistic world of the Self."<sup>7</sup>

Without implying anything metaphysical, Škof built its new ethics mirroring the spontaneous act of breathing, thus reaching the domain of intersubjectivity as "breathing atmosphere." Such an approach seeks to avoid two fallacies, identified by Luce Irigaray within the history of Western thought. On the one hand, the fact that every single theory

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<sup>5</sup> Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes, eds., *Breathing with Luce Irigaray* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 217.

<sup>6</sup> Lenart Škof, *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 1.

<sup>7</sup> See Škof, *Breath of Proximity*, 79ff.

on the subject has (always) been created and appropriated by a male subject, and, on the other, that ethics had been persistently avoiding the body as a “system of gestures.”<sup>8</sup>

Within his theory of intersubjectivity, Škof has also addressed human nature. He observed that we always encounter a conflictual element in the history of humankind, which seems to portray the human desire for (violent and egoistical) affirmation. The breathing body, as a place of spiritual becoming, represents an answer to such evidence, inasmuch as it aims to be a place of pacification both within the human being and in the relationship between human and non-human beings. This is the primary meaning of the “ethical anatomy” proposed by Škof: to conceive of our body as an “inter-corporeality” that is able to bear “the old understanding of the world as the interconnectedness and interdependence of elements (air or breath, water, fire, and earth) within the entire cosmology of microcosm and macrocosm.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the body is seen as a “part of space that breeds ethical gestures” coexisting with the natural and the spiritual environment, called the *mesocosm*. The concept of the *mesocosm* can indeed be considered one of Škof’s key concepts: it connects the microcosmic dimension of the body and the self with the macrocosmic dimension of the “adjacent world” where nature and the “space of otherness” subsist, enlightening that region of space – the one we placed earlier between philosophy and anthropology – opened up by the ethical-anatomical perspective. The mesocosm shows itself as a medium for mild gestures (“compassion, tender-heartedness, care, attention”) gaining the potential to connect intersubjective levels of our existence.

Our aim here is indeed to draw some anthropological variations from this mesocosmic vision, addressing the enigma of human nature. As we mentioned, the “inspiratory” variation that we are about to present will prevent us from falling into the double *cul-de-sac* of anthropocentrism or biocentrism, but it will also provide the mesocosmic structure with an anthropological antecedent that already seems to murmur within our being.

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<sup>8</sup> Škof, *Breath of Proximity*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Škof, *Breath of Proximity*, 4.

### ...To the "Inspiratory" Standpoint

The starting point of our "inspiratory" framework is provisionally settled within the notion of individual temperament. Being substantially innate and layered, temperament appears to be a natural candidate for an ecological and philosophical standpoint. However, this human feature immediately presents itself as a complex object, insofar as it is not a "thing." Such complexity has often been a thought-provoking factor, but scholars have always proceeded in spite of this. For example, in a now-classic paper from the late 20th century, American psychologist Robert B. McCall stated that the lack of a shared definition of temperament was not a real issue, mentioning that intelligence lies in the same situation.<sup>10</sup>

Obviously, the state of the art is much more advanced today,<sup>11</sup> but there remains a fundamental *datum* that we need to discuss, using McCall's comparison between intelligence and temperament. It can be easily seen that the former lines up more with human abilities, while the latter is closer to its idiosyncrasies. Indeed, even in contemporary definitions, temperament still appears as something alien that we harbour within ourselves. To be fair, intelligence was treated in a similar way in ancient times, as in the *natura addita* of platonic *Nous*. And yet, centuries of thinking have managed to hand the notion over to human subjectivity; temperament, on the contrary, resisted under its "long shadow."<sup>12</sup>

This is because, in our judgment, the structure of temperament always implies something beyond itself, as if constantly signalling the presence of a nature within us, which differs from the nature that we are. We have called this "something beyond" the temperament's *inspira-*

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<sup>10</sup> See Harold H. Goldsmith, Arnold H. Buss, Robert Plomin et al., "Roundtable: What Is Temperament? Four Approaches," *Child Development* 58, no. 2 (1987): 524, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1130527>.

<sup>11</sup> See for example Rebecca L. Shiner, Kristina A. Buss, and Sandee G. McClowry, "What Is Temperament Now? Assessing Progress Temperament Research on the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Goldsmith et al.," *Child Development Perspectives* 6, no. 4 (2012): 436–444, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00254.x>.

<sup>12</sup> See Jerome Kagan and Nancy Snidman, *The Long Shadow of Temperament* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

tion, picturing both the “spiritual” process by which something propagates out of us, passing through us – which is normally the dynamic in which we situate temperament – and the physiological act of inhaling air into our lungs. The latter represents a somatological expansion of temperament’s semantics, which may appear confusing. But if we think, for example, of newborns, we will see that their discovery of the world begins together with their first breath:

All exists as sensations rather than as perceptions of determined things or objects with their own existences and qualities. For example, the newborn can perceive a colour, the sensation of which becomes inscribed in itself without its capacity for identifying to what or to whom this colour relates or assigning a place to it in the global structuring of a consciousness.<sup>13</sup>

As expressed by the philosopher Luce Irigaray, the child immediately begins to feel something, “running the risk” of being overwhelmed by a mass of sensations that it cannot yet organize. Since it does not yet have a consciousness in the proper sense, the first glimmer of light comes from the variation of intensity between emotions. This difference represents the first imprint of temperament in the infant and it will accompany it for the rest of its life.

This example appears simple and straightforward, but closer examination soon reveals it to be quite complex again. On the one hand, temperament appears immediately as something that separates us from one another, inasmuch as it makes us feel different. On the other hand, temperament appears as something that takes us together, since these differences in intensity, though particular, do not appear as unique but as recurring within humankind. Also, temperament links the totality of our acts back to our inner nature, testifying that Nature itself has left a lasting imprint on us. To endure these apparent aporias, we had to introduce *inspiration* as the phantasmatic “double” of temperament, which now requires philosophical investigation.

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<sup>13</sup> Luce Irigaray, *To be Born: Genesis of a New Human Being* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 10.

## The "Faculty of Inspiration"

Quite surprisingly, Galenic medicine in the 2nd century AD already featured a similar dyadic system based on temperament and breathing. Obviously, it is not possible here to account for the extreme richness and complexity of Galen's theory and posterity. Nevertheless, we can rely on two fundamental concepts: *pneuma* and *krasis*. *Pneuma* is a Stoic-derived concept, which Galen conceives of in a rather nuanced way as an "airy matter" found in the brain. It could represent the instrument by which the soul operates or even the soul itself, should it be mortal. *Pneuma* presupposes, for its operation, a mixture (*krasis*) of the four fundamental elements (hot, cold, dry, and wet) in the living being.

*Krasis* represents a specific proportion according to which the relevant bodily factors are related to each other. Each bodily part has its own mixture, meaning that in bodily parts that house capacities of the soul, the soul's performance is affected by variations in this mixture. The particular declension and balance of these same four elements in each is also what forms temperaments. Furthermore, these dynamics are replicated at a physiological level: breathing activity in living beings replicates this balancing function, contributing to the stabilization and nourishment of *pneuma*.<sup>14</sup>

This holistic, philosophical, and somatological, dimension would accompany the breathing-temperament relationship throughout the Hellenistic period and would remain stable, *mutatis mutandis*, even between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, thanks in part to the significant contribution of Arab-Persian culture.<sup>15</sup> With the so-called

<sup>14</sup> On this, see for example Philip van der Eijk, "Galen on Soul, Mixture and *Pneuma*," in *Body and soul in Hellenistic philosophy*, eds. Brad Inwood and James Warren (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 62–88; and Anthony A. Long, "Pneumatic Episodes from Homer to Galen," in *The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine: Classical to Contemporary*, eds. David Fuller, Corinne Saunders, and Jane MacNaughton (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 37–54. Where posterity is concerned, it is also necessary to cite Jerome Kagan, *Galen's Prophecy: Temperament in Human Nature* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> One of the many examples could be that of the physician and philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna). See, for example, this passage from his *Canon of Medicine*: "The primary vital faculty is not sufficient by itself to enable the breath to respond to the other faculties but needs an appropriate temperament first. The physicians also claim that this faculty, besides paving the way for life, itself initiates the movement of the attenuated spiritual substance (the breath, that

scientific revolution, and especially with the rise within it of strictly descriptive and conscientialist assumptions based on the machinic manipulation of reality, this union has crumbled inexorably, albeit leaving some debris. We must now examine the extent of these through the notion of “inspiration,” looking into modern religious (charismatic inspiration) and aesthetic (artistic inspiration) occurrences.

An eminent case is that of the 18th century Scottish school of common sense. It is well known that the forefather of this school, Thomas Reid (1710–1796), built up his theory based on a set of intuitive judgments called “principles of common sense.” These were “necessary to all men for their being and preservation,” and therefore were “unconditionally given to all men by the Author of Nature.” These principles are self-evident in such a way that they are “no sooner understood than they are believed.” The judgment necessarily follows their “apprehension,” so they are not exactly carried out by reasoning, but are rather felt or experienced.

More precisely, Reid says that according to these principles, we are forced to believe – at least at first – in the evidence of our senses in a way that is very similar to the “evidence of testimony.” But in believing based on testimony, we have to rely on the authority of the one who testifies, and since we do not find such authority in ourselves, we have to rely on the authority of “the Almighty.” Reid concludes, therefore, in typical Presbyterian fashion, that we are “inspired” by Nature to believe in such principles, in such a way that our firm belief is an “immediate

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is) towards the various members (organs) and is the agent which brings about the contraction and expansion of respiration and pulse. In that it assists life it is passion; in that it assists the activity and functions of mind and pulse it is ‘action’.” Ibn Sina, *The Canon of Medicine*, trans. Oskar Cameron Gruner (London: Becember, 1929), 121. See also Corinne Saunders, “From Romance to Vision: The Life of Breath in Medieval Literary Texts,” in *The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine: Classical to Contemporary*, eds. David Fuller, Corinne Saunders, and Jane MacNaughton (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 87–110; and Carole Rawcliffe, “A Breath of Fresh Air: Approaches to Environmental Health in Late Medieval Urban Communities,” in *The Life of Breath in Literature, Culture and Medicine: Classical to Contemporary*, eds. David Fuller, Corinne Saunders, and Jane MacNaughton (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), 131–153. Furthermore, it is not possible here to discuss the continuation of this tradition within the valuable – yet ambiguous – case of traditional Persian medicine, which makes the notion of temperament a real cornerstone of scientific research. See Maryam Yavari, ed., *Hot and Cold Theory: The Path Towards Personalized Medicine* (Cham: Springer, 2022), esp. 21–38.



effect of our constitution," which shows a peculiar faculty of "inspiration" or "suggestion."

This view was expressed in Reid's famous *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764),<sup>16</sup> but it was also expanded some years later in further works and in his advanced courses at the University of Glasgow. Here, he talked extensively of temperament, generally describing it as "what is involuntary in a man's active powers."<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, he also added that temperaments should be seen as a tool of "the wisdom of Nature":

The Wisdom of Nature has provided a Succedaneum, to supply in some degree the want of real virtue among Men. The Succedaneum is Temperament, by which Men who have little or no real Virtue, who have no higher end in view than to gratify their own inclinations, are led to fulfil the purpose of the divine Providence and to go to rounds of Social Duty.<sup>18</sup>

A man that has no virtue, still yet common sense; deepening his view on the human "constitution," Reid now seems to imply that temperament represents a critical junction for the aforementioned faculty of "suggestion" or "inspiration," as it represents the seed of Nature's inspiration.

In general, Reid seems to recover the notion of temperament in typical Enlightenment terms. He designates temperament as a seed implanted by Providence, functional to the progress of humanity but also indicative of a fundamental relationship of inspiration between Nature and humankind. This relationship, indeed, does not present the features of a progressive intellectual understanding, but of a real set of experiences, in which our body's thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, and emotions show us the way.

Not long after this, a similar view would emerge again among the 19th century Romantics, coincidentally among those "Anti-romantic

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<sup>16</sup> See Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Derek Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997; first published 1764 by Cadell-Bell and Creech (London and Edinburgh)), 13ff and 328.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Reid, *On Logic, Rhetoric, and the Fine Arts: Papers on the Culture of the Mind*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 86.

<sup>18</sup> Reid, *On Logic, Rhetoric, and the Fine Arts*, 86.

Romantics”<sup>19</sup> who had learned a great deal from British empiricism and particularly from the Scottish school. We are referring here to two Danish philosophers, Henrich Steffens (1774–1845) and Frederik Christian Sibbern (1785–1872), both sensitive to German Romanticism but also philosophically autonomous.

More specifically, Steffens discusses temperaments in the context of a theodicy, as he seeks – in his *Anthropologie* (1820–22) – to show that “human races” are all part of an eschatological design. In his holistic and romantic view, the presence of temperament in the human constitution represents the spiritual trace of a deep connection with Nature. The emergence of temperament demonstrates that the apparent subservience of some races to certain climatic conditions can be overcome through the spiritual development of the individual.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this very subservience is already overcome forever, inasmuch as each human being carries within it the capacity to forge itself a character and a personality, thanks to the planted seed of temperament. A natural connection with all things, which was once separated from consciousness, now appears among the races and rises to a higher truth.

Later on, with Frederik Christian Sibbern, a generation younger than Steffens and his self-styled pupil, as we move close to the shoals of positivism, we find the first attempt at a scientific-psychological definition of temperament: “[temperaments are] dispositions or fundamental moods (*Grundstemninger*) in regard to the emotions and to the whole manner in which one is affected by things, by which whereby certain particular inclinations to certain kinds of feelings are connected.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, temperaments represent the first and foremost semblance

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<sup>19</sup> See Nina Witoszek, “The Anti-Romantic Romantics: Nature, Knowledge, and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Norway,” in *Nature and Society in Historical Context*, eds. Mikulas Teich, Roy Porter, and Bo Gustafsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 209–227.

<sup>20</sup> “The quiet order of the inner and outer life is combined, and the fourfold direction, which has developed in a distorted form in the races, we recognize again in humans, but as tempered elements, as ‘temperaments.’” Henrich Steffens, *Anthropologie*, 2 vol. (Breslau: Max, 1820–1822), vol. 2, 440.

<sup>21</sup> Frederik Christian Sibbern, *Psychologie, indledet ved almindelig Biologie* (København: Schulz, 1856; first published 1843), 447.

of "nature in man according to its effects"<sup>22</sup> (*Naturvirkningen i Mennesket*).

Moreover, in a manner that is certainly romantic yet surprisingly close to Reid, Sibbern returns to the idea of temperament as a place of inspiration. The occasion is a disquisition with an apparently aesthetic interest in the source of artistic ability to convey emotions. On this matter, Sibbern answers as follows:

we always carry in our innermost being this common ground of all mankind, from which in nature and reality all characters are lifted up, this is obviously what makes the poet try so vividly and with so much truth to reflect nature, and that he feels the living drive to do so, since he feels his own *innermost being powerfully touched and addressed by nature*.<sup>23</sup>

The so-called artistic inspiration is here understood as an immediate outburst of sensation that is excited by Nature. More precisely, this process reaches up through the "root" of the character, which is temperament. But what is noteworthy here is that this kind of inspiration is represented by the excitement of a faculty that is dormant in everyone, despite emerging only in (artistically) trained characters. In other words, Sibbern presents artistic character as the developed capacity to spontaneously revive within oneself the common structure of humankind. However, at the same time, he is also postulating that the artist with this stance mimics the inspiratory disposition of Nature itself, aimed at that seed of human character that we call temperament.<sup>24</sup>

Overall, this temperament-based approach seems to have disappeared as early as the late 19th century, although a last trace of it can be found in some of Sibbern's students. However, they were already fully caught up in the categories of positivism, which will undermine, as we are about to see, a full understanding of this "inspiratory" model.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Sibbern, *Psychologie*, 447.

<sup>23</sup> Frederik Christian Sibbern, *Om Poesie og Kunst* (København: Tengnagel, 1834), 31; when the translator is not indicated, the translation is ours.

<sup>24</sup> "Everything that ever gives human nature a peculiar character, a peculiar form in any individual, everything that ever stirs in human beings and sets them in motion, can come forth in the poet and relive him." Sibbern, *Om Poesie og Kunst*, 31.

<sup>25</sup> It is worth mentioning here as an example the well-known Harald Høffding, who was sincerely devoted to his teacher Sibbern. Not surprisingly, in his empirical psychology, we find a fundamental distinction between the "formal self" and the "real self," where the first is the

## The Beginning and End of Philosophical Anthropology<sup>26</sup>

We now need to explain why this temperament-based anthropology was submerged by the tides of time in the late 19th century. As a matter of fact, between the first and second half of the 19th century, a sharp separation between philosophy and the new so-called human sciences occurred. Subjects such as anthropology or psychology departed from the more traditional and academically affirmed philosophy. Philosophy and human sciences thus began to follow separate and often conflicting paradigms, clashing destructively.<sup>27</sup>

Around 1830, the first glimpses of experimental science and the great volume of ethnographic and geographical discoveries were about to make an impact. The academic debate appeared to be divided into

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inner coherence of the life of consciousness, which is a result of consciousness striving to summarize its content. The second is indeed the constant features of an individual's psychic constitution, i.e. their temperament and character. In particular, with regard to temperament, he stated: "Both talent and character are determined by the temperament, just as feeling occupies a central position in relation to cognition and will. Temperament is determined by the organic constitution, and manifests itself in the vital feeling, the fundamental mood which controls the mind independently of definite external experiences. It is one of the most important constituents of the real self, the feeling-regulator of the individual. As a background given from the beginning, it determines the mode in which all experiences are received by the individual, and consequently the mode in which the individual reacts upon the external world." Harald Høffding, *Outlines of Psychology*, trans. Mary E. Lowndes (London: McMillan, 1893), 394.

<sup>26</sup> This debate mainly concerns Germany or at any rate German – romantic – categories. Clearly, the French and English contexts also cannot be left out, although in the field of anthropology, their continental influence was relatively limited, at least in the early 19th century. Conversely, German authors such as Immanuel Kant or Alexander Humboldt were known all across Europe. For context, see for example Harold I. Sharlin, *The Convergent Century: The Unification of Science in the Nineteenth Century* (Glasgow: Abelard-Schuman, 1966); and Faustino Fabbianelli and Jean-F. Goubet, *L'homme entier: conceptions anthropologiques classiques et contemporaines* (Paris: Garnier, 2017), 7–231.

<sup>27</sup> It will come as no surprise, then, that the Danish expat in Germany Henrich Steffens was indeed mocked and considered outdated by almost all his contemporaries, regardless of which school they belonged to. We may mention here some exemplary critiques of Steffens' *Anthropologie* like that of Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841) ("Rezension von Henrich Steffens, *Anthropologie*," *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 12, eds. Karl Kehrbach and Otto Flügel (Langensalza: Beyer & Söhne, 1893), 189–211), that of Johann Christian Heinroth (1773–1843), somehow close to *Naturphilosophie* (in *Lehrbuch der Anthropologie* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1822), 383, 392); and that, of course, of Hegel (in "Fragment on the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit (1822–1825)," trans. Gilles Marmasse, *Archives de Philosophie* 77, no. 4 (2014): 600, <https://doi.org/10.3917/aphi.774.0585>).

two opposing trends: on one side were "Proto-positivists," who were methodologically pushing philosophy and anthropology (together) toward a more "scientific" praxis based on empirical observations, and, on the other, "Late-romantics," who remained barricaded in traditional accounts.<sup>28</sup> As early as around 1850, both those trends would be cast aside as "unscientific" by a new generation of scholars who saw the separation of anthropology and philosophy as natural. Romantic science became a generic and fanciful doxa, in which schools and differences were meaningless.

Using a *reductio ad absurdum*, the new generation of the late 19th century made a *major canon* out of Romantic science: the human being represented for them an absolute subject that was opposed to an absolute object, which was Nature.<sup>29</sup> They even somehow embraced this canon as a mindset, calling for an "anthropocentric" reform of the human sciences (through cultural anthropology, empirical psychology, etc.) while creating a separate "biocentric" field of work (that of biology, ecology, etc.). From an eco-critical point of view, Proto-positivists and Late-romantics were only apparently at odds, as they represented the two sides of the same coin, both leading to a separation between human beings and nature. Proto-positivists explicitly introduced the idea that the subject is capable of shaping nature,<sup>30</sup> while the Late-romantics implicitly thinned the spiritual dimension of the human being to the point of disappearance. Ultimately, the poor reception of this debate has sanctioned a "poisonous" anthropocentric/biocentric polarization, excluding every alternative.

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<sup>28</sup> On this cf. Udo Benzenhöfer, *Psychiatrie und Anthropologie in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Hürtgenwald: Pressler, 1993); Gerlof Verwey, *Psychiatry in an Anthropological and Biomedical Context: Philosophical Presuppositions and Implications of German Psychiatry (1820–1870)* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1998); and Stefano Poggi and Maurizio Bossi, eds., *Romanticism in Science: Science in Europe, 1790–1840* (Berlin: Springer, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, we can place distant thinkers such as Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843) and Johann Christian Heinroth (1733–1843) in the "anthropocentric" set, and Ignaz Paul Vital Troxler (1780–1866) or Lorenz Oken (1779–1851) in the "biocentric" one.

<sup>30</sup> In general, this perspective can be associated with a broader cultural nationalistic movement, rooted in the idea of a subject capable of changing the fortunes of history (which Steffens himself has foreshadowed and criticized). See for example George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: Fertig, 1975), 191ff.

Meanwhile, the notion of temperament quickly became outdated and ambiguous, being employed progressively less and less. Around the first half of the 20th century, temperamental theories were incorporated by the more up-to-date characterology, especially in Germany.<sup>31</sup> However, even this discipline had to gradually give way to new trends in psychology, experimentally based and prone to refuting any assertion that was not strictly descriptive with respect to the data.<sup>32</sup>

At about the same time, thanks to the great minds of thinkers like Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner and Arnold Gehlen, Philosophical Anthropology defined its own status and mission for the first time. But Philosophical Anthropology – with capital letters – was not just a “modern” version of centuries-old philosophical research on human beings, since it was very much engaged in redefining philosophy against the crossfire of “hard sciences” and “new human sciences.” While walking autonomous paths, Scheler, Plessner, and Gehlen took “the process of life” as a common starting point,<sup>33</sup> proposing their new subject as a frontier between philosophy and sciences and thus basically setting aside any earlier tradition.

It wasn't until the late 20th century that a fair amount of interest in temperament began to revive, especially thanks to the social scientist and Harvard psychology professor Jerome Kagan (1929–2021), who attempted the path of a theoretical and psychobiological approach, also contributing a considerable amount from a historical perspective.<sup>34</sup> Fast

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<sup>31</sup> Some examples are William Stern, *Differentielle Psychologie* (Leipzig: Bart, 1921); Gottfried Ewald, *Temperament und Charakter* (Berlin: Springer, 1924); Abraham A. Roback, *The Psychology of Character: With a Survey of Temperament* (London: Trench & Trubner, 1931); Erwin Schrödinger, *Science and the Human Temperament*, trans. James Murphy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1935); and Ernst Kretschmer, *Körperbau und Charakter: Untersuchungen zum Konstitutionsproblem und zur Lehre von den Temperamenten* (Berlin: Springer, 1944).

<sup>32</sup> A good overview of characterology at the turn of the century can be found in Hubert Rohrer, *Charakterkunde* (Wien: Urban & Schwarzenberg, 1975).

<sup>33</sup> Joachim Fischer, “Exploring the Core Identity of Philosophical Anthropology through the Works of Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner, and Arnold Gehlen,” *Iris* 1 (2009): 168. On this, see also Odo Marquard, “Zur Geschichte des philosophischen Begriffs ‘Anthropologie’ seit dem Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts,” in *Schwierigkeiten mit der Geschichtsphilosophie: Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 122–144.

<sup>34</sup> See for example George Rousseau, “Temperament and the Long Shadow of Nerves in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Brain, Mind and Medicine: Essays in Eighteenth-Century Neuroscience*, eds. Harry Whitaker, Christopher U.M. Smith, and Stanley Finger (New York: Springer,

forward to the present day and, while the notion of temperament has begun to affect cross-cutting areas of research,<sup>35</sup> the original mission of philosophical anthropology has basically been abandoned, on the one hand employing some of its insights in related fields (such as ethics, sociobiology, historical anthropology, biopolitics, philosophy of culture, sociology of knowledge, hermeneutics, critical theory, etc.), and on the other hand, hypostatizing the discipline in a metaphysical sense. In both cases, the rush to find arguments to justify the awkward or atypical placement of the discipline can be observed, often having to resort to a "transcendental justification."<sup>36</sup>

### A New "Inspiratory" Shift

Despite the recent revival in temperament studies, no one, to our knowledge, has considered what temperament can represent within a philosophical framework. In this last section, we intend to demonstrate that a new "inspired" philosophical anthropology could find a new centre of gravity, providing a temperament-based definition of human nature.

Indeed, both Henrich Steffens and Frederik Sibbern had already offered us two brilliant contributions on this side, one more suggestive and the other more schematic. Steffens found the scope of his temperament-based anthropology in "sinking into nature" without "getting

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2007), 353–370. More generally, see Jan Streleau, ed., *Temperament: A Psychological perspective* (Cham: Springer, 1998); or Marcel Zentner and Rebecca L. Shiner, eds., *Handbook of Temperament* (New York and London: Guilford, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Recent theories speak of temperament even for animals or plants, looking for an explanatory framework with a clear ecological vocation. See for example Denis Réale, Niels J. Dingemanse, Anahita J. N. Kazem et al., "Evolutionary and Ecological Approaches to the Study of Personality," in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 365 (December 2010): 3937–3946, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2010.0222>; Richard Karban and Patrick Grof-Tisza, "Consistent Individual Variation in Plant Communication: Do Plants Have Personalities?" *Oecologia* 199, no. 1 (2022): 129–137, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00442-022-05173-0>; and Jennifer Khattar, Paco Calvo, Ina Vanderbroek et al., "Understanding Interdisciplinary Perspectives of Plant Intelligence: Is it a Matter of Science, Language, or Subjectivity?" *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 18, no. 41 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13002-022-00539-3>.

<sup>36</sup> See for instance Gershon Weiler, "Philosophical Anthropology as Mere Critique," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 10, no. 2 (1980): 201–207, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004839318001000207>.

lost in it.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, Sibbern stated that, through temperament, the human being “does not take itself too close to the world,” but also that it “yet takes itself duly close to it.”<sup>38</sup> This middle position, skilfully described by both these authors, derives from a philosophical understanding of temperament, as it embodies our bond with Nature both as an innate determination and as the seed of future development.

Such an awareness, as we have seen, seems to be lost towards the end of the 19th century, though the “long shadow” of temperament has continued to reappear sporadically. Various insights could be cited as evidence of this, such as William James’ well-known idea that the history of philosophy can be seen as a “clash of temperaments.”<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, in our judgment, the most interesting example is to be found in Georg Simmel’s fortunate phrase “philosophy is a temperament seen through a picture of the world,”<sup>40</sup> which echoes Elémire Zolla’s idea of art as “a corner of nature seen through a temperament.” What is foreshadowed here but not yet grasped is that temperament is not just a functional structure, but a true philosophical “thing,” in the same sense in which we think of the word *nature*.

To the discerning eye, it will come as no surprise that one person who came close to recognizing the philosophical scope of temperament was Herman Dooyeweerd (1894–1977), a Dutch philosopher moved by the need to constitute a philosophical system inspired by the wisdom of Reformed Christianity. Indeed, terms such as temperament, character and talents are recurrent in Reformed theology, in that they structure the community of believers according to their vocations. On Simmel’s dictum, Dooyeweerd expressed himself as follows:

The genuine life- and world-view has undoubtedly a close affinity with philosophy, because it is essentially directed towards the totality of meaning of our cosmos. A life- and worldview also implies an Archimedean point. Like philosophy, it has its religious ground-motive. It, as well as philosophy,

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<sup>37</sup> Steffens, *Anthropologie*, vol. 1, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Sibbern, *Psychologie*, 369.

<sup>39</sup> William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975; first published 1907 by Longman Green and Co (New York)), 11.

<sup>40</sup> Georg Simmel, *The Problems of the Philosophy of History: An Epistemological Essay*, trans. Guy Oakes (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 23.



requires the religious commitment of our selfhood. It has its own attitude of thought. However, it is not, as such, of a theoretical character. Its view of totality is not the theoretical, but rather the pretheoretical. It does not conceive reality in its abstracted modal aspects of meaning, but rather in typical *structures of individuality which are not analyzed in a theoretical way*.<sup>41</sup>

However, in a typical Reformed fashion, Dooyeweerd raises an important point here: the very notion of temperament calls for a different, "integral" point of view. With his critique, Dooyeweerd emphasized the pre-theoretical plane, directly questioning the "structures of individuality." Nevertheless, after he established that a certain religious viewpoint (in his case, a Neo-Calvinist one) was to be considered the original source of meaning even in philosophy, he did not deepen his analysis any further, partly due to his death before he could complete some works on philosophical anthropology.

What Dooyeweerd had glimpsed may be considered here to be the spiritual significance of temperament. It was not by chance that, before becoming a medical doctrine with Hippocrates and Galen, temperament had represented the ancients' – e.g., Empedocles' – way of reuniting with the four elements of the Earth, which were to be found in the blood (and later in the *krasis*) of human beings.<sup>42</sup> In this sense, temperament needs to be seen primarily as a symbol "that rests in itself."<sup>43</sup> As it represents nothing but itself, any attempt to make it into a structure of explanation irretrievably separates the explanation itself from the simulacrum that temperament represents, as it becomes altogether manipulatable and conditioned by the culture in which it operates. However, by representing nothing more than itself, it can draw on the aura of Nature, simultaneously annihilating and germinating.

If any, Gaston Bachelard seems to have been the one who most closely reached this awareness through the notion of "oneiric tempera-

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<sup>41</sup> Herman Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, Collected Works, Series A – Vol. 1, trans. David H. Freeman and William S. Young (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1984; first published 1953 by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company (Philadelphia)), 128.

<sup>42</sup> See for example Maria Michela Sassi, "Parmenides and Empedocles on Krasis and Knowledge," *Apeiron* 49, no. 4 (2016): 451–469, <https://doi.org/10.1515/apeiron-2015-0005>.

<sup>43</sup> This terminology comes from Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Versuch über die Gräbersymbolik der Alten* (Basel: Bahnmeier, 1859).

ment.” In fact, according to Bachelard, the elemental forces of ancient cosmologies (fire, water, earth, air) are still present in our imageries and have the faculty of animating a dual motion. Those forces allow the subject to fantasize (to enter the *rêverie*) and the material object (e.g. a certain stream of water) to be fantasized about. This happens because between each material element and its cosmological image operates a fundamental “oneiric temperament,” which somehow belongs to the “fantasizing” subject as well.<sup>44</sup>

Despite being rooted in distant phenomenological and psychoanalytical suggestions,<sup>45</sup> Bachelard’s notion of “oneiric temperament” still represents a considerable source of meaning here. His “post-critical” method, which comes from a “second naiveté” that grants him the faculty of imagination, corresponds to our eco-critical vision, which draws on that “ecological wisdom” from which we started. The “hormonal”<sup>46</sup> function that the elemental sphere has toward imagination in Bachelard’s work becomes for us an “ecosophical” horizon within which to place our inspiratory perspective. Temperament, just like its oneiric double, does not belong entirely to the subject who feels it inside itself, since it is also attached to Nature (the elemental side of the *reverie* in Bachelard). As we mentioned, by its very nature, temperament is ontologically complex: it certainly belongs to us, but we do not have *possession* of it. Its very notion implies a constant superfetation of the “real self,” in a way that haunts our “formal self,” showing that we are always *in the presence* of Nature.

## Conclusions

In light of these arguments, our circle closes and we return to where we started: the wake-up call of *ecological wisdom* directed at human

<sup>44</sup> See Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith Farrell (Dallas: The Pegasus Foundation, 1983), 5ff.

<sup>45</sup> His “ascensional psychology” indeed represents “the other side of the coin” of psychology and psychoanalysis, inasmuch as it takes advantage of the openings in these disciplines to embark on a new “aerial voyage,” thus becoming a true source of “inspiration” for us. See Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, trans. Edith Farrell and C. Frederick Farrell (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1988), 11ff.

<sup>46</sup> Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, 11ff.

and political ecology. Through this "inspiratory" shift, philosophical anthropology can make this call its own, aiming to eco-critically address how we conceive the nature we harbour inside and the nature that we inhabit. Moreover, it can initiate a confrontation with all those wisdoms that have long been trying to communicate its legacy, while often being spiritually, economically and ecologically depauperated. The absence of a common ground for this debate often reflected the desire to preserve our ideas of human nature, society and resource exploitation.<sup>47</sup>

Admittedly, the aim of this contribution was only to offer some justifications for an "inspiratory" regeneration in philosophical anthropology, strongly committing ourselves to certain theoretical *desiderata* of ecological wisdom. Many of the suggestions advanced here will have to be explored in greater depth elsewhere, but we hope that we have sketched out at least a meaningful horizon line, providing us with enough space to think and enough ground to continue our journey.

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<sup>47</sup> In the very last few years, however, some works are opening a new path. See especially Eduardo Kohn's pioneering *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2013).

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# ON STIFLING A TRANSCENDENTAL BREATH: AN ITALIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF BREATHING

Michael Lewis

## Breath in Recent Times: On an Empirical Conception of Breath and the Soul

To what extent, if any, has the more or less newly founded respiratory philosophy conceived of breath in an empirical way? It seems to us that if *spiritus* is understood as that which binds together the ideality of the soul with the materiality of the body, then it could go either way. And yet it has mostly been taken as, for instance, Franco (“Bifo”) Berardi seems to when he speaks of the “soul” in the wake of Epicurus as “the vital breath that converts biological matter into an animated body,” which is to say that the soul – or more precisely, the spirit – is to be understood in a bodily way, as the potentiality which the body accrues, or as Spinoza had it, “[w]hat the body can do.”<sup>1</sup>

But are there no risks attached to this apparent tendency to elide any notion of breath that exceeds the empirical, the material, the bodily, the natural? The question of the empirical status of breath is indeed not merely an academic affair; it may help us to explain certain aspects of the events that have dominated the last three and a half years, since March 2020, in the form of a virus declared “pandemic,” which was

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<sup>1</sup> Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2009), 21.

transmitted for the most part by way of the breath. More specifically, considering such questions may help us to understand the immensely jarring contrast between the friendly valorisation of a shared con-spiration that has characterised this young philosophy up to now, and the intense, even violent, hostility to the breath of the other, which the developed world exhibited from at least 2020 to 2022, and which took the form of the enforced stifling of infants, not to speak of adults, by way of such measures as the mask. What element of our conception of breath can have allowed such a reversal of values, and therefore what needs to be altered in that conception in order that such a transvaluation is never allowed to happen again? A certain turn towards the *transcendental* form of the breath is here urged upon us.

Before passing on to the nature of this breath, let it be said that we do not intend to relegate Berardi himself to the “empiricist” side of the debate, even if we have too little space here to include a reading of Berardi’s book entitled *Breathing*,<sup>2</sup> or his more recent text, *The Third Unconscious*, which devotes itself to the development (and degeneration) of the soul in the time of the “pandemic.” The latter work, in certain of its minor strands, attempts to signal its own virtuous distance from the “anti-masker” line, despite the major thrust of the text moving in quite another direction,<sup>3</sup> and indeed Berardi’s work as a whole may help us eventually to think at least two things: how our sense of social solidarity could have become so degraded that the only way in which it could manifest itself was in a delusional “protection of others” from our living breaths (and a secret, and similarly delirious protection of ourselves from theirs). As Berardi puts it: “the exposition [*sic*] to the breath of the other can have a pathogenic effect [...], poisoning the sources of that con/spiration that makes life pleasurable.”<sup>4</sup> The second thing he allows us to think is the explosion of identity affirmation

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<sup>2</sup> Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Franco Berardi, *The Third Unconscious: The Psycho-sphere in the Viral Age* (London: Verso, 2021), 28: “I’m far from joining the right-wing negationists [*sic*; i.e. “denialists”] who want to reclaim the freedom to not wear a mask”; “My intention is not to question the sanitary policy”; cf. also 44, and yet, cf. 74ff.

<sup>4</sup> Berardi, *Third Unconscious*, 66.

that seemed to arise in tandem with this baffling tendency, and even to become intertwined with it. Some middle-class Americans seem to be stating now that they are continuing to wear “their” masks as an expression of “who they are.” Their own identity has become an altogether anonymous, faceless affirmation of pure “caring.”<sup>5</sup> In any case, Berardi helps us to raise the question of how the very fundament of human society, a *conspiratio* and a face-to-face, might have become so corrupted, and indeed inverted in such a way that the social bond was conceived, at least for a number of years, as founded precisely upon a *stifling* of breath, a concealment of the face, and a shunning of the other’s physical body.

To some extent adopting an approach that resembles Giorgio Agamben’s in his considerations of biometrical identification,<sup>6</sup> Berardi associates this transformation of identity in the name of health with a much broader digitalisation, one which, in America at least, took advantage of an earlier epidemic (AIDS) in order to promulgate itself. We can read the recent plague and its effects upon our avowed identity in a similar vein, but this time as rendering conceivable the ultimate *completion* of this digital revolution, and the replacement of what Berardi describes as an affectionate, physical “conjunction” with a distanced, digital “connection” or “connectedness,”<sup>7</sup> which wreaks havoc in what he persists in calling our “soul,” not to speak of the intercourse of our bodily life.<sup>8</sup>

To some readers, particularly the academics, no doubt the slightest criticism of the concealment of the face and the stifling of the breath will seem surprising, if not reprehensible: after all, was “masking” (note

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<sup>5</sup> The present author was recently seeking a fellow academic and found that someone working in the same department – one single figure among perhaps twenty, engaged in a single-handed re-definition of the phrase “virtue signalling” – had posted as her “profile picture” a photograph of herself with her identity entirely obscured by a mask, perhaps making the political point that this lack of individual identity *was* her new identity.

<sup>6</sup> Berardi, *Third Unconscious*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Berardi, *Third Unconscious*, e.g., 18–19.

<sup>8</sup> That said, we should note that Berardi considers this vision of the future, which he takes to be Agambenian, to be merely “probable,” and his intention is to sketch the outline of an alternative, one in which this online “connectivity” and distantiation come to be associated in our minds precisely with “sickness,” and their opposite with health, joy, and pleasure. Cf. Berardi, *Third Unconscious*, 18–19; on Agamben, cf. 43–44.

the quasi-deliberate confusion of active and passive voices) not the least egregious and “harmful,” the least “restrictive” of all “restrictions,” those multifarious forms of separation that held us apart for so long, and often, in the end, forever, and which even went so far as to legally prohibit many from comforting their most dearly beloved in the moment of their death, their expiry – for fear of their very (last) breath?

In truth, without a proper conception of the human, which the stress that we are about to lay on a transcendental form of breath – in excess of the empirical – will in part be designed to allow us to reveal, one will seemingly remain unable to see just how deleterious to human social life it is to deprive one’s self of a face and to allow one’s self to be deprived of the slightest experience of the face of another.

Naturally the philosophy of breath as an academic sub-discipline cannot be held responsible for international policy here – save insofar as its proponents would have been well-placed to make an intervention that does not seem to have been forthcoming – but we might understand the tendency within it which we are here analysing as a reflection of a broader conception of breath, voice, and the human, which, insofar as it characterises the pre-thematic consciousness of the general populace, might have allowed the measures at stake to have been more readily accepted than they might otherwise have been. We have dealt with this conception and the manifold affronts to the humanity of the human that it leads to in a recent book, and regret the minimal room we found it possible to devote there, largely in footnotes, to the phenomenological and political effects of the censoring of the face.<sup>9</sup> What matters is for us to attribute a real meaning and ontological consistency to the *phenomenal*, and so few in the Humanities, which devote themselves to just this layer, summoned up the courage to insist upon it.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Michael Lewis, *Philosophy, Biopolitics, and the Virus: The Elision of an Alternative* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2023), 188–189n61.

## A Neglected Path in the History of the Philosophy of Breath: Italy

Where might we find an example of a conception of breath that is transcendental? Berardi will already have given us a hint.

In a recent essay on breath in Italian philosophy of the 20th and 21st Century, Alberto Parisi contends that “the reflections on pneumatology proposed by these [Italian] philosophers [Giorgio Colli, Giorgio Agamben, Adriana Cavarero, and Emanuele Coccia] have been underestimated.”<sup>10</sup> The pioneering work carried out in respiratory philosophy in its early years has indeed for the most part dealt with other traditions, and it is with a view to supplementing the discipline as it stands, but also moving some way beyond Parisi’s own inspirational account, that we have charted our course.

One of the routes we shall take in an attempt to open up the problems we have raised is to read the work of Giorgio Agamben, and in particular his *Language and Death* from the late 1970s and early 1980s (a seminar of eight days, spoken and then written, to be published in Italian in 1982).<sup>11</sup> This work deals with the question of the difference between the animal voice and the human Voice (which Agamben capitalises to indicate an audible sameness but a graphic, literal, and indeed substantial difference – one which is brought about by the articulation of the animal voice by means of letters). If we read this text afresh with our own idiosyncratic interests in mind, it becomes clear that the breath which carries this voice may be deemed essential to the question, and that a similar distinction may be drawn there. This notion of spiration or spirit, the pneumatic, may be taken in two distinct senses – the empirical and the transcendental. The hypothesis we shall try to propose is that this distinction might help to shed some light upon the incipient discipline of respiratory studies, if only as something that might be borne in mind so as to temper certain excesses which it might

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<sup>10</sup> Alberto Parisi, “From Voice to *Pneuma* and Back: Italian Pneumatologies against Derrida’s Grammatology,” *Journal of Italian Philosophy* 5 (2022): 2.

<sup>11</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity*, trans. Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991; first published in 1982 by Einaudi as *Il linguaggio e la morte: Un seminario sul luogo della negatività*).

occasionally risk, and to help us to understand, and indeed to hesitate before, the turn towards a materialist – which is to say, purely empirical – conception of breath.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Among those who might be deemed founders of this field: for all its merits, the work of Havi Carel seems to us often to stray into a certain empiricism of breath, and indeed, this can be said to be the result of the original intent of her work on illness and the “life of breath” in particular, which was broadly therapeutic or practical; this is reflected in those aspects of the discipline more generally which stress its relation to yoga and meditative breathing exercises. And yet “transcendental meditation” is not so transcendental as all that, and the emphasis laid by – for instance – Carel upon the “deep culture, spiritual, and personal meaning” that attaches to the physiological process of respiration in no way extends so far as to reach the transcendental, being little more than “subjective colouring,” a superstructure or secondary stratum laid atop a natural experience, a flattening of the transcendental that is reflected in the particular (non-ontological) way in which phenomenology is for the most part conceived in her work. Cf. Havi Carel, “Invisible Suffering: The Experience of Breathlessness,” in *Atmospheres of Breathing*, eds. Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2018), 233.

But let it be said that we owe personal thanks to the author for an initiation into the philosophical question of breath since we were privileged to experience the inaugural moments in which this new terrain was first explored, in the *Life of Breath* project, as a part of which our own initial contributions were presented, at the workshop on *Phenomenology, Anxiety, and Breath*, held at the University of Bristol on Thursday 16th March 2017. They were also given in a revised form before the Philosophical Society of England, in Alnmouth, Northumberland, at a symposium entitled, *The Voice of Philosophy*, on Saturday 23rd September 2017, and published in greatly condensed form as “A Voice that is Merely Breath,” in *The Philosopher* 106, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 3–10. The present work tries not to rely on this work, but it inevitably builds on the insights gleaned throughout the whole process of its conception and is indebted to all those involved.

As for other pioneers of the field, Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson, a more sustained engagement than we can afford here would need to take place, but the tendency seems to be in both cases to flatten the difference between the transcendental and the empirical, to deconstruct or elide it, and indeed to take breath as the warrant precisely for doing that: a gesture which we would wish to decelerate or indeed to hesitate before a little longer. Škof’s gesture might be said to be made predominantly under the influence of Luce Irigaray (cf. Lenart Škof, *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 1, 14ff) and as he describes his own trajectory: “The line of the argument extends from the plane of a new cosmology to the plane of the [*sic*] ‘material’/bodily intersubjectivity, based on the cosmic/material *element* of air and the phenomenon/act of breathing,” and he explicitly affirms that he is speaking in the context of the “new materialism” and indeed signals his distance from Derrida by attributing to the latter’s work an “insistence that the only possible philosophy is a transcendental one.” Škof, *Breath of Proximity*, 11. Škof wonders whether Derrida can, as a result, “grant any philosophical relevance to the ‘empirical’ breath,” whilst the author avows his own pursuit of the “possibility for an ethics that reaches beyond the empirical-transcendental divide.” Škof, *Breath of Proximity*, 14.

In the case of Berndtson, to summarise things with a haste still more unjust, responsibility may devolve upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose path beyond transcendentalism and naturalism is reasonably well-known. Petri Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Re-*

We shall read Agamben's text with a view to determining whether the strategy of focusing our reading on the notion of breath renders his project intelligible in a new way, and whether it helps us to understand the very question of breath itself, and in particular the questions we have set ourselves to unfold.

### Agamben's conception of metaphysics and its overcoming

Within *Language and Death*, Agamben's references to breath itself are somewhat scattered, and to a casual glance they could appear peripheral: to demonstrate that this need not be so, the reader has first to grasp the more general problematic of Agamben's text, for it is in pursuing a very particular goal that he broaches the topics which form our concern here.

Philosophically, and perhaps in light of the contemporary predominance of a deconstructive reading of Heidegger's conception of the end of metaphysics, he finds it necessary to set himself two tasks:

1) To present a new vision of what metaphysics is.

On his account, metaphysics involves a certain very peculiar conception of *grounding*: the Western metaphysical way of thinking, speaking and acting is founded upon a conception of the act of foundation which takes this operation to involve an exclusion or exception; in the context of language, to take a privileged instance, in the transition between animal and human, what must be excluded in order for *logos* to form is the animal voice or *phōnē*. More curiously, and in a way that will take us much longer to justify, the removal of the animal voice is aligned with the impossibility for human language to refer indexically and in an immediate way to the singularity of the real thing – such a reference is

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*spiratory Primacy of Being* (London: Routledge, 2023), 3ff. Berndtson speaks of his own work as nurturing “a Merleau-Pontian-inspired phenomenological philosophy of the primacy of breathing.” Berndtson, *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing*, 5.

In relation to the present work, I must here insert a note of thanks to the reviewers from *Poligrafi*, who spared me from much obscurity in the article in general and from a number of errors I would otherwise have made.

ruled out by language in its propositional or apophantic form,<sup>13</sup> which is specifically human and to which the animal has no access.

Agamben supports his account of metaphysics with an intriguing reading of G. W. F. Hegel and Martin Heidegger, who on most interpretations of the history of metaphysics constitute the philosophers or thinkers jointly responsible for the closure of metaphysics. This reading singles out the discreet but decisive role of *pronouns* within the text of philosophy, and in particular of the demonstrative pronouns *Diese* and *Da* which take centre stage at the very outset of the dialectic in the passages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* devoted to “Sense Certainty,” and in Heidegger’s notion of “Da-sein,” being (the) “there” (*Da*). The way in which these pronouns function allows Agamben to demonstrate the way in which each of the two thinkers conceives the negative or “removed” foundation that is characteristic of metaphysics. For instance, Hegel demonstrates that a singular referent, intended by “natural consciousness,” cannot truly be referred to by language, save as (what turns out ultimately to be) a universality. Such is the first dialectical inversion of the *Phenomenology*: language, as Hegel puts it, speaks more truth than our intentions, for when it adverts to “this” singular entity, the word, the demonstrative pronoun, can refer, with time, space, and a shift in the “I”s who deploy it, to *any* particular thing.

2) To assess the possibilities for “overcoming” metaphysics in a new way in light of this conception. This will allow Agamben to criticise those who attempt to exceed the closure of metaphysics in Hegel and Heidegger on the basis of a mistaken, alternative conception of the same. These include Jacques Derrida and Georges Bataille at their most

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<sup>13</sup> Following the Loeb translations which in turn partake of a long interpretative tradition, we take “proposition” to be a Latinate translation of Aristotle’s “*logos apophantikos*” (cf. Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, in *The Categories; On Interpretation; Prior Analytics*, trans. Harold P. Cooke and Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 17a), and naturally Agamben will have in mind, *inter alia*, Heidegger’s stress on the apophantic “as,” often used to distinguish man from the animals (e.g. in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), a lecture series from 1929–30). Although let it be noted in passing that David Farrell Krell has rightly pointed out an ambiguity in that regard, since Heidegger’s early work tends to stress a *pre*-predicative form of revelation as the prerogative of the human, or *Dasein*. David Farrell Krell, *Derrida and our Animal Others: Derrida’s Final Seminar, “The Beast and the Sovereign”* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).



non-Hegelian: given that, *ex hypothesi*, these figures misjudge the most profound character of metaphysics, their attempts to move outside of it simply reinstall them within it. As Agamben has it: “that which thought [e.g. deconstruction] attempts to categorise as the mystical [a notion that we shall soon come to elucidate], or the Groundless, or the *gramma* [the letter], is simply a repetition of the fundamental notion of onto-theology,” ontotheology being metaphysics, as the science of beings as such and as a whole, on a Heideggerian account.<sup>14</sup>

Metaphysics, like sovereign power in a state of exception (a notion to which Agamben will later devote his “Homo Sacer” series), extends its dominion even in what appears to be the “end of metaphysics”<sup>15</sup>; all previous critics of metaphysics would thus partake of metaphysics’ own “nihilism” without knowing it – a nihilism which ultimately signifies the malign outcome of metaphysics itself, and indeed its ghastly prolongation beyond its own ending.

The curious name that Agamben perhaps most frequently gives to the metaphysical theory of ground as well as to the ultimate position in which those who would attempt to escape it end up is “mysticism.” The crucial characteristic of mysticism for Agamben’s purposes is the notion that language and thought are capable of effacing themselves and so providing us with access to the “ineffable” – the singular real thing in all its truth. This would be the dream of metaphysics itself, but also that of the critics of metaphysics who have attempted to delimit metaphysics *from* such an Archimedean point. As if they were pointing out some condition of its possibility that lay outside of it, or which it was unable to express or capture.

The way in which Agamben weaves together these two possibilities is by tracking the way in which the Eleusinian mysteries are read at two different points in the career of G. W. F. Hegel. At first, in a youthful poem, Hegel proposes the mystical silence – which constitutes the apophatic manner in which language is led to its limits – as a way in which one might gain access to the singularity of things, and so escape the gen-

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<sup>14</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, xiii.

<sup>15</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, xiii.

eralities of word and concept which murder the thing.<sup>16</sup> But later on, in the “Sense-Certainty” dialectic of the *Phenomenology*, he would present a new conception of the mysteries which in fact demonstrates them to be inherently dialectical in character, as the singular referent of the indexicals – “this,” “here,” “now,” “I” – proves to be universal.<sup>17</sup> Effectively, it is this earlier of the two gestures which the post-Heideggerian critics of metaphysics attempt to repeat, following Ludwig Feuerbach in attempting to forestall the dialectical movement at the very outset<sup>18</sup> – thus replacing negation with pure affirmation – without realising that the mature Hegel, and, by extension, metaphysics itself, was already one step ahead of them.

What is crucial, for our purposes, is that Agamben stresses the fact that one of the names given by Hegel to this process of incorporation which takes place as he effectively leaves behind his youthful mysticism, the medium sufficiently plastic as to tolerate the splitting and reconciliation of opposites, singularity and genericity, the outside of language and thought and the inside, is “*Geist*,” the German translation of the Latin “*spiritus*” – “spirit” or indeed “breath”:

The originality of the Hegelian system is that, through the power of the negative [*il potere del negativo*], this unspeakable point no longer produces [...] any leap into the ineffable [as in the early Hegel’s own mysticism]. At every point the Notion is at work, at every point in speech blows the negative breath [*soffia l’alito negativo*] of *Geist*, in every word is spoken the unspeakability of *Meinung* [the singular thing that we “mean” to refer to, and that Sense Certainty takes our experience to be an experience of], manifested in its negativity [i.e. singularity can be spoken of only in its sublation as universality, unspeakability only in speech].<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 6ff.

<sup>17</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 10ff. “This self-preserving Now is, therefore, not immediate but mediated; [...] A simple thing of this kind which *is* through negation, which is neither This nor That [...] we call a *universal*.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; first published in 1807), §96.

<sup>18</sup> Although having in mind more the *Science of Logic* and the putatively presuppositionless beginning of philosophy, Feuerbach asks, “is it not after all a presupposition that philosophy has to begin at all?” Ludwig Feuerbach, “Towards a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy,” in *The Fiery Brook: Selected Writings of Ludwig Feuerbach*, trans. Zavar Hanfi (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1972), 59.

<sup>19</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 14; *Il linguaggio e la morte*, 22.

In Hegel's mature work, in which an oppositional understanding is taken to be a sign of immaturity, the work of the Understanding rather than that of (speculative dialectical) Reason, the notion of Spirit is employed so as to capture the way in which the unspeakable mystery, the singularity of each individual thing, is in fact not exterior to language but suffuses it in the form of a breath that silently blows always and everywhere within language itself, as something inaudible within audible speech, a stream of discreet consonants among the noisy vowels.

It is, therefore, with only a minimal distortion of the text that we may take Agamben to be speaking of the secret centrality of *breath* to the history of philosophy and to its end.

### The Memorialising and Forgetting of Singular Being

From one perspective, the issue of the Sense Certainty dialectic is that the reference to individual things must in the end subordinate them to a certain universality, but also that this reference cannot take place by means of the gestural act of mere pointing, or even by way of its linguistic analogue (the indexical or pronoun), but must rather employ a fully-formed propositional judgement (such as "Now it is night"). This will mean that the Being of the entity must, when linguistically evoked in the context of a complete sentence, be taken to be both singular and generic; and yet, prior to that linguistic moment, Sense Certainty takes the singularity of the entity *alone* to be the very Being of that entity – what that entity *is*<sup>20</sup> – as have the critics of metaphysics who refuse to allow the dialectical machine to start up. But in this context, breath may be taken to express that singular Being which propositional language always vaporises one way or another – whether dialectically, thereby memorialising it (Hegel) or in the way of concealment and therefore forgetting (Heidegger).

A scission is carried out at the very heart of being, thanks to the emergence of the propositional form of language – and therewith the

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<sup>20</sup> "[I]ts truth contains nothing but the sheer *being* of the thing." Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §91.

birth of man. Being is thus divided from the very beginning into the *prôtē ousia*, the singular “this” of mysticism (which Aristotle, in making this distinction between the singular and the generic senses of being, is said by Agamben to partake in, implying once again that mysticism, far from standing outside of metaphysics lies in fact at its very foundation), and the *deutera ousia*, the universality of the categories (or “predicates”), and ultimately the very highest genus, or even that which exceeds the logic of species and genus altogether, thus assuming the position of what the mediaevals came to call the “transcendental.”

This primordial division in the sense of being is at least in part a result of the *propositional* character of the language in which the singular entity is taken up:

The Aristotelian scission of the *ousia* [...] constitutes the original nucleus of a fracture in the plane of language between showing and saying, indicating and signification. This fracture traverses the whole history of metaphysics, and without it, the ontological problem itself cannot be formulated. Every ontology (every metaphysics [...]) presupposes the difference between indicating and signifying, and is defined, precisely, as situated at the very limit between these two acts.<sup>21</sup>

If the propositional form of language joins together a singular subject and a generic predicate which subsumes the former under certain categories, then the proposition itself may be taken to suggest the ultimate structure of metaphysical thinking which is consummated in the Hegelian sublation of the two parts of the proposition (the “infinite judgement”) and the Heideggerian conception of the forgetting of being that propositional language enacts, at least in the form of prose. The prosaic proposition, and so philosophy, can be founded only on an elision, a removal of the singularity that takes place when the singular entity is categorised – “pigeon-holed” – by the predicate. This is the basic metaphysical gesture, the sublation of mystical being (in “spirit”) or its simple “forgetting” (for Heidegger finds it necessary to shift the sense of “being” further back towards the singular thing than Hegel’s dialectic allows – as if the evaporation of being into a generic form could *not* constitute a commemoration but only a betrayal of being).

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<sup>21</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 18.

Before we can get on to the question of how Agamben might propose to move beyond metaphysics so conceived, we need to explore this conception of its nature a little further, not least in order to grasp the precise place this schema reserves for the notion of the *voice*: this will prove crucial in the move beyond metaphysics, since Agamben will come to stress the fact that it is necessary to think of human beings as possessing not merely language (*logos*) but also an especial voice of their own, distinct from the animal's *phōnē*.

### The Animal Voice and the Human Voice

Voice is, therefore, in part Agamben's translation of Aristotle's *phōnē*, one which seems to be made with at least one eye on the novel understanding he is about to propose of a certain relation between the voice of man and that of the animal, and so one which will inflect the sense of the negation by which the former departs from the latter.

Towards the beginning of his *Politics*, and so at the very foundation of metaphysics itself, Aristotle distinguishes man and animal thus:

man alone of the animals possesses speech [*logon*]. The mere voice [*phōnē*], it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well [...], but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right [*dikaion*] and the wrong [*adikon*].<sup>22</sup>

In a summary, from the eighth day of the seminar that *Language and Death* epitomises, Agamben clearly establishes a connection between his project and this passage from Aristotle's *Politics*<sup>23</sup> whilst elaborating upon the particular sense in which human beings nevertheless enjoy the use of a voice:

the Voice presupposed here is defined through a double negativity. On the one hand, it is in fact identified only as a removed voice, as a having-been of the natural *phōnē*, and this removal constitutes the originary articulation (*arthron*, *gramma*) in which the passage from *phōnē* to *logos* is carried out, from

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1944), 1253a.

<sup>23</sup> Which Agamben invokes explicitly at *Language and Death*, 87.

the living being to language. On the other hand, this Voice cannot be *spoken* by the discourse of which it *shows* the originary taking place. The fact that the originary articulation of language can take place only in a double negativity signifies that language is and is not the voice of man. If language were immediately the voice of man, as braying is the voice of the ass and chirping the voice of the cicada, man could not be-the-*there* or take-the-*this*; that is, he could never experience the taking place of language or the disclosure of being. But if, on the other hand [...] man radically possessed no voice (not even a negative Voice), every shifter and every possibility of indicating the event of language would disappear equally.<sup>24</sup>

To make sense of this passage, it will help us to think of the animal voice as if it involved an immediate reference to the real thing, a notion which we are only now coming to be in a position to explain. We can differentiate between animal and human language by describing the latter as propositional and therefore as capable of *apophansis*, revelation or manifestation. Animal sounds can only indicate the mere existence of a real entity stimulating the animal so as to cause pleasure or pain, whereas the propositional structure of *human* language allows us to reveal something of the general essence of the existing thing: phenomenalisation, the event of manifestation, is thereby the exclusive province of man and takes place by means of the formation within language of propositions.

These propositions would constitute the *logos* that is the exclusive province of the human; Agamben deploys the notion of voice to describe the very *enunciation* of these propositions, which he will eventually come to understand as the very event of manifestation itself, and so a – perhaps – *non*-metaphysical notion of Being. But we remain as yet in the context of metaphysics, albeit a metaphysics that is being read with Agamben's ultimate intent of exceeding it already in mind. In this context, Agamben describes the precise process by which Aristotle may be taken to understand the transition from animal to man in the context of language. The pure and unlettered animal sounds are articulated in human speech by means of the letter, the element (*stoikheion*) of speech.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 84–85.

<sup>25</sup> See for example Agamben, *Language and Death*, 38–39; cf. also Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, 16a.

The sounding human voice is not the same as the animal voice (*phōnē*); rather, it is a voice that is articulated by the letter, and it is in fact this gesture of literal articulation which constitutes the properly *human* Voice, and so the properly human breath, which remains *distinct* from the animal – and we can perhaps specify this by speaking here of consonants and vowels.<sup>26</sup>

The invocation of the letter in Aristotle also demonstrates his particular brand of metaphysical mysticism: Agamben speaks of the mysticism of the kind that one finds in the Jewish inscription of the name of God in the form of consonants alone, which are in themselves unpronounceable: IHVH.<sup>27</sup> Letters are exclusively *written* forms of language and thus amount to a silent recollection of the sonorous animal voice, a direct reference to the real which is silenced but manifests itself as silence *within* that Voice. Indeed, the fact that the *gramma* plays this role may explain why Agamben chooses to distinguish the human Voice (*Voce*) by means of a silent change in the initial *letter*.

But how does this help us to justify the alignment of the animal voice with an immediate reference to the singular thing on the part of indexicals in human language, that Agamben's argument, as we have reconstructed it, seems to assume? Perhaps retrospectively: the memory

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<sup>26</sup> Here for want of time we must elide an exposition of the most ambiguous of these fascinating consonants, the letter 'H', the aspirant, so often left unvoiced in Romance languages. Ivan Illich, a great inspiration for Agamben, at least in his later years, has shed some light on this moment of articulation by investigating the early moments of phonetic writing and the later introduction of letters for vowels, whilst rendering explicit the effects of the letter upon the (otherwise animal) breath: "The freely voiced qualities of breathing are not indicated, only the consonants, the harsh or soft obstacles the breath encounters." Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, *ABC: The Alphabetisation of the Popular Mind* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>27</sup> "That which is construed as the supreme mystical experience of being and as the perfect name of God [...] is the experience of the meaning of the *gramma* itself, of the letter as the negation [*negazione*] and exclusion [*esclusione*] of voice." Agamben, *Language and Death*, 30; *Il linguaggio e la morte*, 41. Agamben then moves very quickly to what becomes the main substance of his argument in relation to the voice, a summary of what is to come: "As [or 'Like', *come*] the unnameable name of God, the *gramma* is the final and negative dimension of meaning, no longer an experience of language but language itself, that is, its taking place in the removal of the voice. There is, thus, even a 'grammar' of the ineffable; or rather, the ineffable is simply the dimension of meaning of the *gramma*, of the letter as the ultimate negative foundation [*fondamento negativo*] of human discourse." Agamben, *Language and Death*, 30; *Il linguaggio e la morte*, 42.

retained of the singular reference to the real, the way in which language has long been taken to refer to that which stands beyond language, is by means of the indexical. This ability to indicate may then be taken to constitute a distant memory of the animal and its voice within human language, the faint recollection of that which is without language and so (putatively) in immediate relation with the real: the indexical is the fragment that language retains of its ultimately shattered dream of a relation to the non-linguistic real.

But the ultimate connection of animal voice and the real will prove to be more retrospective still: the voice is not connected with the indexical altogether explicitly by the tradition, but this is what Agamben himself adds even to the linguists who speak of these indexicals as “shifters.” The linguists, Emile Benveniste and Roman Jakobson, add to the philosophical account of the indexical the idea that it refers first of all *not* to the entity it intends but to the very act of language (or indeed, and more precisely, *speech, vocalised language*) in which it occurs: “Pronouns and other indicators of the utterance, before they designate real objects, indicate precisely *that language takes place*. In this way, still prior to the world of meanings, they permit the reference to the very *event of language*.”<sup>28</sup>

What goes undeveloped in the linguistic insight is precisely the transcendental question of how it is *possible* for language to indicate its own pure taking place – and since the Voice that announces this advent is aligned with being, as event, this amounts to the question: how in the end is philosophy as ontology possible? “*The utterance and the instance of discourse are only identifiable as such through the voice that speaks them, and only by attributing a voice to them can something like a taking place of discourse be demonstrated.*”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the reference to

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<sup>28</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 25.

<sup>29</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 32. One is tempted to argue that our overriding concern in the present work, the distinction between the transcendental and the empirical, is marked in the relation that Agamben’s book bears to another great text of Italian philosophy, devoted to the voice: Adriana Cavarero’s *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2005; first published in 2003 by Feltrinelli as *A più voci: Filosofia dell’espressione vocale*). Agamben speaks of the place where Benveniste draws closest to the problematic of the voice, and it involves a consideration of the voice in terms of “the individual particularities of spoken sounds,” alongside the rhetoric of Quintilian



an act of speech can occur only if that linguistic act is borne by a real human voice. And this voice will carry an echo of the animal *phōnē*. The animal voice “is indeed presupposed by the shifters, but as that which must necessarily be removed in order for meaningful discourse to take place”<sup>30</sup>: in other words, *signifying* discourse, propositional manifestation. The Voice that bears language is itself “being” in this new non-metaphysical sense.

### Voice, Self-Reference, Breath, and Being

Even if Agamben is attempting to develop a potential within metaphysics that extends beyond the forms which it was actually able to unfold, he is reluctant to jettison the language of being and the transcendental. We would thus be witnessing in Agamben a transcendental voice, but one which is altering the sense of the transcendental, and so transforming the sense of being.

Thus, we are already beginning to glimpse the idea that the way in which Agamben will breach the closure of metaphysics is by reinventing at least two notions that appear within it in another form: voice and being. And it is in the deployment of the voice in this particular conjunction that we witness breath emerging once again within Agamben's discourse.

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and the “*cantus obscurior*” of Cicero (Agamben, *Language and Death*, 32); it is here that we can clarify the immense divergence of interests which separates Agamben's book on the voice from Cavarero's. Though a lapse in taste, perhaps, it is clear why Agamben's book goes unmentioned by Cavarero. Agamben cares nothing for the singularity of the voice in all its empirical diversity, focussing as he does on the voice insofar as it allows indication – and in general, the point is to situate the voice (or rather, the Voice) between *mere* sound, “the animal voice” (Agamben, *Language and Death*, 35), which, it seems, would be Cavarero's concern, and determinate signification, in the place of an unactualised potential or intention to signify. If one bases one's politics on that transition, on the moment at which each singular entity enters humanity, this politics will turn out differently than it would were one to base it upon the later state of an already singularised voice, or rather of a voice that remains singularised *despite* entering a generic linguistic code.

<sup>30</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 35.

We have too little room to address here this rich subject matter to the extent it deserves,<sup>31</sup> but we can say that the conception of being that Agamben proposes is neither pre-linguistic nor simply coextensive with propositional language and capable of being captured in such propositions; rather, it is the very event of language, the taking place of language, its reflexivity. Being, on Agamben's understanding, would be neither singular being sublated and so remembered in generality, nor a singularity that is forgotten precisely thereby, but rather that which makes the proposition *possible*, that event in which the jointure is first being constructed in (grammatical) copulation or (logical) synthesis. This is the gesture of synthesis that is carried out precisely in the human *Voice*, and that means at the moment at which, at least on the metaphysical account, the animal voice is articulated by *letters*, thereby becoming human.<sup>32</sup>

To imagine that one can refer to the ineffable real is to remain within the mystical structure of metaphysical foundation; the only unspeakable thing to which language might refer which will avoid a metaphysical snare is a reference to the very event of its own occurrence, and this event is not spoken *of* but merely *breathed* in the very articulation of a proposition of human language which is given voice to.

The breath that carries the voice is the non-signifying potential to signify that prior to referring to any actual thing enunciates the fact that speaking is taking place, that language is starting to happen (that the metaphysical machine of the proposition is just getting warmed up). It

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<sup>31</sup> For the interested reader, we do so in a forthcoming volume on Agamben's philosophy more generally, provisionally entitled, *Agamben's Theory of Grounding*.

<sup>32</sup> Agamben indeed at the very least hints that, with this articulation, we are at a sub-metaphysical level: he tells us that the elements which carry out the articulating, the *arthron*, *gramma*, and the other *meros tou logou*, are "not properly either logical or grammatical, but they make possible every grammar and every logic, and, perhaps, every *epistēmē* in general." Agamben, *Language and Death*, 20. We cannot do justice to the point here, but perhaps it would be more accurate of us to say that Agamben locates "being" *here* rather than in the copula that synthesises subject and predicate, along with all of the historical avatars of that process of synthesis, including most centrally the Kantian imagination and its schematism, and it is perhaps somewhere close to this point that one of the great differences that separate Agamben from Heidegger might be opened up.

is the moment of “infancy,”<sup>33</sup> between the mere voice of the animal that will never utter propositions, but only – so the mystics tell us – indicate an altogether real pain and pleasure, and the signifying propositions, the adult human language from which that animal *phōnē* will have been altogether removed, along with the experience of being it encapsulated.

When language draws attention to the very fact of its own incipient propositional articulation, its own ability to manifest things, it vocalises being itself, and indeed this very inflection of the Voice *is* being in the sense of the event of manifestation or phenomenalisation.

It now remains for us to justify the assertion we hazarded in passing, that this ontological aspect of the Voice may be said to be its very breath.

### A Voice of Mere Breath: Nominalism

Such a conjunction (of being or the transcendental with the voice) is not absent from the philosophical tradition: already in Priscian, a grammarian of the 5th or 6th Century, a connection of voice and being had been drawn, but of voice in a very particular sense, that is somewhat akin to a voice that is mere hot air, wind, or breath:

Every one of the *legomena* [in the sense of the Aristotelian categories, the transcendentals], each of the possibilities for speaking listed by Aristotle, could in fact be considered in itself as pure voice; not simply, however, as a mere sound (*vox inarticulata*) or within a determined field of meaning (*vox* as signifying term), but as the bearer of some unknown meaning. The voice, taken in this way, will then show itself as a pure intention to signify, as pure

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<sup>33</sup> “If this Voice is the mystical foundation for our entire culture (its logic as well as its ethics, its theology as well as its politics, its wisdom as well as its madness) then the mystical is not something that can provide the foundation for another thought – attempting to think beyond the horizon of metaphysics, at the extreme confines of which, at the point of nihilism, we are still moving. The mystical is nothing but the unspeakable foundation; that is, the negative foundation of onto-theology. Only a liquidation of the mystical can open up the field to a thought (or language) that thinks (speaks) beyond the Voice and its *sigetics*; that dwells, that is, not on an unspeakable foundation, but in the infancy (*in-fari* [this is a tacit, unmarked expansion of the Italian, which gives no Latin, but simply hyphenates ‘*in-fanzia*’]) of man.” Agamben, *Language and Death*, 91; *Il linguaggio e la morte*, 114–115. Agamben will develop this apparently marginal notion substantially, in the earlier but near contemporary *Infancy and History* and elsewhere. See Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History: The Destruction of Experience*, translated by Liz Heron (London: Verso, 2007; first published in 1978).

meaning, in which something is given to be understood before a determinate event of meaning is produced.<sup>34</sup>

This would be a potential to signify, or “*the pure intention to signify*,” that does not yet do so.<sup>35</sup>

Roscelin and other (so-called “nominalist”) thinkers of the 11th Century affirmed that universal essences were only *flatus vocis* – spoken of with a voice that is merely hot air. Being becomes a mere vapour, emanating from the physical human body, as Nietzsche would eventually have it, somehow consummating this empiricistic and deflationary tradition.<sup>36</sup> “*Flatus vocis* is not meant, here, as mere sound, but in the sense of the voice as an intention to signify and as a pure indication that language is taking place.”<sup>37</sup>

Citing John of Salisbury and Anselm, whilst relating their insights back to Hegel, Agamben tells us that “[t]he ‘thought of the voice alone,’ the notion of the ‘breath of the voice’ [*flatum vocis* – ML] (in which, perhaps, we ought to note the first appearance of Hegelian *Geist*), is a thinking of what is most universal: *being*. Being is in the voice (*esse in voce*) as an unveiling and demonstration of the taking place of language, as *Spirit*.”<sup>38</sup>

Agamben summarises the connection between Voice and ontology by affirming: “The Voice, as the supreme shifter that allows us to grasp the taking place of language, appears thus as the negative ground on which all ontology rests, the originary negativity sustaining every negation.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 33.

<sup>36</sup> Nietzsche exclaims: “The concept of being! As though it did not show its low empirical origin in its very etymology! For *esse* basically means ‘to breathe’.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1962), 84. Cf. Derrida’s “Violence and Metaphysics” for some remarkable passages that expand upon this idea, both conceptually and within the texts of the history of philosophy (Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001; the essay first published in 1964), 173–174); and for certain critical questions regarding Derrida’s reading, cf. Škof, *Breath of Proximity*, 2015, 127ff. We address this whole matter in Lewis, “A Voice that is Merely Breath.”

<sup>37</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 35.

<sup>39</sup> Agamben, *Language and Death*, 36.

## Breath: Transcendental and Empirical

Let us hasten towards our conclusion by seizing upon this relation of the apparently windy voice of being to breath and spirit.

If the voice cannot speak without breath, we may say that breath in this particular (transcendental) sense allows language to refer to its own event and that this sense *must* be distinguished from the purely empirical sense of breath in which we share it with the animals since this capacity for self-reference does not exist in animal *phōnē* as the latter remains unlettered and non-propositional. That said, the human Voice does indeed depend upon the animal's *phōnē* and is grounded upon the loss of the possibility of our enjoying either an immediate relation to the real or an infinite proximity with our own voice, as the animal is said to. This voice must be "removed" in order for human language to be founded.

Transcendentally, breath is to be conceived as that part of human language which recalls this negative ground, the stifled voice of the non-human animal, and the singularity that it is taken to have encountered. And yet, man himself also has a voice, and it is on the basis of this Voice that man will be capable of using language in a self-referential way, and this means that he will be able to speak, at least indirectly, of the very incipient taking place of propositional language itself. This event is the new, non-metaphysical sense which Agamben imparts to Being, which is no longer to be subjected to the scission wrought by the proposition, the division of being into the singularity of the thing and its generic sublation. We move beyond both Hegelian memory and Heideggerian forgetfulness, although Agamben's sense of being might be said to remain closer to that of his teacher, and that is to say to singularity, but in the novel sense of the uniqueness of that linguistic act at that particular time, the uniqueness not of a substance but of an event: this would be enunciated and indeed it would take place in the very first breath of spirit as it attempts to conjoin a subject with a predicate, or even earlier, when it breaks speech up into its articulated literal parts. In terms that combine Agamben's vocabulary with our own topic, the voice of Being would then amount to the infancy of spirit.

When it comes to that topic, perhaps the crucial point for our purposes is that there are *two* senses of breath, and they are prone to confusion: the first is the empirical sense of animal respiration that in a certain sense we are often said to share with all living, respiring things: this sense seems to have preoccupied the attention of the emerging discipline of (critical) respiratory studies up until now;<sup>40</sup> and yet, this ecologically-minded approach risks eliding the fact that the animal voice

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<sup>40</sup> On the relation between this putatively empirical breath of man and the panting, purring, and growling of the animal, see the contributions of Tomaž Grušovnik and Sara Štuva to *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*. The former does indeed want to stress a certain difference between the human being and nature, a gesture which he shows Irigaray's work to bolster; and yet, nevertheless, a certain sameness comes to prevail precisely at the level of *breath*: to avoid either a sceptical Cartesian alienation from nature ("mechanicism paired with exploitation"; Tomaž Grušovnik, "Breathing with the Natural World," in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, eds. Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 120) or an animistic appropriation such as Deep Ecology is said to indulge in, one must insist upon a "separate and dependent existence," such as a child bears to its mother. Breath is taken as the figure of this relation. And yet it seems to be taken in an all too empirical manner: "Being a natural gesture of every living being, connected with air, the cosmic wind, and atmosphere, breathing is – because of its natural proneness to exchange – undoubtedly more suited as a platform on which to build an ethical relationship," not least in the sense that appropriation is ruled out (just as much as indifference) in the case of "the air that we do not appropriate but only exchange." Grušovnik, "Breathing with the Natural World," 119, 123, 127.

One here risks treating humans as if they could be reduced, even temporarily, to the level of the animal (and vegetal) breath; and animals can – we tell ourselves – be muzzled. It is just such a reduction to the level of the merely living that Agamben has problematised throughout his biopolitical work, but also in the chapter of his thought that we are dealing with here. Perhaps indeed, if we were to develop this critical connection, we might also come to understand why environmental concerns trouble his thought so little.

Štuva, in "Breathing with Animals: Irigaray's Contribution to Animal Ethics," (in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, eds. Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes, 130–146; London: Bloomsbury, 2013) makes it clear that according to certain proponents of the philosophy of breath, Irigaray's moments of apparent humanism – which are from our own point of view promising – go too far: "All living creates on this earth live under the same sky and breathe the same air, share the same intercorporeal space and bodily vulnerability. Breathing is thus the first and last physical act that enables us to live, while at the same time making us corporeal, mortal and vulnerable." Štuva finds it "disturbing" that Irigaray "combines non-human animals into a homogeneous whole or at least into something completely separate from the human," although she concedes that this means "different [from the human], but not lesser," a gesture towards the inappropriability of the non-human animal by the human; but she still deems this "not enough" and suggests a move beyond Irigaray to a position in which animals of different kinds are "positioned on a horizontal existential level with humans." And indeed, Irigaray posits such a continuity on the level of a sexual difference which on her account pervades living nature. Štuva, "Breathing with Animals," 131, 136, 136, 137, 138.

must be altogether *removed* in order for the human Voice (and *its* own peculiar form of breathing) to take its place, and thus for the *Voice* as breath to come to be in its transcendental or quasi-transcendental guise – a breath of which – with the best will in the world – the animal can be said to know nothing.<sup>41</sup>

This distinction of the empirical and transcendental senses of breath, at least under the guise of the apparently troubling opposition that separates animal from man in terms of their respective voices, is something that a certain strand of respiratory philosophy seems inclined to efface, but it should encourage us to hesitate before we simply accept the reduction of man to a quasi-animalistic material body, and thus to something that might be subject, without recourse, to the kinds of gagging restrictions that have been imposed upon it over the last three and a half years. This strikes us as one of the propensities of the discipline that Agamben's account will allow us to warn against, without going so far as to urge that it ought to be erased altogether.

If the study of empirical breath has allowed the discipline to stress the fashionable notion of an equality between man and animal, it has also risked being complicit in a certain "animalisation of man" that can render the breath of the latter more vulnerable to stifling, when this breath comes to be considered too rotten (*l'alto* shares an etymology with "h-alitosis"). This is more likely to occur when State power assumes a predominantly biopolitical form, as it has for at the very least

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The philosophy of breath has at times evinced a tendency towards promiscuity which may only be admirable up to a point, at least if it brings in its train a fog which obscures distinctions that remain essential.

<sup>41</sup> If Luce Irigaray's *later* work has understandably proved to be more directly inspirational for the philosophy of breath (cf. for example Lenart Škof and Emily A. Holmes, eds., *Breathing with Luce Irigaray* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)), more light might be shed on the distinction between the transcendental and empirical by returning to her early and foundational deconstruction of the division between the metaphysical and the physical. Her series on the four elements might constitute the most precious resource in this regard: "Metaphysics always supposed, in some manner, a solid crust from which to raise a construction. Thus, a physics [...]. Would the end of the metaphysical be required by their [sc. the elements'] reintervention in the physics of today?" Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary-Beth Mader (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999; first published in 1983 by Éditions de Minuit as *L'oubli de l'air chez Martin Heidegger*), 2–3. Air, whilst in some sense "material," indeed, would be "[t]he *a priori* condition of all of his [the philosopher's] *a priori*." Irigaray, *Forgetting*, 12.

the last century, and the transcendental approach offered by Agamben allows us to specify with more precision and complexity the relation between animal and man at the level of their respective voices and breaths. His work has also allowed us to demonstrate more fully the significance of breath in the history of philosophy.

### Conclusion

We wondered at the beginning whether our reading of Agamben's *Language and Death* might shed light on his project as a whole. In response to this we might say that although it offers a solution that we have not had time to address (in poetry and the poetising of philosophy that mitigates certain effects of the prosaic propositional form, but also in the conceptions of the Absolute and the Event that Hegel and Heidegger themselves propose) and which is either not advocated later on in his *œuvre* or falls into place as one among a number of solutions to the problem of metaphysics, in terms of the overall trajectory of Agamben's work, *Language and Death* may be said to open onto the problematic of the late 1970s and early 1980s which centres around the notion of infancy, before coming to settle, in the later 1980s and early 1990s, on the notion of self-reference and meta-language; this leads immediately on to the notion of potentiality, the potential to signify or communicate, and this in turn to the power that is the topic of *Homo Sacer*. As a consequence of this connection, the precise relation between political power and life, still quite poorly understood by commentators, may be sharply illuminated by this earlier attempt to think the logic of ground in the relation between *logos* and *phōnē*. This earlier work may indeed be understood as foundational for the later, but in the precise sense of foundation that we have been elucidating, as if the work excluded from the *Homo Sacer* series should itself be understood as a "negative ground" for the latter, which had to exist but also to be "removed" in order for that series to get off the ground.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> And as if to testify that breath itself remains at the heart of Agamben's concerns even today, and as if to reassure us that we have not committed too great an act of hermeneutic violence, we might read these extremely recent words of Agamben: "Let us, therefore, continue to attend



This in turn leads us to a position from which we might be able better to understand the other questions and hypotheses that we proposed at the outset: the discourse on voice and its breath should lead us not simply to an affirmation of the post-human communality of empirical respiration and a general reduction of the human to the level of the animal (which in turn lays our very biological life open to all sorts of incursions and impositions stemming from sovereign instances of power); what we are led to is rather a humanistic affirmation of the very different voice (or Voice) and (transcendental) breath of which human beings alone are capable. For in the human, language is capable of referring to its own incipient or infantile state, in which it has left the animal realm behind, but has neither forgotten its animal origins nor yet fully assumed its humanity by composing a determinately signifying linguistic statement. This is the transcendental moment of language, the moment at which it is no longer animal but not yet human – at least, not fully or actually so, but rather human in potential. Perhaps this is not the infant who literally empirically breathes the moment the umbilical cord conjoining him with his mother is severed, but the infant at the moment in which this breath is about to be articulated into vowels and consonants, those silent letters which describe the form that breath assumes when it first becomes spiritual, and the animal voice is beginning to be torn from our throats. This constitutes the transcendental moment of breath as the event of being, to which we alone may be said to be privy.

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to the commas even if the house burns down, let us speak to each other carefully without any rhetoric, listening not only to what we say but also to what the language tells us, to that little breath that used to be called inspiration [*quel piccolo soffio che si chiamava un tempo ispirazione*] and that remains the most precious gift that, at times, language – whether literary canon or dialect – can give us.” Agamben, “Virgole e fiamme” [“Commas and Flames,”], 19th June 2023, <https://www.quodlibet.it/giorgio-agamben-virgole-e-fiamme>. Let us also note that his very most recent text, at the time of writing, returns to the question of the human voice, demonstrating its enduring importance: *La voce umana* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2023).

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LISTENING TO THE BREATH,  
CHANTING THE WORD:  
THE TWO BREATHS  
IN MARÍA ZAMBRANO'S  
CLEARINGS OF THE FOREST

Raquel Ferrández

A Contemporary Western *Upaniṣad*

How could any word be spoken without intonation or chant?  
(María Zambrano)<sup>1</sup>

The border between philosophy and poetry represents a dangerous zone of friction for the rigor to which the history of philosophy aspires today, and an inhospitable place, devoid of gods, for the ahistorical eternity of which poetry continues to dream. The passage from metaphor to concept and vice versa has never been a friendly threshold and is not meant to be. The metaphor of the “clearings of the forest” can be traced back to at least three figures in the history of Western philosophy, namely: Martin Heidegger, José Ortega y Gasset and María Zambrano. If we walk through these three “clearings” carefully, we will observe not only the conceptual influences of the German philosopher on the two Spanish philosophers, but also the fundamental singularity of María Zambrano’s clearings, boldly open to the poetic abyss, as opposed to the more cautious, safe, sheltered landscapes of Heidegger and Ortega.

In *Holzwege (Forest Paths)*, Heidegger brings us close to this zone of friction, but he himself never comes to inhabit it, and its reading does

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<sup>1</sup> María Zambrano, *Claros del Bosque* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1977), 92. All translations of quotations from Spanish texts to English language are provided by the author.

not demand from us the radical experience of the borderline. The fact that the Heideggerian *Lichtung* is devoid of air, as Luce Irigaray pointed out,<sup>2</sup> is closely related to Giorgio Agamben's assessment of Heidegger's relation to poetry. For, although the German philosopher recovered for the history of philosophy poets like Hölderlin, he himself never dared to throw himself into this experience: "[Heidegger] was not able to be a poet; he feared the 'rail accident' that he believed was about to happen in his language."<sup>3</sup> Having said this, Heidegger has needed neither air nor poetry to show us that there are grandiose ways of aspiring to the original word and to the experience of the clearing, even if it is up to others to complete the song and the atmosphere that traverses them. Air is the music of the elements just as poetry is the music of the word. It is no coincidence that María Zambrano's poetic clearings are full of air, of breaths that split, of words that inspire inward, of a being whose asphyxia can provoke the rupture of vital respiration. The first writing that heads her *Claros del bosque* (*Clearings of the Forest*) tells us that a clearing is not something that can be deliberately sought, but only found. And if when we find it, we hesitate in the face of ecstasy and enter it as intruders, a bird will mock us, reproaching us: "you were looking for me and now, when I am finally favorable to you, you turn to that place where you cannot breathe."<sup>4</sup>

Antonio Colinas, poet and friend of María Zambrano, argues that the path of experience brings us closer to the truth through the rhythmic word, that is, through breathing. There is, according to this Spanish poet, a chain of initiates in the practice of conscious breathing, those who have tried to merge "word, feeling and reflection" to acquire both physical and spiritual health. María Zambrano would be one of the latest additions to this initiatory chain:

And María Zambrano, the last initiate of the chain, did she not tell us that when we breathe, "souls breathe in harmony, breathe in rhythm"? [...] We reconcile ourselves with the Whole by breathing the word, breathing rhythmi-

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<sup>2</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* (London: The Athlone Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 70.

<sup>4</sup> María Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 12.

cally, musically. And we reconcile ourselves with the Whole when we are inspired. And the one who breathes musically with the verse breathes infinitely, merges the extremes. We silence, we breathe, we hear the inaudible music, we write it, we pronounce it in recitation...<sup>5</sup>

Colinas considers that the initiators of this initiatory chain are to be found in Indian and Chinese philosophy. He specifically mentions the *Vedas* for their consideration of the *prāṇa* and the breathing rhythm.<sup>6</sup> This appreciation is interesting if we take into account the work that concerns us, *Claros del bosque*, belonging to what would be the end of this chain of initiated “breathers.” Published in 1977, this work gathers a series of writings composed between 1964 and 1971, during a period in which María Zambrano, still exiled from Spain, lived in seclusion with her sister Araceli in a house in La Pièce, on the border between France and Switzerland. It was there that her sister Araceli, to whom this work is dedicated, died. Although all of Zambrano’s work is directed towards the original integration of philosophy, poetry and religion,<sup>7</sup> *Claros* illustrates – as few of her works do – the practical exercise that would correspond to such integration. In *Claros*, the Spanish philosopher dares to make that poetic/breathing leap about which in other writings she had limited herself to theorizing. Consequently, the clearings she offers us are different from those of Heidegger and Ortega, but also different from any contemporary philosophical literary genre. It is not an essay, much less a systematic work, but neither could we consider this work the intimate diary of a thinker, nor a collection of poems. Some of the texts that make up this book are only a few paragraphs long; the titles of the different sections seem to guide us through a kind of transit, but the structure of the clearings is clearly symbolic, and their coherence is not evident to the intellect accustomed to conventional books on contemporary philosophy. And although its format is writing, many of the traces of this work respond to song and orality, they are alive enough to

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<sup>5</sup> Antonio Colinas, *El sentido primero de la palabra poética* (Madrid: Siruela, 2008), 33.

<sup>6</sup> Colinas, *El sentido primero*, 32.

<sup>7</sup> “Philosophy, poetry and religion need to clarify each other, to receive light from each other, to recognize their reciprocal debts, to reveal to the man half suffocated by their discord, their permanent and lively legitimacy; their original unity.” María Zambrano, *Hacia un saber sobre el alma* (Madrid: Siruela, 2005), 57.

become inner music in the reader. “In *Claros del bosque*, when I was so liberated from the word without music, from the word without song, from the abstract word, although from the liturgical one I never was, I heard the grass singing...,” María Zambrano would confess years later.<sup>8</sup> As would we, the readers/listeners, if we repeatedly walked these paths and were open to the original listening; we would come out with certain thoughts turned into oracular music, as for example: “It is necessary to fall asleep up in the light,”<sup>9</sup> or “[i]rremediably, the first sky that has to light our night, is the night itself.”<sup>10</sup>

Because of its condition of poetic centers or clearings, Zambrano presents in this work the fruit of an unusual cultivation of thought in contemporary philosophy. A cultivation that lends an ear both to the idea and to the rhythmic sense of the word from which it cannot be separated, for ideas here are not independent of the way in which they are expressed, just as our breathing is not independent of the air that feeds it. The literary genre of this work makes it uncomfortable in the eyes of institutional philosophy because of its unclassifiable and experimental character, heretical to both poetry and philosophy – just as it is not easy to teach *upanishadic* philosophy in contemporary Western university classrooms without stripping it of that state of mind conceived in union with the whole, of the sacred aspects of being, without which the words of the inspired are meaningless.

The initiatory chain of “rhythmic breathers” to which Colinas refers could still have a continuity, albeit transformed, if we were to contemplate Zambrano’s text in the mode of a contemporary Western *Upaniṣad*. We encounter here the double daring of poetry and mysticism. In 2005, Daya Krishna wondered during a conference addressed mostly to an Indian audience, why no one dares to compose *Upaniṣads* in contemporary times anymore. “But why have the *ṛsis* ceased? Has god forsaken us? Are we not intelligent enough? Are we not sensitive enough?”<sup>11</sup> His conclusion is that human beings in our days are prey

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<sup>8</sup> María Zambrano in Antonio Colinas, *Sobre María Zambrano: Misterios encendidos* (Madrid: Siruela, 2019), 186.

<sup>9</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del Bosque*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del Bosque*, 140.

<sup>11</sup> Daya Krishna, *Nostalgia and Utopia* (New Delhi: Sage, 2012), 230.



to a fear of which the Vedic poets, creators of marvelous compositions made in that sacred state of being, in harmony with the whole, do not partake.<sup>12</sup>

The fear to which Daya Krishna refers might be in sympathy with the fear to which Giorgio Agamben alludes when he affirms that “modern philosophy failed in its political task because it betrayed its poetic task; it did not want to put itself at risk in poetry or know how to do it.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, philosophy lives from and for concepts, but no longer dares to listen to the inner breath of the word; it collects arguments, but does not dare to initiate itself into the song that every language carries with it, to the rhythm that every idea is incubating. That would be to go beyond what is reasonable, beyond what is debatable and, sometimes, beyond what is communicable. “We are still here and you have wanted to make the leap to the beyond,” José Ortega y Gasset said to his disciple María Zambrano, after reading her work *Towards a Wisdom of the Soul* (1950).<sup>14</sup> Certainly, by addressing the breath of the word, Zambrano had dared to leap beyond the “vital reason” proposed by her teacher. And the difference between the two “reasons” can already be perceived in the treatment that both philosophers gave to breathing. Ortega invites us to recognize thought as a vital function, just as breathing is, while Zambrano has the courage to think about the breath of being and invites us to harmonize it with vital respiration. In the following pages, my purpose is to listen to the *Claros del bosque* from a respiratory paradigm, that is, taking into account the fundamental role played by breath, inspiration, asphyxiation, and respiration in all its dimensions, from the beginning of the mystery to its end.

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<sup>12</sup> “Why don’t you write your own *Upaniṣads*? Why don’t I write? Friends! It is a sad thing that at least in the thirteenth century in this country nobody was afraid of composing a new *Upaniṣad*, and yet we feel that something is wrong in writing a new *Upaniṣad* today. Imagine the presumption: ‘How can I write an *Upaniṣad*? Only the *ṛṣis* could do it’. But there was a time when nobody was afraid. Take the case of the Vedas themselves. Anybody who has attempted to read the Veda, even slightly, would be amazed at the fact that *suktas*, new *suktas*, have been composed all the time.” Daya Krishna, *Nostalgia and Utopia*, 230.

<sup>13</sup> Agamben, *The Fire and the Tale*, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Colinas, *El sentido primero de la palabra poética*, chap. “Sobre la iniciación: Una conversación con María Zambrano,” 363.

## Centers of the Forest: Breathing beyond the Others

Zambrano's clearing is a center that comes to meet us by way of revelation. Whoever seeks it finds nothing, or once there, finds nothing within it; and those who manage to enter, without having sought it, suspend all questions there and find in the emptiness that presents itself to them a "new life," an unforeseeable beginning. "Every method jumps out like an 'incipit vita nova' that reaches out to us with its alienable joy."<sup>15</sup> Every philosophical method has its origin in a luminous instant of consciousness, the method being something that aspires to continuity, and consciousness by its nature discontinuous, hence the misunderstanding that occurs between the two, according to Zambrano. But even in the face of the most logical and reductionist of methods, the Spanish philosopher invites us to listen to the melody of its triumphal birth in consciousness: "Hallelujah is heard in the Cartesian discourse."<sup>16</sup> This idea-verse-thought brings us viscerally close to Zambrano's conception of philosophy. Precisely because of the disparity that her "poetic reason" manifests in relation to Cartesian methodical rationalism, one would expect to find a critique of the French thinker's philosophy. However, every philosophical quest goes back to an origin that now in the clear we can hear and celebrate, regardless of its later development. "Not unlike Nietzsche," claims Armando Savignano, "the will to system is, for Zambrano, the will to lie, for it is about totalizing attitudes that cannot account for the multiplicity and richness of the real."<sup>17</sup> Embracing the multiplicity of the real implies also embracing the birth of that which does not accept such multiplicity, which reduces the possibilities that the human being has before the question and belittles their own capacity to breathe. Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson have shown the oblivion of breathing manifested in the Cartesian *Meditations*. In his famous exercise of isolation with the world, Descartes simulates the arrest of all his sensory functions, but does not take into account that the being thus isolated is still in communion with the air that makes it

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<sup>15</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Armando Savignano, *María Zambrano: la razón poética*, trans. Fernando H. Llano Alonso (Granada: Comares, 2005), 24.

possible for him to remain alive, that is, to remain a “thinking thing.” “Descartes is not at all conscious of every breath he takes during the process of thinking. His cardinal sin of ‘forgetting breathing’ leads to a completely fictitious philosophical description.”<sup>18</sup> Far removed from this oblivion are Zambrano’s *Claros del bosque*. Because of its initiatory nature, this work places breathing in the foreground of all that is born – including the breathing of the Cartesian method itself.

What does this “Incipit vita nova” that every method, however strictly logical, instrumental it may be, really mean? It can only respond to the joy of a hidden being who *begins to breathe and to live*, because at last they have found the adequate means to their hitherto impossible or precarious life.<sup>19</sup>

Every method, even the one that refuses to breathe, has its origin in breathing, it has its own unique relationship with the air that feeds it. If we really want to start thinking from a new respiratory paradigm, we cannot limit ourselves to denouncing the oblivion of air in the most important thinkers of modernity. It is also necessary to enter into the heart of this oblivion and hear it beat in its particular “Hallelujah,” to decipher the thread of air that gives life to all these thinking oblivions. Heidegger did not take air into account and yet his metaphysics breathes in a unique and vibrant way; the same is true of Cartesian philosophy. Breath may be absent in their ideas, but not in the words that support them, not in the human being who manifests them. Adopting this hermeneutic turn would lead us to celebrate the triumph of life in the very immediacy of its negation, following the steps that Zambrano sketches in *Claros*: “Only the method that would take charge of this life, at last destitute of logic, incapable of establishing itself as in its own milieu in the realm of the accessible and available *logos*, would be successful.”<sup>20</sup> In this last stage of her exile, in which the writing of *Claros* takes place, the question of “method” will be particularly important for Zambrano. The third section of *Claros*, entitled “Pasos” (“Steps”) begins with a text of barely two paragraphs in length, entitled “Método” (“Method”).

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<sup>18</sup> Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson, “Introduction,” in *Atmospheres of Breathing*, eds. Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del Bosque*, 15. (Emphasis added by author.)

<sup>20</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del Bosque*, 15.

It is necessary to fall asleep up in the light [...] Up in the light, the heart abandons itself, surrenders itself. In the light that embraces, where one does not suffer any violence, because one has reached that light without forcing any door and even without opening it, without having crossed lintels of light and shadow, without effort and without protection.<sup>21</sup>

The method proposed here by Zambrano seems to tell us: “Let yourself be defeated and you will triumph.” In the heart of the clearing, we expose ourselves to the openness of being, without effort, without violence, without safeguard. And this light in which we are invited to fall asleep, without resistance, is directly related to breathing. Joy, love, and breathing are three symbols that, together with light, are representative of *Claros* according to Antonio Colinas. Perhaps because of his own condition as a poet, Colinas has been able to see with lucidity the weight that Zambrano gives to breathing in this work, and he also knows the importance that the practice of conscious breathing had in Zambrano’s life.

Because of this eagerness to breathe consciously, I placed María Zambrano [...] in the last step of that chain in the time of those who have found the light of being in the *light*. Breathing is a precious aid that not only gives us life, but also unifies us and fuses us with the forest-world. “Breathing is the most threatened thing today” she had written [...] She highly values this practice when returning from her walk, already back home, in bed, under the light of her sister Araceli’s lamp: “Then I continued lying down watching the beautiful evening as it was falling, and calming myself in its silence and in mine I said to myself: we must let the soul breathe in the nameless.” Hers is an extreme lucidity in this phrase, which brings together an absolute feeling and thinking.<sup>22</sup>

But is this eagerness to breathe a new and singular contribution of Zambrano’s philosophy, and were not the Spanish philosophers whom she admired so much – such as José Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno themselves great breathers? The answer is ambiguous: yes and no. Yes, insofar as they reconciled, in their own way, philosophy with life, and for this it was necessary to restore breathing to its rightful place in thought. However, they never took breathing beyond life, at

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<sup>21</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 39.

<sup>22</sup> Colinas, *Sobre María Zambrano*, 197–198.

least not as Zambrano does in *Claros*, going back to the first breath of being. The year 2023 marks the centenary of one of Ortega's fundamental works, *The Modern Theme*. There we will find an essential exposition on "vital reason" with which Ortega dethrones abstract thought from its fictitious heights to place it at the level of vital functions, including the respiratory function.

Thought is a vital function, like digestion, or the circulation of the blood. The fact that the latter are processes active in space and among bodily tissues, while the former is not, makes no real difference so far as our particular theme is concerned. When the nineteenth century biologist refuses to consider as vital phenomena those which do not possess corporeal character he admits, at the start, a prejudice which is incompatible with any strict positivism. A doctor treating a patient has before him with equal immediacy the phenomenon of thought and that of respiration.<sup>23</sup>

As a "heterodox" disciple of Ortega, María Zambrano knows well this reason that does not fear life but invokes and embodies it. Ortega's vital reason could be considered the threshold of the "poetic reason" that she will develop in her own way over time. In the first stage of her exile spent in Mexico, Havana and Puerto Rico in the 1940s, Zambrano devoted lectures and courses both to the philosophy of her teacher and to the thought of Miguel de Unamuno. The first lecture of the course on the philosophy of Ortega y Gasset that she gave at the University of Havana began by reflecting on the fundamental role played by the figure of the teacher in our lives: "If we have truly been his disciples, it means that he has achieved from us something apparently contradictory: that, by having attracted us to him, we have become ourselves."<sup>24</sup> This reflection can serve to illustrate the relationship between Zambrano's philosophy and that of Ortega. Attracted to the vital reason, Zambrano reaches that beyond which constitutes her particular proposal in the reform of understanding, the "poetic reason." She herself confessed, in an interview with Antonio Colinas, that for a long time

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<sup>23</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme*, trans. Lázaro Carreter (New York: Torchbook, 1961), 36.

<sup>24</sup> María Zambrano, "Ortega y Gasset: Filósofo español" in María Zambrano, *España: Sueño y Verdad* (Barcelona: Edhasa, 1983), 93.

she thought she was doing “vital reason,” when in fact she was already exercising poetic reason.<sup>25</sup>

Zambrano’s admiration for the irreverent thought of Miguel de Unamuno was reflected in the numerous essays she also dedicated to his work. Unamuno, unlike Ortega, has no will of system and we could even say, no will of philosophy. His thought embraces contradictions, takes as its origin the tragic feeling of existence and is an existentialism with a marked religious anthropology in which recovering the “human being of flesh and blood” is a *sine qua non* requirement to think honestly. According to Zambrano, Unamuno’s literary genre would undoubtedly have been tragedy, were it not for the fact that the Basque philosopher did not compose any tragedy. In one of his most famous works, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, one can read a very common criticism in Unamuno’s writings against “professionalism” in the philosophical field, namely against the tendency to specialization that makes one forget to think and live integrally.

There are, in fact, people who appear to think only with the brain, or with whatever may be the specific thinking organ; while others think with all the body and all the soul, with the blood, with the marrow of the bones, with the heart, with the lungs, with the belly, with life. And the people who think only with the brain develop into definition-mongers; they become the professionals of thought.<sup>26</sup>

To this tendency towards philosophical specialization – which usually underestimates feeling in favor of reasoning, establishing an artificial frontier between the two – Unamuno calls it derogatorily “cerebralism.” Following the premises of “cerebral literature,” our vital functions are also contemplated from their specificity, as if the organism did not live holistically. However, Unamuno insists that “we think, feel and

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<sup>25</sup> “I thought, then, that I was doing *vital reason* and what I was doing was *poetic reason*. And it took me a while to find its name. I found it precisely in *Towards a Wisdom of the Soul* (1950), but without yet having much awareness of it. I took this essay, which gives the book its title, to José Ortega himself, to the *Revista de Occidente*. After reading it, he told me: ‘We are still here and you have wanted to make the leap to the beyond.’” Zambrano in “Sobre la iniciación: Una conversación con María Zambrano,” in Colinas, *El sentido primero de la palabra poética*, 363.

<sup>26</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and in Peoples*, trans. J. E. Crawford Fitch (London: Macmillan & Co, 1921), 2.

will with our total *human constitution* (to use scholastic terminology), although we think by the ministry of the brain, just as we breathe with the whole organism, although by the ministry of the lungs.”<sup>27</sup> With Unamuno, it is no longer only a question of recognizing that thought is a vital function just as breathing is – as in the case of Ortega – but of recognizing that one thinks with the lungs, with the liver and with the skin as much as with the brain. The forgetfulness of breathing in modern Western philosophy is related to this philosophical cerebralism that Unamuno denounces, with the belief that thought can be located only in a specific organ. By reducing the thinking being to a minimal part of itself, it reinforces the dangerous abstraction of the person himself, of the life that passes through them and of the environment that surrounds them.

Following this respiratory thread, with Zambrano it is no longer only a matter of assuming this organic integration, the person “in flesh and blood” of Unamuno, but of seeking in ourselves the original breath, that is, the breath of being, in order to verify how united or split it is from our vital breath. In the second section of *Claros de Bosque*, entitled “El despertar” (“The Awakening”), Zambrano dedicates one of the texts to inspiration. I allow myself to reproduce it here at length given the absence of English translations of this work. As can be seen, Zambrano enters at the same time into the metaphysics and the phenomenology of breathing, which are alien both to Ortega’s vital thought and to Unamuno’s vital feeling.

The first thing in breathing has to be the inspiration, a breath that is then given in a sigh, because in each expiration something of that first breath received remains feeding the subtle fire that ignited. And the sighing seems to restore it, already washed by the very fire that it has sustained, the invisible fire of life that appears to be its substance. An ungraspable substance formed from the first inspiration in the initial breath, enchains the individual that is born with the breathing of all life and its hidden center. And in the image and imitation of that center of life and being, the breathing is rhythmic, within the innumerable rhythms that form the sphere of the living being. But the being, forced to be individually, will remain in a certain emptiness on the

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<sup>27</sup> Miguel de Unamuno, *Obras Completas: Tomo III: Ensayos* (Madrid: Afrodísio Aguado, 1950), 326.

one hand and at the risk of not being able to breathe on the other, between excessive fullness and emptiness. And it will have to struggle to breathe, oppressed by the excessive density that surrounds it, that of its own feeling, that of its own thought, that of its dream that constantly surrounds it. And then it sighs, calling out, invoking a return even more powerful than that of the first breath, which now, at the very moment, crosses all the layers in which its hidden burning is enveloped, which are sustained by it. A new inspiration that sustains it, itself and all that weighs on it and on which it is sustained.<sup>28</sup>

### Being and Life: The Two Breaths

Inspiration constitutes a struggle for the being. Forced to breathe individually in order to be born and to give itself to life, it strives to overcome nothingness, emptiness, on the one hand, and, on the other, the density that suffocates it. Petri Berndtson has shown that Merleau-Ponty, in a writing that was published only a few years before that of Zambrano's *Claros*, briefly mentions the inhalation and exhalation of "Being" and invites us to take this literally. However, Berndtson points out, "Merleau-Ponty does not say anything else about this ontology of 'inspiration and expiration of Being'."<sup>29</sup> Berndtson wonders if it is possible to find an ontology of breathing, and who could serve as inspiration for such an ontology. In *Claros*, Zambrano not only speaks of the breath of being, but understands that all being is already in itself "breathing," "pulsating life."

A "being" in a certain way is a pulsation, a palpitating presence: life. Something elusive, blowing, breathing. [...] A wound without edges that turns being into life. It arises in the immediacy that with being does not fit in the human or in any living being. An unlimited gift, a pledge received as if it were one's own, this palpitation that is neither being nor only life, but living already and since now. Since when? A congenital breath with the birth, which is received from the darkness that sustains when the light is somehow made.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> Petri Berndtson, "The Possibility of a New Respiratory Ontology," in *Atmospheres of Breathing*, eds. Lenart Škof and Petri Berndtson (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), 29.

<sup>30</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 30.



One of the fundamental themes that can be appreciated in this work is the split between the vital, physiological breath and the breath of the being that lies hidden and is, in truth, sustaining the breath of life. In one of the texts entitled “Solo la palabra” (“Only the Word”), Zambrano explicitly thematizes these two breaths, their longed-for unity and the consequences of their splitting for life and for being. Significantly, Zambrano points out that the direct manifestation of being is the word. At this point, the breath of being and the breath of the word are unified, for through the breath of the verb we can access the breath of being. This appreciation is also closely related to the song that Zambrano recognizes as inherent to the word in other texts of this work. “There is no history without a word, without a written word, without an intoned or chanted word – how could any word be spoken without intonation or chant?”<sup>31</sup> Do chants and breaths coincide here? Could it be the inner breathing of the word, through which being manifests itself, the chant that is inherent to it? It is in the stones, writes Zambrano, which lack history because they lack the written word, that we must seek the lost song. “And that stone, so much like the others, could it not be the one that chants? And could not those, these stones, each or all of them, be something like letters?”<sup>32</sup> Under Zambrano’s gaze, the mysticism of the word takes a surprising turn to unite with a more solid and opaque mysticism of nature; the air or the inner “breathing” of the word is twinned with the “unwritten stones,” with that solid/earthly element that Luce Irigaray recognized as the favorite of the metaphysical tradition.<sup>33</sup>

The presence of the word alone establishes a kind of inner breathing, a breathing of being, of this being hidden in the human that needs to breathe in its own way and that cannot be the way of life alone. Life and being must breathe at least in the human realm making us presentiment that it is so in all realms of being and life distinctly or unitedly.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 92.

<sup>32</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 91–92.

<sup>33</sup> According to Luce Irigaray: “As long as Heidegger does not leave the ‘earth,’ he does not leave metaphysics. The metaphysical is written neither on/in water, nor on/in air, nor on/in fire. Its *ek-sistance* is founded on the solid.” Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 100.

The possible unity or the probable split between these two breaths – that of life and that of being – condition the life of each human being and are at the same time an indicator of his or her own process of self-knowledge. Everything begins with the split, the separate birth of these two breaths. But in this double channel, the breath of life is at the mercy of the breath of being hidden in the human being; although the asphyxia of being is only revealed to us in its affectation of physiological breathing, the relationship between the two breaths is always at play, whether we perceive it or not. Zambrano seems to lament that the ordinary human being believes they have only one breath, the one that is most obviously presented to them, their organic and physiological breathing.

Initially the two breaths – that of life and that of being – are given separately. The breathing of life is under a threat of a cessation that only makes itself felt at certain moments by an immediate physiological cause and so often by the lack of breathing of the being hidden in the human being. [...] *And it is rare that the lack of breath of the being does not fall back on the breath of life* as it is rare or impossible that any ailment of the being does not affect the ailment of life.<sup>35</sup>

If we must take literally the idea that the being inhales and exhales, as Merleau-Ponty pointed out, then we must also recognize, following Zambrano, that the inhalation and exhalation of life in us depends on this original inhalation and exhalation, and not the other way around. “The inverse, on the other hand, follows another law. The being hidden by breathing can hold aloft the life of the one in whom it is given, without any preconceived intention or any stimulus from without getting in the way.”<sup>36</sup> Therefore the relationship between the two is not equal, for the health of the being determines the health and flourishing of life. Karolina Enquist illuminatingly explains Zambrano’s cosmological ontology in which this particular relationship between being and life can be appreciated:

In Zambrano’s ontological rendering of the cosmos, being is a fundamental concept of totality defined by potentiality, nothingness and the need to

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<sup>35</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 100.

<sup>36</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 100.

come into presence. Being is an eternal potential presence, because it is also nothingness. Located within being is life. Life is all that is enmattered and which for that reason participates in a space-time structure that it has in common with others. Life is the continuous process of expressing and representing being, conducted by the soul in the human case.<sup>37</sup>

This poetic phenomenology of the two breaths aims at reunification, at restoring their original unity. However, the rhythm of these two breaths constitutes a transcendent instant that few people are able to experience, and, in most cases, it only remains a form of longing. Zambrano's description of this rare state of union transports us to a mystical plane charged with the symbols of emptiness, nullification and silence. It is the breath of being that gives meaning and depth to the breath of life, and when both breaths are unified, the word/breath of being, which is its "most direct incalculable manifestation" unfolds the entire language to unify it as well, resulting in the destruction and nullification of the word itself in silence. The last breath of being, in this longed-for unity, produces the last word that precedes the ultimate silence.

And, at last, in some human beings the union of the two breaths is fulfilled. [...] The inward breathing of being, if considered from that surface that life inexorably offers. For life is by principle superficial, and only ceases to be so if its breath is joined by the breath of the being that, hidden beneath it, is deposited on the first waters of Life, which our living barely touches. [...] Everything is transcended by the breath of being and thus its word, the single, unknown and prodigious, miraculously identified word, raises in its unique impetus all the words together and unifies them, destroying them irreversibly. For in the human being that which transcends, it nullifies. And this action also manifests itself doubly. The nullification that proceeds from the being, pledge of the union, and that other supreme way that proceeds not from the cessation of the vital breathing, but from the extinguishing of the breathing of the being that is more hidden with greater impetus, breathes, giving then its only word. Only its word before opening the silence that transcends it.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Karolina Enquist Kålgren, *María Zambrano's Ontology of Exile* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 127.

<sup>38</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 101.

These fragments will be enough to notice that in *Claros* we are in the plane of a phenomenology, not only poetic or metaphorical, but opaque and mystical, whose purpose is to transport us to that breathing, to that chant, to that union of the two breaths, rather than to invite us to think about them in a reductionist way with the help of a single specific organ. The “cerebralism” that Unamuno denounced, so frequent in the institutional philosophy of our days, would completely prevent the joy, the ecstasy, the love and the light to which this work invites us. And yet it gives the impression that the work itself, in its vibrant vitality, knew how to protect itself against unwanted visitors and was designed to respond differently depending on the visitor’s state of being. For anyone who tries to approach *Claros* as if it were a piece of cerebral literature will find it inaccessible and unbreathable, the words will close the way and hide its clearings from the gaze of the uninitiated.

### Conclusion

Numerous writings on the thought of María Zambrano focus on the geographical frontiers that this philosopher crossed physically, by virtue of her exile from Spain after the end of the civil war in 1939. Her stay in Mexico, Cuba, Italy or Geneva, among other locations, extended a situation of uprooting in which Zambrano took root through what she would later call “poetic reason.” However, in this essay I wanted to focus not on the external frontiers, but on the inner frontier between poetry and philosophy, between the word and its chant, between the breath of being and the breath of life, which Zambrano thematizes in *Claros del bosque*, resorting to a whole symbolic universe. Thus, she invites us to a thought whose word chants and breathes, whose word speaks to us explicitly of chant and breath. Zambrano’s clearings lead us to the encounter of a truth that cannot be calculated, systematized, or even deliberately sought. What clear and distinct method can there be to unite the breath of being with the breath of life? Or to restore the lost chant of the word? What method to fulfill a consciousness that is by nature discontinuous? Of course, the germ of this mature work can already be found in her extensive previous bibliography, since Zambrano’s work maintains a coherence throughout her life. In this sense,

her way of understanding philosophy was always related to the symbols that – in *Claros* – enjoy a life and a body of their own. In a lecture she gave at the University of Havana, during the first period of her exile, she asked her audience what philosophy consisted of, and she herself recognized that the answer she was about to give may not only sound strange, but also “old.”

Philosophy is a form of love, the only form of love that is not a passion, for it is intellectual love. And so, being love, it partakes in the qualities of intelligence; indeed, of the very essence of thought. And in turn, thought, being love, participates in the intrinsic quality of love, which is its capacity to transcend. Love and thought are thus saved by each other: love is saved from being a passion, that is to say, from being passive and basically immobile, limited. Thought is saved from remaining in that cold region that floats above life, from being sterile, from not having the capacity to engender a form of life.<sup>39</sup>

Love and thought, saved one by the other, will both be brought back to the symbol of light so dear to Zambrano’s poetic reason. “Intellectual love resolves itself into light, that is, into vision; it is above all a hunger to see.” In turn, in *Claros* this vision will be reconnected to breathing: “The fact that breath and vision are given together – and not as a simple possibility but in act – is already a high, pure heaven.”<sup>40</sup> Vision, breathing, light, love or joy, are some of the symbols that María Zambrano’s heaven gives us, generous in clearings, and therefore, in enigmas and questions, more than in answers. It is a heaven worthy of being breathed and, at the same time, a challenge to the breathless frenetic rhythms of the academic philosophy of our days. These clearings cannot be breathed in a single breath, nor can they be traversed by shoes that already know where they want to go in haste.

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<sup>39</sup> María Zambrano, “De Unamuno a Ortega y Gasset,” in *Unamuno* (Barcelona: Penguin Random House, 2023), 163.

<sup>40</sup> Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, 143.

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# ELEMENTALNE POLITIKE V ŠKODO ZANIKANIH KULTUR: PRIMORSKO NARAVOVERSTVO

Cirila Toplak

## Uvod: primorsko naravoverstvo

Naravoverci so bili zgodovinska religiozna manjšina na Primorskem, organizirana kot politična skupnost. V 2. polovici 20. stoletja je prišel z njimi v stik lokalni zapisovalec izročila in zbiratelj Pavel Medvešček – Klančar, slovenska javnost pa je zanje izvedela šele leta 2015 z objavo Medveščekove knjige *Iz nevidne strani neba: Razkrite skrivnosti staroverstva*. Pavel Medvešček je v tej obsežni monografiji, izšli pri založbi ZRC SAZU, razkril ekskluzivno in neinterpretirano, a temeljito dokumentirano etnografsko gradivo, sestavljeno predvsem iz intervjujev s prebivalci odročnih hribovitih predelov Primorske na Medveščkovih službenih poteh za Zavod za spomeniško varstvo v obdobju od 1950 do 1978. Vsebina teh intervjujev ni mogla biti javno razkrita prej zaradi zaprisege molčečnosti, ki so jo od Pavla Medveščka zahtevali njegovi sogovorniki.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pavel Medvešček je držal besedo in molčal do zahtevanega leta 2007, nato pa še dolgo iskal založnika za svojo monumentalno knjigo, zato je glavnina virov o primorskem naravoverstvu postala dostopna javnosti šele leta 2015 z izidom *Iz nevidne strani neba*. Pred tem je Medvešček že objavil povezane etnografske zapise: pravlјice v zbirki *Na rdečem oblaku vinograd rase* je zbral predvsem v mejni dolini reke Idrije, monografiji *Skrivnost in svetost kamna* in *Let v lunino senco* pa sta zaobjeli prostor od Bovca do slovensko-hrvaške meje v Istri (od tod med drugim relevantnost rabe pridevnika »primorsko« za naravoverstvo). Veliko posamičnih etnografskih tem je Pavel Medvešček pokril tudi v obliki člankov. *Iz nevidne strani neba* je bila v slovenski javnosti sprejeta z navdušenjem, znanstvena skupnost pa se je sprva odzvala s skepsno in dvomi

Naravoverska ideologija je temeljila na prasili stvarnici, imenovani Nikrmana, ki se je posameznikom občasno prikazovala kot oblaki, strele, mavrice, različne živali itd. Konceptija Nikrmane bi lahko izvirala iz mogočnih antičnih boginj mater, kot so bile Magna Mater Kibela, Izida in Diana, navezati pa jo je mogoče tudi na krščansko sv. Marijo.<sup>2</sup> Naravoverstvo je bilo izrazito mono- in henoteistično, ohranjalo pa je tudi drobce staroslovanskih, antičnih rimskih in še neidentificiranih religioznih prežitkov. Naravoverci so častili sonce, zlasti ob solsticijih, najpomembnejših naravoverskih praznikov, kot vir svetlobe in toplote, ki jo potrebujejo vsa živa bitja; luna pa je bila zanje še pomembnejše nebesno telo zaradi njene očitne moči nad naravo in predvsem vodo. Naravoverci so vzpostavljali oziroma prepoznavali tročane, tj. prostorske ali abstraktne trikotnike/triade, ki so jim zagotavljali zaščito in plodnost, in jih upravljali s pomočjo obredno opolnomočenih prodnikov z vdelanimi očmi, imenovanih kačje glave, ter samostojelih svetih megalitov, imenovanih matjarji. Nasploh so številu tri pripisovali največjo moč in organizirali svoj svet v duhu trojnosti.

Naravoverstvo je vključevalo elemente, značilne za staroselske kulture, kot so animizem, čaščenje prednikov, čaščenje svetih strug, vrhov hribov in podzemnih jam, svetih dreves in svetih živali. Naravoverci so verjeli v transmigracijo duše (»zduhca«) po smrti v drugo telo po lastni izbiri. Zaradi geografske izolacije in izključno ustnega izročila so se pojavljale razlike v interpretacijah naravoverstva, vendar pa te niso povzročale sporov zaradi dovoljšnje strpnosti članov skupnosti in morda tudi zato, ker so se voditelji skupnosti občasno skrivoma sestajali in verjetno usklajevali zadeve v skupnem interesu.<sup>3</sup>

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o verodostojnosti Medveščkovih gradiv. Problem virov o naravoverstvu obravnavata med drugimi Miha Kozorog, »Etnološka recepcija starovercev«, *Etnolog* 30 (2020): 111–123; ter Katja Hrobat Virloget, »Razmislek o (ne)pristnosti gradiva o ‚posoških starovercih‘, primerjavah in sodobnih starovercih,« v *Staroverstvo v Sloveniji med religijo in znanostjo*, ur. Saša Babič in Mateja Belak (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2022), 15–34. O mojem raziskovalnem sodelovanju s Pavlom Medveščkom pišem v poglavju »Družbeno-politični vidiki zahodnoslovenske naravoverske skupnosti,« v *Staroverstvo v Sloveniji med religijo in znanostjo*, ur. Saša Babič in Mateja Belak (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2022), 47–70.

<sup>2</sup> Za teze o izvoru Nikrmane glej poglavje »Nikrmanstvo: Črna mati« v Cirila Toplak, »*Naša vera*«, *Naravoverstvo na Primorskem* (Ljubljana: AMEU, 2023), 111–146.

<sup>3</sup> Pavel Medvešček – Klančar, *Motnik: Nekovsko posebno in obredno vino* (Tolmin: Halauc, 2017), 32.



Skupnost naravovercev je bila primarno biološka (in zato veliko več kot skrivna družba),<sup>4</sup> čeprav so bili kristjani včasih kooptirani vanjo, zlasti tisti s posebnimi sposobnostmi. V naravoverstvo niso spreobračali, so pa dopuščali svojim, da so se spreobrnili v krščanstvo, če so to hoteli.<sup>5</sup>

Vrednostni sistem naravovercev je po ohranjenem izročilu temeljil na soodvisnosti z naravo, zvestobi domovini (ne abstraktni in odtujeni državi), pravičnosti, poštenosti, skromnosti, strpnosti in solidarnosti. Skupnost naravovercev je bila nedvomno patriarhalna, »moška stvar«, kot je ugotavljal že sam Pavel Medvešček,<sup>6</sup> čeprav mu je o življenjskem svetu naravoverk uspelo izvedeti veliko manj kot o moških. Skupnost pa je bila obenem tudi feminilna,<sup>7</sup> še naravoverci sami so uporabljali izraz »babjeverna«.<sup>8</sup>

Naravoverska skupnost je imela skrivno ozemeljsko upravo, ki je delovala vzporedno z uradnimi upravnimi strukturami, in voditelje z dosmrtnim mandatom, imenovane dehnarji. Ozemlje, poseljeno z naravoverci, je bilo razdeljeno na manjše upravne enote, hoste, in vsaka hosta je imela svojega dehnarja. Dehnar je bil izbran v skladu s sposobnostmi po dolgoletnem uku pri vodečem dehnarju. Po nastopu dosmrtnega mandata je avtonomno vodil posamezno hosto s podporo treh zapriseženih ter drugih svetovalcev in pomočnikov.

Naravoverska skupnost je stala in padla z dehnarji, zato je bila njihova identiteta »zunaj skupnosti« povsem prikrita. Dehnarji so izvajali skupnostne ekonomske politike (blagovna menjava, shrambe semen, vzajemna posojila)<sup>9</sup> in tako uveljavljali skupnostne preživetvene stra-

<sup>4</sup> Georg Simmel, »The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies,« *American Journal of Sociology* 11, št. 4 (1906): 441–498, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2762562>.

<sup>5</sup> Kriteriji za pripadnost skupnosti so povzeti v naslednji izjavi Medveščkovega ključnega informatorja iz Volčanskih Rutov Janeza Strgarja: »Za razumevanje in predvsem občutenje vsega staroverskega se moraš namreč v tej skupnosti roditi in v njej vsaj nekaj časa tudi živeti. S terminom 'živeti' mislim na to, da si vse, kar potrebuješ za življenje, iztisneš iz te skope zemlje, ki pa ti daje zgolj preživetje.« Pavel Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba: Razkrite skrivnosti staroverstva* (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2015), 69.

<sup>6</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> Gert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2011), 297.

<sup>8</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 234, 85.

tegije. Sodili so po načelih recipročnosti in lotokracije<sup>10</sup> ter vodili represivno črno vahto, ki je zagotavljala varnost skupnosti in kaznovala prestopnike znotraj nje.<sup>11</sup>

Odnose skupnosti s krščansko večino so zaznamovali preganjanje, škodovanje in nasilje, kar je pri naravovercih spodbujalo preživetvene kompromise in infrapolitične strategije,<sup>12</sup> kot je obrambna mimikrija,<sup>13</sup> (di)simulacija, prikrivanje, zanikanje, molk, bojkot in druge oblike aktivnega in pasivnega odpora. Krščanstvo so naravoverci dojemali kot izključujoče in tuje, čeprav so utrjevali in ohranjali svojo kolektivno identiteto v veliki meri skozi sinkretično shizmogenezo z njim.<sup>14</sup>

Naravoverska skupnost je imela svoj neformalen in nedogmatičen sistem vseživljenjskega izobraževanja. Učitelj v naravoverski skupnosti je bil predvsem dehnar, v »daljni preteklosti« tudi edini pismen med naravoverci.<sup>15</sup> Socialni okvir tega sistema izobraževanja ni bila skupina tujcev iste generacije kot v zahodnih šolah, ampak družina, rod in skupnost.<sup>16</sup>

Naravoverci so razvili zdravstveni sistem za ljudi, živali in rastline, ki so ga vzdrževali potujoči zdravilci.<sup>17</sup> Zanesli so se na preventivno sa-

<sup>10</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 68, 113.

<sup>11</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 60–63.

<sup>12</sup> Infrapolitika so načini upora v kontekstu konflikta med vladajočimi in zatiranimi, ki jih vladajoči spregledajo ali prezrejo, kar pa ne pomeni, da tovrstno vedenje zatiranih nima vpliva na družbo. Ker je zatiranim prikrajšan dostop do legitimnih kanalov za izražanje političnih stališč, le-teh ne morejo in ne bodo artikulirali po konvencionalnih političnih kanalih, temveč se bodo zatekali k dejanjem »pod radarjem«, da bi si povrnili svoje dostojanstvo, bodisi individualno ali kolektivno. Infrapolitična dejanja ostajajo pod pragom politične zaznavnosti, zaradi česar so toliko bolj zanesljivo dejanja upora: manj ko so zaznavna, bolj učinkovito prikrivajo odpor, ki ga vzbujajo med zatiranimi. Glej James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 1990), 199.

<sup>13</sup> Mimikrija je v družbenem kontekstu vzdrževanje hotene navidezne podobnosti. V konkretnem primeru naravovercev je pomenila pretvarjanje, da so kristjani, pa čeprav pasivni in »slabi«, da so se izognili pregonu in lažje ohranili svojo vero. Glej tudi Marjan Smrke, *Družbena mimikrija* (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> O shizmogenezi, procesu negativnega zrcaljenja družbenih praks med dvema skupnostma v neposrednem stiku, glej David Graeber in David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books, 2021), 180.

<sup>15</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Glej tudi Cirila Toplak, »Tales in Social Practices of Nature Worshippers in Western Slovenia,« *Acta Hystriae* 30, št. 3 (2022): 627–654, <https://doi.org/10.19233/AH.2022.27>.

<sup>17</sup> Toplak, »Tales in Social Practices,« 174.

mozdravljenje, imenovano samoč, po zdravje pa so hodili tudi k svetim drevesom in na svete kraje, kot je bil beli tročan, svetišče na Prvejku ali Belinov tron.<sup>18</sup> Za zdravljenje so uporabljali tudi vodo, kamne, čarne predmete in uroke ter živali; bolnike so nameščali v tročane in nanje polagali roke. Medtem ko so dehnarji izvajali posvetne vodstvene in obredne naloge, so se vidoni (vidci) in veduni (učenjaki) obeh spolov osredotočali na produkcijo vedenja s »šamanskimi« tehniki, z opazovanji in eksperimenti.<sup>19</sup>

Naravoverci niso zavračali tehnološkega napredka v imenu svojih vrednot, toda napredek, kot ga je dojemala in uveljavljala oblast, je ogrožal naravo in s tem obstoj skupnosti. Skupnost je v 20. stoletju izumrla zaradi degradacije okolja in odseljevanja, ki so ju povzročile tako svetovni vojni kot tudi modernizacija (gradnja infrastrukture, industrializacija in urbanizacija), ki je pretrgala medgeneracijske vezi in demografsko izpraznila oddaljena podeželska območja. Naravoverske skupnosti ni več, ker ni več tiste narave, iz katere je vzniknila v težko opredeljivi preteklosti, in ker ni več ljudi, ki so naravo prepoznavali kot vredno čaščenja in živeli z njo in od nje. Vse poglobitve razloge, da se je naravoverska skupnost lahko tako dolgo ohranila – odročnost naravoverskih zaselkov in kmetij, ki je odganjala tujce in lajšala prikrivanje, izjemne voditeljske sposobnosti dehnarjev, učinkovitost črne vahte pri izvrševanju pravice in zagotavljanju varnosti, dolgotrajna kontinuiteta poselitve in s tem izročila – je 20. stoletje izničilo v imenu »napredka« in »razvoja«.

### Med prhom in preduhom: naravoverstvo in naravni elementi

Primorski naravoverci so bili s kulturne perspektive značilna gramscijevska antihegemonska »zanikana kultura«, <sup>20</sup> tako dobesedno kot preneseno, saj je njihova skupnost predstavljala izziv hegemonski krščanski družbi, zaradi preživetja pa je bila primorana zanikati celo samo sebe.

<sup>18</sup> Toplak, »Tales in Social Practices,« 487, 507, 106.

<sup>19</sup> Toplak, »Tales in Social Practices,« 139.

<sup>20</sup> Lucia C. Birnbaum, *Black Madonnas: Feminism, Religion and Politics in Italy* (Lincoln, NE: toExcell, 2000), 14.

Predvsem pa je (bilo) naravoverstvo *natureculture* ali naravakultura, kjer so naravni in kulturni elementi med seboj vitalno soodvisni, naravno in »nadnaravno« sobivata, razcep med naravo in kulturo, značilen za zahodno miselnost, pa je neskladen s percipirano stvarnostjo življenjskega sveta, v katerem je vse naravno. Koncept naravekulture je izraz sodobnega akademskega upora nezdružljivim konceptualnim dvojnostim,<sup>21</sup> ki so nasledek klasične, še bolj pa razsvetljenske interpretacije sveta, s katero se je človeška vrsta sčasoma odtujila naravi do te mere, da zanjo naj ne bi več veljali naravni zakoni.<sup>22</sup> Človeška vrsta naj bi sedaj narekovala naravne zakone, kakor nakazuje koncept »antropocena«.<sup>23</sup>

Univerzalni naravni elementi – voda, zemlja, zrak, ogenj – so pričakovano determinirali lokalizirane naravoverske religiozne in družbene prakse. Med naravne elemente ob navedenih tako v zahodni kot v vzhodnih klasičnih tradicijah sicer spada tudi eter, za antične filozofe neuničljiva, nespremenljiva in krožeča kozmična energija, ki so jo srednjeveški sholastiki interpretirali kot zvezdno snov. Blizu konceptu nevidnega, vseprisotnega etra bi lahko bil naravoverski prh. »Prh je v vseh stvareh, ki jih vidimo, [...] razen na nevidni strani neba.«<sup>24</sup> Pa tudi na nevidni strani neba je po pripovedovanju enega od sogovornikov Pavla Medveščka nekaj:

Nebo pa je bilo črno, kot da bi pogledal v brezno. Vse, kar se je lenobno premikalo, pa je oddajalo svetlobo kresnic. Od bele, rumene, rdeče, vijoličaste, modre in zelene. Ko pa so se med seboj te čudne stvari dotaknile, se je barva teh pomešala v neko drugo. Tako naj bi se tudi med seboj sporazumevali. Oblike teh čudnih stvari so bile kot razvaljano testo, ki se je spreminjalo,

<sup>21</sup> Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Glej Nicholas Malone in Kathryn Ovenden, »Natureculture«, v *The International Encyclopedia of Primatology*, ur. M. Bezanson in sod. (John Wiley / Sons, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119179313.wbprimoi135>.

<sup>23</sup> Vrstni odtis homo sapiensa na planetu se res zdi globok s človeške perspektive, toda z vidika narave smo le utrinek (0,007 % trajanja Zemlje) zgodovine evolucije.

<sup>24</sup> Medvešček, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 379. Etimološki izvor besede »prh« napeljuje tudi na prah v pomenu prsti in na trohnenje, naravni proces razkroja pod vplivom vlage. V naravoverskem izročilu je vse živo – in živo je vse – podvrženo razkroju, življenje in smrt sta eno in ni enega brez drugega, kot po Haraway ni narave brez kulture in obratno.

vijugalo, se daljšalo in krajšalo. Z izrastki, ki so nastajali, pa so se drug drugega objemali in pozibavali.<sup>25</sup>

Tudi srednjeveški alkimisti, sledeč antičnemu Plotinu, so peti element opisovali nekoliko podobno svetlobi. Še bližje etru je opis naravoverske »nevidne strani neba« kot »nasprotje nebu, ki se vidno spreminja podnevi in ponoči. Nevidno nebo pa je vseskozi enako, mračno in podobno blatnemu pesku oziroma spreminjajočemu se mulju.«<sup>26</sup> Če v tem uvidu v univerzalnost pomena elementov za človeške kulture v času in prostoru sežem še nekoliko dlje, tudi japonska klasična elementalna filozofija na primer zajema praznino/nebo. Med naravne elemente ali substance po kitajski klasični filozofiji pa spadata poleg štirih osnovnih še les in kovina. Les je bil izjemno pomemben tudi v primorski naravikulturi kot vsestranski proizvod skoraj vseprisotnega gozda, kovina (v kamninah) pa bolj posredno v kontekstu magnetizma, ki so mu naravoverci prav tako pripisovali živost in skozi sistem tročanstva neposreden vpliv na varnost in plodnost/preživetje njihove skupnosti. Po drugi strani pa je kamen tako determiniral naravoversko stvarnost, da bi že na osnovi frekvence omemb kamna lahko sklepali, da je bil najpomembnejši element naravoverstva.<sup>27</sup>

Najstarejše naravoversko znamenje je bil grmin, sestavljen iz kače, bika in triroge sekire.<sup>28</sup> Grmin je po izročilu nastal, ko je prvemu naravovercu na ravnici Grmin nad Babjo jamo v sekiro udarila vročinska »kačja« strela, volu v bližini pa odbila rogove. Po pričevanju, ki ga je zapisal Pavel Medvešček, je razklana sekira ponazarjala vse štiri naravne elemente. Grmin je dolgo stal tam, kjer je nastal, številni pa so grmine imeli tudi doma, da so odganjali strele. Po Pleterskem naj bi bik, tukaj sicer vol, predstavljal vodo, kača kot podzemno bitje zemljo, od strele zadeta sekira pa ogenj.<sup>29</sup>

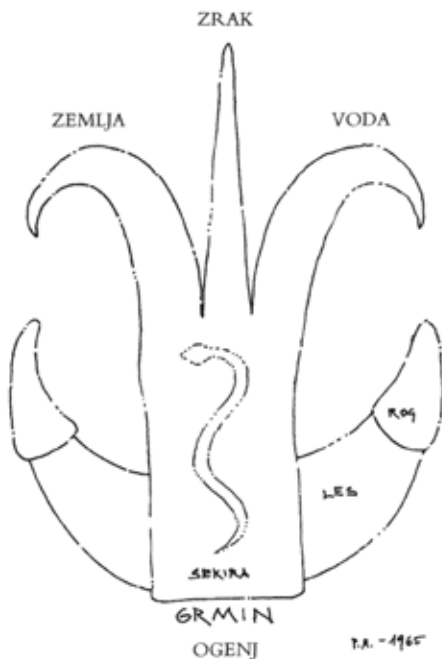
<sup>25</sup> Medvešček, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 379.

<sup>26</sup> Po teh pričevanjih bi nevidna stran neba lahko predstavljala neke vrste naravoverski pekel, saj so zduhici morilcev, ki so tam za kazen pristali, postali večni črvi in izgubili izbiro ponovnega utelešenja. Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 537.

<sup>27</sup> V *Iz nevidne strani neba* je kamen omenjen kar 538-krat, les 187-krat, voda 108-krat, nebo 80-krat, ogenj 76-krat, zemlja 32-krat, zrak pa 17-krat.

<sup>28</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 454.

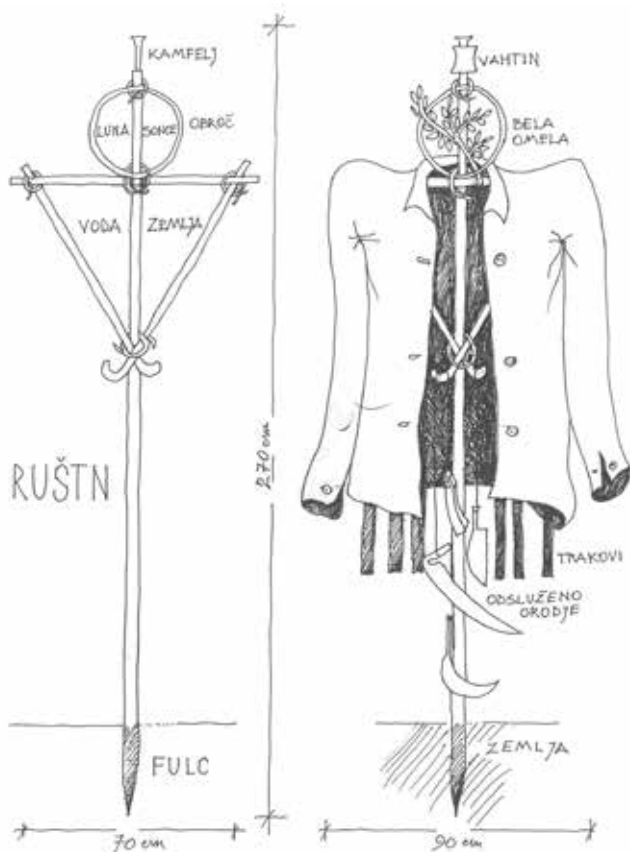
<sup>29</sup> Andrej Pleterski, »Staroverstvo in pričevanja starovercev,« v Pavel Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba: Razkrите skrivnosti staroverstva* (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2015), 23.

Slika 1: Grmin<sup>30</sup>

Podobno ponazarjajoče naravne elemente je bilo tudi obeležje dednik, ki so ga naravoverci nekoč postavljali, da bi obeležili in praznovali izkrčeno novino in se s posebnim obredom zahvalili gozdnemu duhu, da je ljudem prepustil del gozda za obdelovalno zemljo.

Kar je bilo za kristjane le »ptičje strašilo« – današnja ptičja strašila na poljih so morda povsem pozabljen prežitek starodavnega obreda dednovo –, je imelo za naravoverce globok pomen kot hvaležen poklon naravi in pokojnim prednikom, ki so se že pred njimi mučili s krčenjem gozda. Dednika so naredili na ogrodju, imenovanem ruštn, ki je bil Pavlu Medveščku takole opisan:

<sup>30</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 454.

Slika 2: Dednik<sup>31</sup>

Kamplj vleče iz neba vse dobre sile, ris pa predstavlja nebo z luno in soncem. Pod njim je tročan, ki je razdeljen na dve polovici. Ena predstavlja vodo, druga pa zemljo. Drog, ki vse skupaj drži pokonci, pa predstavlja zemeljski ogenj, ki gre skozi fulc in se na vrhu združi z nebesnim ognjem. Ko pa je dednik oblečen, je na kamfelj naslonjen odsluženi brusni kamen, ki mu rečemo vahtin.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 473.

<sup>32</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 474.

Dednik je torej povezal štiri elemente, ob vodi, zemlji in ognju še nebo ali naravoverski nadsvet, ki ga je tudi moč vzporejati s konceptom etra.

Voda, ogenj in zemlja naj bi tvorili zemeljski tročan ali temeljno triado varnosti in plodnosti.<sup>33</sup> Enako je veljalo tudi za hišni tročan, znotraj katerega so naravoverci gradili svoja domovanja in gospodarska poslopja kakor tudi zasajali sadovnjake in njive. Hišni tročan so zmeraj zamejevali trije kamni, dva temeljna in en vogelni. Slednji, imenovan binkel, je bil družinska skrivnost in predmet medgeneracijskega izročila, vedno pa je moral biti vodni, ognjen ali zemeljski: »Tročan je bil vedno v znamenju ognja (sonca), vode in zemlje. Prenekatero kmetijo je pobralo, ker se je vedenje o hišnem tročanu izgubilo ali pa so ga celo iz nevednosti uničili. [...] Baje je imela vsaka kmetija takrat svoj binkel, vendar le ognjenega, vodenega ali zemljenega.«<sup>34</sup> Tudi naravoverske kozmogonske predstave so se razumljivo opirale na naravne elemente:

Zemlja pripada ljudem, živalim in rastlinam, vse to pa preletavajo zduhci. Prvi nadzduhec je vetrni duh, ki se premika od Zemlje do oblakov. Nad njim gospodari vodni duh, ki prihaja občasno vse do Zemlje. Čisto pod nevidnim nebesnim stropom pa je prostranstvo duha groma in bliska. Nad tem stropom je tretji svet, kjer domujejo luna, sonce in zvezde. Šele nad njimi je nadsvet, kjer vlada Nikrmana, ki ureja vse pod in nad zemljo, pa vse gor do nadsveta. Od nadsveta dalje pa je še neznani ne svet, ki je in bo za človeka še naprej ostal večna skrivnost.<sup>35</sup>

Tudi v tem pričevanju razbiram uvodoma omenjeni eter, saj pričevalec v obliki svetov razlikuje med zemljo, vetrom/zrakom, vodo, ognjem, ki ga simbolizirata grom in blisk, ter nebom s planeti in nadsvetom v domeni Nikrmane. Onkraj nadsveta pa navaja še »ne svet«, ločen od domovanja bogov, ki naj bi bil povsem nedoumljiv.<sup>36</sup> Pleterski navaja podobno celovito razumevanje naravnih elementov iz bohinjskega vira:

Je v tleh pri Matješi [to naj bi bil zemeljski ogenj], je v sapi ali vetru in mokroti in je v oblakih neba, ki jih robi in farba Sonce. V tem, da je vsa ta sila, od

<sup>33</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 114.

<sup>34</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 114.

<sup>35</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 434.

<sup>36</sup> Po drugem pričevanju je »ne svet« domovanje Nikrmane skupaj s planeti, po tretjem pa je Nikrmana nebo naselila kot »prva in edina« še pred zvezdami. Gl. Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 299, 471.



katere dobivajo odgovarjajoči del rastline, živali in človek za časa življenja. Od tam, da prihaja vse, tudi prava pamet in tja se vse povrne – tudi pomnjenje.<sup>37</sup>

## Zemlja

V skladu z naravoverskim izročilom je nekdo lahko postal in bil naravoverec le, če je živel od skope, a svete primorske zemlje, »iz katere vse prihaja in odhaja«,<sup>38</sup> kar je seveda tudi krščanska maksima. Tudi v naravoverski koncepciji stvarnosti se vsako telo na zemlji sčasoma preoblikuje v prst,<sup>39</sup> ker pa naravoverci za razliko od kristjanov niso verjeli v sodni dan, se jim ni zdelo potrebno častiti telesnih ostankov pokojnih in oskrbovati njihovih grobov (po izročilu so svoje pokojnike prvotno sežigali). Povedno je, da je arhaičen slovenski izraz za zemljo »svet«, ki ima isti koren kot »sveto«. Ko sem gospodarja stare domačije na severnem Primorskem vprašala, kaj je zanj sveto, je stopil na hišni prag, zamahnil proti veličastnemu razgledu in odgovoril: »Svet.« Njegova zemlja, njegov svet, ki mu je svet. Čeprav so naravoverci svoj svet imenovali »kamnita nebesa« in se je bilo z obdelovanjem zemlje zelo težko preživljati, je vendarle bila njihova, odkar so jo v davnini prav tako težko iztrgali gozdu in odtujili gozdnemu duhu, in, čeprav obrobna in zapostavljena, je ostajala »deviška in v popolni oblasti Nikrmane«. O zemlji so govorili kot o živem bitju, ki so ga »ranili« človeški posegi, prvi tak je bil gradnja železnice v Soški dolini v začetku 20. stoletja.<sup>40</sup> Največja skrunitev, prizadejana zemlji, pa je bila prva svetovna vojna oziroma soška fronta, ki je primorsko zemljo dobesedno prepojila s človeško krvjo in preobremenila s kovinskimi odpadki. Tudi zaradi tega je skupnost prvo svetovno vojno štela za najpomembnejši časovni mejnik v svoji zgodovini in merila čas kot »pred« in »po« veliki vojni.

Prav posebne obravnave je bil pri naravovercih deležen zanje ne-  
ločljiv del zemlje – kamen, ki ga je bilo v njihovem naravnem okolju obilo in jim je služil kot gradivo ter sestavina vsakdanjih in obrednih

<sup>37</sup> Pleterski, »Staroverstvo«, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 473.

<sup>39</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 93.

<sup>40</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 41.

predmetov. Na pomen kamna za naravoverstvo kaže na desetine različnih izrazov za kamne glede na njihove lastnosti ali namembnost. Tudi v tem je primorsko naravoverstvo značilna naravakultura; če imajo naravokulture povsod po svetu skupno intenzivno soodvisnost z naravnimi elementi, pa po drugi strani specifična prisotnost in delovanje naravnih elementov v posameznem lokalnem okolju narekujeta pripoznanje in hierarhijo naravnih elementov za posamezno naravokulturo. Inuiti imajo zato verjetno toliko izrazov za sneg, kot jih imajo Tuaregi za pesek in primorski naravoverci za kamen.

Izpostaviti kaže zlasti kamne kačje glave, ki so izhajali iz zemlje, posvečeni so bili v kačje glave s sveto vodo v obredu, ki so mu naravoverci rekli ozben, dehnarji pa so kačje glave izbrali v naravi glede na njihove posebne lastnosti in precej verjetno je, da bi to lahko bila njihova namagnetenost ali ognjena moč. Ob upoštevanju izjemno pogostih udarov strel v Posočju, v tem naj bi bilo to območje med najaktivnejšimi v Evropi, in delovanja zemeljskega magnetizma preko tukaj stikajočih se tektonskih plošč,<sup>41</sup> kakor tudi vsebnosti železa v tukajšnjih kamninah, je moč domnevati, da so naravoverci posedovali znanje o magnetizmu. Kamni kačje glave so tako v sebi združevali zemljo, vodo in ogenj. Zamejevali so naravoverski teritorij in prostorčas.<sup>42</sup> Imeli so širok razpon namembnosti, ob tročanskih kačjih glavah še zelene glave varuhinje semen, črne glave Črne vahte in hišne kačje glave. Naravoverci so zdravili in vedeževali s kristali (kamnito strelo ali kvarcem).<sup>43</sup> Kamni krinti so imeli osebno varovalno vlogo in so jih naravoverski otroci nosili kot amulete ali krščanske križce okrog vratu, da so jih branili pred slabimi vplivi krščanske šole. Tudi prodniki bulcne so služili kot varovala. Kamenčki veziči so krožili med naravoverskimi domovi kot znamenje gostoljubja in skupnostnih povezav.<sup>44</sup>

V kontekst naravnega elementa zemlje pri naravovercih spada tudi les, ki je bil enako kot kamen osnovno gradivo in sestavni del številnih vsakodnevnih in obrednih predmetov; pripisovali so mu živost in svetost. Les je večinoma proizvod gozda, do katerega so imeli naravoverci

<sup>41</sup> Gl. Rudi Čop, »Vpliv monolitov na lokalno magnetno polje,« v *Staroverstvo v Sloveniji med znanostjo in religijo*, ur. Saša Babič in Mateja Belak (Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2022), 147–156.

<sup>42</sup> Toplak, »Naša vera«, 229–236.

<sup>43</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 267.

<sup>44</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 515.

poseben odnos. Od podalpskih hribovij do dinarske verige, kjer se je v preteklosti razprostirala »naravoverska dežela«, je bil včasih en sam gozd in prebivalci tega prostora so z velikimi napori izkrčili prostor za bivanje in obdelovalne površine. Nekdanje samotne naravoverske kmetije so danes zaraščene, a včasih so stale na gozdu z muko iztrganih krčevinah. Najbolj razširjen pomen izraza za osnovno naravoversko upravno enoto »hosta« je sopomenka za gozd ali goščavo, čeprav glasovno razmerje med besedama ni zadovoljivo pojasnjeno. Naravoverci bi potemtakem lahko bili ljudje, ki so živeli v gozdu ali od gozda, čeprav izraz »hosta« za gozd v zahodni Sloveniji ni običajen.<sup>45</sup>

Gozd, »ki na koncu vedno zmaga nad človekom«, je bil za naravoverce »kot maternica« in seveda dom drevesom, ki so jih nekateri šteli za brate in sestre. Drevesa so naravoverce spremljala od rojstva, ko je oče zлил vodo, v kateri so okopali novorojenca, k mlademu drevesu, ki je postalo otrokov »drevent«, nato poroke, ki je ob ženinu in nevesti vključevala tudi drevo, do dreves, ki so jih sadili zmeraj v tročanu, in svetih dreves, ki so jih obiskovali, da bi se spočili ob njihovih koreninah in sprejeli njihovo energijo. Še posebej sveti so bili hrasti, saj naj bi imel »vsak posameznik v naravi svoj hrast in [...] so se jih prav zato bali sekati. Zgodilo bi se namreč lahko, da bi posekali prav svojega, posledično pa bi v hipu umrli.«<sup>46</sup> Tudi sploh prvo drevo na Zemlji naj bi bil hrast. V izročilu pa se je ohranil tudi spomin na sveta drevesa različnih funkcij: vrhine, bliste, krepunike, orlovo bukev itd. Po Medveščkovih besedah so bila drevesa za naravoverce »živ in čuteč organizem, prav tako kot človek in vsa druga bitja v naravi, le da imajo drugačno obliko in poslanstvo v njej. Verjeli so, da nosijo sveta drevesa v sebi podobe prednikov, odtise njihovih rok ter solze sreče in žalosti, ki so jih srkale njihove stoletne korenine.«<sup>47</sup> Drevesa za naravoverce torej niso veljala za povezovalce le med prostorskimi razsežnostmi, kot je interpretirano

<sup>45</sup> Gozd se ob meji z Italijo (Kambrško) imenuje bošk kot izpeljanka iz it. *bosco*, na Cerkljanskem pa meja, morda zato, ker je gozd razmejeval krčevine, na katerih so stale kmetije.

<sup>46</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 188.

<sup>47</sup> Pavel Medvešček – Klančar, »Med nebom in zemljo – drevesa v staroverskem čaščenju,« v *Gozdovi in ljudje – dediščina za prihodnost*, 3. seminar za etnobotaniko, 16. in 17. marec 2019 (Ljubljana: Slovenski etnografski muzej, 2019), <https://etnobotanika.si/povzetki-predavanj-2019/>.

drevo življenja oziroma svetovna os, ampak tudi med časovnimi razsežnostmi naravoverskih svetov.

## Voda

Za naravoverce je bila Soča sveta reka. V Soči so znali ugledati Nikrmmano, pripisovali so ji dušo in jo šteli za »odmev pračasa«. Z njo so se pogovarjali, jo prosili, ji darovali in vedeževali iz nje. Ob Soči je bilo najpomembnejše naravoversko svetišče Babja jama, »zemeljsko srce Nikrmane«. Iz Babje jame je ob močnem dežju bruhala deroča voda, ki je morebiti ponazarjala belo kačo varuhinjo naravoverstva. Struge pritokov Soče je Nikrmana v davnini določila za naravna svetišča, kot npr. Doblarc (svetišče Padence) ali Mrzli potok (svetišče Dujence). Porečje Soče je bilo prepredeno s prostori moči in tudi pritoki pritokov Soče, zlasti Idrijce in Bače, so bili devince ali svete vode. Te vode so imele tretjo moč, verjetno je to bila referenca na tročanstvo, zato so se v njih obredno umivali in jo dajali piti bolnim, da bi ozdraveli, in umirajočim, da bi lažje umrli, tako ljudem kot živalim.<sup>48</sup> Kot že omenjeno, so v svetih vodah tudi ozbenali kamne, da so postali kačje glave in s tem varuhi naravoverskega prostorčasa. Iz barve in gibanja neoskrunjene svete vode so napovedovali prihodnost.<sup>49</sup> Vode so naplavljalje prodnike, ki so jim naravoverci pripisovali razne moči, ter dobre in slabe ašure, lesne naplavine izrazitih oblik. Reke so nekateri strici šteli za sestre in ljubice, vsi naravoverci pa za živa bitja in prebivališča vodnega duha. Ob hudi suši so vodnega duha prosili za dež, ob poplavih so zarotovali, da bi se podivjane vode umirile.<sup>50</sup>

Ko so zidali hišo ali hlev, predvsem temelje, so nekateri v malto zamesili nekaj snovi, ki so jo nabrali na rečnih kamnih ali skalah, ki so bile vedno pod vodo, saj je vsebovala tisočletni čas, obenem pa je imela v sebi tudi varovalno moč reke. [...] Voda, ki jo vidimo v reki, je le del trenutka, ki kmalu za tem odide. Del vode, ki je tekla v preteklosti, je danes v usedlinah, pesku in gramozu, pa tudi v snovi, ki se je oprijela skal in kamenja. Vse to nosi tisočletni zapis, ki ga znajo brati le tisti, ki jih je izbrala Nikrmana. Do nas je prihajal

<sup>48</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 103, 350.

<sup>49</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 294.

<sup>50</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 471.

skozi vso zgodovino reke in še vedno prihaja. [...] Reka te vedno pomirja, ko si v stiski. Poslušaj te, čeprav drvi mimo tebe. Je pa sopotnik, ki ne obstane. Morda prav zato, ker te s tem spodbuja, da vstaneš in kreneš na pot rešitve.<sup>51</sup>

Narasle in deroče vode so spoštovali in se jih bali kot prebivališč duhov utopljenecv. Bile so včasih nepremostljiva ovira med dvema bregovima, kar pa je bilo za ohranjanje naravoverske skupnosti tudi dobro. Ko so Drugi zgradili most čez reko, so po njem namreč prihajali prišleki, ki so se na naravoverskem ozemlju stalno naselili in gradili cerkve, simbole izpodrivanja in preganjanja naravoverstva.

Kjer pa žive vode ni bilo, je bil odnos [naravovercev] do nje še bolj častljiv in racionalno uporabljen, saj so verjeli, da tista voda nosi v sebi del neba, od koder prihaja in ostane v telesu tistega, ki jo zaužije. Enak odnos so gojili tudi do zemlje, iz katere zraste vse, kar človek potrebuje. Prav zaradi slednjega postane del človeka samega in prostor, kamor se ob koncu poti vrne tudi njegovo mrtvo telo.<sup>52</sup>

Navedek učinkovito ponazarja ne le vitalen pomen in vseprisotnost naravnih elementov v vsakdanu naravovercev, ampak tudi, kako so bili naravni elementi zanje med seboj povezani in prepleteni v celoto in enost vsemogočne narave, za katero so se zavedali, da je mogoče živeti in delovati le z njo, nikoli pa proti njej, kot to nepremišljeno in lahko-miselno počne sodobna družba.

## Ogenj

V davnini, ko so se predniki naravovercev šele naseljevali v svoj življenjski prostor današnje zahodne Slovenije, je bil naravni element ogenj ključnega pomena, da so si s požigalništvom lahko zagotovili preživetje. Ogenj jim je omogočil, da so iz gozda ustvarili pašnike za živino, njive za pridelavo poljščin in vrtnin ter prostor za bivanje. Še prej, ko so po naravoverskem izročilu bivali v jamah, jim je ogenj dajal toploto in varnost. Strele, simbola ognja, so se bali, a se tudi zavedali njene zmožnosti namagnetenja kamnin in to s pridom uporabljali. Ogenj je dajal moč, zato so na domačih ognjiščih hranili razne predmete, ki so se

<sup>51</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 319.

<sup>52</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 529.

tako napojili z ognjeno močjo. Ognjišče je bilo središče naravoverskih domačij, kjer so se zlasti pozimi na toplem zadrževali člani družine.

Dom je bil v tej skupnosti močnejše poudarjen kot drugje. Pripadnost ognjišču in ognju, ki jih je grel in tako ohranjal ter jih obenem tudi držal skupaj, je bila trdna. [...] Ko pa je šel *žar kamen* iz domačega ognjišča v novo hišo enega od potomcev po moški strani, je za njim šla tudi nevidna, a močna vez, ki je obenem širila tudi prostor za preživetje skupnosti.<sup>53</sup>

Žar kamen je bil poseben kamen, skrivoma odnesen iz domačega ognjišča in vgrajen v ognjišče nove domačije, ko se je mladi rod osamosvojil. Po naravoverskem izročilu naj bi prvi žar kamen z neba poslala Nikrmana. Lahko da je pri žar kamnih šlo izvirno za meteorite, katerih padci so bili na severnem Primorskem v preteklosti kar pogosti.<sup>54</sup>

Ogenj je skozi starodavno veččino oglarstva omogočal učinkovito ogrevanje in skromen zaslužek oglarjev. »Ker so imeli oglarji opravka tudi z ognjem, so jih vabili na kresovanja. Verjeli so namreč, da bo imel kresni ogenj dvojno moč, če ga bo prižgal oglar.«<sup>55</sup> Zimski in poletni sončni obrat sta bila najpomembnejša naravoverska praznika, ki so ju zmeraj obhajali s kresovi. Zimski kres naj bi soncu pomagal znova dobiti moč, ki je ima takrat najmanj. Vanj so vrgli brinje, da je »obredni ogenj tako dobil še dodatno brinovo moč, ki so jo darovali onemoglemu soncu«.<sup>56</sup> Z žerjavico s kresa so nato tudi na domačih ognjiščih zakurili nov ogenj, ki ni smel ugasniti do naslednjega kresa. Na ognjiščih naravoverskih domačij je v času zimskega kresa več dni gorel tudi kresni panj. Kresovanja so bila pomembni družabni dogodki, kjer se je lokalna srenja zbrala za številne obrede, pa tudi za druženje, pojedino posebnih

<sup>53</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 76.

<sup>54</sup> Dragan Božič, »Sto let padca meteorita v Avčah,« *MMC RTV SLO*, 27. marec 2008, <https://www.rtvsllo.si/znanost-in-tehnologija/sto-let-padca-meteorita-v-avcah/85286>. Po enem pričevanju naj bi žar kamne poznali tudi nekje v Karpatih, kar bi lahko bil namig na izvor naravoverstva. Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 76.

<sup>55</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 92.

<sup>56</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 166.

kresnih jedi in ples.<sup>57</sup> Pavel Medvešček je zbral pričevanja še o osvatini ali »poganskem ognju«, ki so ga kurili v marcu, da bi pregnali zimo.<sup>58</sup>

Naravoverci so z ognjem oziroma žerjavico vedeževali in zdravili.<sup>59</sup> V ta namen so kurili tudi poseben »ognjeni ris«: »Tisti, ki je takrat šel v notranjost risa, je bil deležen ognjene moči, ki mu je iz telesa očistila vse bolezni in hudega duha.«<sup>60</sup> Pa tudi: »Takrat, ko so pripravljali apnenico, so vanjo nekateri zdravilci dali tudi take kamne, ki potem v vodi niso razpadli v apno kot drugi. Ti ognjeni kamni naj bi imeli v sebi veliko ognjene moči.«<sup>61</sup>

## Zrak

Posameznikov dih je bil za naravoverce »živ« oziroma trajnejši od posameznika, ki je dihal: »Sicer pa je bolje, da danes nihče več iz [pipe mrtvega dehnarja] ne bi kadil. Le tako bo v njej ostal vsaj delček dehnarjevega diha, tako značilnega zanj.«<sup>62</sup> Vsaj po enem pričevanju starejšega domačina iz okolice Tolmina naj bi izraz »dehnar« izviral iz lokalne izgovorjave besede »dih«, »deh« in se tako etimološko navezoval na duhovnika, kar je dehnar znotraj naravoverstva med drugim tudi bil.

Za animistične naravoverce je bil zrak prebivališče duhov in pokojnih prednikov, pa tudi posrednik do Nikrmane. Ženske so iz drevesnih listov izdelovale posebne lone za prošnje in zahvale, imenovane steljc. »Ko so pripravljale steljc, ki so ga namenile gori, breznu, kalu ali reki, so uporabile večji list, kot je na primer lapuhov. Nikrmano pa so prosile,

<sup>57</sup> Slikovit opis poganskega kresa najdemo v romanu *Umirajoči bog Triglav* Franceta Bevka. Čeprav je srednjeveška vsebina romana iz leta 1930 predvsem alegorija trpljenja Slovencev pod italijanskim fašizmom, je primorski pisatelj, rojen v cerkljanski Zakojci, imel za deda znane-ga zdravilca in je zelo verjetno vedel za obstoj naravoverstva. Gl. France Bevk, *Umirajoči bog Triglav* (Gorica: Goriška matica, 1930); in Milko Matičetov, »Duhovna kultura v Gornjem Posočju,« v *Dobrodošli v Furlaniji*, ur. Enos Costantini in Silvester Gabršček (Udine: Società Filologica Friulana, 2003), 533–543.

<sup>58</sup> Pavel Medvešček, »Osvatina – poganski ogenj,« *Etnolog* 53, št. 1 (1992): 151–156.

<sup>59</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 199.

<sup>60</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 298.

<sup>61</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 375.

<sup>62</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 101.

ali pa se ji zahvaljevale, tako da so v vetrovnem vremenu na vzpetini vrgle steljce v zrak, ki ga je nato odnesel veter.«<sup>63</sup>

Zrak je bil medij transmigracije duš, ene od ključnih razlikovalnih prvin naravoverstva od krščanstva. Naravoverci so verjeli, da je v vsakem živem zduhec, ki se po smrti telesa preseli v drugo telesno obliko po želji umrlega. Prehod v drugo telesno obliko po smrti ni bil pogojen z dobrimi ali slabimi deli v tem življenju, ampak z željo po drugem telesu, ki je včasih predstavljala kompenzacijo za pomanjkljivosti predhodnega telesa. Naravoverci, s katerimi je prišel v stik Pavel Medvešček, so si v veliki večini želeli po smrti postati živali in ne spet ljudje.

Zduhec, po pomenu med drugim naravoverski ekvivalent krščanske duše, najbrž tudi etimološko izvira iz slovanskega korena za besedo zrak. Ker je zduhec telo umrlega zapustil po zraku, so ob smrti na domu odpirali okna, da bi zduhec lažje našel pot na prosto. Vsaj po enem pričevanju pa je bil zduhec ločen od preduha, kot so rekli »tisti odprtini, ki je bila nekoč za dim nad vhodnimi hišnimi vrati. Skozi njo naj bi hodili tudi zduhci. Predvsem pa preduh človeka, ki je umrl v hiši.«<sup>64</sup>

Zduhcu obešenca, utopljenca in nerojenega otroka, ki umre na porodu skupaj z materjo, je izhod onemogočen. Prav tako tudi zduhcu vojaka, ki ga je granata v hipu zdrobila v nevidne drobce, in tistega, ki ga zažgejo ali vržejo v živo apno. Pa tudi drugim. Pri vseh naštetih gre za zduhomor. To pa povzroči vse mogoče oblike izrodov v oblikah nečistih in strah vzbujajočih duhov, ki se potem potepajo po zraku, v vodah in podzemlju, pa še kje.<sup>65</sup>

Zduhn je bil predmet, ki je simboliziral pokojne prednike. V podobni lesenega goloba je visel v zraku nad družinsko mizo. Naravoverci so prednike šteli za integralni del družine, jih častili in spraševali za nasvete ob težkih odločitvah. Tudi sicer je vsak naravoverec imel nekakšnega »nevidnega prijatelja« zduhca, s katerim se je lahko pogovarjal in posvetoval. To je lahko bil znan umrli ali pa kakšna žival, ki jo je redno videval. V tej vlogi je bil zduhec ekvivalent krščanskega angela, prav tako zračnega bitja. Tako kot angeli so tudi nekateri zduhci letali čez

<sup>63</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 398.

<sup>64</sup> Pavel Medvešček v sprotni opombi na isti strani preduh pojasni kot dušo. Po drugem pričevanju je bil preduh varuh duhov umrlih. Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 301, 449.

<sup>65</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 115.



nebo (eter vesolja) kot Nikrmanini sli, ljudem pa so bili tedaj vidni kot zvezdni utrinki.<sup>66</sup>

### Elementalne politike v škodo naravoverstva

Sodobni premisleki naravnih elementov v kontekstu človeškega vpliva nanje so inherentno politični, saj dostop do njih in ravnanje z njimi povzročajo temeljne krivice in neenakosti med živimi bitji, a tudi prepoznanje le-teh. »Navezovanje odločanja o elementih ne le na ekološki, ampak tudi na politični kontekst povečuje transparentnost, postavlja v ospredje distributivne procese, ki sicer pogosto ostajajo v ozadju, in pojasnjuje delovanje prikritih družbenih in tehnoloških struktur, ki artikulirajo moč in kapital,«<sup>67</sup> ugotavljata Ingwerson in Müller. Tudi Boelens in Seeman potrjujeta na primeru vode, da je »dostop do vode neogibno političen problem. Toda politične razprave stremijo k naturalizaciji in depolitizaciji vode, namesto da bi prepoznale, da je dostop do vode v domeni človeških interesov, izbir, pogajanj in moči. [...] Za ranljive družbene skupine negotov dostop do vode [...] pogosto odraža neenakost razmerij moči.«<sup>68</sup> Tudi za dostop vseh do zdravih tal za pridelavo zdrave hrane nikakor ne zadostuje Svetovna listina o prsti, ki jo je Organizacija za prehrano in kmetijstvo OZN sprejela leta 1981 in revidirala leta 2015 v luči napredujoče globalne degradacije prsti, nezavezujoča priporočila Listine pa ne naslavljaajo prej omenjenih družbenih neenakosti in protislovij.<sup>69</sup>

Elementalna politika je torej vsakršno politično delovanje, ki se nanaša in učinkuje na zemljo, zrak, vodo in ogenj. Če so elementalne

<sup>66</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 97.

<sup>67</sup> Moritz Ingwerson in Timo Müller, »The Aesthetics and Politics of Elemental Agency,« *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 70, št. 1 (2022): 16, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zaa-2022-2046>.

<sup>68</sup> Rutgerd Boelens and Miriam Seemann, »Forced Engagements: Water Security and Local Rights Formalization in Yanque, Colca Valley, Peru,« *Human Organization* 73, št. 1 (Spring 2014): 1, <https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.73.1.d44776822845k515>.

<sup>69</sup> Gl. FAO, *World Soil Charter* (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 1982), dostopano 4. 12. 2023, <https://www.fao.org/3/p8700e/p8700e.pdf>; in FAO, *Revised World Soil Charter* (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2015), dostopano 4. 12. 2023, [https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/GSP/docs/ITPS\\_Pillars/annexVII\\_WSC.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GSP/docs/ITPS_Pillars/annexVII_WSC.pdf).

politike politične odločitve in vzpostavljanje razmerij moči v skupnosti ali v imenu skupnosti, ki imajo (ne)posreden ali (ne)hoten učinek na naravne elemente,<sup>70</sup> je ob naravoverski odvisnosti od naravnih elementov nepresenetljivo, da so pretekli posegi v naravo imeli neposreden in večinoma negativen vpliv na naravoversko skupnost. Tovrstne elementalne politike so se razlikovale predvsem v tem, ali so bile zavestno naperjene proti naravoverski kontrakulturi<sup>71</sup> ali pa so naravovercem škodile posredno v imenu politik etnične diskriminacije, vojaške agresije in okupacije ter kapitalističnega ekstraktivizma, »razvoja« in »napredka«.

Sledimo jim lahko nazaj do najstarejšega pisnega vira o obstoju naravovercev v Posočju. »Križarski pohod« na Kobarid, o katerem se nam je ohranil arhivski zapis, naj bi se zgodil leta 1331. Po kronistu dogodka je duhovščina iz Čedad nad Kobarid poslala »vojsko« duhovnikov in plačancev, da bi zatrli poganstvo domačinov. »Križarji« so takrat posekali sveto drevo in zasuli sveti studenec sredi Kobarida.<sup>72</sup> Čeprav naravoverstva s tem seveda niso izkoreninili, se je znašanje kristjanov nad naravoverskimi svetimi kraji, kamni, vodami in drevesi nadaljevalo in je sčasoma pripomoglo k prenehanju obstoja naravoverske skupnosti. V pričevanjih, ki jih je zbral Pavel Medvešček, je veliko zgodb oziroma spominov na tovrstne uničevalne dogodke, s katerimi so iz krajine postopoma izginjali elementi akulturiranja, ki so jih opredelili in vanjo prispevali naravoverci. Z več pričevanji koroboriran primer je bila razstrelitev luninega kamna v naravnem svetišču Padence. Ta poseben kamen, mogoče meteorit, je bil sestavni del obredov v Padencah in naravovercem svet.

Njegova izjemnost je bila vidna že na prvi pogled. Bil je temno rdeče zamolkle barve in iz kamnine, ki je tu v bližini ni. Vanj so bili vklesani prastari

<sup>70</sup> Primer neposrednih politik s hotenim učinkom je skupnostno upravljanje z vodami, medtem ko so učinki kmetijskih politik posredni in nehoteni, a predvidljivi. Družbeni procesi, kjer so naravni elementi sploh le kolateralna škoda, pa so na primer vojne.

<sup>71</sup> Milton Yinger, »Contraculture and Subculture«, *American Sociological Review* 25, št. 5 (1960): 625–635, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2090136>. Gl. tudi Toplak, »Naša vera«, 238.

<sup>72</sup> Prav ta dogodek je osrednja tema Bevkovega romana *Umirajoči bog Triglav*. Gl. tudi Cirila Toplak, »Politično-zgodovinski kontekst križarskega pohoda na Kobarid leta 1331,« v *Pozno pokristjanjevanje slovenskega ozemlja: zbornik prispevkov, predstavljenih na simpoziju v Kobaridu*, 12. 8. 2017, ur. Nejc Petrič in Marko Hren (Ljubljana: Društvo Slovenski staroverci, 2018), 47–62.

znaki, katerih sporočila ni nihče več poznal. Na veliko žalost nas starovercev tistega svetega kamna danes seveda ni več, saj so ga neznani nasilneži na božični večer leta 1925 razstrelili. Govori se, da je bila razstrelitev opozorilo poganom. Eni so takrat slavili, mi pa smo se zavili v nepopisno žalost in molk. Tako nam je svetoval tudi dehnar, ki se je bal, da bi se lahko nasilje še stopnjevalo, kar je bilo čutiti tudi v pogovorih z nekaterimi ljudmi, ki so bili blizu nasilnežev. Eksplozijo smo slišali tudi pri nas doma, a vest o tem je prišla šele naslednji dan, ko nam je to prišel povedat prijatelj iz Doblarja; vse je slišal v gostilni, kmalu po tistem zahrbtnem dejanju. Nekaj časa smo lunin kamen nadomeščali kar z drugim manjšim, ki smo ga našli tam v bližini. Vendar nam ga je prva velika voda prevrnila in odnesla. Zato nam je dehnar svetoval, naj ne iščemo drugega; že po razstrelitvi luninega kamna je namreč nasprotoval vsakemu nadomestku. Rekel nam je celo, naj sprejmemo to stvar takšno, kakršna je.<sup>73</sup>

Lunin kamen je tukaj izbran za primer tudi zaradi značilne reakcije naravovercev na njegovo uničenje. Čeprav je marsikdo med njimi gojil maščevalne misli in so natanko vedeli, kdo je dejanje izvedel in kdo naročil in plačal, v povračilo niso mogli ukrepati, da ne bi pritegnili pozornosti na druge svete predmete in kraje v naravi, dostopne kristjanom, ali nasploh na pripadnike svoje skrivne skupnosti. Ker je dehnar odločil, da se je najbolje vzdržati odziva, lahko sklepamo, da se tudi dehnarju podrejena Črna vahta v tem primeru ni smela odzvati. Mogoče je seveda, da je Črna vahta opravila svoje delo, pa pričevalci tega niso vedeli ali Pavlu Medveščku tega niso hoteli zaupati. Tudi nadomeščanje tako uničenih predmetov ni prišlo v poštev. Če bi svete kraje in predmete bilo mogoče nadomestiti, bi se naravoverci verjetno preselili daleč stran na varno že takrat, ko so bili ob srednjeveški frankovski okupaciji in sočasnem pokristjanjevanju prisiljeni izbirati med prisilno spreobrnitvijo, eksilom in »ilegalo«. Odločili so se večinsko za slednje, ker

oditi drugam, je pomenilo izgubiti vse svete predmete, predvsem pa svete kraje, povezane s tem verovanjem, saj jih ni bilo mogoče vzeti s seboj. Saj to ni bil »katekizem«, ki ga lahko odneseš in bereš kjerkoli. Emigranti so sicer v sebi ohranili staro vero, kar pa ni isto kot ostati in živeti z vsem, kar to verovanje v tem prostoru ponuja. Če so želeli ostati pri svojem, je bila torej najboljša rešitev, da so se potuhnili. Na zunaj so se kazali kot ostali, v sebi pa so ostali isti.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 55.

<sup>74</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 82.

Drugi sklop ciljnih elementarnih politik v škodo naravoverstvu so bile ekstraktivistične in razvojne politike oblasti, ki se obstoja naravoverske kontrakulture sploh niso zavedale. Ker je šlo za kontrakulturo, se zaradi razlike v vrednotnih sistemih nanjo ne bi ozirale, četudi bi vedele zanjo. Tovrstne politike so naravoverci trpeli že od časa avstro-ogrske monarhije, ki jih je na tej »divji« meji z Beneško republiko stoletja sicer bolj ali manj zanemarjala oziroma puščala pri miru, v začetku 20. stoletja pa je tudi v te odmaknjene kraje prišla železnica. Gradnja železnice v Soški dolini je za naravoverce pomenila uničenje njihovega najpomembnejšega svetišča, Babje jame, ki jo je železnica dobesedno povozila. Prav nad Babjo jamo je bil speljan železniški viadukt, ob gradnji je bila razstreljena skala Škurblja, ki je bila del glavnega tročana Babje jame.<sup>75</sup> Po naravoverskem izročilu je zaradi tega onečaščenja njihova zavetnica bela kača zapustila Babjo jamo in spremenjena v zlatega orla odletela daleč proč na varno. Babje jame zatem sicer niso povsem opustili: »Čeprav je Babja jama po izgradnji bohinjske železnice izgubila prvotno moč in svetost, je še vedno ostala najpomembnejši kraj za staroverce. Čeprav so vedeli, da so z uničenjem skale Škurblje onečastili njihov sveti prostor, so staroverci nadaljevali z vsakoletnim obredom, ki se je vršil v jami.«<sup>76</sup> Pozornost pa so čim bolj skrivoma vendarle poslej usmerjali v svetišče Padence na drugem bregu Soče, a tudi tega je posredno ogrožala železnica. Železniški delavci od drugod so se namreč stalno naseljevali v te kraje in radovednost jih je po naključju vodila in navedla k odkrivanju naravoverskih skrivnosti v njihovi soseščini.<sup>77</sup>

Železnica, ta simbol modernega napredka in mobilnosti, je bila torej za naravoverce velika nesreča. »Železni zmaj« je s smradom in nenačnim hrupom motil podeželski mir in mamil mlade zdoma v mesta, kjer so pozabili na izročilo. »Stari možje so takrat govorili, da bo *cuh* pripeljal v deželo le slabe reči in s tem počasi uničil vse, kar je našega in naravnega.«<sup>78</sup>

Naslednji udarec neposrednih elementarnih politik je bil naravovercem zadan z gradnjo hidroelektrarne na Soči pri Doblarju. Zanje so

<sup>75</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 67.

<sup>77</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 52.

<sup>78</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 271.

Sočo upočasnili z velikanskim jezom pri Podselu. To je bilo že delo medvojne fašistične italijanske oblasti. Leta 1936 se je začela gradnja jez, leta 1939 pa je hidroelektrarna začela obratovati. Do leta 1947 je bila priključena na italijansko omrežje, nato pa na omrežje socialistične Slovenije, ki je pospešeno nadaljevala z gradnjo elektrarn na Soči.<sup>79</sup> Največ, kar so naravoverci lahko naredili, je bil bojkot tovrstnih gradenj in z njimi povezanih posegov v naravo (kot delovna sila), kar pa jih seveda ni upočasnilo ali zaustavilo.

Fašistična italijanska oblast je v medvojnem času prepovedala kurjenje ognja na prostem. To je pomenilo, da naravoverci niso več mogli praznovati sončnih obratov s starodavnimi običaji kresovanja. Nekateri so se prepovedi uprli, večinoma pa so se ji prilagodili.<sup>80</sup> Nedvomno je prizadela njihove skupnostne vezi in razrahljala naravoverske hoste. Prispevala je k siceršnji postopni redukciji naravoverstva iz sprva večinske življenjske filozofije na vse manj številčno in vse bolj razpršeno manjšino, nato zgolj na posamezne družine in nazadnje le še na zadnje ostarele strice. Kar je bila nekoč »naravoverska dežela« na obeh straneh aktualne državne meje, so sčasoma bili le še osamljeni zaselki, nato samotne hribovske domačije, na koncu le še posamezniki, ki so ohranjali naravoverstvo živo v svojih mislih in srcih.

Res smo kresove, pri katerih smo od vedno vsi sodelovali, s težavo opustili. Ne poznam hiše, ki ne bi imela enega ali več udeležencev. Vendar pa je od takrat naprej postal hišni ogenj, ki je gorel na ognjišču, nadomestek za zimski kres. [...] Središnji prostor, kot sem že omenil, je postalo ognjišče, okoli katerega se je zbrala cela družina. Zelo redko so bili prisotni sosedge. Izjemoma, če so bili sami. Ogenj je bil tisti element, v katerega so bile uprte vse oči prisotnih. Čarobnost in skrivnostnost, ki je lebdela v prostoru, je obredju dajala poseben pečat, dokler se noč ni prevesila v naslednji dan. Pričakovanje je torej doseglo vrhunec, ko so le dočakali novo rojeno sonce, ki je zopet premagalo temo.<sup>81</sup>

Medvojna italijanska oblast je tudi spodbujala in zapovedovala intenzivno sečnjo lesa v primorskih gozdovih, ki so ga bili domačini pri-

<sup>79</sup> Soške elektrarne Nova Gorica, »HE Doblar 1,« dostopano 4. 12. 2023, <https://www.seng.si/hidroelektrarne/velike-hidroelektrarne/2017060915280084>.

<sup>80</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 458.

<sup>81</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 450.

morani prodajati po nizki ceni. Če so sovražni kristjani naklepno sekali naravoverska sveta drevesa, so tuji gozdni delavci nevede uničili marsikatero sveto drevo in naravovercem onemogočili, da bi se napajali z njegovo energijo in ga častili. Primorski naravoverci, ki so odhajali na sezonsko gozdarjenje na Koroško, so verjetno vsaj znali prepoznati sveta drevesa druge. Med drugo svetovno vojno pa so italijanski gozdarji ljudem pritrgovali les za kurjavo, saj ga je primanjkovalo.

Še pred vsem tem je Primorsko in s tem naravoversko skupnost odločilno zaznamovala prva svetovna vojna. K strahotnemu uničenju, ki ga je na naravoverskih svetih krajih v naravi povzročila soška fronta, je bilo naravovercem treba prišteti še tragične posledice modernega vojskovanja za skupnost: množične človeške žrtve med vpoklicanimi vojaki in civilisti, travmatično begunstvo in odvrnitev od izročila pod vplivom izrednih razmer. Po približnih ocenah je bilo pregnanih okrog 100.000 prebivalcev severne Primorske, na soški fronti je padlo okrog 300.000 vojakov. Neugotovljivo število ljudi je pokosila kolera, v zaledju fronte je vladalo strašno pomanjkanje. Čeprav vojna ni bila nasledek politike, ki bi bila ciljno uperjena proti naravnim elementom, je (z močjo ognja) nepovratno prizadela zemljo, vodo in zrak.

Skale, drevesa in podzemni svet [so bili] »obloženi« s človeško bolečino in trpljenjem. Groza, krik in jok se je vtisnil v vse, kar tam rase. Zemlja, ki je nekoč prehranjevala ljudi, je zdaj polna železa, svinca, smodnika in drugih odpadkov, ki so se tu odlagali vsa ta leta.<sup>82</sup>

Begunci so ob vrnitvi na domačije našli le še razvaline in jalovino. Naravoverski sveti kraji so bili zasuti ali do nerazpoznavnosti razdejani, saj so številne bitke potekale prav v krajih, omenjenih v Medveščkovih zapisih. Ko so pod vodstvom dehnarjev naravoverci zemljo očistili težkih kovin, so tudi tročani znova delovali, čeprav ne več tako dobro kot prej. S tem si je tudi njihova naravakultura nekoliko opomogla od zaradi vojne skrhanih medčloveških odnosov. Še danes, več kot stoletje po prvi svetovni vojni, obilen dež po hudourniških strugah prinese kovinske predmete iz tega obdobja in dogajanja.

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<sup>82</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 117.

Po drugi svetovni vojni, ki je prav tako prinesla boleče izgube, materialno uničenje in onesnaženje narave vsem Primorcem, je po priključitvi socialistični Jugoslaviji sledilo obdobje intenzivne industrializacije, urbanizacije in nasploh modernizacije. Elektrarni Doblar in Plave (zagnana leta 1940) sta zadovoljevali 40 % potreb industrializirajoče se Slovenije po elektriki.<sup>83</sup> Jez pri Podselu je imel neposreden vpliv na so-točje Soče in Doblarca, kjer je bilo naravoversko svetišče Padence. »Naši predniki [so] častili vodnega duha, imenovanega Mahinc. Kraj njegovega čaščenja je bil skalnati prostor na Tokavi, kjer se Doblarec izteka v Sočo. Pri gradnji elektrarne Doblar je bil tisti del tako poškodovan, da od prostora za čaščenje ni ostalo nič.«<sup>84</sup> Slovenija je po vojni na Soči in njenih pritokih zgradila še 25 hidroelektrarn. Pri vsakokratnih posegih v prostor se seveda nihče ni oziral na skrivno naravoversko skupnost in njene potrebe. Nasprotno, elektrika je bila domačinom obljubljana kot zveličavna civilizacijska pridobitev, čeprav je trajalo desetletja, preden jim jo je oblast napeljala v domove.<sup>85</sup> V dolini Soče in njenih pritokov so zrasle tovarne, ki naj bi ohranjale poseljenost teh obmejnih območij in zagotavljale prihodnjo »diktaturo proletariata«. Prinesle so tudi osiromašenje virov ter onesnaženje vode in zraka. V zemljo so svoje dodali še pesticidi in kemikalije intenzivnega mehaniziranega kmetovanja. Cestne povezave so odročne kraje približale urbanim središčem in pospešile onesnaženje narave s hrupom in izpuhi, pa tudi urbanizacijo, ki je posredno slabila naravoversko skupnost, kolikor je je po drugi svetovni vojni še ostalo. Moderni način življenja je porušil nekdanji mir in tišino, ko je človek še lahko slišal veter ali vodo, ju poznal in predvideval. Svetlobno onesnaženje je pretrgalo tradicijo opazovanja nočnega neba, s katerim se je akumuliralo astronomsko znanje generacij. Četudi je bila socialistična oblast brezbrizna do naravoverstva, ker je bila zazrta v socialistični krasni novi svet, je z modernizacijskimi procesi skrivni naravikulturi povzročila toliko in še več škode, kot če bi jo odkrito preganjala.

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<sup>83</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 42.

<sup>84</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 437.

<sup>85</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 217.

## Sklep

Izvorna antična definicija elementa je osnovni delec, tvarina, ki je ni mogoče deliti še na manjše delce. S sodobnim znanjem o kvantnih osnovnih delcih je ta definicija povsem presežena. Ko danes pomislimo na elemente, je prva asociacija kemijska lestvica elementov, druga pa naravne ujme, ki jih imenujemo elementarne nesreče. V humanistiki in družboslovju so bili naravni elementi do relativno nedavnega skoraj izključno konceptualna domena filozofije, kjer so mislece zaposlovali že od antike.<sup>86</sup> Sedaj postajajo vse bolj aktualna tema premislekov tudi na presečišču ekologije, ekonomije, sociologije in politologije. Sodobno elementarno politično odločanje in delovanje je po namenu in učinkih moč deliti predvsem na dve kategoriji: politike kapitalističnega ekstraktivizma in dominacije, ki degradirajo naravne elemente za vsa živa bitja s ciljem generiranja koristi/dobička za peščico ljudi, ter politike s pozitivnim vplivom na naravne elemente v prid vseh deležnikov, ki jih pogosto sprožajo in v njih vztrajajo staroselske skupnosti oziroma naravekulture, ki so najbolj odvisne od naravnih elementov. Te skupnosti, ki so ponotranjile globoko državljanstvo skrbi zase, za skupnosti in planet,<sup>87</sup> so bile neomajne, čeprav vse bolj nemočne varuhinje naravnih elementov nekdanj in so še danes. Raba ženskega spola je na mestu ne le slovnično, ampak tudi politično, saj v teh bojih vse bolj v ospredje stopajo prav ženske.<sup>88</sup> Že naravoverci pa so se v svoji skromnosti in vztrajnosti zavedali, da »ne za eno zrno, za deževno kapljo se moraš potegniti«.<sup>89</sup>

Čeprav elementalne politične odločitve sprejemajo posamezne človeške skupnosti, učinek njihovih implementacij praviloma presega njihovo teritorialno suvereniteto, zato bi elementarno politično odločanje moralo biti odgovorno do človeških in več-kot-človeških Drugih. Pri-

<sup>86</sup> Gl. npr. David Macauley, *Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water as Environmental Ideas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

<sup>87</sup> Paul B. Clarke, *Deep Citizenship* (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 119.

<sup>88</sup> V (formerly Eve Ensler), »Indigenous women are showing us how to fight for environmental and human rights,« *The Guardian*, 25. 9. 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/sep/25/indigenous-women-brazil-fight-environment-human-rights>.

<sup>89</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 87.



mer tovrstnega zavestnega elementalnega političnega odločanja s posledicami za celoten planet je brazilsko upravljanje z amazonskim gozdom, ki seveda nima posledic le za globalno naravo, ampak za kulturno bogastvo človeštva.<sup>90</sup> Če demokracijo razumemo kot politično namero odgovornega sobivanja z drugimi živimi bitji ob spoštovanju njihove nepremostljive drugosti,<sup>91</sup> je elementalna demokracija politično delovanje s ciljem ohranjanja in izboljšanja stanja naravnih elementov v prid celotnemu ekosistemu. Po primere tovrstnega političnega delovanja nam ni treba na drug konec sveta. Vpis pravice do pitne vode v slovensko ustavo na podlagi referendumu je demonstracija vodnega državljanstva.<sup>92</sup> Civilnodružbeni boji za čistejši zrak v Anhovem ali razstrupitev tal v Mežici sta prav tako primera elementalnega političnega delovanja. Po analogiji z demokracijo vode gre pri Anhovem za demokracijo zraka in v Mežici za demokracijo prsti.

Kopka izpostavlja, da krizo drugih naravnih elementov »niti ne bi mogli nasloviti na ustrezen način, ne da bi bili pozorni na naše dihanje in zrak, ki ga dihamo«.<sup>93</sup> Element zrak resda zaznamuje večja urgentnost zaradi biološke zasnove večine živega, a so tudi vsi ostali elementi živemu enako vitalnega pomena. Naravni elementi so med seboj tako tesno povezani, da ločevanje in kategoriziranje na politiko oziroma demokracijo vode, ognja, zraka in zemlje/prsti ni smiselno, vse so dejansko ena elementalna demokracija. Demokracijo je v tem kontekstu boljše prevajati z močjo/zmožnostjo ljudstva kakor z vladavino ljudstva, saj ljudje naravi ne moremo vladati, s ciljem vrstnega preživetja se ji lahko le znova, po naravoversko zaupljivo in spoštljivo, predamo. Prevlada človeške vrste nad vsem drugim živim ni vzdržna; prilagoditi se bomo

<sup>90</sup> Edward W. Butt in sod., »Amazon deforestation causes strong regional warming,« *PNAS – Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences* 120, št. 45 (2023): 1–8, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.2309123120>.

<sup>91</sup> Luce Irigaray v Aleksander Kopka, »Air Democracy: on the Principles of Breathing Together,« *Sophia* 61 (2022): 138, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-022-00902-7>.

<sup>92</sup> »Vodno državljanstvo so diskurzivni procesi in institucionalne prakse, skozi katere uporabniki vode oblikujejo skupnosti, občutek pripadnosti in lojalnosti zalagam vode in vodni infrastrukturi, skozi katere porazdeljujejo in upravljajo vodo.« Karsten Paerregaard, Astrid Bredholt Stensrud in Astrid Oberborbeck Andersen, »Water Citizenship: Negotiating Water Rights and Contesting Water Culture in the Peruvian Andes,« *Latin American Research Review* 51, št. 1 (2016): 199, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2016.0012>.

<sup>93</sup> Kopka, »Air Democracy,« 146.

morali kompleksnemu sistemu, v katerem ima vse živo enako inherentno vrednost. Kapitalistična interpretacija darvinizma nas je pripeljala na rob propada, zato je skrajni čas za biocentrično reinterpretacijo Darwinovih teorij, morda pa tudi za prizemljeno redefinicijo fiziokracije kot demokracije Zemlje. Kot ugotavlja Vandana Shiva v istoimenski knjigi, »samo demokracija vsega živega je tudi živa demokracija«. <sup>94</sup> Za spremembe ne bo zaleгла nova družbena pogodba, če se človeška družba ne bo prepoznala kot naravakultura. V osnovni šoli sem imela zelo rada predmet Narava in družba. Učni načrti v osnovnih šolah sedaj zajemajo med drugim predmete Družba, Naravoslovje in Spoznavanje okolja, ki je torej »okoli nas«, ločeno od ljudi. Le če bodo učni načrti namesto teh drobitev pripoznali kot ključni predmet Družba v naravi, bodo šolajoče prihodnje generacije imele prihodnost.

Na italijanski strani meje južno od Gorice pred mostom čez Sočo stoji obcestni napis »Fiume sacro« – sveta reka (gl. sliko 3). Svetost Soče je za patriotske Italijane povezana s soško fronto. Kjer teče po slovenskem ozemlju, je za maloštevilne morda tudi danes sveta še iz drugih razlogov.



Slika 3: Obcestna tabla pred mostom čez Sočo v Italiji<sup>95</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* (Boston: South End Press, 2005), 62.

<sup>95</sup> »Una mano di vernice ha oscurato a meta il cartello dell'Isonzo,« *Il Piccolo*, 21. 4. 2018, <https://ilpiccolo.gelocal.it/trieste/cronaca/2018/04/21/news/una-mano-di-vernice-ha-oscurato-a-meta-il-cartello-dell-isonzo-1.16742363>.

Prebivalcem Posočja je Soča večinoma vir, saj njeno izkoriščanje pri-  
naša pitno in industrijsko vodo, električno energijo, ribe, pesek, turi-  
zem. Zanj in za druge primorske vode se zmenimo samo še ob ekscesih  
– suši, poplavih, plazovih. Enako velja za ogenj v naravi, ki mora biti  
kar najhitreje ukročen in zatrt, čeprav so koristi ognja za obnavljanje  
ekosistemov že dolgo znane in je tudi pri požarih preventiva učinkovi-  
tejša od gašenja.<sup>96</sup> »Gašenje požarov« je postal v slovenščini celo frazem  
za prepozen/jalov odziv, a birokratska inercija in politične posledice sen-  
zacionalnih požarov ohranjajo moderni *status quo* pri javnem odnosu  
do ognja. Tudi v domovih nam ogenj ni več dovoljen zaradi splošnega  
onesnaženja s fosilnimi gorivi, s katerimi so predhodne generacije pre-  
tirano razmetavale. Samo še na kakšnem pikniku ali ob prvomajskem  
prazniku se kres sme prižgati in udeleženci se verjetno komaj zmenijo  
za njegovo lepoto in moč. Škof opominja, da je

ogenj kot elementalna sila s tem, ko je ljudi povezoval z božanskim in  
naravnim, materializiral tako ustvarjalnost kot uničevalnost. Z nastopom in-  
dustrijske dobe in povezane rasti pa je po izumu parnega stroja nastala nova  
znanost o toploti, ki je povsem prevladala nad poprejšnjimi mitološkimi, re-  
ligioznimi in filozofskimi premisleki in rabami ognja. Kapitalistični režim to-  
plotne energije je ogenj odtujil ljudem in zadušil elementalni ogenj [...] ogenj  
zdaj podžiga masovno proizvodnjo in vojne; od začetka 20. stoletja, stoletja  
nasilja, pa igra vlogo v procesih, ki zadevajo in uničujejo tudi zrak.<sup>97</sup>

Zrak in zemlja sta nam samoumevna in tudi samoumevno onesnaže-  
vana. Les in kamen imata nalepke s ceno. Ogenj je grožnja. Pitna voda  
je resda v Sloveniji postala ustavna pravica,<sup>98</sup> je pa ujeta v plastenke.  
Elementalni subjekti mnogoterih svetih voda, živih skal, poosebljenih  
vetrov in obrednih ognjev so se zreducirali na abstraktno ednino eko-

<sup>96</sup> Gl. Roger A. Sedjo, »The Politics of Fire,« *Issues in Science and Technology* 19, št. 1 (2002), [https://issues.org/br\\_sedjo/](https://issues.org/br_sedjo/).

<sup>97</sup> Lenart Škof, »Democracy of Breath and Fire: Irigarayan Meditations,« *Sophia* 61 (2022): 121, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-022-00911-6>.

<sup>98</sup> Čeprav se Boelens in Seeman ne izrekata proti politični formalizaciji dostopa do vode, na primeru perujske staroselske skupnosti Janque dokazujeta, da formalna pravica do vode še nikakor ne pomeni zagotovljenega dostopa do vode, dokler niso razrešena temeljna protislovja družbenoekonomskih razmerij moči. Boelens in Seemann, »Forced Engagements,« 9.

nomskih virov.<sup>99</sup> Ljudje smo odmislili, da smo v 99 % tudi mi sestavljeni iz kisika, vodika, dušika, ogljika, kalcija in fosforja. Naravne elemente smo, skratka, od-svetili, popredmetili, poblagovili in spolitizirali. Politizacija je dobesedno segla do neba: antični eter je poln satelitov in onesnažen z njihovimi odpadki, raziskujemo galaksijo z namenom stalne naselitve na drugem planetu, Slovenija je pravkar sprejela državno vesoljsko strategijo. Ker so že naravoverci dobro vedeli, da »vse teče v krogu, vse gre in zopet pride«,<sup>100</sup> se nam to ravnanje tudi že vrača. Skozi zrak, vodo in zemljo zastrupljamo sami sebe. S pretirano sečnjo žagamo vejo, na kateri sedimo kot vrsta. Podnebne spremembe nam kažejo, da naravo potrebujemo veliko bolj kot ona nas. Kot nazorno kaže primer primorskega naravoverstva, z uničevanjem narave uničujemo tudi človeške kulture, če nam že za več-kot-človeške Druge ni dovolj mar.

Zato je zelo na mestu, da se spomnimo tega, kar smo pozabili, ne le da v človeški aroganci kar naprej ponovno izumljamo in se na napakah drago učimo. Naravni elementi so dinamičen in minljiv predpogoj obstoja vsega živega in naše skupno dobro, ki mu velja skupna dolžnost skrbi; v preteklosti smo si odgovornost tako delili za gmajno, ki so ji naravoverci zelo umestno rekli tudi »našina«.

Še naprej se pogovarjamo o elementih, toda zdaj kot o nečem, pred čimer se moramo braniti: pred njihovo krutostjo, še zlasti v nepredvidljivih podnebnih razmerah, pred njihovo muhavostjo in nevarnostjo. [...] A kaj, če so elementi več kakor grožnja? Po cunamijih, potresih in nevihtnih sistemih se še predobro zavedamo elementalnih družbenih razhajanj, bojev in konfliktov. K čemu nas silijo elementi z grožnjo propada?

se sprašujeta Cohen in Duckert.<sup>101</sup> Moj poskus poenostavljenega odgovora bi bil, da nas silijo k prenovi globalnega skupnostnega delovanja na osnovi vedenj in tradicij lokalnih naravkultur.

Mogoče bo k preporodu pripomogla nova klima, ko bodo začeli pihati sveži vetrovi in prinesli sem novo energijo v nabito polnih oblakih, ki bodo

<sup>99</sup> Christopher Hamlin, »Waters' or 'Water'? Master Narratives in Water History and Their Implications for Contemporary Water Policy,« *Water Policy* 2 (2000): 313–314, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1366-7017\(00\)00012-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1366-7017(00)00012-X).

<sup>100</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 441.

<sup>101</sup> Jeffrey J. Cohen in Lowell Duckert (ur.), *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 6.

povzročili odrešujoče deževje, ki bo namočilo posušeno prst, iz katere bo vzkliklo prerojeno in po meri današnjega časa »preoblikovano staroverstvo«, ali če hočeš naravoverstvo. [...] Dobra ideja [se] nikoli ne izniči, ker je pač neuničljiva sila,

sta že pred pol stoletja skupaj dognala Pavel Medvešček in njegov naravoverski sogovornik Frlin.<sup>102</sup> Če to drži, je naravoverstvo res dobra ideja, saj še zmeraj živi, nenazadnje tudi skozi to besedilo. Čas je, da osmislimo in kontekstualiziramo družbene prakse, ki jih je narekovala ta ideja, da bi kot vrsta preživeli in redefinirali razvoj in napredek z odgovornostjo do vseh Drugih.

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<sup>102</sup> Medvešček – Klančar, *Iz nevidne strani neba*, 258.

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# POLJUB Z DIHOM: FILOZOFSKA TEOLOGIJA LJUBEČEGA SREČANJA

Lenart Škof

## Najvišji par

Nato sta Vsedobri, ki je zavest, in Mati Vsedobra sedela združeno, v nedvojnosti.<sup>1</sup>

V simboliki tantrične vezi sta prvobitni spolno-božanski energiji moškega in ženske predstavljeni kot združeni v (stanju) enosti. Njuni telesi, ki žarita ali vibrirata prek okvirov nasprotij obeh spolov – v srečanje najvišjega para –, sta znamenje razsvetljenja in kot taki uresničene izvirnega stanja biti v ljubezni v skladnosti nasprotij. V tem stanju se Vsedobra in Vsedobri, »niti trajna niti nična, kažeta popolna [...] v prvobitnem uvidu velike enakodušnosti«.<sup>2</sup> Tantra uči, da se ljudje v iskanju ljubezni med seboj privlačijo v vez ljubeče mirnosti. Temporalnost tega srečanja – neizmerno kratek trenutek v času, v katerem dva dosežeta to stanje ljubezni – je sama po sebi skrivnost: da bi jo razumeli, moramo najprej preoblikovati logiko ljubezni in dvojice. Kot trdi Ludwig Binswanger, obstaja ženska/moška tubit (*Dasein*) (tu) kot

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<sup>1</sup> *Velika tantra o levovi dovršeni izrazni energiji*, prevod po angl. prevodu odlomkov *The Great Tantra of the Lion's Perfected Display-Energy* (tib.: *Senge rtsal rdzogs chen po'i rgyud*) objavljenih kot »The Ultimate Couple«, prev. Janet Gyatso, v *Buddhist Scriptures*, ur. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (London: Penguin, 2004), 489.

<sup>2</sup> »The Ultimate Couple«, 492, 491.

ljubeče srečanje in ljubezen je prav to odpiranje tubiti za samolastno enost kot praobliko »najinosti« (*Wirheit*).<sup>3</sup> V svojem ontološkem temelju je vsak torej vselej že dvojica v tej skrivnostni in arhaični enosti dvojine.<sup>4</sup> Svet ljubezni se tu razkrije v svoji prvobitnosti: brez srečanja ni ljubezni. Vzajemna privlačnost srečanja tega izvorno dvojnega bitja se nam bo razkrila kot prvobitna ali elementarna kozmična (oziroma kot bomo poskušali pokazati, kvantna) božja energija, ki prehaja skozi par in v njem prebiva kot najvišja izmed vseh vezi: kot objem ljubezni. Kot bomo videli, je Binswanger v zvezi s povezavo med duhovnimi in materialnimi/telesnimi plastmi biti sledil filozofijama Jakoba Böhmeja in Franza von Baaderja ter njunima naukoma o nebeškem androginu kot paradigmi za naše »tuzemsko« hrepenenje po ljubezni.

Vse od začetka indijske verske zgodovine je v starodavnih vedskih sanhitah vez ljubezni pojmovana kot *želja* ali poželenje (imenovana *kama* in *tapas*). V rgvedski hvalnici o stvarjenju imamo (To) Eno (*tad ekam*), ki na skrit način diha vase in iz sebe, ne da bi pri tem kazalo kakršne koli vidne znake življenja.<sup>5</sup> V prvem ontološkem razvoju, ki sledi tej začetni konstelaciji, imamo tako Eno, ki nastane s pomočjo toplote – to je prvobitna kozmična želja ali ljubezen: prvi znak življenja. Ustvarjanje prostora-časa je v Vedah opisano na preddialoški način temeljne razlike v dvojnosti: Eno, ki diha z lastno močjo in obstaja v praznem prostoru tišine ter lahko simbolizira maternico kot lupino bivajočega – svoj prvobitni prostor. Vendar pa je v tej prvi lupini bivajočega *že skrito jedro prvinske topline/ljubezni (spolna razlika), ki je pred mislijo in je edino, kar lahko oživi dih v prvi skupni dih – sodih (konspiracijo oziroma sodihanje dveh)* – in lahko vzpostavi možnost prvega ljubečega diha sveta. Schelling se tega zaveda, ko zapiše: »Kajti tudi duh še ni najvišje; je samo duh, ali dih ljubezni. Ljubezen pa je najvišje. Ljubezen je tisto,

<sup>3</sup> Gl. Lenart Škof, *Antigonine sestre: o matrici ljubezni* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2018), 204.

<sup>4</sup> Dvojina se v indoevropskih jezikih kot slovnično število redko uporablja. Razen v slovenščini se ohranja še v lužiški srbsščini, ki se govori v jugovzhodnem delu Nemčije, v kašubskem narečju, ki ga govorijo prebivalci severne Poljske, v ostankih pa je prisotna še v irščini, škotščini in posameznih litovskih narečjih.

<sup>5</sup> O tem glej Lenart Škof, *Besede vedske Indije* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2005), pogl. »Primerjave v medkulturnosti: začetki indijske in grške filozofije«.

kar je bilo, še preden je bil temelj in obstoječe (kot ločeno), toda še ne kot ljubezen, temveč – kako naj to označimo?»<sup>6</sup>

Oglejmo si zdaj naslednji odlomek iz *Vélike tantré o levovi dovršeni izrazni energiji*, ki ponazarja srčiko srečanja dveh bud. Vsedobra podeli spremljevalnemu budi ta nauk:

Jaz, Nespremenljiva Vsedobra se kažem kot razodevajoče se telo *dharme*. Jaz, Neizrekljiva Vsedobra izkazujem zavedanje onkraj meja pojmovanja. V vse(m)razodevajočem se bistvu prvobitne gnoze ni ne stvarstva ne stvarnika. [...] V posamičnem nastopu zavedanja sta *samsara* in *nirvana* dovršeni/izpopolnjeni. Zavedanje vstopi v polje Vsedobre. Oče-Mati-v-enosti, niti trajna niti nična, se kažeta v čisti obliki.<sup>7</sup>

Kaj bi poleg budističnih naukov ter z njimi povezano simboliko in ikonografijo lahko še ponazarjal ta najvišji par? Katera teološka in spolno opredeljena genealogija utemeljuje to metafizično srečanje? V budističnem nauku nadspolni ljubeči objem v svojem transsubstancijskem telesnem izžarevanju pomeni sam vrh vzvišenega znanja. *Samsara* in *nirvana* sta v tem božanskem dejanju izpolnjeni in oba subjekta tega srečanja dosežeta stanje budovstva, tj. sposobnost prvinskega zavedanja, pri katerem se vse konceptualne razlike in z njimi povezane kategorije kažejo kot navidezne.

Pomembno je povedati, da je Vsedobra oznaka za Samantabhadri, družico Adibuddhe oziroma prazčetnega in najvišjega bude po doktrini ločine Njingma tibetanskega budizma (kjer ta buda nosi ime Samantabhadra).<sup>8</sup> Samantabhadra velja za utelešenje »zavedanja« (tib. *rig pa*). V zgornjem odlomku je vstop zavedanja v Samantabhadri prispodoba za spolno združitev.<sup>9</sup> Simbolizem para kot dveh teles, združenih v eno, je tu ključnega pomena: ponazarja izvorno enost v dvojnosti,

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Izbrani spisi*, prev. Doris Debenjak (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1986), 79. Za več o temah vedskega stvarjenja in Schellingu gl. Lenart Škof, *Etika diha in atmosfera politike* (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2012), Preludij k prvemu delu; in Škof, *Antigonine sestre*, 4. poglavje.

<sup>7</sup> »The Ultimate Couple,« 491, 492.

<sup>8</sup> V tibetanskem budizmu je Adibuddha najvišje bitje in vse bude veljajo za vidike njegove narave kot *šunjate* (praznine). Adibuddha je poosebljenje telesa *dharme*. V Indiji je ta buda znan pod imenom Vadžradhara, v Tibetu pa kot Samantabhadra.

<sup>9</sup> Zahvaljujem se Donaldu S. Lopezu za komentar o tej tantri. Budistična praksa ločine *rnjing-ma* oziroma njingma vključuje spolno dejavnost v nadzorovanih pogojih meditacije, pri

ki presega konceptualno znanje, hkrati pa nakazuje možnost elementarnega razumevanja poti razsvetljenja – saj je tantrična pot razsvetljenja dosegljiva skozi telesno izžarevanje (in *prano* kot njegov bistveni subtilni element). Kot bomo lahko videli, je to stališče zelo blizu Böhmejevi in Baaderjevi mistično-elementarni poti do najvišjega ljubezenskega srečanja, povezanega z možnostjo najvišje oblike sodihanja (*conspiratio*) in *diha-poljuba* (kot izmenjave *pneume*).<sup>10</sup>

In nazadnje, glede logike spolne razlike v budizmu so razlike med zgodnejšimi palijskimi viri, mahajansko šolo in tantrično potjo v vadžrajani. Vprašanje, ali ženske uživajo enak položaj kot moški in lahko dosežejo razsvetljenje ali pa jih moški samo spolno izkoriščajo in si jih prilaščajo kot sredstvo za doseg lastnega razsvetljenja, se pojavlja tudi znotraj teh tradicij. Yael Bentor pravi, da je mogoče v palijski in mahajanski književnosti »najti zelo jasne izjave, ki zanikajo možnost, da bi ženske kot take lahko dosegle razsvetljenje«. <sup>11</sup> Hkrati se obe tradiciji s to temo še vedno spopadata. Dopusčena je možnost, da bi ženske lahko postale razsvetljena bitja, če bi se v drugem življenju spremenile v moške oziroma bi razsvetljenje lahko dosegle samo kot naginiji ali boginje. Tretja možnost za žensko razsvetljenje je povezana s poskusi obeh tradicij, da bi težavo premostili s preseganjem razlikovanja med moškimi in ženskami skozi utrjevanje ideje praznine. V vadžrajani, kamor spada *Velika tantra o levovi dovršeni izrazni energiji*, velja, da so ženske obdarjene z modrostjo (*pradžnjo*), moški pa s sočutjem (ali sredstvom, *upajo*): »Ko se dva združita v spolni praksi, se podata na pot bodhisattve do razsvetljenja, na kateri sta praznina in sredstvo enakovredna. Torej mora biti

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kateri se energija spolnega odnosa z meditacijsko tehniko preoblikuje v obliko znanja oziroma modrost.

<sup>10</sup> O Baaderjevi erotologiji glej njegovih »Štirideset tez iz religiozne erotike«, objavljenih v prevodu Gorazda Kocijančiča v *Posredovanjih* (Celje: Mohorjeva družba, 1996), 333–345. V tem eseju se sicer neposredno ne navezujemo na to Baaderjevo delo, omeniti pa želimo ta stavek iz 28. teze: »V normalni spolni povezanosti – povezanosti preko ljubezni – pomaga moški ženski občudovati, ta pa možu ljubiti, ali mož pomaga ženi v sebi k moškosti, ta pa možu v sebi k ženskosti.« Baader po Kocijančič, *Posredovanja*, 340 isl. V isti tezi Baader omenja tudi svojo idejo izvirne človeške androgynosti.

<sup>11</sup> Yael Bentor, »Can Women Attain Enlightenment through Vajrayāna Practices?«, v *Karmic Practices: Israeli Scholarship on India*, ur. David Shulman in Shalva Weil (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 132.

modrost – ženska – tu enakovredna sredstvu – moškemu.«<sup>12</sup> V tantrični spolni združitvi Samantabhadri in Samantabhadre – kot najvišjem in sublimnem ljubečem srečanju dveh *arhaično popolnih teles* – ni druge kontemplacije kot te, ki ima za objekt samo sebe. To srečanje je čisti dar vsem budam in vsem čutečim bitjem. O elementarni medtelesni dinamiki tega srečanja (izmenjavi in medsebojnem podarjanju subtilnih telesnih energij – *prane*) bomo lahko razmišljali, potem ko si bomo ogledali naslednji primer.

Osredotočimo se zdaj na nekaj bogatih krščanskih analogij s tantrično potjo višje ljubezni in ljubečim srečanjem. Kot Hermann Spreckelmeyer natančno povzema v zgoščen in izčrpn obravnavi Franza van Baaderja (ki ima veliko skupnega z našimi razlagami tantričnih praks), »sta red transcendentnih človeških odnosov in ljubezen tesno povezana« in »kaže, da praksi [Urschuld] kot neljubezen meče senco na svet tako *navznoter usmerjene* kot *medčloveške* ljubezni«. <sup>13</sup> Toda kaj sploh pomeni ta stavek? Praizvirna Ljubezen je bila vselej že izgubljena, skrita in pozabljena. Človeštvo je bilo doslej, v vseh obdobjih svoje zgodovine in v vseh vlogah raziskovalca skrivnosti ljubezni, brez razlike vedno že ujeto v pozabo te prvinske in svete vezi ljubezni. Tu je na Baaderja močno vplival Jakob Böhme, ki je s svojo filozofijo prvobitnega para eden od vrhuncev erotične in spolno opredeljene teologije ljubezni in na tej podlagi razvija lastno filozofsko teologijo ljubezni.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bentor, »Can Women Attain,« 133. Bentor dodaja: »Štirinajsti dalajlama je istega mnenja: »Toda stališče Najvišje joga tantrje je drugačno [od Vinaje, Abhidharme in mahajanske tradicije ...]. V Najvišji joga tantri – denimo v temeljni tantri Guhjasamadža – je možnost, da tantrikinja v svojem življenju ženske doseže, popolno razsvetljenost, navedena izrecno in nedvoumno.« Bentor, »Can Women Attain,« 133.

<sup>13</sup> Hermann Spreckelmeyer, *Die philosophische Deutung des Sündenfalls bei Franz Baader* (Würzburg: C. J. Becker Universitäts Druckerei, 1938), 262. Navajamo po (neobjavljenem) angleškem prevodu Roberta Faasa.

<sup>14</sup> Razlagi *spolno opredeljene teologije* moramo dodati to opombo: termin »spolno opredeljen« smo si izposodili od Luce Irigaray, ki pravi, da je treba ločevati med »spolno opredeljeno (*sexuate*) identiteto« in golo spolnostjo, ki zajema samo »spolne« (*sexual*) vidike človeka.

Med najzgodnejšimi pričevanji o spolnih razlikah v indijskem kontekstu je kozmološko-teološka zgodba o stvarjenju ženske in moškega ter začetkov tega sveta, podana v *Upanišadi Brhadaranjaka*. Najstarejša izmed upanišad tako pravi, da je bil svet v začetku samo eno telo, oblikovano kot človek (*atman*), okrog katerega ni bilo ničesar. Potem pa je do nastanka obeh spolov prišlo tako: »Ni pa [ta človek] imel zares nobenega veselja: zato kdor je sam, ni zadovoljen. Želel je [imeti] drugega. Bil pa je tako velik, kot sta mož in žena, ko sta tesno objeta.

Razen na Baaderja je Böhme močno vplival tudi na Schellinga in Feuerbacha, njegovo razmišljanje o ženski Matrici (v pomenu Sofije in Marije) pa je v sklopu zahodne mistične filozofije edinstveno – Böhme jo predstavlja kot mistično-elementaren preplet ženskih in moških odtenkov Biti, ki se kaže v ideji androginega Kristusa –, povezano s srednjeveško poročno mistiko (*Brautmystik*).<sup>15</sup> Po Böhmejevem mnenju je androgini Kristus »vsakemu spolu to, kar mu/ji manjka do enosti in celovitosti«. <sup>16</sup> V tem pogledu Kristus nastopa v vlogi čistega/popolnega (in spolno opredeljenega) bitja, ki presega razdeljene ali sporne spolne in pojmovne dihotomije kot Adibuddha v budizmu. V okviru tega sta lahko Kristus in Sofija za Böhmeja najvišji nebeški par – kot paradigma najvišje ljubezni in harmonije – sama po sebi, pa tudi kot simbol popolnosti nas ljudi: »zato se imenuje Sofija, / kot Kristusova družica«. <sup>17</sup> Po Böhmeju in njegovi metafiziki dveh spolov v svetu človeških bitij je Adam kot prvo (dvospolno!) bitje (*Urmensch*) zaspal in s tem izgubil rajsko enost z Bogom. Posledično sta bila iz Adama ustvarjena dva spola in odteje je največja človekova želja, da bi si povrnil to prvobitno celovitost: se spet združil z nekdanjo izgubljeno enostjo in celovitostjo v samem jedru svojega bitja. Moški in ženska si zdaj prizadevata, da bi ponovno združila svoja ločena elementarna odtenka (subtilna elementa ognja in luči) dveh nesnovnih polovic v enost – povzdignjena erotična ljubezen bi lahko pripravila nov prostor za to ponovno združitev, in kot bomo

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Svoje telo je razdelil na dvoje in tako sta nastala drug in družica. Zato je Yājñavalkya vedno dejal: »Sva kakor dve polovici deleža.« Tako je ta prostor napolnjen z žensko. Združil se je z njo in rodili so se ljudje.« Škof, *Besede vedske Indije*, 37; 1.4.3. Kot pravi Valerie J. Roebuck, je v sanskrtu *atman* kot povratni zaimsek s pomenom »sebe, se« vedno moškega spola, ne glede na slovnični spol osebe, na katero se nanaša (on/ona/ono se ...) *The Upaniṣads*, prev. in ur. Valerie J. Roebuck (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 396. Atman tako tu prevzame vlogo (moškega) stvarnika boga.

<sup>15</sup> Za njegov vpliv na Schellingovo misel gl. Škof, *Antigonine sestre*, 4. poglavje (»Clara/Matrica«). Za njegov vpliv na Feuerbacha gl. 3. poglavje o Mariji in Sofiji.

<sup>16</sup> Böhmejevi filozofiji sledimo po raziskavi Ernsta Benza, *Der Vollkommene Mensch nach Jacob Böhme* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1937), 7. pogl., »Fall und Geschlecht« (»Padec in spol«), gl. str. 177 za navedek.

<sup>17</sup> Benz, *Der Vollkommene Mensch*, 119. Zanimivo je, da tako v krščanski kot vadžrajanski simboliki ženski pol predstavlja modrost.

zdaj pokazali z Baaderjem, bo izmenjava subtilnih telesnih pnevmatičnih (dihalnih) energij v poljubu z dihom najvišji simbol tega srečanja.<sup>18</sup>

Franz von Baader (1765–1841) je bil sodobnik Schellinga in Feuerbacha. V svojih mističnih delih, ki so izšla iz katoliške tradicije, je Baader razvijal Böhmejev *rajski par v enosti*. Prevzel je motiv izgubljene združenosti ter ga predstavil kot ustvarjalni odnos in magično enost, vidno v naši imanentni želji po transformativnem *sobivanju*. Tako kot njegovi predhodniki (med njimi Paracelsus in Böhme) tudi Baader trdi, da so vsakemu živemu bitju dane elementarne življenjske oblike, ki jih razlaga kot »elektriko in spolno ali erotično energijo«.<sup>19</sup> Od te začetne faze si po Baaderju oba spola (kot na tantrični poti) prizadevata za vrnitev k prvotnemu in izgubljenemu *dvojnemu bitju*. Kot trdi Spreckelmeyer, bi moralo »adamsko bitje« spojiti moške elemente [*ogenj*] in ženske elemente [*luč*] »v dejansko in neločljivo eno ali združeno telesnost.« In nadaljuje:

Po stvarjenju adamskega bitja so se ti elementi znašli v *harmoničnem ravnovesju* [*Temperatur*] in z možnostjo [*posse*] nezdružitve. Bistvo *dvoenotnega bitja* oziroma *prvobitnega para v enosti* je tako pojem človeške *ideje* odnosa kot svetle(če)ga prototipa enosti, [zdaj] pojmovanega kot celota ali celostnost, ker je ta odnos zagotavljal pomen njegovemu obstoju pred Božjim obličjem, večnost *Imago Dei in homine* [podobe Boga v človeku].<sup>20</sup>

To prvobitno adamsko bitje – kot moško/žensko bitje v enosti – je vsenavzoča klica stvarjenja. Sposobnost tega bitja je, da se razmnožuje z združitvijo obeh internih spolnih bitij. Ko je bila z izvirnim grehom ta enost uničena, spolna združitev brez libida ni bila več mogoča in pojavila se je potreba po tretjem elementu, ki bi pomagal človeštvu: »praisvirna podoba tega procesa je troedini Bog«.<sup>21</sup> Med ljudmi je tretji dejavnik te zevajoče vrzeli *vmesnosti* Sveti duh oziroma Sveti dih. Duhovna izmenjava te dihalno-somatske energije se zdaj uteleša v poljubu z dihom: Baader se tu spomni »sijajne legende z Vzhoda, po kateri bi *rajski človek* lahko prebavljal v ustih in se razmnoževal skozi srce s po-

<sup>18</sup> Za Feuerbacha, ki sledi tej misli, je poleg vode dihalni element tisti, ki je jedro naše biti. O tem Škof, *Etika diha*, pogl. »Feuerbach«.

<sup>19</sup> Spreckelmeyer, *Die philosophische Deutung*, 265.

<sup>20</sup> Spreckelmeyer, *Die philosophische Deutung*, 266.

<sup>21</sup> Spreckelmeyer, *Die philosophische Deutung*, 270.

ljubom [skozi *poljub z dihom* ali *objem duha*: s srci ali dušami, ki se objemajo ali sodihajo] [...] Dva, ki se poljubita, resnično dihata skupaj in to, kar nastane z združitvijo obeh dihov, deluje in se prepleta v obeh». <sup>22</sup> Poljub z dihom se udejanja v zgornjem delu človeškega telesa, v tako imenovanem *predelu srca* (Baader doda *predel prsi* kot še en antipod nižje ležečemu širšemu *predelu trebuha*, kjer je sedež nagonov), s katerim so povezani *objem*, *nežen priteg* in *poljub z dihom* – vsi kot izraz ljubezni. Objem in poljub z dihom sta tako najvišja možnost ponovne združitve v pozabljeno in izgubljeno *dvoenotno bitje*. V Pridigi št. 81 o *Visoki pesmi* Bernard iz Clairvauxa poimenuje »Svetega duha *sodihanje* ali poljub Očeta in Sina». <sup>23</sup> Baader razmišlja o tem tako:

[S]odihanje ali Duh zahteva medsebojni objem: kajti ne samo, da sta Oče in Sin (pa tudi moški in ženska) spet eno ali ponovno združena preko *sodiha-nja* ali v njem; oba skupaj in Duh so trije v enem, iz česar se takoj nato ločijo skozi diferenciacijo. <sup>24</sup>

Navdahnjenje človeka z Duhom je čudovito opisal že Hipolit Rimski v *Komentarju k Visoki pesmi* (ki bi lahko bil najstarejši ohranjen krščanski komentar k tej pesnitvi, saj je nastal pred letom 235 n. št.):

2.1 Zdaj pa pogledjmo to povabilo [njega/knjige], v katerem pravi. »Poljubi me s poljubi svojih ust, zakaj tvoje prsi so prijetnejše od vina in vonj tvojega olja za maziljenje opojnejši od vseh kadil in je tvoje ime kakor vonj olja za maziljenje, ki se razliva.«

2.2 Kakšna je volja Duha, v čem [je njegova] moč ali kakšna bi lahko bila razlaga (db. oznaka, znamenje) te skrivnosti? Oznanjati moramo tistim, ki so pripravljeni poslušati, saj je to podoba (db. primer) ljudstva, ki božjo Besedo prosi za poljub, ker *se želi povezati usta na usta*. Kajti [ljudstvo] se želi združiti z močjo Duha.

2.3 In pravi, »Naj me poljublja s poljubi svojih ust«, kar pomeni prav to: po zapovedi, ki jo zapoveduje, naj se izpolni pri meni, saj iz teh ust prihaja ljubezen – [Gospod,] naj te bom vreden. <sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Spreckelmeyer, *Die philosophische Deutung*, 277–278.

<sup>23</sup> Spreckelmeyer, *Die philosophische Deutung*, 279.

<sup>24</sup> Spreckelmeyer, *Die philosophische Deutung*, 279.

<sup>25</sup> Yancy Warren Smith, »Hippolytus' Commentary on the Song of Songs in Social and Critical Context« (dokt. dis., Fort Worth, TX: 2009), 267; naš poudarek.



V razpravi Catherine Keller o teologiji erosa se *poljub* pojavlja v kontekstu *Evangelija po Filipu*, v katerem je Marija Magdalena imenovana Jezusova družica oziroma *koinonos* – kar lahko pomeni »soproga«, »žena« ali »duhovna sopotnica«. V enem od prizorov iz evangelija najdemo te besede: »Družica [Odrešenika] je Marija Magdalena. [Odrešenik] jo je ljubil bolj kot vse učence in jo pogosto poljubljal na [usta].«<sup>26</sup> Ker je v izvirnem rokopisu vrzel, se Keller pridružuje tistim razlagalcem, ki menijo, da so mesto poljuba na telesu najverjetneje usta. Čeprav se je beseda poljub pogosto uporabljala v pomenu spolnega odnosa, se avtorica strinja z Robertom Priceom, da je ta gesta še vedno duhovnega in metaforičnega značaja.<sup>27</sup> Za poljub med Jezusom in Marijo Magdaleno pa je še ena razlaga: lahko bi simboliziral njuno edinstveno duhovno srečanje, pri katerem sta si izmenjala dih v *poljubu z dihom*. V *Antigoninih sestrah* smo že navedli, da se je vstali Jezus najprej prikazal Mariji Magdaleni *in šele potem dahnil* v svoje učence zalogo svojega božanskega Diha (Jn 20,22: »In ko je to izrekel, je dihnil vanje in jim dejal: ‚Prejmite Svetega duha!‘«).<sup>28</sup> Po našem razumevanju dogodka Njegovega vstajenja Jezus najprej izmenja Sveti dih z Marijo Magdaleno (ona je prva apostolka in njegova duhovna družica), šele nato ga dahne v apostole. V *Evangeliju po Janezu* smo priča trenutku v trinitarični krizi, ko Jezus reče Mariji Magdaleni, naj se ga ne dotika (»Ne oklepaj se me!; *me mou haptou*«), ker, pravi, »nisem še šel gor k Očetu [...]« (Jn 20,17). Prepoved dotikanja Jezusa prav v tem trenutku je po našem razumevanju povezana z idiosinkratičnim *pnevmatičnim* (in ne haptičnim) pomenom: tu smo namreč priča dotiku znotraj *etično-dihalnega intervala* med neodvisnima telesoma in dihom, srečanju popolnoma božjega značaja, oznanjenju nove duhovne vezi ali sodihanja – prihoda ljubezni na ta svet, ko bodo možje in žene postali spiritualni bratje in sestre in ljubezni tako, da si bodo v bodoči skupnosti sočutno delili dih.

<sup>26</sup> *Filipov evangelij*, v *Zgodnjekrščanski spisi*, ur. Klaus Berger in Christiane Nord; urednika slovenske izdaje Gorazd Kocijančič in Vid Snoj (Celje: Celjska Mohorjeva družba, 2015), 949. Gl. o tem Catherine Keller, »She Talks Too Much': Magdalene Meditations,« v *Theology of the Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, ur. V. Burrus in C. Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 240 isl.

<sup>27</sup> Keller, »She Talks Too Much',« 241.

<sup>28</sup> *Sveto pismo Stare in Nove zaveze: Slovenski standardni prevod* (Ljubljana: Svetopisemska družba Slovenije, 1997), 1637.

*Odrešenik jo je ljubil bolj kot vse učence in jo pogosto poljubljal na usta* – ta vez med njima (Marija Magdalena kot Jezusova *koinonos*) je bila napoved še nerazkrite skrivnosti vstajenja. V tem pogledu Jezusovo prikazanje Mariji Magdaleni zahteva zdaj ta najvišji dogodek *diha poljuba* z njo kot predpogoj za deljenje njegovega božanskega Diha z učenci in človeštvom: Jezus in Marija Magdalena sta najvišji par.

Vrnimo se zdaj k Baaderju. John Trinick pravi, da se šele iz »neodvisnega in ločenega darovanja sebe, ki *sta ga vzajemno udejanjili* različni telesnosti, lahko razvije ljubeče srečanje, pri katerem se lahko njuni duševnosti skupaj povzdigneta na pravo raven svoje resnične enosti«. <sup>29</sup> Pri Baaderju se *telesnosti* srečata predvsem v objemu in poljubu. Po analogiji z naukom sv. Bernarda o Svetem duhu kot *poljubu* Očeta in Sina sta za Trinicka »[b]itji, ki se objameta, resnično združeni v dihu, ki jima je skupen. [...] Baader govori o možnosti zedinjenja dveh duš z vzajemnim ‚navdihovanjem‘. [...] Skratka, obstaja ‚sodihanje‘ bitij, nekakšno zedinjenje skozi dih«. <sup>30</sup> To somatsko-pnevmatično *sodihanje ljubezni* – kot izmenjava duhovnih(-dihalnih) energij (*pnevme* in *prane*) – je torej najvišje dejanje ljubečega srečanja in kot tako podobno najvišjim oblikam spolnega objema med budami v tantrah ali v poljubu z dihom med Jezusom in Marijo Magdaleno.

To somatsko-pnevmatično *sodihanje ljubezni* je zdaj treba razumeti dobesedno: tako v tantričnem kot v krščanskem kontekstu dihalni ali pranični vidiki telesa ponazarjajo subtilne snovno-energetske plasti naše biti. Duhovno je v tem primeru »telesno-energetsko«: vez ljubezni nakazuje izmenjavo naših notranjih dihalnih energij. Ta opis se ujema z razmišljanjem o energiji pri Catherine Keller, ko omenja Williama Blakea, ki je binarnost med dušo in telesom v zahodnjaški filozofiji dekonstruiral z osupljivim vnovičnim vpeljevanjem ideje energije, in sicer z besedami:

Energija je edino življenje in izvira iz telesa, razum pa je meja  
ali zunanji obod energije.  
Energija je večna radost. <sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> John Trinick, *The Fire-Tried Stone* (Cornwall: Worders of Cornwall Ltd., 1967), 101.

<sup>30</sup> Trinick, *The Fire-Tried Stone*, 102.

<sup>31</sup> William Blake, »To Nobodaddy,« v *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ur. David V. Erdman in Harold Bloom (New York: Anchor Books, 1985), 471; navedeno po Catherine Keller, »The Energy We Are: A Meditation in Seven Pulsations,« v *Cosmology, Ecology, and*

Pri ideji energije kot radosti ne gre za banalnost sebičnega čutnega užitka ali hedonistične dobrine; gre za veliko več, saj njen pomen sega na kozmološko-ontološko raven bivanja. Že v 20. letih prejšnjega stoletja je Whitehead trdil, da se »[v]sak tok energije podreja ‚kvantnim pogojem‘«,<sup>32</sup> in kot ob Keller ugotavlja več kvantnih fizikov, da poskus, povezani z Bellovim teoremom, kažejo, da »delca, ki se povežeta na kakršen koli elementaren način, dejansko ohranjata to povezavo, tudi če sta nato [prostorsko] ločena.«<sup>33</sup> Ta skrivnostna in hkrati *snovna/elementarna* prepletenost delcev – če jo prevedemo v našo telesno-energetsko bit – nakazuje, da na tem telesu skrivnostne energije [tj. kvantnem polju] subsistirata dve duši in da so naša telesa stkana iz pretanjenih medsebojno sporazumevajočih se energij, ali kot se nazadnje sprašuje Keller – je torej Bog »tisti, ki vsemu v vsem *daje zagon* [...] energijo naše intimne/neskončne prepletenosti?«<sup>34</sup>

Ob upoštevanju problema domnevno izključujoče heteronormativnosti, ki je viden tako v tibetanskih mantrah kot v Böhmejevem krščanskem mysticismu, še zlasti in poudarjeno pa v Baaderjevi misli, moramo potrditi, da so geste objema, ljubečega srečevanja, enosti skozi spolno združitev in poljuba z dihom znamenja *enega hrepenečega* človeštva – žena, mož in oseb onkraj dualnosti spolnih ali kakršnih koli drugih identitet –, ki si prizadeva doseči nekoč izgubljeni kraj popolne relacijskosti, vzajemne predanosti in višje ljubezni. Amy Hollywood piše o tem, ko razmišlja o mistikinjah: »Ko mistikinje pišejo o tem, kako željno poljubljajo sveto rano [predstavljeno kot vulvo], izpodnašajo svoj odnos s Kristusom, saj je poželenje, s katerim se enačijo, tako moško kot žensko.«<sup>35</sup> Še več, ker mistikinje uporabljajo nadvse erotičen jezik in

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*The Energy of God*, ur. Donna Bowman in Clayton Crockett (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 14.

<sup>32</sup> Albert North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 309; navedeno po Keller, »The Energy We Are«, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Keller, »The Energy We Are«, 22. Gl. tudi: »Če kakor koli vplivamo na delec *a*, se bo z njim prepleteni delec *b* – čeprav se je morda znašel v milijardo svetlobnih let oddaljeni galaksiji, odzval, kot da ste vplivali tudi nanj. In odzval se bo takoj. Malin meni, da [se] takšna povezava vzpostavi, ker oba dogodka tvorita eno(tno) ustvarjalno dejanje, eno dejansko entiteto, ki izhaja iz skupnega [energetskega] polja potencialnosti«.

<sup>34</sup> Keller, »The Energy We Are«, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Amy Hollywood, »Sexual Desire, Divine Desire; Or, Queering the Beguines,« v *Theology of the Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, ur. V. Burrus in C. Keller (New York:

metaforiko, pogosto izzivajo normativno heteroseksualnost krščanske kulture in vere. Pri nekaterih od njih

spol postane tako radikalno fluiden, da ni jasno, *katera* spolna usmerjenost – znotraj dihotomije heteroseksualnost/homoseksualnost, ki se modernemu bralcu najprej ponudi – je uporabljena za prikaz odnosa med človekom in bogom. [... I]ntenzivnost božanskega poželenja sili spolni jezik v nove, nepoznane konfiguracije. Zato se je v poznem srednjem veku pojavilo to, kar Lochrie umestno imenuje »mistični kvir«.<sup>36</sup>

Lep primer tega je Mechthild iz Magdeburga, ki v svojem nekako tantrično obarvanem delu *Tekoča luč Boštva* na erotiziran način pripoveduje o svoji izkušnji srečanja z Bogom. Njene besede so najbolj subtilno pričevanje o človeško-božanskem ljubezenskem srečanju:

Tako gre najdražja k najlepšemu v skrite sobane  
nevidnega božanstva. Tam najde posteljo in tabor  
ljubezni, od Boga na nadčloveški način pripravljena.

Nato naš Gospod spregovori:

»Ustavite se, plemenita duša!«

»Kaj veliš, Gospod?«

»Sleči bi se morali!«

»Gospod, kaj se bo potem zgodilo z mano?«

»Plemenita duša, vi ste tako zelo zasidrana v moji naravi,  
da ne sme biti ničesar med vami in mano.«

Naposled je po njuni skupni želji  
nastopila blažena tišina.

On se je predal njej  
in ona se je predala Njemu.

Kaj se ji zdaj godi, to ve ona,  
in to me tolaži.

Vendar ne more dolgo trajati;  
kjer ljubimca skrivaj prideta skupaj,  
se morata vselej znova raziti, ne da bi se pri tem ločila.<sup>37</sup>

To srečanje je normativne narave, vendar sta vlogi ljubimcev še vedno zamenljivi: srečanje tu ne implicira samo heteroseksualno oprede-

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Fordham University Press, 2006), 120.

<sup>36</sup> Hollywood, »Sexual Desire«, 122.

<sup>37</sup> Alen Albin Širca, *Teopoetika: študije o krščanskem mističnem pesništvu* (Ljubljana: KUD Logos, 2007), 127–128.

ljene bližine, temveč – kot kažejo zgornji verzi – priča o najvišji, popolni izkušnji *dvojine, ki postaja eno: da ne sme biti ničesar med vami in mano [...] / nastopila [je] blažena tišina [...]*. To se čudovito ujema z naslednjimi verzi iz pesmi Nika Grafenauerja o intervalu dvojine, ki temelji na dveh v ljubezni združenih dihih:

nad mizo v vrtu dihindih.  
večnost naslonjena na nič  
med nama.<sup>38</sup>

Končno lahko zdaj to ugotovitev uglasimo z opombo Amy Hollywood, da pri drugi mistikinji – Hadewijch – bližina posameznika božanskemu »spodkopava vsakršno ustaljeno razliko med moškim in žensko in [...] asociiranje moškosti z božanskim in ženskosti s človeškim [...]«. <sup>39</sup> Lahko pa jo povežemo tudi s čudovito in vzvišeno predstavo ljubezni v tantrični podobi združenega para, ki se v srečanju kaže v popolnosti in čistosti, netrajna in nenična.

Ker vedno iščemo bližino in dotik, je vsako srečanje dveh človeških bitij – kot bomo pokazali v nadaljevanju – stik in intimnost dveh v obljudi zedinjenja njunih še vedno skrivnostno prepletenih življenj. Ob naših srečanjih in stikih, še zlasti kadar si delimo prostore svojih spolno opredeljenih identitet, si izmenjujemo energije (odtenke bivanja), toda tudi upe, strahove in spomine, ki smo jih podedovali od svojih prednikov. Najvišji par, kot je predstavljen v tantričnem in krščanskem kontekstu, je tako najvišji simbol te človeško-božanske ljubezni: vezi dvojine, zapečatene z objemom in ustoličene onkraj vsakršne konceptualne, spolne ali ontološke dihotomije in ovire – in v tem pogledu je vsak ljubeč par najvišji par.

<sup>38</sup> Niko Grafenauer, *Dihindih* (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2000), 125.

<sup>39</sup> Hollywood, »Sexual Desire,« 128.

## Lupina intime

dih z ustnicami v dih, oko v oko  
(Niko Grafenauer)<sup>40</sup>

Kakšna je torej logika ljubečega para? Kakšno hrepenenje in prepletenost dveh sta zaobjeta v konspiraciji (*kot* sodihanju) srečanja, enosti – kot bi rekel Binswanger – kot praoblike »najinosti«? Proti kateri ontološki plasti se giblje tišina miru vrhunca takega srečanja – kot ga ponazarjajo budistične, krščanske in Binswangerjeve obravnave ljubezni, kjer se telesnosti srečata v objemu in poljubu in za neskončno kratek trenutek v času zadržita dih v pričakovanju prihajajočega čudeža ljubezni? V skrivnostni tišini tega trenutka prebiva ljubezen. V trenutku z dihom podprte dvojine postanemo eno in kot v Mechthildinem srečanju *nastopi blažena tišina* (»*tišina* brezglasja« pri Binswangerju)<sup>41</sup> ter nas ovije v nežen kokon dvojine: nekakšno kopijo prvobitnega pomaterničenja ali izžarevanja ljubezni iz Prvega diha.

Želimo se še poglobiti v telesno logiko ljubečega srečanja in njegovo intimo – kot horizont ljubezni, ki izžareva iz srečanja dveh telesnih in čutnih subjektivnosti. *Pot ljubezni* Luce Irigaray je nedvomno najbolj razdelano razmišljanje o tej intimnosti;<sup>42</sup> po našem mnenju lahko v poglavju Potovanje k izvoru intimnega najdemo najbolj izpopolnjeno predstavitev logike dvojine v povezavi z našim prevpraševanjem ljubečega srečanja. To poglavje je posvečeno govoru, »s katerim bi razkrili za zdaj še nema področja biti«.<sup>43</sup> Irigaray želi v tem delu proučiti modalitete srečevanja enega bitja z drugim: geste, ki jih je treba iznajti, da bi izpolnili obet srečanja – in novega, še vedno neznanega področja našega sobivanja. Tu v srečanje vstopi božanskost. Za Irigaray je ta »v novem poslušanju sebe in drugega, da bodo [nove besede srečanja] lahko od-

<sup>40</sup> Grafenauer, *Dihindih*, 117.

<sup>41</sup> Ludwig Binswanger, *Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins* (Heidelberg: Roland Asanger Verlag, 1993), 179.

<sup>42</sup> Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, prev. Heidi Bostic in Stephen Pluháček (London: Continuum, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 45.

krite, izrečene«. <sup>44</sup> In prav tu za tako srečanje potrebujemo nov horizont – novo razodetje božanskega:

In ni rečeno, da bi nam stari bogovi ali boginje lahko služili za vodnike. Morda zdaj odkrivamo odnos do boga, ki je drugačen od tistega, ki smo ga doslej poznali, do boga, ki ne živi le skupaj z ljudmi, temveč v njih samih, in ki ga moramo sprejeti medse ter mu prisluhniti [...] Nebo in bogovi so v najbolj božanskem v sebi povezani z dihanjem in lahko skozi dih komunicirajo z zemljo in smrtniki, bivajo v njih in med njimi. <sup>45</sup>

Mayra Rivera predstavi to razodetje božanskega v sijajnem esej o teologiji relacijske transcendence. V njem raziskuje »prežetost telesa in ljudi s transcendenco in njeno širšo kozmično razsežnost, kjer se transcendenca kaže kot erotično kozmološko utelešenje«. <sup>46</sup> Rivera pravilno ugotavlja, da levinasovsko srečanje iz oči v oči potrebuje teološko-eritično razširitev v spolni ali erotični stik telesa s telesom (kože s kožo). Razvijajoč horizontalno transcendenco Luce Irigaray, Rivera potrdi, da erotično srečanje »zahteva imaginarij, ki lahko sprejme telesno transcendenco – kot telesa v stiku in *drugega v drugem*«. <sup>47</sup> V njenem imaginariju spolnega stika/srečanja je potreba po dinamičnem intervalu, razdalji med telesoma, ki lahko zaščiti in obvaruje njuno dvojino. Rivera tu zastavi vprašanje »Si smemo predstavljati Boga kot živ in dinamičen ovoj, ki naju povezuje in hkrati varuje razdaljo med nama? Ovoj, ki razmejuje ‚prostor‘ razlike in odpira bitja za relacijsko neskončnost, ki se spreminja kot posledica odnosov v različnosti?« <sup>48</sup>

Čeprav Irigaray tega v svojih delih izrecno ne priznava, je njen ključni predhodnik na tej poti ljubezni kot *horizontalno-božanskega srečanja* nedvomno Ludwig Feuerbach. Njega so pogosto šteli za zagovornika

<sup>44</sup> Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 50, 51.

<sup>46</sup> Mayra Rivera, »Ethical Desires: Toward a Theology of Relational Transcendence,« v *Theology of the Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, ur. Virginia Burrus in Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 256.

<sup>47</sup> Rivera, »Ethical Desires,« 260; naš poudarek.

<sup>48</sup> Rivera, »Ethical Desires,« 265. Rivera je kritična do heteronormativnosti Luce Irigaray in tudi do telesnih lastnosti, ki jih ta ne obravnava – kot so »polt, tekstura las, brazgotine na koži, oblika postave kot rasni označevalec« (269) – in ki so vsa znamenja natančno določenih *spominov* teh teles. Ostaja vprašanje, ali Irigarayjina misel res ne more pripustiti in sprejeti tovrstnih razlik.

materialistične filozofije religije, z vidika teologije pa je njegova misel veljala preprosto za ateistično. Kot osamljen mislec v dobi velikanov, kakršen je bil Hegel, Feuerbach ni bil pripravljen slediti vertikalnim teološkim modusom razodetja in ontološkim shemam, povezanim z njimi. Njegov predlog antropološkega jedra religije je bil kritiziran in zavrnjen ter večinoma pozabljen. Toda če prisluhnemo najboljčutljivejšim in z elementarnim najbolj prežete odlomke iz njegovih del, lahko v njih že zaslišimo Luce Irigaray: za Feuerbacha iskanje božanskega pomeni, da Bog zdaj *ne živi le skupaj z ljudmi, temveč v njih samih, zato moramo ga sprejeti medse in mu prisluhniti*:

Kar je človeku *bog, to je njegov duh, njegova duša*, in to, kar je človeku *duh, njegova duša, njegovo srce, to je njegov bog*; bog je razodeta notranjost, je izgovorjeni človekov jaz; religija je praznično razkritje skritega človekovega zaklada, izpoved njegovih najbolj notranjih sil, *javno priznanje njegove ljubezenske aktivnosti*.<sup>49</sup>

Bog se razodeva v intimnosti naše biti in njenih skrivnostih – biti, za katero je že Feuerbach pokazal, da je vedno intersubjektivna, dialektična in odnosnostna. Prav ta skrivnostna vez ljubezni (ljubezni kot energije) deluje med nami, ko je sebstvo omejeno z inherentnim občutkom odnosnosti in odvisnosti:

Samo v občutjih in ljubezni ima *ta* – ta oseba, ta stvar, se pravi, partikularno – absolutno vrednost, samo takrat je *končno neskončno*. V tem in samo v tem je bistvo neskončne globine, božanskosti in resnice ljubezni. [...] *Resnična dialektika ni monolog osamljenega misleca s samim seboj. Je dialog med »jaz« in »ti«*.<sup>50</sup>

Ljubezen je skrivnost preobražanja končnega v neskončno; moj lastni jaz, sprva zaprt v lastne meje, se odpre naravi kot svojemu resničnemu in inherentno elementarnemu (ter kot bomo videli, energetskemu) jedru. Dve bitji se srečata v intimnosti stika.

<sup>49</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Bistvo krščanstva*, prev. Frane Jerman in Božidar Kante (Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1982), 90.

<sup>50</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, v *Kritiken und Abhandlungen II (1839–1843)*, ur. Erich Thies, 3. zv. *Werke in sechs Bänden*, Theorie Werkausgabe (Frankfurt ob Majni: Suhrkamp, 1975), 299 isl., 321. Več o tem v naši analizi intersubjektivnosti pri Feuerbachu v Škof, *Etika diha*, 55–90 (tudi v povezavi s Fichtejem).



Feuerbach utemeljuje svojo filozofijo čutnosti z naravnimi elementi, najprej z vodo in zrakom (ves svoj nauk je poimenoval »dihhalno-vodno zdravstvo«; *pneumatische Wasserheilkunde*)<sup>51</sup>. Tem elementom je pridružil še človeka kot element narave skupaj s telesnimi organi oziroma deli telesa (očmi, glavo, srcem, želodcem, spolnim organom), med katerimi zaseda vodilno mesto (kot temeljni organ zaznavanja) nihče drug kot *koža*: z etičnega vidika lahko tako kožo obravnavamo kot organ za tip, objem, stisk in različne telesne stike, vključno s spolnostjo. Filozofija čutnosti ima tako svoj začetek v telesu, ki ga obdaja porozna koža, ter po Feuerbachu telo zdaj v polnosti diha in žari s kožo in skozi njo. V povezavi s prej obravnavanim spolnim srečanjem in poljubom z dihom je koža (denimo ustnice) prag našega utelešenega sebstva, lupina naše telesne biti. Koža predstavlja telesno intenco in mejo naše subjektivnosti v odnosu do človeškega in božanskega, ali kot je zapisal Feuerbach:

Skozi telo jaz ni jaz, temveč objekt. Biti v telesu pomeni biti v svetu. Koliko čutov – koliko por. Telo ni nič drugega kot *porozni* jaz [...] Toda najbolj bistveno, izvirno, neizogibno z jazom povezano nasprotje jaza je – telo, meso, konflikt med duhom in mesom, ki je, gospodje moji, najvišji *principium metaphysicum*, nič manj kot skrivnost stvarjenja, temelj sveta. Ja, meso, ali, če vam je ljubše, telo, nima le naravnozgodovinskega ali empirično-psihološkega pomena, temveč ima tudi bistveno spekulativnega, metafizičnega.<sup>52</sup>

Človek je bitje narave, toda Feuerbach o božanskosti razmišlja tudi tako: Bog ni nič drugega kot narava; v tem smislu in bolj radikalno razmišlja tudi v povezavi z božjo osebo Jezusa Kristusa: »Inkarnacija je bila solza božjega sočutja, torej pojav *človeško čutečega*, torej *bistveno človeškega bitja*.«<sup>53</sup> Po Feuerbachovem mnenju sta torej človeški in božanski svet tesno povezana, saj je oba mogoče razumeti kot naravo:

<sup>51</sup> Feuerbach, *Bistvo krščanstva*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, »Einige Bemerkungen über den 'Anfang der Philosophie' von Dr J. F. Reiff,« *Kritiken und Abhandlungen II (1839–1843)*, ur. Erich Thies, 3. zv. *Werke in sechs Bänden*, Theorie Werkausgabe (Frankfurt ob Majni: Suhrkamp, 1975), 138 in 139.

<sup>53</sup> Feuerbach, *Bistvo krščanstva*, 129. V 1. poglavju spisa *Bistva religije* pravi: »Tisto od človeškega bistva ali Boga, katerega opis je *Bistvo krščanstva*, razlikovano in neodvisno bitje – bitje brez človeškega bitja, človeških lastnosti, človeške individualnosti – ni v resnici nič drugega kot narava.« Ludwig Feuerbach, »Das Wesen der Religion,« v *Kritiken und Abhandlungen III (1844–1866)*, ur. Erich Thies, 4. zv. *Werke in sechs Bänden*, Theorie Werkausgabe (Frankfurt ob Majni: Suhrkamp, 1975), 81.

»Božansko bitje, ki se razodeva skozi naravo, ni nič drugega kot narava sama.«<sup>54</sup> V tem odnosu do narave občutljivost zamenja spekulativnost – kar je popolnoma v nasprotju z v tem smislu hladnim Kantom, Heglom ali spekulativno teologijo. Intersubjektivnost kot odnosnost je mogoče razumeti edino skozi to novopridobljeno občutljivost, ki temelji na elementarnih virih narave – ti pa so voda, zrak, zemlja, hrana in svetloba. Čutna zaznava (koža) je zdaj za Feuerbacha dobesedno »organ absoluta«.<sup>55</sup> Naj nazadnje omenimo še *Načela filozofije prihodnosti*, v katerih Feuerbach tako opredeljuje intersubjektivno bitje: »*Samota* pomeni *končnost in omejenost*, *skupnost* pomeni *svobodo in neskončnost*. Človek *za sebe* je samo človek (v običajnem pomenu); *človek s človekom* – *enost*, *mene* in *tebe* – pa je *Bog*.«<sup>56</sup>

Ali bomo torej končno pripravljeni sprejeti in gostiti tega Boga med nami – v srečanju in intimnosti dvojine?

### Dvojina – kvantno srečanje?

Ljubezen lahko iščemo s pomočjo narave. Zdaj se moramo spomniti Whiteheadovega opisa energije te narave, ko trdi, da se *ves tok energije podreja kvantnim pogojem*. V naši interpretaciji Nolanovega filma *Medzvezdje* smo videli, da se podobno, kot »skrivnostna« ali znanstveno še neodkrita odnosnost povezuje brano in višjedimenzionalni hiperprostor (ter njegova hipotetična »bitja« v vsaki od kategorij), enaka relacijskost pojavlja tudi med trenutkoma v času.<sup>57</sup> Potrdili smo, da mora biti v kvantnih pogojih naš čas na nam še neznan način povezan s temporalnostjo nekega »Boga«, ki tako rekoč posega v naše »običajne« svetove prek učinkov, ki smo se jih naučili razumeti kot »čudeže« (mednje spadajo naključna srečanja, iskrice ljubezni ali telepatija). Predvideli smo tudi, da bi zdaj – podobno – lahko Bog obstajal kot najvišje bitje iz hiperprostora: če On (Jezus) obstaja kot tako bitje in če nekako (zagonetno) *prehaja* skozi naše svetove, bi njegova »težnost« lahko vplivala na nas na načine, ki so nam še

<sup>54</sup> Feuerbach, »Das Wesen,« 86.

<sup>55</sup> Feuerbach, *Grundsätze*, 304.

<sup>56</sup> Feuerbach, *Grundsätze*, 321.

<sup>57</sup> Lenart Škof, »The Futurity of God,« *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 21, št. 1 (2022): 136–157, <https://jcr.org/archives/21.1/Skof.pdf>.

nedoumljivi in jih še ne zmoremo opisati. Taki domnevi daje podlago ta hipoteza: smiselna in večinoma verjetna je domneva, da sil, polj in delcev hiperprostora – če obstajajo – še dolgo ne bomo mogli čutiti ali videti. Ko bitje iz hiperprostora prehaja skozi naše brane, ne bomo videli snovi, ki tvorijo to bitje. Presek bitja bo prozoren... Po drugi strani pa bomo vendarle *zaznali* težnost takega bitja ter njegovo ukrivljanje prostora in časa. Če se, denimo, hipersferično bitje pojavi v meni (na primer v mojem »trebuhu«) in poseduje dovolj močen gravitacijski privlak, lahko v trebuhu občutim krče, ko se moje mišice napnejo in poskušajo preprečiti, da bi jih posrkalo v središče krožnega preseka tega bitja.<sup>58</sup>

Toda ali ni to le nekoliko neizdelana razlaga za to, kar se dejansko dogaja, ko začutimo *gravitacijski privlak* osebe, v katero smo zaljubljeni? Predpostavimo zdaj kot Feuerbach, da nismo nič drugega kakor *porozni* jaz, telesno-čutno bitje, obdano s kožo, ko občutimo osebo, ki jo ljubimo, ko o njej razmišljamo ali se z njo srečamo, se nam koža vzburja in nenadoma vzdrhti. Transcendenca drugega me vsega zaobjame – pretanjeno se spopade z mojim poroznim jazom kakor v napovedi ljubečega srečanja, v katerem se bo oblikoval par. Vznemirjenje spreleti telo, da zavibrira. Ta gravitacijski privlak v mojem telesu se zdaj nekako spremeni v občutek drhtenja (*»metuljčkov v trebuhu«*): znamenje prisotnosti ljubezni v nekom, ki ga zdaj lahko razumemo dobesedno. V jeziku kvantne fizike lahko to prijetno vznemirjenje ob ljubečem srečanju opišemo tako:

[V]esolje in vse njegove sestavne dele tvori energija z različnimi stopnjami vzburjenja. Ljudje, mize, stoli, drevesa, zvezdne meglenice in tako naprej so vzorci dinamične energije, razvrščeni na ozadju (kvantnem vakuumu) mirne, nevzburjene energije [...] [Č]e postavimo dve kovinski plošči zelo blizu skupaj, druga drugo privlači zaradi neznatnega pritiska kvantnega vakuuma na vsako od njiju. Vrsta transcendence, ki jo ponazarja kvantni vakuum, je podobna tisti, ki je opisana kot *dao* ali praznina (šunjata) v mnogih daoističnih, hindujskih in budističnih besedilih.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Kip Thorne, *The Science of Interstellar* (New York in London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 192 isl.

<sup>59</sup> Danah Zohar in Ian Marshall, *Duhovna inteligenca*, prev. Erik Majaron (Tržič: Učila, 2000), 18. Glej tudi: »Na začetku tega poglavja sem govorila o kvantnem vakuumu – temeljnem energijskem stanju vesolja, viru vsega obstoječega. Poudarila sem, da je vakuum poslednja transcendentna realnost, opisljiva znotraj fizike. To je miren, tih 'ocean', na katerem se vse

Praznina torej – ali nemara rajši *dih ljubezni*? Vstop drugega vame je učinek energije ljubezni, višji in bolj sublimen izraz gravitacije. Podobno kot v primeru iz knjige Kipa Thorna *Znanost v Medzvezdju* (kjer se hipersferično bitje iz hiperprostora z dovolj močnim gravitacijskim privlakom pojavi v mojem trebuhu) lahko, kadar se vznemirimo zaradi privlaka katere druge vrste (ki ga za zdaj slutimo, vendar ga še nismo sposobni pojasniti), po analogiji s še vedno nepojasnjeno in skrivnostno *temno snovjo* ta občutek ljubezni v trebuhu poimenujemo kot skrivnostno – toda zaznavno – navzočnost *temne sile ljubezni* v telesu. Po Schopenhauerju se občutek, ko smo nekomu storili krivico, v našem telesu pojavi kot *občutje neprijetnosti* v notranjosti (bolečina v trebuhu), kot posledica in izraz naše slabe vesti. Ta notranji občutek tvori *korespondenco* med bitji prek *vozlišča*, imenovanega »Volja«, ki je povezan s pojavom telepatije.<sup>60</sup> Prepletenost skozi telepatijo lahko dalje razumemo kot obliko še nerazkrite sinhronosti v logiki same duše – razkritje korespondence, pri kateri bi *dih (temne sile) ljubezni* deloval kot povezovalni neksus. Ta nepojasnjena in subtilna energija v dihu se bo zdaj končno razkrila kot kozmična vez – tišina in mirnost božjega polja, ki izžareva intimo dvojice ali para. To je zdaj pričevanje za subtilno energijo v dihu, ki prede ovoj ali kokon ljubezni.<sup>61</sup>

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Naša vzajemno prepletena življenja morajo tako ali drugače obstajati v skupnem *sonihajočem* polju in v teh redkih, toda toliko intenzivnejših trenutkih izžarevanja matrice ljubezni smo se kot ljudje zmožni pov-

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bivajoče pojavi kot ‚valovi‘ (oscilacije energije). Prva stvar, ki se pojavi iz vakuuma, je energetsko polje, znano kot Higgsovo polje. Izpolnjeno je z zelo hitrimi, koherentnimi oscilacijami energije, ki so izvor vseh polj in temeljnih delcev v vesolju. To polje je samo po sebi velikanski Bose-Einsteinov kondenzat. Če je protozavest temeljna lastnost vesolja, potem obstaja protozavest v Higgsovem polju in *kvantni vakuum postane zelo podoben temu, kar mistiki imenujejo ‘imanentni Bog’, Bog znotraj vsega. [...] ‘Bog’ je pravo središče jaza.*« Zohar in Marshall, *Duhovna inteligenca*, 90; naš poudarek.

<sup>60</sup> Več o tem v našem prihajajočem članku o telepatiji pri Schopenhauerju.

<sup>61</sup> Prim. John D. Caputo, *Cross and Cosmos: A Theology of Difficult Glory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 203: »Vsaka stvar je prepletena z vsem ostalim v skupnem polju potencialnosti, skupnem temelju bivanja, morju prepletenih možnosti, nagubani valujoči brezmejnosti, *tehomu*. Teološko se ujema s panenteizmom *Deus-sive-natura*.«

ezati z nekakšno božjo ali kozmično matrico na način, ki ga ne moremo predvideti ali razumsko razložiti. Za Luce Irigaray je »[z]rak medij našega naravnega in duhovnega življenja, našega odnosa do sebe, do govorjenja, do drugega. In ta medij, ki neopazno prestopa meje različnih svetov ali univerzumov, včasih ustvarja iluzijo intimne, čeprav gre samo za istočasno doživljanje nečesa, kar nam je skupno«. <sup>62</sup> Ljubeče srečanje temelji na tej matrici ter se skrivnostno in nepojasnljivo uteleša v sočasnem in medsebojnem telepatiskem razumevanju, ljubečem govoru, bližini dotika in izmenjavi vonjav – strnjenim v čuječnost ljubezni in intimo para, ki ju zamejujeta vzajemno spoštovanje in dostojanstvo: v transcendenci ljubezni. S tem dihom ljubezni se Bog subtilno razodeva skozi nas – od znotraj in iz srca, trebuha in tako naprej. *Bog je organ Ljubezni, zakrament intersubjektivnosti.*

Dve telesi se drugo skozi drugo prežemata in ožarjata kakor spektralni sebstvi, ki se nevidno dotikata skozi zrak. Ljubezen domuje v naših telesih: vstopa vanje in prižiga željo ... Ljubim te ter ljubim tvoje nevidne in vidne brazgotine in rane. Izžarevanje tvoje krhke biti zdaj sodiha z mojim telesom in najine ustnice so združene v poljubu z dihom. Ti si izbranka/-ec. Si božanska/-i. Dvojina je najvišja blaženost.

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<sup>62</sup> Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, 67.

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## A B S T R A C T S

Michael Marder

*Air and Breathing in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*

This essay is a study of the element of air and the process of breathing in light of the medieval book of *Zohar* and related aspects of the broader Jewish tradition. Mapping air onto the divine body comprised of the *sefirot*, or the emanations of God, I reconsider the connection between breath and spirit, while also focusing on the sensuous and atmospheric aspects of aerial and pneumatic phenomena: wind, scents, the rising expansion of hot air and the falling condensation of the cold. Breathing is examined throughout the entire respiratory system, from the lungs to the nostrils, with respect to both the *sefirotic* divine body and the breath of life, animating the creaturely realm. Throughout the study, I pay particular attention to the paradoxical mode in which air remains an indeterminate, literally groundless element and, at the same time, is at the heart of theo-anatomy, of life, and of sustaining a fragile world.

*Keywords: air, breath, mysticism, emanations, spirit*

Petri Berndtson

*From Respiration to Fleshpiration: A Merleau-Pontian Journey into  
Respiratory Philosophy and Respiratory Religion with Jesus, St. Paul, Claudel,  
and Merleau-Ponty*

In this article, I introduce a new word, the neologism “fleshpiration.” It is a word or a name in which I intertwine “flesh” and “spirit” or “spiration.” This new word is inspired by the thinking of Jesus, St. Paul, Paul Claudel, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The interpretative starting point of my article is taken from Claudel, who states: “the spirit is respiration.” With Claudel’s idea, which has its roots in the etymological analysis of *pneuma* and *spiritus*, I interpret the spirit (*pneuma*) of Jesus and St. Paul to mean respiration in the first place. Within this respiratory interpretative context, I suggest that both Jesus and St. Paul emphasised the essentiality of breathing in their religious thinking. For St. Paul, life according to the flesh and life according to the Spirit as life according to the Respiration are opposite lifestyles. Within the context of Merleau-Ponty, it can be said that St. Paul’s

dichotomy between the flesh and the Spirit can be challenged and surpassed. For Merleau-Ponty, the flesh and the Spirit can be intertwined in a paradoxical manner. Within this framework of paradoxical thinking, it becomes possible to discover this new word “fleshpiration” and initially claim that it names a new respiratory beginning for philosophy and religion.

*Keywords: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Claudel, Jesus, St. Paul, respiration, flesh, fleshpiration*

Alberto Parisi

*Intentio Spiritus: The Materialist, Pneumatological Origins of Intention in Augustine*

Intention is one of the catchwords of 20th-century Western philosophy. Positively or negatively, it takes a central role in numerous traditions, from phenomenology to analytic philosophy, and in none of them has it anything to do with air or breath. According to its widely accepted lineage, the concept of intention can be traced back to Medieval Scholastic philosophy, specifically to Augustine’s utilisation of this term. It is in Augustine’s *intentio animi* (the intention of the soul) – most critics argue – that intention first meant directing one’s attention towards something or a voluntary design or plan.

In this paper, such a genealogy will not be proved wrong but rather complicated by taking seriously the (anti-)pneumatological context in which Augustine developed his concept of intention and, at the same time, those unheeded studies of his works that claim the origins of his use of *intentio* to lie in the Ancient Stoic concept of *τόνος* (*tonos*, tension or tone). A new study will show that *intentio* is what allows Augustine every time to prove the spirit to be immaterial, namely to not be a form of material air or breath. By transforming *intentio* into *attentio* (attention) first and *voluntas* (will) later, Augustine makes possible the realm of the immaterial spirit. Furthermore, however, this article also shows that his arguments seem to take for granted and reject an earlier, materialist pneumatological conception of intention, whose traces can be found in some of the works of the Roman Stoic Seneca, as well as in now-lost 4th century CE Christian heretical theories of the Holy Spirit.

*Keywords: Augustine, intention, intentio, attention, will, pneuma, spirit, breath, air, pneumatology, Stoicism, Neo-Platonism, Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost*

Zahra Rashid

*Nafas: Breath Ontology in Rumi's Poetry*

For the sake of a respiratory philosophy, it makes sense to look to the East, since many Eastern traditions such as Sufism include breathwork in their somatic practices. In my paper, I aim to show how Rumi – a 13th century Muslim theologian and Sufi – used breath or *nafas* in his Persian poetry to outline how breathing is an originary phenomenon. My paper will take a few samples of his poetry to demonstrate how breath connotes a newness through the “gift” of life that it endows upon us, and how the creative, endowing, and primal nature of breath is linked to an openness to the Divine Other and to others. Furthermore, for Rumi, every passing breath ushers in a new existence, annihilating its older form and thus creating an ontological sense in the reader of both the finiteness of existence through what has passed and the infinite possibilities it holds when the newness arrives. Bridging the finite and infinite through breath enables us to develop a respiratory ontology that aims to conceive of dualities through an inter-related perspective. This, I wish to argue, is the true promise of Rumi's poetry for a philosophy of breathing.

*Keywords:* Rumi, Sufism, breathwork, Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty, embodied philosophy

Geoffrey Ashton

*The Somaesthetics of Heaviness and Hara in Zen Buddhist Meditation*

Breath is a grounding phenomenon present in many forms of Buddhist meditation. In traditional Buddhist meditations (including *ānāpānasati* and *vipassanā*), the practitioner observes the breath, surveys various physical and mental phenomena, and from there realizes that suffering (*dukkha*) is not ultimately binding (and along the way, they may experience the nonduality of body and mind). Similarly, the seated meditation practice (*zazen*) deployed by Rinzai Zen begins with attention to breath, refines one's attention to psycho-physical sensations, and fosters a realization of mind-body unity that enables the practitioner to face *dukkha*. But this form of Zen recasts the respiratory philosophy of early Buddhism in some important respects. This paper explores how these adaptations take place in terms of an explicitly somaesthetic orientation. Emphasizing the postural form of the body, the capacity to sense the pull of gravity, and the performance of breathing

from the *hara* (lower belly), *zazen* seeks to awaken the somatic body by transforming the weight of suffering into nondual, vital energy.

*Keywords: zazen, duḥkha, gravity, grief, somaesthetics, hara breathing*

Pier Francesco Corvino  
*New “Inspirations” in Philosophical Anthropology*

This paper aims to endow the contamination of ecological wisdom with human and political ecology by outlining the basic features of a renewed philosophical anthropology. With this purpose, the concept of human nature is investigated here, using an ecological, eco-critical and integral framework, known as “inspiratory.” The key concept of this framework is to be found in the seemingly antiquated notion of temperament, which will be archeologically recovered and philosophically enhanced.

*Keywords: inspiration, temperament, breath, talent, character, ecological wisdom*

Michael Lewis  
*On Stifling a Transcendental Breath: An Italian Contribution to the Philosophy of Breathing*

The article contends that respiratory philosophy has, thus far, laid predominant stress upon the empirical form of breathing, as opposed to the transcendental; or at least it has used breath precisely as an occasion to elide or deconstruct this very opposition. Breath is then conceived primarily as material, bodily, and natural: as binding us together with the animals and with all living things.

And yet this apparently benign ecological gesture is not without its deleterious side-effects: by contrasting this gesture with a more humanistic and transcendental conception of breath, inspired by Giorgio Agamben’s work on the voice, we might begin to gain some clarity as to the jarring contrast that sprang up between the friendly valorisation of a shared con-spiration that has characterised this young philosophy up to now, and the intense, even violent, hostility to the breath of the other which the developed world exhibited from at least 2020 to 2022.

We consider whether an overly empiricistic conception of breath and of the human might have played a part in this reversal of values. In conclusion, the ar-

ticle urges upon us a certain turn towards the transcendental form of the breath, and indeed to a certain human exceptionalism in this regard.

*Keywords:* Agamben, language, voice, breath, animal, human, humanism, transcendental, empirical, masks, stifling, identity, invisibility, virus, pandemic

Raquel Ferrández

*Listening to the Breath, Chanting the Word: The Two Breaths in María Zambrano's Clearings of the Forest*

*Clearings of the Forest* (*Claros del Bosque*, 1977), one of the most poetic and challenging works of María Zambrano's thought, cannot be approached from a breathless paradigm. For the immersion in these clearings take us into the breathing of being that we contemplate alongside the more obvious physiological breathing, the breathing of life. In this work, Zambrano proposes a poetic and mystical phenomenology of the breathing of being through the breathing of its word. Thus, to recover contact with this inner breathing could be to recover the lost chant of the word. This essay does not pretend to be a detailed analysis of Zambrano's thought as a whole, nor of the vibrant mystery that her clearings reveal. The purpose is to uncover the fundamental role that breathing plays in this poetic-philosophical journey, along with other symbols such as light or love, with the question of what place this type of philosophical exercise occupies today in the classrooms of contemporary universities.

*Keywords:* poetic reason, María Zambrano, being, love, Unamuno, Ortega, respiration

Cirila Toplak

*Elemental Politics to the Detriment of Denied Cultures: Nature Worship of Primorska*

The secret historical counterculture of allegedly pre-Christian Nature Worshipers of Western Slovenia had a profound spiritual connection to the air, water, fire, and soil, the fundamentals of their lifeworld. In the 20th century, political processes in the region where the Nature Worshipers secretly survived among intolerant Christians, forcefully transformed the Nature Worshipers' elemental practices,

and led to the dissolution of their community. The First World War resulted in such an overload of metals in soil due to artillery fighting at the Isonzo front that the Nature Worshipers' system of spatial triads – *tročans* – ensuring protection and the fertility of the land collapsed. Following the post-war occupation of Primorska by fascist Italy, the Nature Worshipers were forbidden to burn bonfires and therefore prevented from their most important annual communal rituals. The Italian fascist authorities built a series of dams and hydropower plants that desecrated the sacred Soča river. Intensive industrialisation and extractivism in the Socialist Yugoslav era after 1945 caused further pollution of the air, water and soil and fatally captured the nature that the Nature Worshipers treated like awesome divinity. Elemental degradation through "development" and "progress" in Primorska in the 20th century thus not only had a direct impact on nature but also on a denied subaltern culture that was inseparable from and dependent on nature. Due to their survivalist secrecy, the Nature Worshipers had almost no means of protecting these precious elemental commons. By the end of the 20th century, the elemental fundamentals of the Nature Worshipers' culture were irreversibly lost and so was the Nature Worship of Primorska.

*Keywords: elemental politics, Nature Worship, Primorska, natural elements, history*

Lenart Škof

*Breath-kiss: Philosophical Theology of Loving Encounter*

The article deals with the contemplation of the logic of divine love in Buddhist tantras, Christian mysticism, and contemporary Western philosophy of religion and philosophical theology. The basic thesis of the article is that all the aforementioned thematizations of love are connected by the archaic connection of the couple, which was lost with the development of the first layers of existence. The search for this lost unity of the couple is carried out in the first part through the treatment of Tantric writings, followed by Christian mystical writings. Within the framework of the Christian conception of the logic of the couple, we rely on Jakob Böhme and Franz von Baader and their explication of the original couple and breath-kiss. In the second part, we take a step forward in the direction of the philosophy and theology of love of Ludwig Feuerbach and Luce Irigaray. In this part, we also critically reflect on the heteronormative logic of the theology of love. Feuerbach's and Irigaray's explication of love leads us to the third part, in which, referring to Catherine Keller, we focus on the possibilities of connecting our phi-

losophy of love with the theory of quantum entanglement. We conclude the paper with a meditation on the proximity of the humanely-divine couple.

*Keywords: philosophical theology, breath-kiss, love, philosophy of breath, dualis, Tantra, Franz von Baader, Ludwig Feuerbach, Catherine Keller*





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## POVZETKI

Michael Marder

*Zrak in dihanje v srednjeveškem judovskem mysticismu*

Pričujoča razprava je študija elementa zraka v procesu dihanja v luči srednjeveške knjige *Zohar* in z njim povezanih vidikov širše judovske tradicije. V kartiranju zraka na božje telo, ki ga sestavljajo *sefirot* (edn. *sefira*) oziroma božje emanacije, avtor na novo obravnava povezavo med dihom in duhom, ob čemer se podrobneje posveti tudi čutnim in atmosferskim vidikom zračnih in pnevmatičnih pojavov, kot so veter, vonjave, dviganje in širjenje vročega zraka, kondenzacija ter spuščanje hladnega zraka. Dihanje raziskuje v celotnem dihalnem sistemu, od pljuč do nosnic, tako glede na sefirsko božje telo kot dih življenja, ki oživlja stvarstvo. V študiji se posveča paradoksalnosti, da zrak ostaja nedoločen, tako rekoč breztemeljen element, ki hkrati predstavlja samo jedro teološke anatomije, življenja in vzdrževanja krhkega sveta.

*Ključne besede: zrak, dih, mysticism, emanacije, duh*

Petri Berndtson

*Od respiracije do »telospiracije«: merleau-pontyjevske popotovanje po respiratorni filozofiji in respiratorni religiji z Jezusom, svetim Pavlom, Claudelom in Merleau-Pontyjem*

V prispevku ujamam neologizem »telospiracija« (ang. *fleshpiration*), novo besedo oziroma poimenovanje, v katerem sem prepletel »telo« (ang. *flesh*) in »duha« oziroma »dah(njenje)/dih« (ang. *spiration*). To novotvorjenko je navdahnilo razmišljanje o Jezusu, svetem Pavlu, Paulu Claudelu in Mauriceu Merleau-Pontyju. Za interpretativno izhodišče članka sem vzel Claudelovo izjavo »duh je dihanje«. Skozi to Claudelovo idejo, ki izhaja iz etimološke analize besed *pneuma* in *spiritus*, interpretiram duha (*pneuma*) pri Jezusu in svetem Pavlu prvenstveno v pomenu dihanja. V tem respiratorno-interpretativnem okviru zagovarjam tezo, da sta tako Jezus kot sveti Pavel v svoji religijski misli poudarjala bistvenost dihanja. Za svetega Pavla sta si življenje po telesu in življenje po duhu kot življenje po dih(an)u nasprotna načina življenja, v kontekstu Merleau-Pontyja pa lahko rečemo, da je dihotomijo svetega Pavla med telesom in duhom mogoče izpodbijati in preseči.

Po Merleau-Pontyjevem mnenju se telo in duh lahko paradoksalno prepletata. V okviru takega paradoksalnega mišljenja je mogoče najti predstavljeni neologizem »telospiracija« in ga opredeliti kot nov, respiratorni začetek za filozofijo in religijo.

*Ključne besede: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Claudel, Jezus, sveti Pavel, dihanje, telo, »telospiracija«*

Alberto Parisi

*Intentio Spiritus: Materialistični pnevmatološki izvori namere pri Avguštinu*

Namera je ena od krilatic zahodne filozofije 20. stoletja. V pozitivnem ali negativnem smislu zaseda osrednjo vlogo v številnih tradicijah, od fenomenologije do analitične filozofije, v nobeni od njih pa nima nič opraviti z zrakom ali dihom. Splošno sprejeto je, da koncept namere izvira iz srednjeveške sholastične filozofije, natančneje iz Avguštinove rabe tega termina. Večina kritikov zagovarja mnenje, da se je prav v Avguštinovi *intentio animi* (nameri duše) namen prvič pojavil v pomenu človekovega usmerjanja pozornosti k nečemu ali njegovega zavestnega načrta.

Pričujoči prispevek takšne genealogije ne izpodbija, temveč jo dodatno zapleta z resno obravnavo (anti)pnevmatološkega konteksta, v katerem je Avguštin razvijal svoj koncept namere, in več neupoštevanih študij njegovega dela, ki zagovarjajo tezo, da ima njegova raba *intentio* izvor v starem stoiškem konceptu *τόνος* (*tonos*, napetosti ali tonusa). Nova študija tako pokaže, da prav *intentio* omogoča Avguštinu vsakokrat dokazati, da je duh nesnoven oziroma ni oblika snovnega zraka ali diha. S preoblikovanjem *intentio* najprej v *attentio* (pozornost) in nato v *voluntas* (voljo) Avguštin omogoči obstoj sfere nesnovnega duha. V članku je nadalje prikazano tudi, kako Avguštin v svojem argumentiranju jemlje kot samoumevno oziroma zavrača zgodnejše, materialistično pnevmatološko pojmovanje namere, ki ga lahko zasledimo že v nekaterih delih rimskega stoika Seneke in v danes izgubljenih krščanskih heretičnih teorijah Svetega Duha iz 4. stoletja n. št.

*Ključne besede: Avguštin, namera, intentio, pozornost, volja, pneuma, duh, dih, zrak, pnevmatologija, stoicizem, novoplatonizem, Sveti Duh*

Zahra Rashid

*Nafas: Ontologija diha v Rumijeve poeziji*

Pri utemeljevanju respiratorne filozofije se je smiselno ozreti na vzhod, saj številne vzhodne tradicije, med njimi sufizem, vključujejo dihanje v svoje somatske prakse. V prispevku je prikazano, kako je Rumi – muslimanski teolog in sufi iz 13. stoletja – v svoji poeziji uporabljal *nafas* oziroma dihanje na način, ki je poudarjal njegovo prvobitnost. Na odlomkih iz Rumijeve poezije avtorica ponazori, kako dihanje implicira novo z »darom« življenja, ki nam ga prinaša, in kako je ta ustvarjalna, podarjajoča in prvobitna narava dihanja povezana z odprtostjo Božanskemu Drugega in drugim. Poleg tega za Rumija vsak vdih pomeni začetek novega obstoja, ki izniči svojo predhodno obliko, s čimer bralcu posreduje ontološki občutek končnosti obstoja preko tega, kar je minilo, in neskončnih možnosti, ki jih novo prinaša. Zbliževanje končnega z neskončnim v dihanju omogoča razvijanje respiratorne ontologije, katere cilj je razumevanje dualnosti v medsebojno povezani perspektivi. Prav to pa je po avtoričinem mnenju obet Rumijeve poezije za filozofijo dihanja.

*Ključne besede:* Rumi, sufizem, prakse dihanja, Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty, utelešena filozofija

Geoffrey Ashton

*Somaestetika teže in hare v zenbudistični meditaciji*

Dih je eden od temeljnih pojavov, prisoten v številnih oblikah budistične meditacije. Pri tradicionalnih budističnih meditacijah, vključno z anapanasati (*ānāpānasati*) in vipasano (*vipassanā*), meditant opazuje dihanje, spremlja različne telesne in duševne pojave in na podlagi tega spoznava, da trpljenje (*duḥkha*) ni obvezno (ob tem lahko izkusi tudi nedualnost telesa in duha). Podobno se sedeča meditativna praksa (*zazen*), ki jo je razvila šola rinzai, začne z osredotočanjem na dihanje, nato ostri pozornost za psihofizične zaznave in vodi do končnega spoznanja o enotnosti duha in telesa, ki meditantu pomaga spoprijeti se z *duḥkha*. Vendar pa ta oblika zena v določenih pomembnih vidikih na novo podaja respiratorno filozofijo zgodnjega budizma. Avtor v študiji raziskuje, kako do teh prilagoditev prihaja v smislu izrecno somaestetske usmeritve. S poudarkom na držbi telesa, zmožnosti zaznavanja težnostnega privlaka in izvajanju dihanja iz *hare* (spodnjega dela trebuha) skuša *zazen* prebuditi somatsko telo tako, da teža trpljenja preoblikuje v nedualno, življenjsko energijo.

*Ključne besede:* zazen, duḥkha, teža, težnost, žalost, somaestetika, dihanje iz hare

Pier Francesco Corvino  
*Novi »(na)vdihi« v filozofski antropologiji*

Avtor poskuša z orisom temeljnih značilnosti prenovljene filozofske antropologije vnesti nekaj ekološke modrosti v človeško in politično ekologijo. V ta namen raziskuje koncept človeške narave, pri čemer uporablja ekološko-ekokritično-integralni, t. i. »inspiracijski« okvir. Ključni koncept v tem okviru je navidezno zastarel pojem temperamenta, ki ga avtor kakor arheolog »izkoplje« iz zgodovine in filozofsko nadgradi.

*Ključne besede: (na)vdihi, temperament, diha, talent, značaj, ekološka modrost*

Michael Lewis  
*O dušenju transcendentalnega diha: italijanski prispevek k filozofiji dihanja*

Avtor podaja mnenje, da je filozofija dihanja doslej poudarjala empirično obliko dihanja na račun transcendentalne ali, če hočemo, izkoriščala diha kot priložnost za izničevanje ali dekonstrukcijo tega nasprotja. Dih se tako primarno pojmuje kot nekaj snovnega, telesnega in naravnega, kot nekaj, kar nas povezuje z živalmi in vsemi živimi bitji.

Ta na videz dobrohotna ekološka gesta pa ima tudi škodljive stranske učinke: če jo primerjamo z bolj humanistično in transcendentalno predstavo diha, ki jo je navdahnilo delo Giorgia Agambena o glasu, bomo morda jasneje uvideli moteči kontrast med pozitivnim vrednotenjem so-dihanja, ki zaznamuje to mlado filozofijo, ter veliko nenaklonjenostjo, celo sovražnostjo do diha drugega, kakršno je razviti svet izkazoval najmanj od leta 2020 do leta 2022.

Avtor v članku tehta, ali je k takšnemu preobratu vrednot morda prispevalo preveč empiristično pojmovanje diha in človeka, v sklepnem delu pa poziva k nekakšnemu zasuku k transcendentalni obliki diha in pravzaprav k določenemu človeškemu ekcepionalizmu v tem pogledu.

*Ključne besede: Agamben, jezik, glas, diha, žival, človek, humanizem, transcendentalno, empirično, maske, dušenje, identiteta, nevidnost, virus, pandemija*

Raquel Ferrández

*Prisluškovanje dihu, petje besede: dva diha v Gozdnih jasah Marie Zambrano*

H *Gozdnim jasam* (*Claros del Bosque*, 1977), enemu od najbolj poetičnih in zahtevnih del filozofije Marie Zambrano, je neizogibno pristopati z vidika respiratorne paradigme. Potopitev v te čistine nas namreč popelje v dihanje biti, ki ga mislimo poleg očitnejšega fiziološkega dihanja – v dihanje življenja. V tem svojem delu Zambrano predstavi poetično in mistično fenomenologijo dihanja biti skozi dihanje njene besede. Znova vzpostaviti stik s tem notranjim dihanjem bi tako lahko pomenilo znova najti izgubljeno pesem besede. Pričujoči prispevek ne poskuša dajati vtisa, da ponuja podrobno razčlemba filozofije Marie Zambrano kot celote niti živahne skrivnostnosti, ki se razkriva skozi njene jase. Njegov namen je odkriti temeljno vlogo, ki jo ima dihanje na tem pesniško-filozofskem popotovanju skupaj z drugimi simboli, kot sta svetloba ali ljubezen, z vprašanjem, kakšno mesto danes zaseda tovrstna filozofska vaja v predavalnicah sodobnih univerz.

*Ključne besede: poetični um, María Zambrano, bit, ljubezen, Unamuno, Ortega, dihanje*

Cirila Toplak

*Elementalne politike v škodo zanikanih kultur: primorsko naravoverstvo*

Skrivna zgodovinska kontrakultura domnevno predkrščanskih naravovercev v zahodni Sloveniji je bila globoko duhovno povezana z zrakom, vodo, ognjem in prstjo, temelji njihovega življenjskega sveta. V 20. stoletju so politični procesi v prostoru, kjer so naravoverci na skrivaj preživeli med nestrpnimi kristjani, močno preoblikovali njihove elementalne prakse in pripeljali do razpada njihove skupnosti. Gradnja železnice še v času Avstro-Ogrske je uničila najpomembnejše naravoversko svetišče. Prva svetovna vojna je zaradi topniškega obstreljevanja na soški fronti povzročila tolikšno preobremenitev prsti s kovinami, da je propadel sistem naravoverskih prostorskih triad – tročanov –, ki so zagotavljali rodovitnost zemlje in varnost skupnosti. V času medvojne okupacije Primorske je fašistična italijanska oblast prepovedala kurjenje kresov in tako preprečila najpomembnejše naravoverske skupne obrede. Italijanska oblast je zgradila tudi prve hidroelektrarne in jezove, ki so oskrunili sveto reko Sočo. Intenzivna industrializacija in ekstraktivizem v obdobju socialistične Jugoslavije po letu 1945 sta povzročila nadaljnje onesnaženje zraka, vode in prsti ter usodno predrugačila naravo, ki so jo naravoverci strahospoštljivo častili kot božanstvo. Elementarna degradacija zaradi »razvoja« in

»napredka« na Primorskem v 20. stoletju tako ni imela neposrednega vpliva le na naravo, temveč tudi na zanikano, od narave neločljivo in odvisno kulturo. Naravoverci zaradi prikrivanja niso imeli možnosti za zaščito dragocenega elementalnega skupnega dobrega. Do konca 20. stoletja so bili elementalni temelji njihove kulture nepovratno izgubljeni in s tem tudi primorsko naravoverstvo.

*Ključne besede: elementalna politika, naravoverstvo, Primorska, naravni elementi, zgodovina*

Lenart Škof

*Poljub z dihom: filozofska teologija ljubečega srečanja*

Članek se ukvarja s premišljevanjem logike božanske ljubezni v budističnih tantrah, krščanski mistiki ter sodobni zahodni filozofiji religije in filozofski teologiji. Osnovna teza članka je, da vse omenjene tematizacije ljubezni povezuje arhaična povezanost popolnega in enotnega para, ki je bila izgubljena z razvitjem prvih plasti bivanja. Iskanje te izgubljene enosti para se v prvem delu izvaja z obravnavo budističnih tantričnih spisov, ki jim sledijo krščanski mistični spisi. V okviru krščanskega pojmovanja se opiramo na Jakoba Böhmeja in Franza von Baaderja ter njuno eksplikacijo logike izvirnega para in poljuba z dihom. V drugem delu se pomaknemo za korak naprej v smeri filozofije in teologije ljubezni kot bližine in intimnosti v okviru misli Ludwiga Feuerbacha in Luce Irigaray. V tem delu tudi kritično premišljujemo o heteronormativni logiki teologije ljubezni. Eksplikacija ljubezni Feuerbacha in Irigaray nas nazadnje vodi v tretji del, v katerem se v navezavi na Catherine Keller sprašujemo o možnostih povezave filozofije ljubezni in kvantne prepletenosti. Prispevek sklenemo z meditacijo o bližini para in dvojine.

*Ključne besede: filozofska teologija, poljub z dihom, ljubezen, filozofija diha, dvojina, tantra, Franz von Baader, Ludwig Feuerbach, Catherine Keller*

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Michael Marder is an IKERBASQUE Research Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU), Vitoria-Gasteiz, Spain. His writings span the fields of ecological theory, phenomenology, and political thought. He is the author of numerous scientific articles and monographs, including *Plant-Thinking* (2013), *The Philosopher's Plant* (2014), *Dust* (2016), *Energy Dreams* (2017), *Heidegger* (2018), *Political Categories* (2019), *Pyropolitics* (2015, 2020), *Dump Philosophy* (2020), *Hegel's Energy* (2021), *Green Mass* (2021), *Philosophy for Passengers* (2022), *The Phoenix Complex* (2023), *Time Is a Plant* (2023), and, with Edward S. Casey, *The Place of Plants* (2023).

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Michael Marder je znanstveni raziskovalec in profesor na Univerzi Baskije (UPV-EHU) v Vitorii-Gasteizu v Španiji ter član baskovske fundacije za znanost IKERBASQUE. Ukvarja se s področji ekološke teorije, fenomenologije in politične filozofije. Je avtor številnih znanstvenih člankov in monografij, med njimi *Plant-Thinking* (2013), *The Philosopher's Plant* (2014), *Dust* (2016), *Energy Dreams* (2017), *Heidegger* (2018), *Political Categories* (2019), *Pyropolitics* (2015, 2020), *Dump Philosophy* (2020), *Hegel's Energy* (2021), *Green Mass* (2021), *Philosophy for Passengers* (2022), *The Phoenix Complex* (2023) in *Time Is a Plant* (2023), v soavtorstvu z Edwardom S. Caseyjem pa je napisal študijo *The Place of Plants* (2023).

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### PETRI BERNDTSON

Petri Berndtson, PhD, is a research associate of the Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies at the Science and Research Centre Koper, Slovenia. His main research interests and expertise lie in the experiential phenomenon of breathing, phenomenology (especially Merleau-Ponty), embodiment, the elemental poetics of air (Bachelard), and contemplative studies. He is the author of *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Respiratory Primacy of Being* (Routledge, 2023) and the coeditor of *Atmospheres of Breathing* (SUNY Press, 2018). He is a practitioner of mindfulness through breathing meditation and other forms of breathwork.

He has also given many experiential workshops on mindful breathing and various somatic practices.

Dr. Petri Berndtson je znanstveni sodelavec Inštituta za filozofske in religijske študije Znanstveno-raziskovalnega središča Koper. Njegova poglavitna raziskovalna in strokovna področja so izkustvena pojavnost dihanja, fenomenologija (zlasti Merleau-Ponty), utelešenje, elementalna poetika zraka (predvsem Bachelard) in kontemplativne študije. Je avtor dela *Phenomenological Ontology of Breathing: The Respiratory Primacy of Being* (Routledge, 2023) in sourednik monografije *Atmospheres of Breathing* (SUNY Press, 2018). Prakticira čuječnost z dihalno meditacijo in drugimi dihalnimi praksami. Vodil je tudi že več izkustvenih delavnic o čuječem dihanju in različnih somatskih praksah.

#### ALBERTO PARISI

Alberto Parisi received his BA in Philosophy and Literature from The University of Warwick (2017) and his PhD in Comparative Literature from Harvard University (2023) with a dissertation on the relationship between intention and breath in the history of European philosophy and poetry. His reviews, articles, and translations have appeared in *MLN*, *PMLA*, and the *Journal of Italian Philosophy*, among others. He also writes about pop culture, digital media and contemporary art for a wider audience. He is one of the Chief Editors at *layOut magazine*, an Italian publication of contemporary poetry, art, translation and intermediality.

Alberto Parisi je diplomiral iz filozofije in književnosti na Univerzi v Warwicku (2017), doktorski naziv iz primerjalne književnosti pa pridobil na Harvardski univerzi (2023) z disertacijo o odnosu med namero in dihom v zgodovini evropske filozofije in poezije. Njegove recenzije, članki in prevodi so med drugim izšli v revijah *MLN*, *PMLA* in *Journal of Italian Philosophy*. Piše tudi prispevke o pop kulturi, digitalnih medijih in sodobni umetnosti, namenjene širšemu bralstvu. Je eden od glavnih urednikov spletne publikacije *layOut magazine*, ki pokriva področja sodobne poezije, umetnosti, prevajalstva in intermedialnosti.

#### ZAHA RASHID

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Zahra Rashid je znanstvena sodelavka Univerze za upravne vede (LUMS) in Univerze za informacijske tehnologije (ITU) v Lahoreju v Pakistanu. Zaključila je magistrski študij filozofije ter magistrski študij islamistike in arabistike. Posveča se predvsem raziskovanju sovplivanja med tradicionalnimi verskimi sistemi s poudarkom na sufizmu in verskih šolah ter v povezavi z idejami kontinentalne filozofije. Njena objavljena dela vključujejo poglavje v zborniku in več strokovnih člankov o sufijski estetiki in etiki v interakciji z modernističnimi in post-modernističnimi zahodnimi filozofi.

### GEOFFREY ASHTON

Professor Geoffrey Ashton is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of San Francisco. He has conducted research in Sanskrit, Thai, and Spanish, at numerous institutions of higher learning outside of the United States (twice as a Fulbright scholar), including Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi, India), Deccan College (Pune, India), the Jñāna-Pravaha Institute (Varanasi, India), Chiang Mai University (Chiang Mai, Thailand), Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok, Thailand), and La Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Madrid, Spain). He has authored numerous articles, book chapters, and essays on Indian Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy, Philosophy of Religion, Comparative Ethics, and Comparative Aesthetics. He is currently revising a manuscript on philosophy of nature in Indian philosophy. Another research project centers around the interrelation between meditative practice in Zen Buddhism and the phenomenology of gravity.

Profesor Geoffrey Ashton je izredni profesor za filozofijo na Univerzi v San Franciscu. Raziskave v sanskrtskem, tajskem in španskem jeziku je izvajal na več svetovnih visokošolskih ustanovah (dvakrat kot prejemnik Fulbrightove štipendije), med drugim na Univerzi Džavaharlala Nehruja (Delhi, Indija), Dekanski fakulteti (Pune, Indija), Inštitutu Jñāna-Pravaha (Varanasi, Indija), Univerzi v Čiang Maju (Čiang Maj, Tajska), Univerzi kralja Čulalongkorna (Bangkok, Tajska) in Avtonomni univerzi v Madridu (Španija). Je avtor številnih strokovnih člankov, poglavij v monografijah in esejev s področij indijske filozofije, budistične filozofije, filozofije religije, primerjalne etike in primerjalne estetike. Trenutno izpopolnjuje rokopis na temo filozofije narave v indijski filozofiji, v sklopu drugega raziskoval-

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### PIER FRANCESCO CORVINO

Pier Francesco Corvino is Visiting Lecturer at the Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis. His main lines of research concern the problem of human nature in the history of modern thought and the relationship between human nature and Nature. He recently published his first monograph, *Henrich Steffens, Filosofo della Natura* (2022) for Mauna Edizioni (San Benedetto del Tronto, AP). He has also published essays and contributions in books and peer-reviewed journals.

Pier Francesco Corvino je gostujoči predavatelj na fakulteti Alma Mater Europaea – Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis. Njegovi osrednji raziskovalni področji sta tematika človeške narave v zgodovini moderne filozofije ter odnos med človeško naravo in Naravo. Pred kratkim je pri založbi Mauna Edizioni (San Benedetto del Tronto, Italija) izšla njegova prva monografija *Henrich Steffens, Filosofo della Natura* (2022). Je avtor tudi več esejev, poglavij v zbornikih in prispevkov v recenziranih revijah.

### MICHAEL LEWIS

Michael Lewis is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. He is the author of *Heidegger and the Place of Ethics* (2005), *Heidegger Beyond Deconstruction: On Nature* (2007), *Derrida and Lacan: Another Writing* (2008), *The Beautiful Animal: Sincerity, Charm, and the Fossilised Dialectic* (2018), and *Philosophy, Biopolitics, and the Virus: The Elision of an Alternative* (2023). He is the General Editor of the *Journal of Italian Philosophy* and is working on two monographs, one on philosophical anthropology and the other on the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben.

Michael Lewis je višji predavatelj filozofije na Univerzi v Newcastlu v Veliki Britaniji. Njegova avtorska dela vključujejo *Heidegger and the Place of Ethics* (2005), *Heidegger beyond Deconstruction: On Nature* (2007), *Derrida and Lacan: Another Writing* (2008), *The Beautiful Animal: Sincerity, Charm, and the Fossilised Dialectic* (2018) in *Philosophy, Biopolitics, and the Virus: The Elision of an Alternative* (2023). Je glavni urednik revije *Journal of Italian Philosophy*, obenem pa pripravlja dve monografiji, in sicer o filozofski antropologiji oziroma filozofiji Giorgia Agambena.

## RAQUEL FERRÁNDEZ

Raquel Ferrández is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the National University for Distance Education (UNED, Spain). She is dedicated to Indian philosophy and Fusion philosophy. Co-founder of the Society for Yoga and Philosophy, she has published numerous academic writings and two books in Spanish: *Sāṃkhya y yoga: Una lectura contemporánea* (*Sāṃkhya and Yoga: A Contemporary Reading*; Kairos, 2020); and *Trance y Memoria en el budismo y el yoga* (*Trance and Memory in Buddhism and Yoga*; Kairos, 2022).

Raquel Ferrández je predavateljica na Oddelku za filozofijo Državne univerze za izobraževanje na daljavo (UNED) v Španiji. Posveča se proučevanju indijske filozofije in »fuzijske« filozofije (angl. »Fusion philosophy«). Je soustanoviteljica Društva za jogo in filozofijo, objavila pa je tudi številne strokovne članke in dve knjigi v španskem jeziku: *Sāṃkhya y yoga: Una lectura contemporánea* (*Sāṃkhya in joga: sodobna interpretacija*; Kairos, 2020); in *Trance y memoria en el budismo y el yoga* (*Trans in spomin v budizmu in jogi*; Kairos, 2022).

## CIRILA TOPLAK

Full Professor of Political Science and Scientific Councillor Cirila Toplak received her PhD in International Relations from the Sorbonne University in Paris. Since 2001, she has been teaching and researching at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Ljubljana, where she is also Head of the Research Centre on Political Theory.

Cirila Toplak is the (co)author of 13 scientific monographs, 24 original scientific articles and 27 chapters in scientific monographs. After years of researching Europeanisation processes and Slovenian political history, since 2016, her research focused on the study of alternative political practices and local cultural traditions. Her latest publication in this respect is the scientific monograph *“Our Belief”: Nature Worship of Primorska* (2023).

Redna profesorica politologije in znanstvena svetnica dr. Cirila Toplak je doktorirala iz mednarodnih odnosov na pariški Sorboni. Od leta 2001 predava in raziskuje na Fakulteti za družbene vede Univerze v Ljubljani, kjer je tudi predstojnica raziskovalnega Centra za politično teorijo.

Cirila Toplak je (so)avtorica 13 znanstvenih monografij, 24 izvirnih znanstvenih člankov in 27 poglavij v znanstvenih monografijah. Po večletnem raziskovanju evropeizacijskih procesov in slovenske politične zgodovine se od leta 2016 posveča proučevanju alternativnih političnih praks in lokalnih kulturnih tradicij. Njena

zadnja objava iz teh vsebin je znanstvena monografija »Naša vera«: *Naravoverstvo na Primorskem* (2023).

## LENART ŠKOF

Lenart Škof is Head of the Institute for Philosophical and Religious Studies at the Science and Research Centre (Koper, Slovenia) and Dean of Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis (Ljubljana, Slovenia). He is a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts (EASA, Salzburg) and president of the Slovenian Society for Comparative Religion. He recently co-edited *Shame, Gender Violence and Ethics: Terrors of Injustice* (Lexington Books, 2021), *Atmospheres of Breathing* (New York: SUNY Press, 2018), *The Poesis of Peace* (Routledge, 2017) and *Breathing with Luce Irigaray* (Bloomsbury, 2013). Škof is the author of several books, among them *Antigone's Sisters: On the Matrix of Love* (SUNY Press, 2021) and *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace* (Springer, 2015). He is editor-in-chief of the book series Routledge Critical Perspectives on Breath and Breathing (with Magdalena Górka) and his main research interests are in respiratory philosophy, new elemental philosophy, and philosophical theology.

His homepage is: <https://zrs-kp.academia.edu/LenartŠkof>.

Lenart Škof je predstojnik Inštituta za filozofske in religijske študije Znanstveno-raziskovalnega središča (Koper, Slovenija) in dekan Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis (Ljubljana, Slovenija). Je član Evropske akademije znanosti in umetnosti (EASA, Salzburg) in predsednik Društva za primerjalno religiologijo. Souredil je zbornike *Shame, Gender Violence and Ethics: Terrors of Injustice* (Lexington Books, 2021), *Atmospheres of Breathing* (SUNY Press, 2018), *The Poesis of Peace* (Routledge, 2017) in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray* (Bloomsbury, 2013). Je avtor več knjig, med njimi *Antigone's Sisters: On the Matrix of Love* (SUNY Press, 2021) in *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics and Peace* (Springer, 2015). Je glavni urednik serije Routledge Critical Perspectives on Breath and Breathing (z Magdaleno Górsko). Njegovi glavni raziskovalni interesi so respiratorna filozofija, nova elementarna filozofija in filozofska teologija.

Spletna stran: <https://zrs-kp.academia.edu/LenartŠkof>.





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P O L I G R A F I

doslej izšlo / previous issues:

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*Mislec neskončnosti Giordano Bruno • Logos in kozmos*  
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*Transplanted Buddhism in and from Southeast Asia • Religijska in mitološka simbolika v vzhodnoazijski umetnosti*  
*Revisiting Dreams*
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AIR AND BREATH  
IN RELIGIONS AND  
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ZRAK IN DIH  
V RELIGIJAH IN FILOZOFIJAH

Lenart Škof: *Air and Breath in Religions and Philosophies: Introduction*  
*Zrak in dih v religijah in filozofijah: Uvod*

Michael Marder: *Air and Breathing in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*

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Cirila Toplak: *Elementalne politike v škodo zanikanih kultur:*  
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